

LOST FOOLS OF ATLANTIS

A BLACK COMEDY ABOUT CONSPIRACY

By Newt Newport



Preview



BALANCEENGINE

D101 GAMES

Burn before Reading.....

By order of the High Council of Greyface.

“Please pardon my levity; I don't see how to take death seriously. It seems absurd.”

Robert Anton Wilson, Saturday, January 6, 2007, Five days before his death of Cancer on January 11th 2007.

Please note that the following is an unedited work in progress that will change before publication.

Lost Fools of Atlantis

A Game using the Balance Engine in Eight Parts

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Ten thousand years ago, the golden civilisation of Atlantis sunk beneath the waves. Its splendour, sophistication and intelligence are lost to the world. Survivors were scattered around the globe. Once they dried themselves and acclimatised to their surroundings, they started the serious business of getting back on top of the pile and taking over the primitive civilisation they found themselves in. Hideously outnumbered by the 'apes' they sought to dominate, they melted into the background and secretly made their plots, manipulating humankind from the shadows. Hence, they brought mankind the gift of CONSPIRACY. Now in the modern age, these Conspiracies make one final desperate attempt to rule the world before the end times arrive.

The fact that the End Times may be due to their age-old plots completely escapes them. The fact that although they share a common heritage, each conspiracy believes that only they are the true inheritors of the Atlantean legacy also escapes them. The fact that other powers alien to this world also have designs on total domination also escapes them.

You see, it's been 10,000 years. Time can dull a race's genius like that.

Lost Fools of Atlantis (Lost Fools for short) is a roleplaying game where players and the Game Moderator take on the roles of people in crisis who live out their lives in an imaginary game world which is similarly in a state of exciting crisis. It is a world very like our modern world, except that Atlantis was real and the survivors of the cataclysm that destroyed their civilisation walk amongst us and are the root cause of numerous conspiracies.

Lost Fools is intentionally a black comedy. It's a comment on both those people who believe in Conspiracies and let it cloud their lives with fear and dilute their purpose and a send-up of some of the so-called real-world 'conspiracies'. On a less lofty level, it's a dark look at what happens when a group of familiar strangers, each with a less than stable state of mind and differing agendas, get together and work towards a common goal. But above all, it's a game designed to create as many fun opportunities as possible for play.

So, with that in mind, LET THE GAMES COMMENCE!

Lost Fools uses a short and streamlined narrative game system, which I call the *Balance Engine*.

Part 1. I don't think we are in Atlantis Anymore

It's the end of the World as We Know it (Again)

Turning Points in recent Earth History.

2000. Millennial end-of-the-world conspiracies come to a head and fizzle out.

2012. End of the Mayan Calendar. The whole new age movement gets excited because the whole of the planet is about to move from the impoverished Third Dimension to the much more energetic and god-like Fifth Dimension. This doesn't happen, but canny observers point out that something has changed that irrevocably changed so that humanity is now firmly on the road to ...

2020. Ascension. The new new date for the winners on Planet Earth, those who are drinking water, meditating, and generally thinking nice thoughts about others, to move en-mass to the new, improved 5th Dimensional Earth in bodies made of pure light. Losers will kindly be allowed to reincarnate on other planets to continue their life lessons and journey to (eventual) Ascension. Meanwhile, the rest of the planet is talking about the very 3rd dimensional Covid 19 pandemic.

2030. People in the know say that previous turning points have reduced multiple timelines to a much more marketable Two Timelines model. One leads to total and never-ending state of Fascism, the other leads to total Freedom. Which timeline humanity chooses will all be decided by 2030.

Out of the Tube

I'm awake.

I look around me. I'm in a large cavern, with lots of machines with flashing lights, large worm-like power cables everywhere and widescreen computer screens suspended from a ceiling that so high I can't see it.

Urggh I seem to be laying in a pool of goop! Sticky grey goop, in some form of mansized steel tube. Have been sleeping in this? It has an open lid, with a glass panel that I nearly bump my head on as I sit up. The coldness of cave hits my nakedness. My eyes begin to focus. A man in a white coat who is looking at a computer glances over his shoulder at me.

"Ah I see she's awake?" he comments absently.

"Where I'm I?" I ask.

"A place called Frisland, an island southwest of the land mass known as Iceland, where we retreated after the Fall" a second man with whitecoat with a clipboard says, suddenly coming into view from behind me.

"The Fall?" I ask, resisting the urge to yawn.

"Oh you don't remember, do you?" Whitecoat #2 quizzes.

"This one's 99% amnesic" replies Whitecoat #1 looking at a read out on a nearby by screen.

"Drat and Blast it!" storms Whitecoat #2.

"Tsk. I know how much you feel that briefing the newbies is beneath you Magnus, but it is your turn" shoots back Whitecoat#1.

"Hello, I am here you know!" I shout, becoming irritated at the two egg heads.

There's an ominous pause as the two scientists look at me in shock. All I can hear is the humming of the electrics and a torturous drip of some faraway water echoing around the cave. It suddenly strikes me how cold I am.

"Some clothes would be good" I remark.

The scientists gawp at me. Whitecoat #1 blushes a deep red, Whitecoat #2 (or Magnus as his colleague called him) stomps over to a nearby cupboard and grabs what looks like a one size fits all surgical gown and a big white towel.

“Dry yourself down and put this on”, he orders.

“Turn around and give a lady some modesty” I retort.

He shrugs and turns around. I give Whitecoat #1 a sharp look, and he blushes again before turning away towards one of the screens, pretending to look absorbed in his work.

I get out of the tube with a sickening sloop as I pull myself out of the tube and the main body of goop falls off me. I wipe the remaining goop off on the towel with the words ‘Hilton Hotel, Paris’ embroidered on the hem and slip into the gown.

Meanwhile, Magnus has gone off and got what looks like a glossy brochure. He hands it to me. It has a group of people on the front, all hair and smiles, and the neatly typed title “Earth in the 21st Century: What you need to know about your situation”. He gestures at a nearby chair. I sit down, surprised at my own compliance.

<insert image of brochure front cover>

“That will tell you what you need to know. Read it, and if you have any questions, ask afterwards.”

He says. I start reading like a person thirsty for water, suddenly aware of the vast knowledge gaps in my memory. There’s a section called ‘Where you are from, where you are going to’. I start reading.

“I’m just about to brew up. Coffee or Tea?” He asks, changing the subject.

“Tea please, white, no sugar”, I reply before sticking my head back into the brochure.

Where You are From and Where you are Going to

Congratulations you are an Atlantean, or a Homo Superior. You are a member of the greatest race the world has ever seen. Rejoice unless you die violently or fall victim to a disease or ailment that we have yet to find a cure to you will live many hundreds of years longer than the standard Human race, Homo Sapiens. This gives you the glorious opportunity to shape the future of this planet with the numerous superior talents you possess.

But to understand your full potential as a member of Homo Superior you need to know something about our illustrious past. A past that you have taken part in, even though you may not currently remember it.

In old Atlantis

Our race is not from this planet Earth. No, the first Atlantis was a planet in Galaxy Far Far Away, and a long time ago, before a cataclysm destroyed it. Two vast colony ships escaped the doomed Atlantis. One and boldly went where no man had before to find a new home world.

Eventually, both ships found a world suited to our physiology: Earth. The first ship landed on a land mass in what is known as the Atlantic Ocean, and its people founded the colony of Atlantis.

The other ship landed on a land mass on the other side of the world in what is known as the Pacific Ocean and formed the colony of Lemuria (or Mu), near present-day Japan.

Both colonies prospered, developing similar but differing sciences, arts, religions and magic, and five hundred years after arrival on earth, both civilisations were enjoying a Golden Age of Trust, Equality, Harmony and Happiness for all.

So what went Wrong?

The Greyface Plague, that’s what. Initially, there was only one Greyface. Where he came from, we do not know. Various theories’ put his origins as an alien, a human who had become so obsessed with logic he denied his very humanity, or a magical experiment gone wrong. The original Greyface was indistinguishable from a normal Atlantean, except he never smiled, laughed, or showed any sign of human emotion. One apparent thing was his superior intellect. He

soon gathered around him a large group of disciples. The weak, the feeble, the easily led, who were entranced by his teachings, which seemed to revolve around two central precepts.

1. Eliminate your useless feelings.
2. Get the others, before they get you.

His followers quickly became copies of him, spreading like a joyless virus throughout Atlantis. This dis-ease could have quickly been dealt with by the superior powers of the Atlantean people had not another crisis come to a head simultaneously. Tensions had been rising with the Lemurians for a couple of years previously. They had become jealous of our culture and the advances that we had made over us. They refused to share their advances for the benefit of all and started creating weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to intimidate and ultimately dominate us.

As tensions grew, the Grey-face grew in power. Instead of the freeform meritocracy we had previously enjoyed, the Grey Faces argued that we needed an active group of leaders to deal with the Lemurian problem. Confused and bewildered, we accepted, and soon the Ruling Council was formed. Little by little, over the next hundred years, their 'emergency powers' extended over every aspect of our lives. We blindly accepted it, for surely, they had protected us from the Lemurian Terror?

Still, the Lemurians continued in their escalation of the coming War. They created from their own DNA mixed with that of upright Apes and created a new sub-race, Homo Sapiens. These 'Humans' were created as biological weapons that were naturally aggressive, dull of intelligence and easily dominated, bred like rabbits. It is postulated that the Lemurians would use them as a ready source of troops against us. But they never got the chance.

The Atlantean Council, alarmed by the growing Lemurian menace, unleashed Geothermal Weapons against Lemuria, sinking it beneath the Pacific Ocean. It was meant to be a surgical strike against the enemy that would have removed them as a world power. Our glorious leaders had not anticipated that the Lemurians had their own Geothermal Weapons. While the victory celebrations were in full swing across the Atlantean Continent, the weapons detonated, and the mountains erupted as powerful Volcanos and Atlantis too sunk beneath the waves.

The few survivors, of which you are one, relocated to our northern outpost a rocky island, where ironically, our geothermal weapons had been developed, known in Modern times as Frisland, near Iceland. There apart from a few caretakers, most of the survivors were put in suspended animation to such a time as the world was less hostile to us. After the Fall, it was discovered that the Grey Face plague was a Lemurian biological WMD, that had been unleashed to destroy our civilisation.

The first Awakenings occurred a couple of thousands of years later. These great men and women wandered into the world that seemed free of the Grey Face plague and Lemurian terror. They found the Humans relatively passive and open to guidance. If you want to look for the first Awoken, you only have to look at the dawn of Human Civilisation in Ancient Mesopotamia.

As you go through the great sweep of history, you will find evidence of the Awoken at work, shaping the destiny of Humankind to create a new Golden Age. Virtually all the great figures of history are Atlanteans, for we tower over Homo Sapiens like a tall, proud tree, our knowledge or power dwarfing theirs. While this is our blessing, it is also our curse, for they fear our individuality and the great unthinking mass is ever ready to rise up using violence against anyone who stands out from the crowd, who is different and who gives them a reason to be jealous. Remember, we are few, and they are many.

Our great mission to restore the glory of Atlantis on a world scale is also hindered by the fact that our old enemies, the Lemurians, are still out there. They work through the shadows, through ancient and criminal secret societies. It became clear when our early efforts to bring the world into the light were hindered. The Fall of Babylon, the destruction of Troy and the destruction of the Crystal Palace at the North Pole were all down to Lemurian terrorists.

In modern times despite new optimistic technological advances created to make man's life easier, all it seems to have done is make him more depressed. Where our intervention was designed to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the divide got greater. Only recently did we realise the menace of the Grey Face plague had returned and was responsible for this.

Your Awakening

You have been in stasis since the fall of our great civilisation. 'Deep Sleep', an advanced Artificial intelligence that runs the systems that have kept us alive all these thousands of years, took the intelligent decision only to wake a small number of us periodically to avoid the unwanted attention of Humans or the agents of the Lemurians. Now in these modern times, we seem to be approaching some sort of critical point in our Great Mission (see below), and Deep Sleep has started waking us up in ever-increasing numbers to see the Great Mission successfully realised.

The Great Mission on Earth

Put simply, our goal on earth is:

"To bring the Glory of Eternal Atlantis to the entire planet Earth. To bring peace, harmony and joy to all beings native to this world"

With this in mind, step forward into a new day and work with your fellow Homo Superior to bring this Great Mission to its realisation!

JOIN US IN OUR QUEST FOR WORLD DOMINATION!

Game Concepts

Let's take a moment out of the narrative flow to look at the game concepts underpinning Lost Fools of Atlantis.

The Balance Engine

The Universe is all a computer simulation. It's one big game where everything is defined in terms of *Objects*, which have *Classes* which group together *Methods*, which are ways that the objects can interact and play with other *Objects*.

The Balance Engine game system explains playing within this Universe as a tabletop roleplaying game.



Players

Obviously, this being a game, you will need people to play it. Lost Fools categorises players in three ways.

- *Players* whose *avatars* are in the game are the player characters. These are the stars of the adventures and the centre of the story that unfolds during the game.
- *The Games Moderator* is an individual player who takes on the roles of the rest of the game world and the objects within it, such as non-player characters (or GMCs – Game Moderator Characters), manages the flow of information about the world to the players (aka GM information management) and is the arbiter of any rules disputes.
- Collectively, the players at the gaming table are referred to as the *Audience*. The audience should be a supportive environment where everyone harmoniously works together to create a fun and memorable experience.

The Core Mechanic

The Universe comprises of pairs of opposing forces that push and pull each other, existing in balance. When these forces come into conflict, and you need to know which has the upper hand at any given moment, you roll to two opposing D20s. This is known as the Action Roll:

The procedure is as follows.

1. The player chooses *a method* with a bonus between one and five and adds one bonus from an assisting factor (another method, situational or narrative bonus) to a D20 roll.
2. The Game Moderator also rolls a D20 and adds bonuses for an Opposing Method (which is either from an opposing non-player character or from a static physical obstacle, again +1 to +5) + any assists they deem relevant.
3. Whoever rolls the highest wins the action. If the rolls tie, the player wins as long as they give a quick narration on how the character at the last moment tips the standoff in their favour.

In a bit more detail

Methods are ways that a character uses to overcome problems. They are a mixture of trained skills, natural talent, and life experience. They can also be skill in using a particular piece of equipment or even a magical power. They are the fundamental building blocks of characters. Opposing methods can either be from other characters or some environmental obstacle the character is trying to overcome (like a sheer cliff they are trying to climb).

Assists are usually a single bonus (between +1 to +5) to the dice roll. They are whatever is helping the character achieve the task. Normally these come from the bonus of another method that the character has, which can be considered to be able to help with the action. If applicable, the player can also pull assists from the environment around the character or their situation. Finally, the Game Moderator can issue an assist if the player's narration of their action indicates they should get one (also known as the *Fun bonus*). On the opposing side, the Game Moderator can issue assists to the opposing roll, which are favourable modifiers arising from the opposing character's methods and situation, but also from penalties from the player characters' situation, weakness or any because of any damage the player character has taken. The player character's *weakness* is a bonus because it is always added to the opposing roll.

There are also different types of actions, that are used depending on the situation.

- *Quick*. No dice are rolled. The success or failure of the action is determined simply on the score of the method being used. No assists are allowed. Note that the result does not cause damage to the character. This type of action is used when the character's ability to do something is of minor importance. The audience wants to note it and move on without disturbing the flow of the narrative.
- *Simple*. Roll the dice once to determine the winner. The loser of the exchange may take damage, depending on the situation. This is the standard type of action in the game, where a quick dice roll is needed to determine if a character knows or can do something before play moves on. Only one factor is used on either side for the Assist, usually a related method for the player character.
- *Dramatic*. Make a series of rolls and note the winner in each exchange. The first to five wins over their opponent wins the dramatic action overall. The loser of the action may take damage, depending on the situation. This sort of action is used for contests. So physical combats, duelling psychics, and courtroom battles would all use dramatic action to resolve them. Assists can come from more than one source. So that you can have assists from a method plus bonuses from the situation and colourful narration. These change from exchange to exchange. Usually, you'll only have one or two Dramatic actions per game session at a point where it makes sense to resolve a big conflict between two opposing sides.
- *Action Sequence*. This is an alternative to a dramatic action, where the characters need to successfully complete a series of simple actions to achieve a goal.

The action system is used for all endeavours where it's not one hundred per cent clear whether the Avatar will know or be able to do something, from recalling an obscure myth and discerning its meaning, to fighting an opponent to a non-lethal conclusion. Some actions are described as Dangerous, and if the Avatar fails, they can take damage. Damages take the form of a bonus from +1 to +5 and are added to the opposition's dice roll in actions where they are appropriate. So, a Broken Leg +3, a severe damage gained in a fight earlier in the game, will add to an opponent's dice roll in any combat or action where movement is involved, but not in an attempt to verbally convince an opponent. No matter what source they come from, if the total bonuses of all damages the Avatar has reached +10 they are out of play, possibly permanently at the player discretion or at least until they have healed.

Characters

Player characters, known as *Avatars*, comprise the following elements.

- *Methods*. The character's building blocks and approaches to overcoming specific problems in the game. They have a bonus from +1 to +5.
- *The Golden Vision of Atlantis*. This method is how the avatar fondly remembers old Atlantis before the fall and what they are working towards in the current day.
- *Classes*. These are groupings of methods and a method in themselves with an attached bonus (one to five). The methods attached to the class have a bonus, that uses the class's bonus as a base and then has extra points invested in it. The class itself can be advanced, or the attached methods can be individually advanced. Lost Fools has two main types of Classes. *Origin*, which is the character's upbringing or origin story. *Cover*, as used in a spy-thriller, is a set of methods associated with an occupation that can change or *morph*, between adventures.
- *Relationships* are methods that measure the character's connections with followers, lovers, enemies and organisations. You can easily see them since they start with a description of the relationship, such as Enemy or Friends.

- *Weakness*. Characters are big damn heroes in their fields of expertise, but this method is their Achilles Heel that they or the GM can invoke to give their situation a definite downturn and earns them Ego Points. If it is involved in an action, it is added to the opposing roll. Unlike other methods that are increased through growth, the player will usually decrease the bonus through growth.
- *Ego points* are a meta-currency that allows the players to take narrative control from the GM and have their characters bend normal reality. They are a resource that are quickly expended. When they are spent they are handed over to the GM who adds them to their Bad Karma pool

For more information, read the Characters chapter.

Here is an example starting character, Gemma the Rude girl, an Essex (UK) based Gangster.

Gemma the Rude Girl

Personal Details

Presentation: Dresses in Urban style, with big white trainers, baggy trousers, a big oversized puffer jacket, a blue baseball cap, and blonde hair tied back.

Golden Vision of Atlantis: Aggressive expansionist Empire +1

Faction: Foot soldier of the Blade +1

Weakness: Doesn't know when to shut up and leave it alone +5

Classes

Origin: Essex resident of East End London descent +1

- Be loud and leary +2
- Know the criminal underground in Essex +3
- Mischievous and slightly mad +3

Cover: Criminal +1

- Knife fighting +3
- Drive Landrover +2
- Graffiti Artist +2
- Enemy of Harold the Grifter +2
- Friend of Norman the Nob +2

Ego Points 2

A Roleplaying, not Wargaming System

One last note about the Balance System as a roleplaying game. Roleplaying games emerged from war games in the 1970s. This system firmly abandons the last remnants of that origin. So you won't find things such as hit points, weapon damages expressed as dice ranges, movement rates, or missile weapon ranges. The system firmly supports theatre of the mind combat, improvisational storytelling, and narrative gaming.

What's in this book?

This book is made up of eight lucky parts.

1. *Introduction.* You are here now.
2. *Avatars.* How to create and grow the players' avatars, their alter-egos in the game.
3. *Methods.* These are the building blocks of all characters in the game. They can be freeform and defined through play, but I also give you a chapter worth of fifty or so "pre-defined" methods, so you know what you are dealing with.
4. *Playing the Game.* This rules chapter contains rules and advice for players and GMs.
5. *Writing and Running Adventures.* Primarily for the GM, this chapter gives you a step-by-step method for creating adventures and advice on handling the rules and social aspects during the game.
6. *The Worlds of Atlantis.* Atlantean civilisation has left its mark across many worlds, both terrestrial and extra-terrestrial, and this chapter details them as playgrounds for use in adventures.
7. *Malcontents and Misfits.* A chapter filled with GMCs, both friend and foe, often at the same time. Details the more fantastical creatures that can be met during the game and a Rogue's gallery of Atlanteans.
8. *Moon on a Stick.* An introductory adventure. Join the Secret Space fleet and discover what's really happening on the moon. Then decide whether it's time to let all humanity in on the joke.

What you'll need to play this game

- A twenty-sided dice (D20). Ideally, for comfort and to stop fights over dice, each player will need their own D20.
- Some paper to make notes and make scrap maps during the game.
- Each player will need a character sheet to record the details of their character. You can either copy the information given on the example sheet at the back of this book or download and print off the pdf version that can be found at d101games.com/downloads.
- Some counters for Ego points. We use glass beads that can be found in most game stores or at garden centres (for decorating the tops soil of indoor plants).
- Time, a standard session of Lost Fools takes 2-4 hours.
- A sense of humour.

If you are playing this game online, you really only need a minimal setup. Something like Google Meet, Zoom, or Jitsi for audio-visual, an online dice roller or trust everyone to roll their dice on their side of the screen, and a shared document space (such as Google Docs) to share character sheets.

Bibliography/Inspirations

Books

- The Illuminatus Trilogy by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson. If one series of books acts as an introduction to this game, this is it.
- The Principia Discordia – the crazy disorganised religion that underlies the Illuminatus trilogy. Lucky for you, its available online to read.
- Schrödinger's Cat by Robert Anton Wilson.
- Catch 22

Comics

- The Invisibles
- Preacher (also a cracking TV show on Amazon Prime)

Films

- Dr Strangelove
- Buffalo Soldiers
- The Sleeper
- The Watchmen. Yes, the film, not the Graphic Novel, the right blend of self-righteousness super-powered individuals thinking they know right for humanity in a big mess of a conspiracy all of their own making.

TV

- The Prisoner
- The Man from Uncle
- Preacher (see comics above)
- Watchmen TV Series from HBO. More dark paranoia from the superheroes.
- The Boys

Games

- *Paranoia 2nd Edition*. The original roll D20 and make it up from their game. Also the tone and factions (service groups and secret societies) originated in that game. Bear in mind that the player vs player element is far less savage than Paranoia's "get them before they get you" approach.
- *Unknown Armies 2nd edition*.
- *Sorcerer*. Ron Edward's narrative game about Sorcerers and their demonic pets.
- *Questworlds I* played a game for the best part of the 2000s, which heavily influenced this game.
- *Fate*. The Weakness rule is heavily inspired by Fate, and the idea that all characters, nonplayer characters and game world artictas can be described as collections of objects and methods has its origin in Fate's Bronze Rule.
- *Tripod*. Took HeroQuest's base of abilities as described with scores and tightly focused it into a six-sided dice paradise by Graham Spearing.
- *Monkey*. My own narrative system uses a deck of cards to model all sorts of social, magical and kung-fu shenanigans of powerful Chinese Immortals seeking redemption.
- *Mythic Russia*. By Mark Galeotti, took HeroQuest and tightly defined it for his game of Medieval Russian folklore. Also, the Chained Contest system is the basis of Action Sequence.