

Pugmire



Buried Bones
Creating in the Realms of Pugmire

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Credits

Written by Eddy Webb

Additional writing by Travis Legge

Edited by Molly McRedmond

Art by Bryan Syme, Pat Loboyko, Pat McEvoy, Jeff Laubenstein, Felipe Gaona

Art Director: Mike Chaney

Creative Director: Richard Thomas

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Introduction

It's hard to believe it's been almost a decade since I started working on *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau*. In my mind, it's still this wild idea I thought maybe my mom and a few of my friends would enjoy. But after talking with so many fans at conventions, signing autographs, receiving gifts, and hearing stories of great games that have made me laugh and moved me to tears, I have to admit my "silly little dog game" is really something special to have touched the hearts of so many people.

I love talking about *Pugmire*, and over the years I've talked in a lot of places about various aspects of it. I have tons of blog posts, internal documents, podcast interviews, and email conversations where, over time, I've revealed details, answered questions, and addressed concerns about the games and the world they're set in. These scattered fragments were like buried bones, cool things hidden just out of sight, but a delightful

surprise to the diligent dog who takes the time to dig them up. I decided it was time to pull all these bones together into the skeleton of this book and give them a vigorous shake... er, I mean, rewrite.

That's *Buried Bones*. It's not a game book so much as a compilation of my thoughts on how to make a *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau* product. It's most obviously of use to people making their own products for the Canis Minor community content program (you can learn more at <https://www.drivethrurpg.com/cc/17/canis-minor>), but the things you find in this book can also be helpful for people running their own *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau* chronicles. For fans who are interested to know some of the thought that goes into making an RPG or are just curious about some behind-the-scenes information, I hope you find this useful or entertaining as well.

Buried Bones is divided into four chapters.

- **Chapter One** is the style guide. This is a version of the document I gave to all new writers on *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau* products. It talks about the tone I look for in written material, covers topics like inclusivity, magic, and religion, and gives a comprehensive lexicon and advice on how to write in the *Pugmire* “house style.”
- **Chapter Two** is a compilation of blog posts I’ve written for the Onyx Path Publishing website. It covers a lot of design commentary, going into some depth on specific topics and exploring why I made the design decisions I did. There’s also some good advice for Guides covering topics I didn’t address in either core rulebook and a couple of other blogs that are weird but possibly interesting to fans of the Realms of Pugmire.
- **Chapter Three** is a compendium of 5e OGL changes. Originally written by the ever-helpful Travis Legge as a Canis Minor product, this is a breakdown of how the *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* system differs from core fifth-edition open game license content. If you’re looking to convert some OGL-compatible material to *Pugmire*, this should be helpful.
- **Chapter Four** is a collection of frequently asked questions. Here, I address questions (and occasionally admit to mistakes) about general rules, as well as ones specific to *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau*. I also answer some questions people have had about the world of the Realms of Pugmire.





Chapter One: Style Guide

For the past few Realms of Pugmire books, I've used a writer's style guide that I kept as a private document for years. This was different from the outline of the books – I felt it was important to give writers specific details of the world, as well as an overview of the game's tone. Here's an amended and updated version of that guide. Use it for making your own *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau* adventures to give them a feeling of authenticity or refer to it while putting together your community content projects.

Tone (or “Why This Isn't a Funny Game”)

Pugmire is a game about adventure and quiet morality. It's about companionship and salvation, mystery and exploration. *Monarchies of Mau* is also about adventure but incorporates intrigue and personal morality. Unlike *Pugmire*, it's about

the conflict of instincts and society in addition to mystery and exploration.

Both are light-hearted with large doses of humor, but the humor is subtle. It mostly manifests from the juxtaposition of our modern-day understanding of their society and genre fantasy tropes, but the humor should never be on-the-nose funny. In fact, I'm going to indulge in a pseudo-intellectual rant about this topic.

Let me start by spelling it out: *Pugmire* is ultimately about the power and danger of nostalgia. Everything (intentionally or unintentionally) points back to this concept, whether it's the fact that dogs worship an idealized humanity, cats wistfully desire a time when their monarchy was independent, or the intentional use of *Dungeons & Dragons* as a mechanical base. That's the secret lurking at the heart of this world – the Realms of Pugmire are built to evoke fondness for what has come before.

Taken a step further, nostalgia can be funny or sad, and in an ideal world, the Realms of Pugmire strives to be both. Hell, in my first version of *Pugmire* (ominously titled “The Fall of Pugmire”), the melancholic qualities were very strong, and melancholy has a close connection with nostalgia. The interesting thing about nostalgia is it works primarily because we *don’t* clearly remember all the details. Thus, a story evocative of nostalgia is not one that’s a slavish reproduction of what came before, but evocative of the high points, the parts that really resonated, the parts that *mattered*. That’s why the world of *Pugmire* isn’t *exactly* recognizable as our own, why the dogs aren’t *exactly* right about what humanity was, and why the game system isn’t *exactly* like old-school gaming. It’s the best bits of all those things, blended together into one seamless whole.

But *Pugmire* is being experienced by people, and in particular people with at least a moderate knowledge or affinity for fantasy fiction and gaming tropes. As a result, it takes on a meta-textual context. In addition to wanting a game of light-hearted fun, people want to enjoy that nostalgic and elegiac feel because they love animals (including those pets that have passed on), or because they desire a simple game experience (including mourning the days when they had the time to play more complex games).

The desire to enjoy fun animal stories is undeniable and widespread — animals have been protagonists in stories for centuries. As for a simple game experience, I’ve come to believe “simple” is usually code for “I recognize these tropes” along with “I have very few barriers to understanding this.” Understanding what constitutes “light-hearted fun” would require a whole book (such as *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* by Raph Koster), but for our purposes it generally means “I want to laugh a bit, ideally with friends and family.” But I reject the notion that simple and fun are at odds with presenting challenging narratives. In fact, because of the meta-textual context — these are people who know how fantasy tropes work, after all — we’re in a place where we can twist and subvert those tropes to make engaging stories.

We laugh at the dog that tries to act like a cat, or ineffective bureaucracies run by constantly distracted nobles, or cats that knock objects off

shelves just to initiate a personal duel. But we’re left with the vague sense that maybe these sweeping tropes and stereotypes aren’t okay when applied to people. If these dogs and cats and other uplifted animals are presented as authentic characters, as authentic *people*, then maybe it’s not okay when applied to them, either. This gives us leave to take problematic tropes and change them in ways that still make sense in the world and thus still feel authentic. This is why cats aren’t evil, and why Princess Yosha Pug goes out to adventure instead of staying home waiting for her true love. And yet, in them we still recognize *different* (and, frankly, more inclusive) concepts like “the people we don’t trust” and “nobility as moral leaders.”

This also applies to the humor. The humor needs to treat the characters as serious and authentic. If the meta-narrative humor drowns out the story context, then the humor has failed. “Be a good dog” works because the humor supports and reinforces the concept — there are plenty of comic strips that play off the religious overtones of the phrase, and that’s exactly where we go as well. Having a Shiba Inu head of the Church of Man with the title of “Doge” drowns out anything that character might do that’s narratively interesting. A few characters are intentionally humorous and can get away with more, but all in all the humor should work with the world concept, not against it.

None of this needs to be done intentionally as you work in the Realms of Pugmire. In fact, in my experience, it’s better if it’s not foremost in my mind when I write. But it does help when going back and deciding what makes for an authentic *Pugmire* story or not.

Magic and Religion

Just so we’re clear: all the “magic” in this setting is sci-fi tech, and there aren’t any gods ready to respond to a dog’s prayers, nor do cats miraculously reincarnate eight times. In fact, regarding magic and religion, there are three points to keep in mind:

- *Never* pull the curtain back to the characters. Occasionally we can let the *audience* in on things and pull the curtain aside for them, but the characters should never learn that humanity is gone and that their magic

is all just advanced technology. That is the fastest way to kill the magic of this world.

- *Never* make faith or spirituality look stupid. This is a common trope in horror fiction, where the priest prays for intervention and nothing happens while they are murdered by a monster. This doesn't work for *Pugmire*, because from a dog's perspective faith *does* have power. This goes back to not pulling the curtain aside — as an audience, we somewhat know it's not the power of faith that does this, but the characters can never fully discount the possibility that there *are* gods up there.
- *Always* muddy the waters. The technology is sufficiently advanced that even modern-day readers won't completely understand it. Add elements of weirdness (in the vein of the previous two points) that make the reader question their interpretation of things. That “book” made of glass with moving text is clearly an iPad. But how did it survive all these years? Why does the battery still work? And why does the screen light up only when in the hands of dogs, not cats?

Inclusive Fantasy

The Realms of Pugmire are inclusive in a friendly way. That's not a buzzword, nor is it a marketing strategy. It's also not something I trot around a lot, because a lot of the inclusivity is quiet. But it's important to me, which is why I default to gender-neutral terms like “dogs” and “cats,” and why I err on the side of more female characters whenever I can. This means:

- No jobs are restricted to a single gender. Period. Yes, the Church of Man has “sisters” and “brothers,” but they do the same job. A queen is just as good as a king as well. Hell, to some dogs, their gender identity is simply “dog.”
- I am *really* against open expressions of sex in this game — as far as I'm concerned, dogs fall in love, and then puppies come along sometime later for reasons. Same goes for cats. Families are important things to explore, as well as concepts like inheritance and noble breeding, but the act of sex is *deeply* implicit.
- However, the topic of love is just fine to explore, as long as we keep it on the lev-



el of “flirting and expressing emotions in dramatic ways” instead of “dogs and cats making out.” Further, that love can be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, polyamorous, or asexual (i.e., “deep friendships”).

- There are no one-to-one analogs between an uplifted species and a real-world or historical race. And there absolutely aren’t any “evil dark-skinned races.” Each species is sympathetic from their point of view. Even the rats and badgers.

Gendered Language

Pay attention to the way we handle gendered language in our products. Use “dog” or “cat” instead of “man” or “woman.” (“Man” as the deific construct of dog religion is an exception, but feel free to alternate that with “the Old Ones” to avoid excessive patriarchal overtones.) If binary gender is important, default to “boy” and “girl” (like “Who’s a good boy? You are!”)

Additionally, alternate genders when using third-person singular pronouns in nonspecific manners. You can use the gender-neutral “they” once in a while, but I’d prefer it be reserved for talking about a specific character that is nonbinary. However, when referring to multiple players or characters, the plural “they” is acceptable. (“They each make a roll.”)

The exception are noble titles in the kingdom of Pugmire. While gender doesn’t matter much to dogs on a day-to-day basis, they still use gendered language (King/Queen, Prince/Princess, Duke/Duchess, etc.). The Monarchies of Mau, however, prefer gender-neutral titles (Monarch, Dynast, Commander, etc.).

Style Guide

Capitalization, bold, and italics: Try to avoid unnecessary capitalization and italicizing – if it’s not capitalized in the lexicon, don’t capitalize it.

American English: Use standard American English. Color, gray, toward, backward, afterward, empathize, worshipper, traveler; not colour, grey, towards, backwards, afterwards, empathise, worshiper, traveller.

Species, Not Race: I know it’s a fantasy trope, but never use the word “race” to refer to

the different nations of people. Use “species,” with “people” or “nation” as alternatives.

No (Modern) Profanity: Keep it clean. Characters can use the profanity of the world (like “cur”), and mild profanity like “damn” and “hell” and “bullocks” are fine, but beyond that, don’t do it. Also, “bitch” is completely out. Yes, I know it refers to a female dog, but that’s not how it’s used culturally, and fighting to reclaim the word is not a hill I want to die on.

“Paws” not “Hands”: Something a lot of writers get wrong is the use of “hands.” In *Pugmire*, try to avoid all uses of this word, even when not referring to those things at the end of your arms. So, you “give” something over instead of “handing” something over, you use “two-pawed” weapons, and so on. Side note: All characters have paws, even lizards and birds.

Breeds: When a breed is a character’s name, it’s capitalized (like all surnames). If you’re referring to a character by their breed, it’s lowercase. For example: There’s never been a more wonderful dachshund than Pan Dachshund. Also, characters never refer to themselves as breeds – they’re families.

Lexicon

Below are game-specific terms for Realms of Pugmire, and how they are used, spelled, and capitalized in the text. In general, if you’re not sure if it needs to be capitalized, it probably doesn’t.

- ability
- ability check (never “ability roll”)
- ability modifier
- ability score
- action
- advancement
- advantage
- Ages of Man
- artisan (*Pugmire* calling)
- attack roll
- background
- bad dog
- badger
- bond

- bonus action
- botch
- boy (never “man;” as used in “who’s a good boy?”)
- breed (*Pugmire* family concept)
- Brother (as a title in the Church of Man)
- calling
- cat
- challenge rating (only rarely “CR”)
- champion (*Mau* calling)
- Charisma
- the Church of Man
- City of Good Dogs (the epithet used for the kingdom of *Pugmire*)
- Code of Man (the Church of Man’s code of ethics)
- the Code
- Commander (*Mau* title)
- companion (*Pugmire* breed)
- conditions (individual conditions are capitalized, like Anosmic and Deaf)
- Constitution
- cur
- Darkvision
- defense
- demons
- Dexterity
- difficulty
- disadvantage
- dog
- Duke/Duchess (as the head of a noble family of dogs)
- Dynast (*Mau* title)
- failure
- fettle (*Pugmire* breed)
- fix (as in a magic item)
- flaw
- footpad (*Mau* calling)
- fortune
- fortune bowl
- fortune pile
- free action
- free dog (as in a dog that is not part of the *Pugmire* empire)
- girl (never “woman;” as used in “who’s a good girl?”)
- good dog
- guardian (*Pugmire* calling)
- Guide (as in the person who runs a game of *Realms of Pugmire*; also, the act of running a • game as Guide)
- herder (*Pugmire* breed)
- house (in general terms)
- House Angora
- House Cymric
- House Korat
- House *Mau*
- House Rex
- House Siberian
- hunter (*Pugmire* calling)
- ideal
- improvement
- Intelligence
- kitten (never “child”)
- level (both player level and spell level)
- Low-light Vision
- Man
- mancer (*Mau* calling)
- masterwork
- minister (*Mau* calling)
- moggie (a cat who lives outside civilization)
- Monarch (leader of the Monarchies of *Mau*; currently vacant)
- Monarchies of *Mau*
- mutt (as a breed)

- Mutt (as a family name)
- necromancy
- noble
- non-player character (never “NPC”)
- the Old Ones
- opportunity attack
- pariah (synonym for “free dog,” but more dismissive)
- paw (Never use “hand;” avoid awkward constructions like “he pawed him the object”). Also, bird hands are also “paws,” although you can refer to them as “claw-like paws.”
- person (avoid gender unless it is important)
- personality trait
- pioneer (as a representative of the Royal Pioneers)
- Pioneer (as a title or as a short form of the group name “Royal Pioneers of Realms of Pugmire”)
- plastic
- player character (never “PC”)
- pointer (*Pugmire* breed)
- potion
- Precepts of Mau
- primary ability
- proficiency
- proficiency bonus
- Pugmire
- puppy (never “child”)
- ratter (*Pugmire* calling)
- reaction
- refinements
- relic
- resting
- round
- the Royal Pioneers
- rucksack
- runner (*Pugmire* breed)
- saving throw
- scat
- secret (*Mau* special ability; same as “trick”)
- the Shadow Bloc
- shepherd (*Pugmire* calling)
- Sister (as a title)
- skill
- sleeping
- spell (individual spell names are capitalized and italicized, like *Magic Missile*)
- spell level
- spell slot
- stamina dice
- stamina points
- stray (*Pugmire* calling)
- Strength
- success
- they/them (when referring to Man, it’s always lowercase and plural “they”)
- tracker (*Mau* calling)
- trailblazer (as a representative of Trillani’s Trailblazers)
- Trailblazer (as a title or as a short form of the group name “Trillani’s Trailblazers”)
- trick (*Pugmire* special ability; similar to “secret”)
- triumph
- turn
- the Unseen
- wanderer (*Mau* calling)
- Wisdom
- wonder (as in a magic item)
- the Word of Man
- worker (*Pugmire* breed)



Chapter Two: Claws and Effect

A while after *Pugmire* came out, the folks at Onyx Path asked me for some related content they could put up on their blog. They would have been happy with snippets of text from the book, but I thought it was a good opportunity to write about some topics I didn't get a chance to address in either *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau*. I've edited those blogs and divided them up into design commentary and Guide advice, with a couple additional essays at the end.

Design Commentary

These are essays about my thinking behind various books and elements of the games.

Is This a Joke?

Related to my discussion in the previous chapter articulating the tone of Pugmire, I remembered an old blog post I made way back when I first announced

Pugmire in the ancient days of 2014. A lot of people assumed the announcement was some kind of joke – enough that a few months later, I wrote a blog about it.

One question I get regularly is whether *Pugmire* is a joke. Given that I've been responsible for some pranks when I worked with White Wolf, it's a fair question. The short answer is obviously no, but there are nuances to the question that are more complex beyond the obvious fact that this is a real game that is being made.

For example, it isn't a typical Onyx Path game on the surface. It's not using pools of d10s, it isn't gritty and dark, and it's not geared toward an adult audience. Over the years I've gotten pretty good at working on those kinds of games, and I'm happy to keep doing so, but part of the reason I developed *Pugmire* is that I wanted to try something different. That's one of the great points of working with Onyx Path over White

Wolf for me – Rich is able and willing to try new ideas that wouldn't fit in the original company's structure or business plan, and I have ownership over this thing I created, to boot. Since this game doesn't fit an established mold, I can see why some folks would assume it's a joke.

Similarly, the game does have humor in it, but I maintain that it isn't a funny game. We as players laugh at the idea that there's a religious tenet of "Be A Good Dog," but the characters in the world take it very seriously. It's somewhat like the humor in *Paranoia*, although over the years its parody meta-humor has bled into the game itself. Again, if some folks see funny bits, it's easy to mistake that the whole game is a joke.

As I work on the game, one of the trickiest parts is allowing humor without making the game "funny." So far, I've been using the term "light-hearted" to explain the nuance, but it's something that you really only get once you dive in. Some of the playtest groups are nice enough to post quotes or anecdotes on social media so I can read them, and most of those posts are gags. I take that as encouraging – people are excited and having fun with the game, even at this early stage. When I've run the game myself, the level of humor changes depending on the group, but there's always at least some laughs. The reason it isn't a joke, and why I'm adamant on that point, is because a "funny game" can only be funny. A light-hearted game, however, can include more depth and options.

This ties in the concept of mourning.

Wait, what? Give me a moment to explain.

One of the images I keep in my mind is something Rich mentioned during one of our many chats about the game: the dog who mourns the passing of its owner by lying down outside their room or by their bed. That's the overall tone of how dogs feel about the loss of Man. In fact, the first version of the game was much darker, and that elegiac tone was a central focus. I pulled back from that before I started writing the game proper, and in one of my first playtests, some of the players at the end remarked at how the game can be "dark as shit." So, paradoxically, groups are more likely to tap into that darker vein, even though the surface of the game obscures it. But

the reverse isn't true: if I wrote the game to be nothing but gags and jokes, it would be hard to get to that spectrum of emotion.

Is it a "serious" game? Hell no. It's a game where you play dogs wielding magic and swords to rescue iPads from ancient ruins. I not only accept that, but I want to make that a feature. I don't know about other people's gaming groups, but mine generally tend to joke around during the session anyhow, so it's nice to write a game that leans into that. But it's also a game that addresses dealing with loss, ethics, religious dogma, casual racism, and nationalism. None of that is necessary to play and enjoy the game, but it's there if you want to dig into it.

Is *Pugmire* a joke? No. Because it can be so much more.

Just D&D with Dogs

Time and again I'll wade into a forum thread or Facebook post about *Pugmire*, and someone will say, "Oh, that's just *D&D* with dogs." And that's both right and wrong.

Yes, it's based on the d20 OGL used for fifth-edition *Dungeons & Dragons*. And unlike some OGL-based games, the surface layer (what I call the "output") looks and acts a lot like 5e *D&D*. But the mechanics that drive the game (what I call the "engine") are distinctly different (and I'll talk in more detail about it in chapter 3, p. XX). I tend to call it a "streamlined" version of 5e, but even that's not entirely right. I've spent a lot of time challenging core assumptions, adapting new ideas, and seeing how each piece impacts the others. For example, rather than having a pre-constructed set of class abilities, I presented a series of options so players can pick and choose the tricks that make sense to them. I also needed to find ways of mechanically representing some of the concepts unique to *Pugmire*, such as the artisans (which is somewhere between a bard and a wizard).

But I wanted to keep that "classic" fantasy gaming feel. I've mentioned in another post that one of the central themes of *Pugmire* is nostalgia, and *D&D* holds a nostalgic place in my heart (and indeed, in the hearts of many gamers). But nostalgia isn't memory – it's a polished and refined view of history that smooths over the rough

edges and focuses on the parts that brought you joy. It's the same with the system — something that looks and plays more like the *D&D* I remembered over the *D&D* that actually existed.

I also wanted to de-emphasize record-keeping and mechanical incentives to kill. That's why there are no experience points or loot beyond relics: The design cycle of *D&D* is “kill monsters, gain treasure and XP, use those to become more powerful, kill bigger monsters.” There's nothing wrong with that cycle — it's worked for over 40 years, after all — but it wasn't what I wanted for *Pugmire*.

Anyhow, the output is (largely) compatible with 5e *D&D*. If you take a bit of 5e OGL design and bolt it onto *Pugmire*, it'll mostly work as intended — you may need to fiddle with some bits (and chapter three can help you with that), but it doesn't take a ton of design experience to make it work. That was my goal. But it's the difference between restoring a classic car as it was, and installing a modern engine, Bluetooth audio hookups, and a satnav into a classic car. In the end, if you drove each car separately, you might consider them equivalent, but if you carefully compared them side-by-side, you'd see a whole host of small changes and differences. Neither is inherently better than the other, but some people prefer one style of restoration over the other.

If you want to make *Pugmire* into a “purer” *D&D* experience, it's easy to port. But because it uses the lingua franca of *D&D*, it's also easy to convert into other systems or to bolt on engine bits you like or prefer. You might even radically change the output so it looks nothing like *D&D*. That's wonderful! Make *Pugmire* into your game. As long as people are having fun exploring the Realms of *Pugmire*, it'll always be something more than “just *D&D* with dogs.”

Build-A-Breed

For a long time, the number one question I got for *Pugmire* was “Can I play a cat?” But now that *Monarchies of Mau* is off to the printers, the new number one question I get is “Can I play as my favorite breed?”

The FAQ in chapter four (p. XX) gives an answer for this, but it's worth digging into the details a bit more, starting with how I came up

with the Breeds in the first place.

As fans of *D&D* might realize, Breed fills the role of “race” mechanically, offering some special powers and an ability bonus. I knew that only having six Breeds was bound to be controversial because there are so many dog breeds past and present. I thought using breed groupings as a way of organizing the material would solve that problem, making it clear and obvious into which group various dogs fall.

Oh, what a fool I was.

“This dog belongs in that group” was the single most prevalent category of open development comments I got. People had very strong opinions on what breed should be represented where. Worse, even in the real world there's hardly a consensus on how to organize breeds. I quickly realized that I had to make a fictional distinction between breeds rather than relying on real-world divisions. But even then, there were issues. What if a breed is both smart and fast? How do you measure stamina over strength? And aren't all dogs worthy of a Charisma bonus for being so darned cute?

Then I got in contact with a professional dog breeder, and she gave me some great information. In particular, she mentioned that dog cognition involves inhibiting hunting behavior at some point along their chain (track, stalk, point/flush, chase, bite, kill, eat). That gave me a lot of clarity, and between us we were able to rearrange the breeds into their current forms. But it's not perfect.

However, I never intended it to be perfect. “Breed” is purely a mechanical construct. Families have in-game impact, but like our families, there can be diversity within a familial unit. Just because pugs tend to be cute and clownish doesn't mean you can't have a tough, serious pug. And some groups are going to have different opinions on which breeds should have what bonus. I didn't want to force people to slot their favorite pets into a specific group.

Granted, there are some canonical families that I've written. For example, I couldn't find a version of “German Shepherd” that worked with my naming convention, so I use the alternative name “Alsatian” instead. Nearly all the hounds

have “-Hound” in their name, even dogs like “Fox-Hound,” but not all Hounds are necessarily in the same Breed groups. And I largely sidestep the issue of named mixed breeds — as far as I’m concerned, it’s up to individual characters if they prefer to be known as a Puggle or a Mutt.

It’s all a bit of a mess, and that’s intentional. Family lines aren’t easy to backtrack, and I wanted to reflect that in the game. And that gives you some room to tweak and adjust things in your own way. So absolutely move the families around within the Breed breakdowns in whatever way makes sense for your game. If you’re having fun, that’s all that matters.

Callings

Designing the callings for *Pugmire*, *Monarchies of Mau*, and *Pirates of Pugmire* was an interesting challenge. I wanted the games to be nostalgic reinventions of classic fantasy gaming, so some form of “class” was necessary. But I also wanted the callings to be evocative of this new world I was creating.

Early on, I decided a couple ground rules:

1) Each calling would key off two attributes. It would have been easy to tie each calling to one primary attribute, but I felt two gave each calling more depth. Since tricks are picked and refined by player choice instead of a built-in progression, it means that following one of two rough paths could lead to different expressions of the same core calling idea.

2) I wanted six callings in each core rulebook. Not only did this pair well with the six attributes, but six is generally the number of players I have in my games. I wanted each player to have the opportunity to play something cool.

Let’s look at how well I did!

Pugmire

Pugmire was the first book, and at the time possibly the only book, so I had to get the core concepts down the first time.

Artisans (Charisma and Intelligence): This is one of the more radical callings in the book. I wanted magic users that were more like a blend of charismatic sorcerers and classic mages. I felt the stereotype of the “loner magician” worked better for cats, so even though I wasn’t 100 percent sure

I would ever do a cat game, I still wanted the dogs to have something different.

Guardians (Charisma and Strength): I struggled with this for a while. Originally, they were going to be more like paladins, but that felt too similar to Shepherds. Then I was going to make them a lot like generic warriors, but that got too close in gameplay to Strays. I settled on charismatic warriors: warlords, leaders, and ideologues. That felt more like a “guardian” to me.

Hunters (Dexterity and Wisdom): Hunters were one of the first callings I immediately knew how to structure. I wanted room for dogs that travel in the woods and hunt things, although I tweaked the flavor to “hunt monsters” to make them more explicitly heroic. They’re really close to rangers, but in this case, it worked so well I didn’t mess with the formula much.

Ratters (Constitution and Dexterity): I probably fiddled with this one the longest. I struggled to figure out how “thief” worked in the setting I was building. It wasn’t until I stumbled on the concept of rat-hunting dogs and merged that with a kind of Gray Mouser antihero that I was able to nail this down. But even then, I wanted these to be hardier than the average thief, which is why I swapped Constitution in. It’s a calling that feels stereotypical at first, but you find the depth and nuance as you play it.

Shepherds (Intelligence and Wisdom): This was another calling that I knew pretty much right away how I wanted it to land. It’s a monotheistic cleric, essentially, with a dash of magical knowledge. I gave them a little more combat capacity, since I took away the paladin bits from Guardians, but otherwise they were easy to work out.

Strays (Constitution and Strength): This one had a good concept right away (although they had the name “pariahs” for a long time), but it evolved as I worked on the game design. Mechanically, it fills the role of a strong, tough warrior that the callings needed, but most of the other tricks were geared around helping other dogs in the party. Thematically, Strays help themselves, so it took a while to make the mechanics work so the gameplay of the calling still landed right, but they still had incentives to help the rest of the party out.

Monarchies of Mau

Since this was a companion game, I knew the callings had to be equivalent yet distinct. They needed to feel like they were cool and interesting to play in their own right, but they could also fill roughly equivalent roles that *Pugmire* callings do.

It was a tricky balance, and honestly, I didn't do a great job when the book originally went to Kickstarter. A few people pointed out that some of the callings were quite similar. I knew I wanted to hire a full team to write *Mau* (instead of writing most of it myself, like I did for *Pugmire*), and that observation reinforced that was a good instinct to have. (Get it? Instinct? Because *Mau*? I'll see myself out.)

That said, even when working with Matthew Dawkins on the updated callings, I still had a good idea what I wanted to see, to hit that right balance.

Champions (Charisma and Strength): I wanted this to be less “charismatic leader” and more “roguish swashbuckler with a dash of samurai.” But there's a lot of overlap, and the first pass was pretty much like a Guardian. Adding a secret like Barbed Heckle and making that one of the first secrets you learn helped shift the balance, along with some great flavor text.

Footpads (Dexterity and Intelligence): Like I mentioned earlier, I knew I wanted the “classic” thief/rogue to be on the cat side, so this was fairly easy to nail down. The swap from Constitution to Intelligence was enough to distinguish. Fun fact: This was called “burglar” for a very long time (cat burglar? eh?), but we felt it ended up feeling too much like *Lord of the Rings*, and the pun was just on the wrong side of funny.

Mancers (Intelligence and Wisdom): This was a happy accident. I knew immediately that I wanted necromancers for *Mau*, but beyond that I didn't have a strong idea for them. When Rich was researching art ideas, he noticed a lot of cats in wizard and witch hats, which reminded me that I hadn't really done a “classic” wizard in *Pugmire*! The concept functionally wrote itself after that.

Ministers (Charisma and Constitution): Ministers were something that made complete sense to me, but I struggled to articulate them for a long

time. Since *Mau* didn't have a state religion like *Pugmire*, I wanted something that was more secular. The name “minister” is both a governmental position and a spiritual one, and I really wanted to play in that space of someone who preaches to magical effect. In a lot of ways, it's a bard with a little more magical oomph. But it took a few tries before we landed on a presentation and set of mechanics that made all that clear.

Trackers (Constitution and Wisdom): This was the other calling that felt very close to its *Pugmire* counterpart, the Hunter. I had a lot of problems figuring out a way to make it work, until we hit on the idea of moving *Smite* from the Champion to here. Both callings became much clearer as a result: The Champion solidified as that swashbuckler concept I wanted, and the Trackers became careful but deadly demon hunters.

Wanderers (Dexterity and Strength): I knew immediately I wanted the Stray parallel to be a monk, but without the religious trappings. Martial arts cats are a cool concept, and there's a reason it ended up on the cover! A lot of the thoughts I had to make the Strays work helped me nail the Wanderers quickly.

Pirates of Pugmire

This was an interesting challenge, because I had a new set of conditions I needed to fulfill. Specifically, I needed two dog-specific callings, two cat-specific callings, and one calling each for lizards and birds. Early on I made it easier for characters to share those callings, but that was still my initial design idea.

This time, though, I also gave more room to the writer, Dixie Cochran, so it was even more of a team effort than the *Mau* callings.

Crusader (dog; Charisma and Constitution): In my tweaking of the Guardian calling in *Pugmire*, I realized that I never really got a chance to do a proper “paladin” calling. This was a chance to do that, with a dash of Spanish conquistador tossed in.

Gundog (dog; Constitution and Dexterity): When I knew I needed two gun-wielding callings, this one was pretty easy. I mean, gundogs are a thing, so the name pretty much sells the concept. Like with most areas where I want to distinguish cats and dogs, this calling errs on the side of Constitution.



Torpedo (cat; Dexterity and Strength): That said, I wanted the cat version to be tough, too. “Torpedo” is an old criminal term for a thug or brute, someone who beats people up for a living. Pairing that with naval torpedoes gave the cats a fun, gun-wielding, brutal calling to play with.

Mystic (cat; Intelligence and Strength): I knew I wanted to do a druid-like sea witch. They seemed to make more sense as cats. I also wanted the class to have only a smattering of spell-related knacks, which is why it has a decent chunk of tracker in it as well.

Alkalist (lizard; Intelligence and Wisdom): Early in the art phase of *Pugmire*, I wanted to lean lizards away from being purely desert-dwelling. That’s where the idea of salt magic came from, so I knew I needed to add this calling. It also tied well to the “sea salt” vibe of the book. The biggest challenge was making the calling distinctive within a very small word count allotted to me in the book, which is why it ended up being more alchemist than wizard.

Rimer (bird; Charisma and Wisdom): This one was a struggle to design. Originally, I want-

ed what was essentially a kind of serious jester, as jester classes are a bizarre but neat little trend in *D&D* subclasses over the decades. And I felt the colorful nature of birds worked well with the aesthetics of the jester class. But the jester class isn’t great, and we worked on a few different approaches in both the flavor and mechanics to get what I wanted out of this. In the end, we just gave them one solid knack around performance, some spells, and then mixed in some rogue/thief elements to make it all work.

Raining Plastic

Pugmire and *Monarchies of Mau* both make some subtle changes to the “traditional” fantasy gaming formula. One that I’ve found some people struggle with is the lack of a detailed currency system. Most people seem to get it after they try it for a bit, but I’ve had several players and Guides who simply can’t wrap their heads around it. So why did I do it? There are three main reasons.

For one, I just don’t like detailed financial systems. I think it gets in the way of the parts of

gaming that I enjoy, and as a self-employed freelancer, I have to do enough of my own taxes as it is! But to be fair, that's not a very good reason.

Another reason is that I wanted to reposition the role of money in fantasy. By carefully articulating how much money something is worth or how much a character has, you give narrative weight to that concept. If I discover that the rat bandits have, say, 14 plastic coins, there must be a reason why that's important. And in *Pugmire*, it really isn't. It is important to distinguish if someone is rich and someone else is poor, and there's something compelling about finding out a noble is only carrying a few coins — money has some role in things — but not enough to calculate it to the last plastic chunk. By abstracting loose money, it reduces the impact of it for the player experience.

Which leads nicely into my third point: It also doesn't matter as much to the kingdom of *Pugmire*. Both *Pugmire* and *Mau* aren't too far removed from pure barter societies. The Monarchies are a little further along — they had centuries of negotiations and trade between city-states — but the idea that plastic is both valuable and a way to barter by proxy is still relatively novel. And while certain fantasy settings claim similar dynamics, it doesn't pan out in practice. Player characters will haggle over a few copper pieces, because the price in the book is listed as a certain amount. By keeping currency abstract, it also allows for (pardon the pun) fuzzier negotiations for services. Imagine the following scene:

Guide: "The innkeeper scowls and holds out his paw. The services he provides are cheap, in every sense of the word, but he's asking for a lot more than this inn is worth."

Player in Traditional Currency System: "Well, he's asking for 80 copper. Would 30 be a fairer price? I only have 25, so maybe he'll accept that. Or maybe I can get a loan from the noble and come back with the difference. How much does everyone have again?"

Player in Pugmire: "He's asking for many coins, when he's only worth a few? Bah! I'll convince him to lower his prices, or we'll take our custom elsewhere!"

In both case the same idea is present, but one gets lost in the specific numbers, while the other keeps things moving. And in both the game sys-

tem and the game world, the specific details are secondary to the larger point — this innkeeper is trying to get more than he can reasonably charge. The concept of detailed economics is one of the aspects that the Old Ones have yet to re-impart on the dogs and cats of the world.

All that said, if you prefer to pinch your plastic, feel free! Just because I don't spell things out doesn't mean you can't add such details to your own chronicle. You won't break the game by providing a price list for items and services or by awarding players with heaps of plastic. If you're running a game centered around mercenaries, this might be a particularly good addition. Just be careful if your core idea is that the characters are well-stocked adventurers taking on difficult tasks in the name of the state.

Fortune and Underwritten Rules

I like fortune because it's a good example of a mechanic that works better through use than through explanation. If you've played either game, you know how fortune works. Each story, you start off with two fortune in the fortune bowl. Players experience setbacks or play into their personality traits to add fortune to the bowl, and anyone in the party can ask to take a fortune from the bowl. If no one says no, the fortune is removed and the person using fortune can reroll the die or modify the world in some small way.

Let me digress a bit. As a designer, I prefer to underwrite rules instead of overwriting them. "Underwritten" rules are rules that don't spell out every possible permutation or heavily explain why they work the way they do, whereas "overwritten" rules explain everything and often force the players into specific channels. Whether a rule falls on one side or another is subjective, and both approaches have their problems and benefits. I'm just putting out there that I generally err on the side of leaving players room for interpretation, instead of spelling everything out.

As an example of the dangers of underwritten rules, let's look at *Pugmire*, p. 88. Right at the top, it says, "At the start of every adventure, the fortune bowl has two points in it." Some players

have mentioned that they're confused whether that means every session or every story, and whether fortune carries over from story to story. Since I don't mention points carrying over, they don't, and in the section on story, I do mention that "adventure" is a synonym. Thus, the intent is that every story starts with two fortune, which is built up over the course of the story. It's clear, but you have to read exactly what's written, which sometimes can be unclear when bringing in knowledge and techniques from other games. In this specific case, it also doesn't help that I don't do it that way myself – in my home games, the fortune bowl is reset every session – but having the bowl tied to the story makes more sense for the ebb and flow of adventure design.

Regardless, I don't spell out the design intent for the mechanic, but most people get it very quickly: It's meant for teambuilding. I've run *Pugmire* at conventions with strangers over a dozen times now, and each time they're working like a team within a few hours of using fortune. The thief that steals something at the worst possible time isn't ruining the game – they're just generating fortune for use down the road. Players ask if it's okay to use fortune, and sometimes groups encourage them to spend it. I've rarely seen anyone give a hard no on spending fortune except when they're down the last point or two. Every game ends up having one conversation about "Is this the right time to dip into the fortune bowl?" and one example of "You know, if you do something character-appropriate here, you can get fortune." But by players discovering that for themselves, they feel like they really get it, instead of being told why this mechanic exists.

But I still get two big questions about fortune: how often to award it, and why fortune in *Mau* works differently.

One thing that's implicit in fortune but never spelled out is that it's inverse to dramatic tension. When the tension of the story is low, players are generating fortune, and when the tension is high, players are generally spending it. So during the first half of the adventure, fortune should be going up, but in the second half it's going back down. Since fortune resets at the end of the adventure, the ideal path is spending down to zero right near the end.

As a Guide, that's a good metric. If players are coasting in the first half, encourage them to make things more complicated. Suggest botching rolls and remind them of their personality traits. Sometimes I give fortune out early on for a great joke or a wonderful roleplay scene, just to remind them that it's out there. The reasons a Guide can give fortune are intentionally vague on purpose. In general, it's not going to hurt anything if you err on the side of giving fortune for the first half.

As things get tougher, hit the players hard. Enemies are, on average, a bit tougher than their *D&D* counterparts, but they're easier to defeat if characters work together. Fortune is part of what makes that easier and gives players room to take character-appropriate actions over game-efficient actions. But it's not a guarantee – you can spend fortune and still fail – so definitely encourage them to spend it as well as acquire it.

One rule that doesn't get a lot of play is letting non-player characters spend fortune into the bowl. If you want an enemy to take a decisive action, put a fortune in the bowl and let them interrupt initiative. This is great because players sometimes get into the flow of organizing their rounds, but in a big fight having an enemy take control is a shock. Plus, it can add a fortune to their bowl if it's out, so players don't feel too bad when it happens.

Okay, that's pacing. Why do cats have the option to keep fortune? The objective answer is that I wanted to add a level of player-vs-player tension in *Monarchies of Mau*. It's a more explicitly political game than *Pugmire* (there *are* politics, but they're generally in the background). By allowing players to keep their own resources that they cannot share, cats have the option to create their own luck, which is very much a theme of the game. But here's the big secret.

Mau players rarely use that option.

Once you put a pot of points in the middle of the table and say that everyone can share, players rarely want to be the person to decide that they're not going to share. I've never seen a cat player use that option more than once in a game, and usually on the level of a "just in case" measure. Having one point in reserve feels great when everything's down to you, the dice have been evil,

and the fortune bowl is dry. But in truth, it's a bigger risk to the group to hoard the point than to let it go to the bowl.

So why offer it at all? Because having the option is a big part of the game. Cats *can* be selfish jerks. Dogs don't even get the option, but cats do. Having the choice changes the dynamic, in the same way destroying relics changes the relationship with magic items.

Speaking of which...

Dogs, Cats, and Artifacts

One of the advantages the Realms of Pugmire has over other fantasy games is that you don't have to sell people on why the main species don't get along. You don't need pages and pages of why Glorthum the Mighty once smote Briflar the Brave a gazillion years ago, and that's why humans and orcs hate each other, or whatever. We've been culturally told that dogs and cats don't get along, so of course they don't get along in Realms of Pugmire. Problem solved!

Except not really. For one, dogs and cats can get along in the real world, a fact that many pet owners rush to point out. Also, players are notorious about playing the exceptions to the rule, making fantasy versions of *The Odd Couple* that go all the way back to Gimli and Legolas. Plus, people don't hate each other just because. There's always a reason. It might be a terrible reason, a made-up reason, a petty reason, or an utterly offensive reason, but there is one. I needed to come up with a reason that was in the world – that's the religious conflict I mentioned in another essay.

However, if I wanted that tension reflected at the table, I'd also need a mechanical reason. Originally, I toyed with fortune being that reason. I ultimately discarded that idea, but you can see a remnant of it in how cats can keep personal fortune piles. It took a while, and some consulting with one of my co-writers, David Bounds, before I figured out that it's all based around artifacts.

In *Pugmire*, I wanted to reflect what I called "the Excalibur effect." Essentially, there's a place in fantasy fiction for magical artifacts to be passed down from generation to generation, or even just to have one become more powerful over time. *D&D* as written doesn't handle that very well, so

I came up with the idea that dogs can invest their magic items with personal power.

However, cats don't invest in the future. As I mentioned previously, they generally believe they'll reincarnate, so investing in themselves is investing in the future. As such, they can't make objects more powerful the ways dogs can. Instead, cats break them to take that power into themselves.

In mixed games, this sets up an interesting dynamic. Once an artifact is found, does the dog hold on to it to make it more powerful, or does the cat break it and take that power for themselves? Further, with artifacts being linked to a dog family's noble status and a cat's value to their house always being tested, there's more about "investing in the future" than pure numbers. This means that dog and cat characters will have a reason for personal conflict each time an artifact is found, and finding artifacts is a key part of the core Realms of Pugmire experience.

Of course, I don't expect this to be a fight every time. Sometimes the conflict will be "who gets to keep this one?" Sometimes it'll be characters hiding an artifact from the other party members. It might even be giving the artifact to a neutral party to decide. The point is that each revelation is another chance for dog and cat characters to spark off each other. And that's a lot more powerful than just a hand wavy "Well, sure, dogs and cats always hate each other. Everyone knows that."

Where is Humanity?

One thing I've been clear on – or rather, one thing I've consistently *refused* to be clear on – is the fate of humanity in the Realms of Pugmire setting. Both *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* mention several possibilities:

- Died out from an outside threat
- Obliterated by some hostile technology rampaging across the globe
- Colonized other worlds
- Evolved into creatures of pure energy
- Stepped into a new dimension
- A plague ravaged the world
- A natural or technological disaster made

the planet uninhabitable for us

- Fought a war that brought about the end of everything
- Explored distant galaxies in generation ships
- Uploaded our brains into a virtual world

But I have a secret, one of the True Secrets of the setting. I don't talk about it much, but I'm going to talk about it here, right now, to you. And the secret is this:

I have no idea what happened to them.

Seriously. No clue. There's nothing lurking in a document hidden somewhere in my Dropbox. I'm not holding back some grand reveal as part of a future product. I simply don't know. And even more importantly, I plan never to determine an "official" answer to that question.

And I think this, more than anything else, confuses a lot of people when they write for me. There's an assumption that every detail of the setting is either worked out in my head, or that I have some plan. For most of the setting, that's true, but not in this case. So why? Why would I not have an answer for such an important question?

Let me take you into the world of designing games for existing properties. When you work on something like *Futurama* or *The Walking Dead* or *Firefly*, you get a "bible" of things you can and cannot do in the property. There are often bits that are marked something like SUPER SECRET DO NOT TELL ANYONE ON PAIN OF OBLITERATION. It's exciting, it's juicy, and it's fun to learn the secrets of a popular universe. But I've found two things to be true when you finally learn them:

- 1) They're never as interesting as you'd hope they would be.
- 2) They always get out.

In the end, what happened to humanity doesn't really matter. It's more important that *something* happened than *what* happened. Because once you know absolutely, 100 percent, for certain what the mystery is, it stops being interesting.

And you can't spoil an ending that doesn't exist.

So, for Guides who want to play with this thread, feel free to come up with your own "true" answer for what happened to humanity. That might be the answer for your chronicle, and you can absolutely enjoy that. But I personally find it's more fun to seed contradictory answers, and let the characters argue about it. Because what happened thousands or millions of years ago isn't nearly as much fun as what's happening at your table right now.

War of Dogs and Cats

As you can see, I enjoy leaving incomplete and contradictory information for players to find. I get a lot of that from years of working on properties like **Vampire: The Masquerade**, which is a game all about endless threads, mysteries, and conspiracies. The games in the Realms of Pugmire aren't as much about that, so I take a lighter touch, but the truth is people misremember and confuse details even within a generation. Sometimes, even within a decade or so. And there's no better example of that than the War of Dogs and Cats.

Before I start, cards on the table: I don't have a definitive idea of how the war panned out. But unlike the fate of humanity where I refuse to detail that material, in this case I'm just leaving it open. I have vague ideas of a wargame or computer game or something set in that time period, so I want to leave something fun for Future Eddy to do if we get there. One thing I *do* know, however, is that neither the dogs nor the cats are right.

Compare the details of the war in *Pugmire* (pp. 135-136) with those in *Monarchies of Mau* (pp. 149-150). Both sides agree that the war basically started over Waterdog Port. The *Pugmire* book claims it's because the monarchy of Korat (pre-unification of the Monarchies of Mau) wanted to use the port but refused to contribute to the cost of building more ships. On the other hand, the *Monarchies of Mau* book takes a more conflicted stance, saying that while the dogs claim this, in truth Korat's accountants had the boats made, but show the dogs charging excessive docking fees. However, the *Mau* book also admits in other sections that cats manufacture documents to justify their version of history.

Another interesting bit: Both sides agree that

Waterdog Port was temporarily under the control of Mau, when it was renamed “Mau’s Glorious Waters.” The *Pugmire* book doesn’t detail this time much but implies that the dogs fought to get it back. Specifically, the line is:

For several months, the Monarchies claimed control (briefly renaming it “Mau’s Glorious Waters”), but the dogs left behind fought them tooth and claw every chance they could. Eventually the cats relinquished control over the port as well, and Waterdog Port became a free city, unclaimed by either side.

And yet, the *Mau* section goes into more detail, and implies that the cat’s control over the port was more of a sunk cost issue. The key line there is:

The cats had to devote all their resources to holding the port against the dogs who’d been left behind by the crown and were fighting back from within. Eventually, the cats ceded control and withdrew from the port.

Both lines reinforce each other, but there’s a subtle spin there. The dog narrative implies that it was their relentless attacks that caused the cats to flee. The cat narrative is that trying to control the port was simply too expensive. Both could be true, but there’s a different emphasis – one where each side is positioned to have made the right decision.

Much like the fate of humanity, what happened in the war is less important than what characters *think* happened. At some point I may do more content within the war that gives an even account, but for now I’m intrigued by the prospect of each side looking at a conflict that was largely a stalemate and claiming a victory out of it.

Nine Lives in Mau

Faith and religion were easy for me to write in *Pugmire*. As soon as I settled on “Man” as a linguistic analogue for “God,” a lot of things fell into place – the Code of Man, the Church of Man, and even casual blasphemy like “Man damn it.” The whole concept was pretty much there right at the beginning, just waiting for me to flesh out the details.

With *Monarchies of Mau*, it was trickier. I knew I wanted cats to believe that humanity worshiped them – partially to play off ancient Egyptian references to such, which tied into the name “Mau,” and partially to give dogs and cats a

built-in reason to fight – but I didn’t know much beyond that. I decided I didn’t want a monolithic church like in *Pugmire*, but something more spiritual and personal. It took a while before I hit on the “cats have nine lives” phrase being a nod to reincarnation. (Side note: It’s interesting how some things seem obvious in retrospect, but sometimes it takes a lot of work to get to the “obvious” idea. A lot of times, when you see something that seems like someone should have thought of it before, it’s because no one really has thought of it before.)

Once reincarnation was on the table, I knew I had a large problem, and honestly, it’s a problem I still have today. You see, the weird dead-gestalt-god idea in *Pugmire* works because we as the readers know the true answer: humanity isn’t really around helping dogs. The core premise of the book refutes that, but no one questions that core premise, which freed me up to allow the dogs to be very earnest about their faith. At the core, however, was one unquestionable truth about the setting: Dogs are wrong.

When I started mentioning reincarnation, however, my beta readers jumped to the opposite conclusion: that nine lives are concrete, real, and countable. In other words, dogs are wrong, but cats are right. I was told that reincarnation must be true, because why would cats believe it if it wasn’t? Setting aside the fact that humans have believed in reincarnation for quite a long time with very little evidence of such, I wasn’t comfortable with one faith system being explicitly true and another one being explicitly false. Either both had to be true, or neither were. And since so much of the tone and feeling of *Pugmire* was based on Dogs Being Wrong About People(tm), I had to rule that cats were also wrong.

There is another reason I’ve stuck to my guns, however, aside from pure artistic vision. I also knew early on that cats would have access to necromancy – something that dogs would abhor. The reason cats are more casual about it makes sense in the context of reincarnation being on the table: if you’re going to be reborn at some point anyway, what does it matter if another cat uses your corpse for some personal gain? You’re done with it, right? If we know that cats are wrong, however, then necromancy becomes



something we as players still find a little horrible. That's important for undead monsters to have any impact at the table.

Now obviously, not all cats feel that way. Some are still attached to the mortal remains of their loved ones. Further, just like there are dogs that don't believe in the Church or Code of Man, there are cats who don't believe in reincarnation. If you've been promised additional lives and it turns out you were wrong, finding ways to come back to life becomes precious, so there ends up being lots of reasons why cats study this aspect of magic. (Compare to dogs, who accept they only have one life. That's why they're more devoted to friends and families — people that can remember them — than the more individualistic cats.)

Finally, if I ruled that reincarnation was explicitly true, players would inevitably play cats as more fatalistic, which wasn't something I wanted. Instead of being unique, textured characters, cats would just be like video game lives, ground down until the last one remained. Only the "last life" would matter on a mechanical level, because

that's the one you can't afford to lose. No matter how harsh I made the act of reincarnation in the rules, the cost is always lower than "I can no longer play my character."

All that said, I did put an optional rule in the game about reincarnation. If you want it to be true in your game, I certainly won't stop you. Keep in mind, though, that choosing to go that route does end up establishing precedents in your game like the ones I mention. If you understand them and are cool with them, enjoy yourself, and I'll see you in the next life!

The Lands Beyond

One of the big discussions we had on *Pirates of Pugmire* was about maps. Not whether a map is necessary — I mean, what kind of game about pirates could I make without a cool map? No, the discussion has been about how the various Realms of Pugmire maps relate to each other.

See, I didn't start creating *Pugmire* with the whole world planned out in my head. I know it's common for fantasy games these days to have a

huge map of intriguingly named areas, but I didn't want to do that. There are a few reasons for this.

First, I wanted to explore the world as I was creating it. If I have everything set in stone, I find I get bored with just filling in the gaps later. So I learned a lot about the Realms of Pugmire when I was writing the first book. That's why, if you look at the area map in the *Pugmire* book, there's an area labelled "Cats?" on the far-right side: I figured I wanted to put the *Monarchies of Mau* on the other side, but I didn't know more than that. (In fact, at the time I was still calling them the Kingdoms of Mau!)

Secondly, one of my design goals for *Pugmire* was to evoke some of the nostalgia I had for old-school fantasy gaming. Part of that is never quite knowing what's on the other side of the mountains or where that river leads to. Setting up discrete areas of a world allows Guides to invent new areas easily without feeling hemmed in by "canon." I know some folks prefer everything laid out at once, but that's not the style of game I enjoy, and I don't want to write a game I wouldn't have fun playing.

Finally, because the world is ostensibly ours, I didn't want to pigeonhole *Pugmire* to any specific real-world location. I've heard a lot of interesting speculation on where *Pugmire* is "really" located, but in truth I don't know. It's so far in the future that continental drift and advanced technology has probably changed the shape of our world significantly. So I just didn't bother trying to have a fixed map ahead of time.

But there have been seven books prior to *Pirates of Pugmire*. The game centered on the Acid Sea, which touched both nations, so we had to work with a mapmaker to combine the scraps we had from various books into a cohesive whole. And through that process I discovered a few things about the world.

- I still don't know what's in the plains west of Pugmire or the desert east of Angora. I asked the mapmaker to put question marks in those areas! It's the first time I've ever spelled out "I don't know what's in these parts of the world, so please make it up." (Now, if I had to guess, I suspect most of the area to the west is overrun

with the badger tribes, while the area to the east is largely uninhabited except by a few wandering tribes of geckos and serpents. But I won't know for sure until I write something there.)

- My decision to not give a scale to the maps ended up coming back to haunt me. Since the rules involve the dangers of travel over the sea, time is a factor, which means I needed to give at least rough estimates of how long it takes to sail between points of interest. I went with a vague "days" length to give me some room, but the fact is that you can now start to estimate how large the respective cities are. Luckily, my approximate math seems to have borne out – for example, I always intended that the Fearful Forest would be *huge* – but it was a realization I had fairly late in the book's development process.

If you're waiting breathlessly for a complete map of the Realms of Pugmire, it probably won't be for a long time, possibly not ever. I suspect at some point I'll need to have at least a rough idea of what the world looks like as new projects have different demands for world detail. But don't wait for me. Draw up your own and make the Realms of Pugmire whatever you want it to be in your chronicle!

Guide Advice

These essays offer some more advice to Guides running *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau*.

Long-Term Play

As written, *Pugmire* and *Mau* chronicles can be reasonably swift. It's possible to go from a starting character to a retired one in ten game sessions. For some people (like me), that's a feature – I rarely have time for sprawling weekly epics that last for years and years anymore. Knowing that I can play an entire chronicle from start to finish in a reasonably short time is compelling.

That said, some people do have time for sprawling weekly epics but struggle with how to use *Pugmire* or *Mau* for such long-term play. The books do provide information on both pacing of levels and how to play beyond level 10, but I have some more thoughts on how you can create epics.

Mini-Advancement with Artifacts

One way is to change the scope of advancements. As Guide, you might award a level only after the end of a series of adventures instead of just one story. Maybe this is the end of a long novel, or a season of a television series. But players like to have new things to play with and use, so consider artifacts and relics as “mini-advancements.”

There are some advantages to this. Many artifacts have powers that emulate advancements, such as improving ability scores and providing trick-like abilities. Fixes are particularly nice because such powers are only used a few times before being depleted, but even full-blown relics can be helpful. Objects can be taken away, lost, neutralized, or otherwise taken out of play for brief periods of time, unlike advancements. Plus, they usually come with story hooks — maybe that cat necromancer will want his magic ax back one day.

Troupe Play

Pugmire has the idea of playing the puppies of old characters, carrying on the past player characters’ missions (and with invested objects to boot). *Monarchies of Mau* explicitly states that reincarnation isn’t real, but you can make it real to play the “future lives” of old player characters in new ways and perhaps get a small boost of magic or skill too. I personally love the idea of soft reboots where the past chronicle informs a new one.

You can take this one step further and play a game more in an “anthology” style. Instead of one group of cohesive characters that hand off to another distinct group, have players make up a few characters each (perhaps even from different games!). Then, each adventure focuses on one of the characters in the pool, while the other players choose appropriate characters to support the spotlight character’s story. Advancements are only handed out at the end of such spotlight tales, which means that not all characters will be the same level. But it allows for groups to explore a lot more of the world, while also keeping the game fresh and interesting.

Flashbacks

One variation on troupe play would be to institute flashbacks. For example, in the jumpstart

“Secret of Vinsen’s Tomb,” the players are left with a lot of questions about King Vinsen and what happened in his tomb. It was meant to, well, jumpstart some chronicle ideas of exploring those mysteries, but another option would be to play through Vinsen’s fall. And what if the game jumps back a couple hundred years, with the players all taking the roles of King Vinsen’s retinue?

These kinds of flashback games are nice because it allows the Guide to communicate background information without spending a long time just telling the players information. They also break up the flow of the chronicle, offering a nice palette cleanser before heading back into the main story. Finally, it’s a great way to introduce new players to the game in a low-stakes way — no matter what happens, that’s all history now!

In conclusion, just because *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* are intentionally designed to end at a specific level, that doesn’t mean you can’t find new ways to play and expand your chronicle. At the end of the day, as long as you’re having fun, that’s all that matters!

Chronicle Styles

Both *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* offer advice on how to “hack” a game into a different shape. But I thought this time I’d show you what effect each of those adjustments can have on the style of chronicle you want to run.

Silly

Yes, *Pugmire* starts off as light-hearted, but you can amp things up to be explicitly silly.

No Death: The Yosha sidebar on p. 97 of *Pugmire* talks about ditching saving throws and never letting a character die. I would definitely use this for a silly game. However, one wrinkle is that you’d have to give Shepherds another basic spell, since “Spare the Dying” would be useless. (I’d probably switch it to a simple “give a character 1 stamina point” spell.)

Faster Pace: In my experience, players work their way past the gags and jokes about one to two hours in. So cut the session down to that length. I’d also award levels quickly — perhaps after every story.

Funny Fortune: A new rule is that players will always get a fortune if the entire table breaks

out in laughter at a joke (or groan audibly at a terrible pun). This will encourage players to keep the punchlines rolling.

Gritty

On the other hand, you can go in a different direction and make things a bit darker and grittier. The original pitch for the game was called “Fall of Pugmire,” and you can bring back that Gothic, elegiac feel if you want.

No Rucksack Save: Lose the Wisdom save to see if characters pack something in their rucksack. Characters have only what they have, which means every item counts. (Merchants are an exception – I’d have them lose their advantage, but they would still get to make such rolls, making them *very* useful in a gritty game.)

Heavier Enemies: The enemies in the book are skewed to be a touch on the easier side. Using monsters that are 1-2 CR higher than normal, however, can give characters a tougher fight. They’ll have to use every resource available.

Political Animals: *Monarchies of Mau* already has a strong political background, and *Pugmire* has one too, although it’s more muted. Amp both of those up and make the characters the focus of several intrigues. Muddy the waters between “good” and “bad” dogs. Push the Monarchies closer to all-out war between the city-states. Everything can fall apart with a hasty word or an errant punch.

Epic

Epic doesn’t just mean long-term play, although there’s some overlap in the two concepts. It’s also bigger-than-life storytelling, where everything feels like a legend in the making.

Starting Artifacts: Give each player an artifact they can improve, right out of the gate. Attach a story to each: “This is my mother’s battle-axe” or “I stole this cloak from the Monarch’s castle the night she died.” Then, allow the character to improve the item every two levels, without spending an improvement. (This is a change from the normal *Mau* rules, but it really adds a feeling of escalating power.)

Minions and Legendary Enemies: The optional rules for minions and legendary characters in the Enemies chapter of each book is perfect

for epic-style play. Mobs of creatures defending a powerful warlord or a conniving necromancer are exactly the kinds of characters players love to hate. Speaking of which...

Returning Enemies: Find ways to bring old enemies back. Maybe the characters keep running into Rondo Border-Collie, the Rat King, or Kibu the Red. Then add some more CR to them. Seeing old enemies come back more powerful than before definitely feels epic.

Creating Adventures

Elements of “The Secret of Vinsen’s Tomb” came from a playtest adventure way back when I started designing *Pugmire* (particularly, the tomb itself). When I rewrote it for the jumpstart, my goal was to showcase to potential *Pugmire* players how each of the key systems worked. Since then, I’ve hired a number of talented writers to create additional adventures for the Realms of *Pugmire*, and I’ve found there are some things I end up discussing with them over and over. So let’s talk about good *Pugmire* adventure design.

Players Should Do Something in Each Scene

I’m putting this right up top because it’s the number one problem I see from new writers. All too often there’s a scene that comes down to some form of “players show up, talk to the non-player character a bit, and leave.” Occasionally I’ll also get a scene that’s “players get from one place to another with no plot-relevant events happening.”

Don’t do that. My cardinal rule is that the point of the scene is for the player characters to do something. It can be a fight, an important choice, or a key dice roll (and no, a Wisdom check to notice something isn’t “key”).

Another strong tip is to use the scene questions in the books. I have those at the top of every scene not only so the Guide has a sense of what the scene is trying to accomplish, but also to help designers know what the scene’s about. I know I used them myself to make sure each of my scenes was on track! If you don’t remember, the questions are:

- How did the player characters get to this scene?

- What do the player characters need to accomplish in this scene?
- Who or what is keeping them from accomplishing it?
- What scene or scenes should logically happen next?

Balance Scenes

Balance out what each scene is doing in the adventure. For “Vinsen’s Tomb,” I went for at least one roleplay or intrigue scene, one interesting combat or action scene, and one exploration or investigation scene. There’s a couple of each of those, and they’re not balanced (for example, there’s some overlap in “combat” and “exploration”). But if you have at least one of each, that’s a good start.

Use the White Space

A lot of players have remarked that *Pugmire* has a lot of “white space,” areas of the game world that aren’t detailed or explained. That’s intentional! The whole concept of Vinsen Pug having a secret tomb was largely just so I could write this adventure. And the adventure itself leaves more open space, leaving unanswered the question of why a demon wants to destroy Vinsen’s sword and shield.

In the same vein, don’t be afraid to use loose threads for future adventures — Derry Lurcher’s story comes from the existence of Rondo Border-Collie (another demon-possessed mercenary), and while they don’t directly connect, there’s clearly some elements in common between the characters.

All Set Up, But No Punchline

In general, if a joke makes sense for what we’re creating, I want all the pieces for the gag to be there. But I don’t want the payoff. Let the reader or the players at the table come to the punchline.

The reason for this is twofold. First, it means people who want to run *Pugmire* “straight” with less humor can gloss over the joke. Secondly, players feel smart if they figure it out themselves, and they get more invested in the game as a result.

Here’s an example: In one of the *Pirates of Pugmire* adventures, there was a character named

Captain Mack. We spent a few pages talking off and on about Mack, who was a bird pirate, and after a while the writer eventually mentioned in an appropriate place that Mack was a sparrow.

At one point, the writer wrote out the full “punchline,” as it were. But I cut that. Instead, what I wanted at the table is the Guide to mention those facts, and one of the players to go “Oh my god. Captain *Jack Sparrow*.”

(Note: This is also why I didn’t call the crossover rules “Dogs and Cats Living Together.”)

Make Fights Interesting

Occasionally, it’s okay to toss in a fight that’s basically “some enemies show up, dice get thrown, and the player characters walk away.” But for narratively interesting fights, I try to encourage writers to add a twist. Add a time limit (“after five rounds the wooden floor starts to burn”). Present interesting terrain (“the fight takes place across three different ships floating on the Acid Sea”). Change expectations (“the dog mercenary turns out to be possessed by a demon”). And leverage conditions like Charmed, Petrified, Repelled, and Scared.

By making fights interesting, you not only keep players from getting bored, but you allow them to bust out the weird tricks and spells they don’t get to use that often. Not everything should be about heaping damage on characters.

Don’t Write the End

I don’t want to see the end of the adventure — let the players decide how things end. I *do* want to see lots of advice for the Guide to handle the fallout, though. That final scene should be the climax, not the epilogue.

That said, not every adventure works out that way. Sometimes you need a bit more structure in that final payoff, particularly for newer Guides. That’s why some of the adventures do have payoff scenes. But in general, try to build the adventure to the climax, and then let go and see what the players do.

5-Star Minor Characters

One thing I’ve noticed about *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* is that people love to make characters. Sometimes they don’t even play them

(although there's a lot of that as well!), but they'll just think of ways to "Pugmire-ize" their pets or friends' pets or random pets online. It can be a fun way to pass the time and get people excited about the world.

What's better is that it makes it easy to come up with characters on the spot. Those of us who have run tabletop RPGs before know the drill — the players go into a tavern or shop or something, and start asking about the characters in the background. But you have no idea about those characters and need to come up with them on the spot. For some reason, I tend to use the name "Frank" in such situations — which is weird, because I don't know many people named Frank — so I had to actually keep a list of random names I could check off during a game session. But in *Realms of Pugmire* games, I can draw on all the pets I've known in my life, giving me a ready list of characters when I'm stuck making one up on the fly.

So what happens when the players decide that the character you just made up is now their best friend or someone they have to pick a fight

with? How do you come up with mechanics on the fly?

Both *Pugmire* and *Mau* do have stat blocks in the back for bandits. This is a great catchall for "I need a combat-capable non-player character right now." Just flipping to the back and using those mechanics will get you out in a pinch. But sometimes they don't quite work. You can swap things out and move them around, but that works better when you're planning an adventure ahead of time, not when players are staring you down. And forget about making a full character sheet.

There is another trick, though. One thing a lot of people don't pick up is the fact I put the modifier for abilities first, rather than the score. It's a subtle way of reframing the important information — the fact that you have 10 Strength is rarely useful, but knowing you don't add anything to your roll is. And the average spread for a character is really between -1 and +3. That's five steps. Or five stars.

Wait, stars? Let's take an example: The characters go into a tavern in Southgate, and they are trying to convince the bartender cat to give them



a discount. All you know about the bartender is that their name is Fluffy, because that's the name of the cat you had when you were ten. Fluffy wants to make a saving throw against Charisma. Should you add anything?

Well, rate Fluffy on a 1- to 5-star scale. They're probably used to people haggling in Southgate, or they wouldn't be a very good bartender. But they're not amazing at it. So, three stars sounds about right. If you assume 1 star is -1, and add two to that, that gives you +1. So, roll a d20, add one, and you can see how well Fluffy resists such an advance. If things get heated, you can give Fluffy a handful of stamina points (say, 2d6), and decide if their weapon is small (1d4), medium (1d6), or large (1d8).

The results are low-powered — don't expect these minor characters to stand up to well-equipped player characters — but they'll do in a pinch, and it's something you can easily sort out in the middle of a game session.

Other

Finally, a couple of essays that didn't make sense anywhere else, but I thought readers might be interested in regardless.

Appendix P

The original *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Master's Guide* had a series of appendices. The fourteenth(!) appendix was N, and it was titled "Inspirational and Educational Reading." I believe it was the first such example of indicating related products that can be read or played to inspire another product, and I've certainly added inspirational reading sections to both *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau*.

But inspiration is a funny thing. It's not always clear how something inspires you. Further, if you're working on an ongoing line like *Pugmire*, things crop up that inspire you long after the initial genesis of the world. People are glad to reference games, books, and movies that I might find interesting. And some of my inspirations aren't what you'd expect.

I only had so much room in the book — I doubt anyone would appreciate pages and pages of cool things to read when they could be get-

ting on with fighting the Unseen with spell and paw — but now I have the perfect format to list what has been and continues to be inspirational to me. Here is my own version of Appendix N... "Appendix P," if you will.

Novels and Anthologies

- *Redwall* by Brian Jacques
- *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* by Robert C. O'Brien and Zena Bernstein
- *Watership Down* by Richard Adams
- *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* by Terry Pratchett
- *Game of Thrones* by George R. R. Martin (for the political structures of *Monarchies of Mau*)
- *City* by Clifford D. Simak
- *The Day of the Triffids* by John Wyndham (for the blend of weirdness in a post-apocalyptic setting)
- The Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser stories by Fritz Leiber
- *The Tao of Pooh* by Benjamin Hoff (for a breakdown of how animal characters can communicate depth)
- The Conan the Barbarian stories by Robert E. Howard

Comics, Manga, and Graphic Novels

- *Mouse Guard* by David Petersen
- *Ginga: Nagareboshi Gin* by Yoshihiro Takahashi
- *Rover Red Charlie* by Garth Ennis
- *ElfQuest* by Wendy and Richard Pini
- *Sam & Max Surfin' the Highway* by Steve Purcell (one of my touchstones of how to pitch the humor of the setting)
- *Maus* by Art Spiegelman (another great example of using animal characters to communicate depth)
- *Kingdom of Dog* by Christopher Lawson and Soo Lee
- *Atomic Robo* by Brian Clevinger and Scott Wegener (another humor touchstone)

- *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* by Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird (the original black and white comics, although I've since become a fan of the recent IDW version)
- *Usagi Yojimbo* by Stan Sakai

- *Owlboy*
- *Undertale* (you can make friends with monsters!)
- *Super Mega Neo Pug* (proof that not all inspirations need to be good)

Cartoons

- *Redwall* by Raymond Jafelice and Luc Bihan
- *The Secret of NIMH* by Don Bluth
- *Thundarr the Barbarian* by Steve Gerber, Joe Ruby, and Ken Spears (for utterly bonkers post-apocalyptic imagery)
- *Adventure Time* by Pendleton Ward (same)

Tabletop Roleplaying Games

- *S3 Expedition to the Barrier Peaks* by Gary Gygax (an old-school *D&D* module)
- *Gamma World* by James M. Ward and Gary Jaquet
- *Mutant Future* by Daniel Proctor and Ryan Denison (a neat retroclone that blends old-school *D&D* and *Gamma World* sensibilities)
- *Mouse Guard* by Luke Crane and David Petersen
- *The Secrets of Cats* by Richard Bellingham
- *Marvel Super Heroes* by Jeff Grubb (for great mechanics on how to encourage players to act like heroes and like a team)
- *Tales of the Floating Vagabond* by Lee Garvin, Nick Atlas, and John Huff (the first game I owned that encouraged me to be funny at the table)

Video Games

- The *Geneforge* series (another weird blend of science fantasy)
- *Kingdom of Loathing* (even though I enjoyed it, it helped me sort out exactly the wrong kind of humor for me)
- *Sam & Max* seasons 1-3
- *Ducktales* (a great game that is very tight mechanically)
- *Armello*

Murray

In September 2017, my pug Murray passed away. He was the inspiration for Seneschal Murra Pug, and one of the pets that acted as the initial inspiration for Pugmire as a whole. The night he passed away, this small fiction piece came to mind, fully formed. It's sad, and I still tear up when I read it, but it's something that shows just what kind of depth Pugmire can have.

Yosha knocked hesitantly on the thick oak door to her uncle's office. She heard a deep "Come in, come in," and pushed the door open.

Behind his desk, Seneschal Murra, Prince of Pugmire, shuffled papers from one part of his desk to the other. Yosha noticed his fur was getting grayer every day. At this point, it was more gray than black. She wondered if he would end up being completely gray at some point.

"You sent for me, Uncle Murra?" Yosha sat in the chair across from him, paws folded in her lap.

"I just need you to sign some papers, niece. A mere formality." He flipped through the stack, and carefully extracted one. He adjusted the glasses on what passed for a nose, nodded to himself, and then handed it to her.

Yosha carefully took it from him. Her eyes grew wide as she read the first few lines. "But uncle... this is your will."

"Yes, my child. I am not a young dog, you know, and I have to make certain... allowances... for when my time comes."

Yosha set the paper down. "But you're a strong dog, uncle. I'm sure you'll live for many years yet."

The elderly dog took his glasses off and set them aside. "Sweet Yosha, I sometimes forget how young you are. To you, everyone will live forever. But I know that I won't. Every day my legs hurt a little more, and my cough gets a little worse."

“But...” She shoved the paper away, suddenly. “I don’t want to think about you dying!” Her eyes brimmed with tears.

Murra stood up, walked over to the young puppy, and knelt beside her. She could hear the soft pop from his joints as he did. “There is a way you can make sure I live forever, you know.”

She wipes the tears away with a paw. “What’s that?”

He smiled and patted her head. “Remember me. Tell everyone about my life, good and bad. If I leave just one happy story behind, then I’ll always live.” He poked her in the chest. “Right here.”

Crying, she leapt out of the chair to wrap her arms around Murra’s neck. “You’ll always be a happy story to me, uncle. Always.”

Murra hugged her back, so she couldn’t see the tears in his own eyes.





Chapter Three: 5e OGL Changes

When Onyx Path first created the Canis Minor community content program, Travis Legge quickly stepped up and offered to provide a system guide allowing people to convert between *Pugmire* and the 5e OGL. I loved the idea so much that I've moved that work into this book.

Creators who are familiar with the systems and terms used in the 5.1 SRD (a.k.a., the 5e OGL) will find information within these pages that will aid in the process of creating new materials that are compatible with *Pugmire*. While *Pugmire* runs on the same core engine as the 5e OGL, there are a number of items that are addressed differently in *Pugmire*.

Ability Scores

Ability scores for player characters are assigned, not rolled or bought with points. The six scores to assign are 15, 14, 13, 12, 10, and 8.

Breed

The word "race" is never used to refer to dogs in *Pugmire*. Dogs have a breed, the mechanics and terminology for which replace race as presented in the 5.1 SRD.

The breeds presented in *Pugmire* are: Companions, Fettles, Herders, Pointers, Runners, Workers, and Mutts.

A character's breed provides a bonus to their ability scores. This bonus is +2 to one ability score for most breeds, and +1 to two ability scores of the player's choice for mutts. Breeds are detailed on p. 54-61 of *Pugmire*.

Callings

Pugmire uses callings in place of classes. Those accustomed to working with the 5e OGL will find callings to be streamlined, and there is no subclass mechanic in *Pugmire*.

Each calling has two primary abilities. These ability scores gain the benefit of the dog's proficiency bonus when calculating saving throws, and the tricks (see Tricks, p. XX) available through the calling are determined by the calling's primary abilities.

A dog's calling also provides a portion of their starting equipment (see Rucksack, p. XX.)

The callings presented in *Pugmire* are: Artisans, Guardians, Hunters, Ratters, Shepherds, and Strays. Conditions are detailed on p. 41-53 of *Pugmire*.

Conditions

Conditions are a bigger part of the game. Some common magical effects are now put into conditions. Many spells and tricks are designed to apply, utilize, and remove conditions.

The conditions used in *Pugmire* are: Anosmic, Blind, Charmed, Confused, Deaf, Incapacitated, Immobile, Invisible, Paralyzed, Petrified, Possessed, Prone, Repelled, Scared, Sickly, Stunned, and Unconscious. Conditions are detailed on p. 97-99 of *Pugmire*.

Damage

Damage types work as described in the 5e OGL, but some terms have changed to further abstract the technology/magic line. The damage types used in *Pugmire* are: Acid, Bludgeoning, Cold, Force, Heat, Lightning, Necrotic, Piercing, Poison, Psychic, Radiant, Slashing, and Thunder. Damage types are detailed on p. 96 of *Pugmire*.

Defense

Armor class in *Pugmire* is called defense. Defense is detailed on p. 83 of *Pugmire*.

Dice Rolls

The core mechanic for dice rolls remains mostly unaltered, but there are a few small terminology changes and effects here that you must keep in mind when creating for *Pugmire*.

The term DC is not used. Instead, use the word difficulty. Difficulty works a little differently in *Pugmire*, with advice for setting difficulties detailed on p. 166 of *Pugmire*.

A natural 20 result is called a triumph. When a triumph occurs, it is always accompanied by a particularly good success result, regardless of the situation. A triumph can occur on any d20 roll including ability checks and saving throws.

A natural 1 is called a botch. When a botch occurs, it is always accompanied by a particularly bad failure result, regardless of the situation. A botch can occur on any d20 roll including ability checks and saving throws.

Initiative is rolled as in 5e, but only the person who rolls highest matters. After the first person goes, they choose who goes next. That person then chooses anyone who hasn't already gone, and so on. The last person to go in a round chooses the first person in the next round and may choose themselves to go again.

Enemies

Monsters as presented in the 5e OGL are instead referred to as enemies. In *Pugmire*, a "monster" is a specific kind of enemy that is mindless, unique, and chaotic.

Enemies are a little easier to defeat by challenge rating than in the 5e OGL. The *Pugmire* core rulebook contains an easy reference chart on p. 193-194 that allows for quick and balanced enemy creation.

Equipment

A character's equipment is collectively referred to as their rucksack. Characters gain equipment at character creation from their calling and background. They can also choose one non-magic piece of equipment before an adventure. Finally, they can make a Wisdom saving throw to "remember" a piece of non-magic equipment that makes sense for their character.

Ammunition is not tracked. Instead, a Wisdom saving throw is made after combat in which a weapon using ammunition is fired two or more times. If the saving throw fails, the character is out of ammunition, but may use up an ammunition item from their rucksack to reload.

Coinage is abstracted. Instead of tracking individual coins, dogs have a ladder of wealth that refers to their current amount of coinage. The available amounts of coin in *Pugmire* are no

coins, a few coins, some coins, many coins, and lots of coins.

Weapons and spells have been adjusted according to *Pugmire*'s power level.

Rucksack is detailed on p. 80-81 of *Pugmire*.

Experience Points/ Advancement

Experience points are removed. Instead, characters go up in level whenever the Guide thinks it's narratively appropriate.

Every level, players gain an improvement. This allows them to increase an ability score by +1 and take a new skill, choose a new trick, or refine an existing trick (i.e., select a specific improvement to the existing trick). Tricks can be refined more than once.

Proficiency bonus increases at a faster rate than in 5e, increasing by 1 at level 3 and by 1 every odd numbered level thereafter (5, 7, and 9.)

Characters stop progressing at level 10. There is an optional rule that allows for progression after level 10, but the *Pugmire* system does not provide support for that rule. The process of advancement is detailed on p. 99 of *Pugmire*.

Fortune

Personality traits and some tricks work with a currency called fortune. There is a fortune bowl that players collectively draw from to modify dice rolls and (in some circumstances) narrative events. Fortune is detailed on p. 166 of *Pugmire*.

Masterworks

Magic items are collectively known as masterworks. Masterworks come in three categories. Permanent, regular-use magic items are relics or artifacts. Permanent but largely useless magic items are wonders. Temporary or limited-use magic items are fixes. Specific items have been modified from 5e.

Relics can be improved over gameplay (they have tricks that can be refined). Such refined relics are hard to lose — in general, it's assumed that such a relic will make its way back to a character's paws after a story is concluded. Masterworks are detailed on p. 170-177 of *Pugmire*.

Size

Size is removed as a concept for characters, although it is used as a metric for making enemies.

Skills

Skills function the same in *Pugmire* as in the 5e OGL, however, *Pugmire* uses a different skill list. The skills in *Pugmire* are: Strength (Intimidate), Dexterity (Balance), Dexterity (Sneak), Dexterity (Steal), Constitution (Traverse), Intelligence (Know Arcana), Intelligence (Know Culture), Intelligence (Know History), Intelligence (Know Nature), Intelligence (Know Religion), Wisdom (Handle Animal), Wisdom (Heal), Wisdom (Notice), Wisdom (Search), Wisdom (Sense Motive), Wisdom (Survive), Charisma (Bluff), Charisma (Perform), and Charisma (Persuade). Skills are detailed on p. 66-68 of *Pugmire*.

Story Structure

Pugmire uses a few different basic terms for supplements and story structure. In *Pugmire*, the DM/GM is called the Guide, an adventure is called a story, and a campaign is called a chronicle.

Spells

All spells are powered by spell slots. Spellcasters spend a number of spell slots equal to the spells level to cast it. Some spells are "basic" and thus do not cost spell slots (akin to cantrips). Spells do not need to be memorized. Spells are detailed on p. 100-126 of *Pugmire*.

Stamina Points/ Stamina Dice

Hit points and hit dice are replaced by stamina points and stamina dice respectively. Dogs gain an assigned number of stamina points at each level. Increases in stamina points per level are not rolled. Stamina points and stamina dice are detailed on p. 65 of *Pugmire*.

Traps and Ambushes

Traps and ambushes are discovered by a Wisdom saving throw.

5E TO PUGMIRE TERMINOLOGY GUIDE

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Tricks

Individual calling, breed, and background powers are collectively called tricks. Weapon and

armor proficiencies are now lumped into a series of aptitude tricks. Tricks are detailed on p. 68-80 of *Pugmire*.



Chapter Four: Frequently Asked Questions

No game, and no world, is perfect. Since I released *Pugmire*, I've gotten some questions about the rules and the background behind Realms of Pugmire. Surprisingly, there aren't as many outright errors as I originally thought there would be! A lot of the answers are there but not explained well, but some aren't explained at all, and a few are just wrong. I'll have a living FAQ over at realmsofpugmire.com, but this chapter covers not only key questions I've received, but also some really nitpicky questions that I've since come across.

Rules: General

These are rules questions common across both *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau*.

Rolling Dice

Q: Do advantage and disadvantage cancel each other out?

A: Yes. If you're in a position where your character has both advantage and disadvantage, you make a normal roll instead.

Q: Can you have multiple advantages or disadvantages? For example, if my character is in a good tactical position, and she also has a trick that grants her advantage, does she get advantage twice?

A: No. Advantage and disadvantage are binary: You either have it or you don't. Think of it like "I have the advantage" or "I'm at a disadvantage."

Q: I have a trick that gives me benefits on ability checks. Does it also work for attacks and/or damage rolls? And does wearing medium or heavy armor subtract from my Dexterity saving throws?

A: No. Ability checks are separate from attack rolls, and benefits or penalties for one kind of die roll do not carry over unless specified.

Fortune

Q: A character can spend fortune to cast a single spell of any level. Does this mean the character can cast a spell she hasn't learned yet?

A: No. They can cast a single spell of any level they have learned, in lieu of spending spell slots.

Armor and Weapons

Q: How does armor work if you don't have the appropriate trick?

A: The dog can't wear the armor to gain any benefit. In other words, her defense doesn't change, even if she's wearing armor. The Guide might impose additional penalties, if he desires.

Q: What about weapons?

A: Any character can use simple weapons, but only those with the Simple Weapon Aptitude trick can add their proficiency bonus. A character using a martial weapon without the Martial Weapon Aptitude trick always rolls at a disadvantage. Characters cannot use exotic weapons unless they have the Exotic Weapon Aptitude trick.

Advancement

Q: When I advance, can I take tricks or secrets outside my calling, house, or breed?

A: No. Where the text says, "take a new calling, breed, or aptitude trick," or "take a new calling, house, or aptitude secret," you can only take tricks or secrets within your calling, breed, or house. The books do have optional rules to allow cross-calling tricks and secrets in the Guide chapters of each respective book.

Q: If my Guide allows cross-calling tricks, and I take a spellcasting trick, how do I calculate spell slots?

A: If you take a trick that allows you to cast spells, you are considered a "spellcaster" by the magic rules. Calculate spell slots accordingly — count all your character levels, not just levels after you take the trick.

Combat

Q: How long is a round in game time? For example, the spell Revivify (Pugmire, p. 20) mentions, "You touch a character that has died within the last minute or the last three rounds." Does that mean one round is 20 seconds?

A: Time is pretty fluid in the game — things genuinely take different amounts of time depending on what's dramatically appropriate. Revivify isn't meant to imply that a round is 20 seconds — rather, it's just to give some drama during the round.

Q: In things like enemy writeups, does a term "creature" mean both player characters and enemy characters?

A: Yes. In general, "creature" means any character.

Q: For enemy tricks that last until the target makes a saving throw, when does the saving throw occur?

A: In general, saving throws (unless specified) happen at the end of the target's turn.

Q: Is it correct that the group rolls initiative once for a combat, and not every round during the combat?

A: Correct.

Q: Does the Guide have to roll initiative for every enemy?

A: Guides can "lump" initiative together for groups of characters. But really, it only matters to determine who goes first in the initiative order.

Q: On weapons with reach, the book says, "[...] and the attacker does not need to disengage if they use their reach to attack." Does this mean I can disengage without using the disengage action?

A: No. Normally ranged weapons cannot be used if you are engaged with the target; they require you to disengage if you want to use them. Reach weapons disregard that requirement. So you are still engaged, but you can use the weapon. If you want to disengage, you still need to take the disengage action.

Rules: Pugmire

These are specific rules questions for *Pugmire*.

Character Creation

Q: What dog breeds can I play? The breed I want to play isn't in the right section.

A: *Pugmire* is designed to be a system that you can easily customize to your taste. You can play any breed of dog and assign her to one of the six game Breeds. If you don't agree with what game Breed we've put a particular breed of dog in, feel free to change it in your game! Game Breeds are purely a mechanical development and have very little impact on the *Pugmire* world.

Q: Are ratters supposed to start with Martial Weapon Aptitude? The character pictured has a rapier.

A: Whoops! Yes, they are supposed to start with Martial Weapon Aptitude. This is accurate in subsequent books, like *Roll of Good Dogs and Excellent Cats*.

Tricks

Q: Some of the tricks aren't clear on whether they require an action, bonus action, or reaction. Can you clarify?

A: If something isn't specified as requiring a bonus action or reaction, it's assumed to use an action. Some exceptions include:

- Burst of Energy (*Pugmire*, p. 76): Bonus action

- Thick Coat (*Pugmire*, p. 76): Reaction
- Instinctive Dodge (*Pugmire*, p. 78): Reaction
- Mighty Thews (*Pugmire*, p. 79): Bonus Action

Q: Does the Cleave trick (Pugmire, p. 71) works with ranged attacks?

A: No, because the second attack must be an opponent within reach. Technically, the first attack could be ranged and the second melee, but that would require changing weapons.

Q: If a guardian with Two-Weapon Fighting Style (Pugmire, p. 71) was equipped with two different weapons, can the guardian choose attack roll of the first weapon and the damage roll of the second weapon?

A: Correct.

Q: For Beast Master (Pugmire, p. 72), is this expected to be used against neutral or hostile animals, not tamed ones?

A: Correct. It's like the Command spell, which does not require the target liking the caster.

Q: For Precise Attack (Pugmire, p. 73), when the ratter successfully hides, is this treated like the Invisible condition?

A: No. It's just an in-world explanation to justify advantage on their next attack.

Q: For tricks like Charming Discourse, Funny Trick, and Animal Friend (Pugmire, p. 76-77), what's the difficulty of the target's saving throw?

A: It depends on the situation. A character that likes the companion might have a difficulty of 20 to resist, while trying to charm your mortal enemy might be a 10 to resist. A bad joke is easier to resist than a good job, and a scared animal is harder to befriend than one who isn't.

Q: The trick Odds and Ends (Pugmire, p. 79) says to make a Wisdom check to see if a dog has a particular piece of equipment. But the equipment chapter on p. 90 says it needs a Wisdom saving throw. So how do you use Odds and Ends?

A: It should say "Wisdom saving throw."



Spells

Q: I only add the Constitution modifier to my spell slots once, right? Not each level?

A: Ah, that's actually an error. It should be two plus your Constitution modifier each level. It's correct in *Monarchies of Mau*, though!

Q: The spell Expeditious Retreat (Pugmire, p. 109) allows you to move further as a bonus action, but the caster is using their bonus actions each round to maintain concentration on the spell and can't use it to move. So how does this work?

A: Whoops, you caught us! It should be spending a reaction to take another move, not a bonus action.

Q: About the Polymorph spell (Pugmire, p. 118), the rulebook says it the target can be any "beast." Does that mean only non-uplifted animals?

A: Yes, only non-uplifted animals.

Q: Is it possible to use the spell Command (Pugmire, p. 106) to force a character to take her own life?

A: No. In the description it says the spell does not work "... if your command is directly harmful to her." Suicide is pretty harmful!

Enemies

Q: A Giant Worm (Pugmire, p. 179) attacks the creatures that moved the farthest in the turn. But what if a Giant Worm wins initiative? Can it choose its target?

A: Yes, it can choose its target in the case where no one has moved.

Q: The Mementorian (Pugmire, p. 191) has Touch of the Grave, which is listed as "two attacks." Can both attacks hit one target?

A: It's one attack but two targets (it's kind of an area effect, except it can be directed a bit, but it's not two fast attacks, one after another). The damage is only 4d10 but counts as both cold and

bludgeoning damage (so characters that are weak to cold get double damage, since cold is one of the components).

Q: The flight trick of the Barool (Pugmire, p. 182) says Barool ignore attacks of opportunity because they fly when they move. So, does a spellcaster flying as the result of Fly spell ignore attacks of opportunity, too?

A: No. That is something unique to the Barool.

Rules: Monarchies of Mau

So far, I've only received one question for *Monarchies of Mau*.

Q: Given the Voice (Monarchies of Mau, p. 82) says a Minister should get three basic spells and two first level spells, but Malcolm Maincoon von Cymric has Command, Charm Person, and Healing Word. Is that intentional?

A: Ouch, that's another error. Swap "Command" with "Animal Friendship."

World Questions

Here are questions about the collective Realms of Pugmire world shared between both games.

Q: What are the ages of some of the characters mentioned in Pugmire's fiction?

A: This was actually something that came up in translation discussions. In Japanese, the way of speaking changes depending on various characteristics, including age. I don't have specific ages for any of the characters, but I do know how old or young they are relative to each other. So here are some of the characters listed from youngest to oldest.

- Princess Yosha Pug (youngest – she's effectively a teenager close to becoming an adult)
- Spike Mutt
- Jack Rat-Terrier (young adult)
- Rex Pyrenees
- Alistair Afghan
- Darcy Cat (adult)
- Picassa Collie
- Leo Bulldog
- Pan Dachshund (older adult)

Q: Can dogs and cats eat foods that would be poison to canines and felines, such as onions, avocados, and chocolate?

A: Yes. Those kinds of foods are no longer toxic to cats and dogs.

Q: What would be a common drink in dog culture?

A: They drink all kinds of things, but beer and water are common.

Q: When dogs hear the word "ratter," what would they think the "rat" in the name indicates? The animal rats? Or uplifted rats?

A: "Ratter" is a term Man uses, so they don't feel it has any connection to rats. It's like how the idiom "cat got your tongue" doesn't refer to a cat literally holding your tongue.

Q: Is catnip tea intoxicating to cats?

A: It is! It's their equivalent to beer.

Q: Can uplifted cats taste sweetness?

A: Yes.

Pugmire

*“Is Pugmire a joke?
No. Because it can be so much more.”*

– Eddy Webb

Since the release of *Pugmire*, creator Eddy Webb has gotten a lot of questions. Is *Pugmire* a “funny” game? Can I play my favorite dog? What products inspired the game? How can I make my *Pugmire* game as authentic as possible?

Collecting a variety of internal documents, email exchanges, blog posts, and community content projects, *Buried Bones* is the ultimate guide to creating in the Realms of Pugmire. Whether you’re making your own products for the Canis Minor community content program, want to make your personal *Pugmire* chronicle as accurate as possible, or are just interested in some of the behind-the-scenes details of the world, *Buried Bones* is the book to read!

- The writer’s guide shared with all *Pugmire* and *Monarchies of Mau* creators
- A number of blogs related to the Realms of Pugmire, rewritten for this edition
- A handy guide to help people convert material from the 5e OGL to *Pugmire* or *Monarchies of Mau*
- Answers to frequently asked questions about the lore of the world and the mechanics of the RPGs



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