

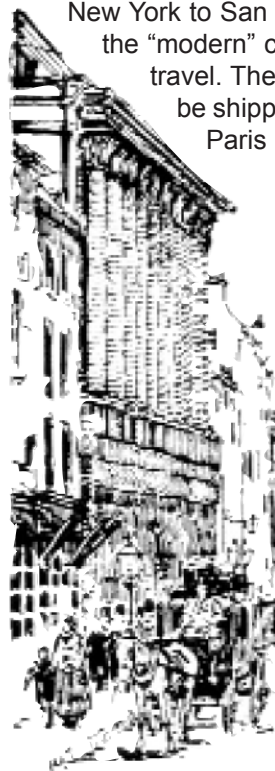
INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *the Game Master's Guidebook to Victorian Adventure*. This booklet is designed to assist game masters in designing and running their own Victorian-era campaigns, using Imperial Age, d20 Past, or any other d20-based rules set.. Within these pages are Victorian themes, genres, and campaign advice. There is also a selection of new feats and weapons, as well as a timeline of the Imperial Age.

WHAT IS VICTORIAN ADVENTURE?

The term "Victorian" immediately conjures up images of men in top hats and women in bustles taking a hansom through the foggy, gas lit, cobblestone streets of London. While this is certainly a part of it, the truth is that Great Britain's presence was felt throughout the world during the Imperial Age. She competed with other European (and native) powers over control of Africa and Asia. She inspired Japan to westernise its society and armies. Across the Atlantic, the former British colonies were also making their presence known throughout the world. While the entire world may not have been controlled by Great Britain in the Imperial Age, it certainly felt her influence.

The Imperial Age is best known to Americans as the age of the Old West, when gunfighters fought for justice against evil cattle barons, corrupt landowners, and scalp-hungry Indians. It is seen as a simpler time, but it was anything but simple. Driven by the industrial revolution, steam engines roared across the Great Plains, the deserts, and even the Rocky Mountains. One could travel from New York to San Francisco without ever leaving the "modern" comforts offered by locomotive travel. The latest fashions could be shipped from London and Paris to Boston, New



Sample file

*The
Game-
Masters
Guide to
Victorian
Adventure*
by
Walt
Ciechanowski

York, New Orleans, and beyond.

In short, while most campaigns will probably be set in London or, more generally, the British Empire (and early Imperial Age supplements support this), Imperial Age campaigns can take place anywhere in the world throughout the 1880s and 1890s, combining Western influences with local culture. Add in a dose of magic or steampunk, and you are truly limited only by your imagination when designing an Imperial Age campaign.

EAST OF WHAT?

Throughout this booklet, the term “Western” refers to North American and European cultures, especially those influenced by Great Britain, France, and Germany, while “Eastern” refers to Asian cultures. Victorians often used the terms “occidental” and “oriental” to mean “west” and “east” respectively, but this author has chosen to use the more familiar terms. The author realizes that the use of “western” and “eastern” is inaccurate and controversial, but it provides a convenient shorthand as well as displays the British mindset of the Imperial Age.

This author has also chosen to refer to the descendants of pre-Columbian Americans as “Native Americans” rather than “Indians.” While “Indian” is the term used throughout the Imperial Age, a distinction was desired between peoples of the Indian subcontinent and the Americas. It should be noted that Americans of European descent usually mean “Native American” when they say “Indian,” while British subjects tend to use the term to mean anyone from South Asia or Southeast Asia (although the term is increasingly limited to the subcontinent). In this work “Indian” refers exclusively to the peoples of the Indian subcontinent.

IMPERIAL AGE THEMES

There are common themes that run through the literature of the period. GMs can incorporate these themes into their Imperial Age campaigns in order to enhance historical immersion. These themes are intertwined with the genres that are discussed in the next section.

TRAVEL

Victorian readers hungered for stories that would take them to exotic (usually Asian) places, such as Bangkok, Bombay, Calcutta, Hong Kong, and Shanghai. While the steamship and the Suez Canal dramatically cut travel times around the world, many people couldn't afford to take long journeys to other lands. Travel novels filled that need, allowing readers to explore exotic places and cultures through the senses of the characters. Western households that could afford it imported carpets, furniture, clothes, and foodstuffs from the exotic East.

While a travel novel in and of itself would hardly make a good adventure, GMs should keep in mind that the journey is often as important as the destination when designing exploratory adventures, especially in comfortable trains and ships (***Around the World in Eighty Days*** (1872) is a prime example of fusing the travel and adventure themes). In addition, the lost world genre is a combination of the travel novel and historical romance. These lost worlds were peppered with liberal borrowings from real world exotic or historical cultures, such as Romans, pirates, and Crusaders.

WESTERNISATION

Another important theme in the Imperial Age is westernisation. Westernisation is essentially a polite way of saying “abandoning your native cultures and beliefs and replacing them with ours, primarily for our economic benefit.” While westernisation does include the spreading of Christianity to the rest of the world, the term goes much further. The British, with varying degrees of success, transported their civil service model to other cultures. Railroads, telegraphs, and other machines found their way to India, China, and Japan. Combat tactics changed forever as the rifle replaced the spear and bow and the machine gun tore through charging armies. Some leaders, such as the Emperor of Japan, saw westernisation as a necessity in order to compete with imperial cultures.

Westernisation also included political dominance. Many early trade agreements turned into imperial influence and eventually conquest. The two competing models were imperialism and colonialism. Imperialism left native cultures largely intact, with local rulers that swore fealty to the ruling country. The ruling country would only interfere when it was convenient, providing

oversight and modernizing the nation (to the Victorian mind, “modernization” and “westernisation” were the same thing). Colonialism, on the other hand, was direct rule by the ruling country, often displacing local populations with its own people. Colonialism was a more popular option in places where the natives were loosely organized and resources were easy to get.

SOCIETY

Society plays a large role in Victorian England. Officially, British society is divided into two classes, noble and commoner. Each is represented by a House in Parliament. Industry and trade, however, made some commoners very rich, and although they could never be nobles (which is a birthright), they shared little in common with the rest of their class. Victorian society, therefore, understood that British society was in fact made up of three classes. The British middle class apes the upper class in ritual and some middle class gentlemen are actually wealthier than some of their “betters.” Faced with dwindling finances, many upper class bachelors take middle class or foreign wives to acquire wealth. Society discourages such cross-pollination, of course, and each class has its own constantly shifting rules of etiquette and manner. Classes are encouraged to keep to themselves, interacting with each other only when necessary.

Two concepts to keep in mind when using society are politeness and scandal. Politeness extends beyond etiquette; there are simply things that a member of society will not do. Open displays of emotion were not permitted in polite society. Men, especially heads of households, will keep from discussing business or delivering troubling news to women. A common practice is for the head of the family to read a newspaper and then relate appropriate news to his wife and daughters. A gentleman or his wife would never be seen doing manual labour, that’s what servants are for. And although the coin had long since left circulation, the guinea was used to quote prices for art, horses, land and professional fees.

Scandal is the one thing that a member of society must avoid. Having a mistress, for example, is not nearly as bad as society finding out about it. Many marital partners will quietly accept that their partner has a paramour as long as they are discreet. This extends to other vices as well, especially overindulgence. It is also scandalous for the upper class to engage in business (patronage is a different matter).

Other nations have their own class systems. In America, for example, land ownership has created a de facto elite even though “all men are created equal.” Former slaves and other Americans of African descent also tend to be treated as a lower class. In Russia, the peasantry resented the noble landowners, especially those that had formerly been serfs (emancipation occurred only a decade prior to the Imperial Age). These sentiments will come to a head in the beginning of the next century. In Japan, the Emperor clashes with the samurai class, which he intends to abolish. In the colonies and empires, social classes are divided by race and ethnicity as well.

Society provides many hooks for campaigns. A broke baron may try to court an American heiress. A noble may find himself in love with a peasant. A samurai might not wish to lay down his sword for the emperor (see the movie *The Last Samurai* (2003)).

New Occupation: Heir

Heirs are the elite sons and daughters of powerful magnates, influential nobles, and imperial monarchs. Unlike dilettantes, however, they are bound by their lineage to certain responsibilities, with the assumption that they might someday rise to lead their families into the future . . . assuming the stars are properly aligned and they do nothing to jeopardize their birthright.

Prerequisite: Age 21+.

Skills: Choose two of the following skills as permanent class skills. If a skill you select is already a class skill, you gain a +1 competence bonus on checks using that skill.

Craft (visual art or writing) (Int), Knowledge (art, business, civics, current events, or history) (Int), Perform (act, dance, keyboards, percussion instruments, sing, stringed instruments, or wind instruments) (Cha), Ride (Dex), Sense Motive (Wis).

Pre-Selected Feat: An heir must choose the Educated feat as one of her starting feats at 1st level.

Reputation Bonus Increase: +1.

Wealth Bonus Increase: +6. An heir may permanently reduce her Reputation bonus by 1 to increase her starting wealth bonus by an additional +1d6; this expenditure must be made before the character begins play. As long as her Reputation bonus is +1 or higher, an heir’s wealth bonus can never drop below 10.

SEXUALITY

Whether warranted or not, those living in the Imperial Age are considered prudish (derisively called “Victorian morality”) when it comes to sexual matters. While this perception is generally limited to the upper classes in general and British society in particular, it can be said that most western literature was very delicate in regards to sex. Polite conversation would never include any sexual topics. While this attitude was maintained in public, very different attitudes arose in private. Courtship was a very formal affair and allowed for little time between prospective partners to get to know each other. Marriages were based on social desirability, not romantic love. This enforced prudery fuelled interest in literature about sexually charged vampires and dashing rogues.

In an Imperial Age campaign, such a situation often leads to married people having affairs, or single people (often male) sneaking around to be with women that he could never marry. These affairs can be used for blackmailing purposes, or allow for unlikely characters to have intimate information. Even player characters can use this to their advantage, using their wiles to gain benefits.

PROGRESS & INDUSTRIALIZATION

Another key theme in the Imperial Age is progress. Science has captured the imagination of the public, and there seems little that science will not achieve. Railroads, telegraphs, and steamships connect continents. A canal has been dug through the Suez. Factories churn out machine-made products. Gaslight keeps cities alive well into the night. Electric light bulbs and telephones are making their debuts.

This scientific and technological progress has fired the imagination of novelists. Jules Verne would write about vessels that could swim beneath the ocean, take to the air, or even shot into space. H.G. Wells explored the concept of a time machine, first in the short story “The Chronic Argonauts,” (1888) and later his more well known novel ***The Time Machine*** (1895). The latter novel was in part an allegory on social classes, with the far future being divided between the beautiful Eloi, a childlike race with everything provided for them, and the hideous Morlocks, a bestial, industrial race that provides for the Eloi, who is in fact their food source. Neither race is as intelligent as the time travelling protagonist.



While perhaps not as extreme as the Morlock future, Progress and Industrialization in the Imperial Age did have its downsides. The poor flocked to the cities in the hopes of finding factory work. What they found was low wages, poor working conditions, and cramped slums (also known as rookeries). Smokestacks belched black smoke into the air and stained clothes, obscured vision, and, in extreme cases, caused suffocation or drowning (as those who lost their way fell into rivers). Disease tore through the densely populated rookeries. Human evolution, promoted by Charles Darwin, suggested that man was little more than an advanced machine, possibly with no God to guide him.

Needless to say, this dark side of the industrial revolution and evolutionary thought also fuelled novelists. A few decades prior to the Imperial Age, Mary Shelley wrote ***Frankenstein, or a Modern Prometheus*** as a warning about man daring to play God. The works of Charles Dickens, many of which showcased the plight of the London poor, are still very popular. During the Imperial Age, Robert Louis Stevenson would combine science and the restraints of polite society in ***The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde***.

REVOLUTION

While America and France had their major revolutions in the previous century, the nineteenth century was almost continually marked with revolutionary fervour. Many dissatisfied subjects and citizens, mainly from the lower classes of their respective societies, would stoke the fires of revolution. Partly spurred on by Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto, popular revolutions exploded across the European continent. For the most part, these revolutions were suppressed. Communism made a resurgence during the Franco-Prussian War in 1871, when a socialist government emerged to take over Paris. This Paris Commune reigned for two months until it was defeated by the regular army. Communism would remain an issue throughout the European continent throughout the Imperial Age, although somewhat curiously Britain and America were virtually untouched by the fires of communism.

All western nations were subject to anarchism. Anarchism was the term given to any movement that sought violent overthrow of the government. While some anarchists were communists, anarchism was a movement all its own. Indeed, any group that used terrorist tactics to influence government was considered an anarchist. Significant anarchist activities throughout the Imperial Age included assassination attempts on the German, Russian, Chilean and British leaders (the attempt on Russian Tsar Alexander II was successful). In Britain, anarchism was equated with Irish separatists (the Fenians). While Fenian terrorist attacks were primarily used as scare tactics, they made assassination attempts on Queen Victoria and stabbed the Chief Secretary of Ireland to death in 1884.

Communism and related equality movements could provide interesting background colour or the motive behind intrigues. Anarchist attacks can add an element of surprise to any Imperial Age campaign. Indeed, the PCs could be in a public building or park on an unrelated adventure when an anarchist bomb or assassination attempt springs out of nowhere. In a covert campaign, the PCs could be secret agents tasked with eliminating anarchist threats.

THE OCCULT

While the Imperial Age is marked by increased interest and application of science and technology, magic and folklore did not go quietly into the night. Indeed, throughout the world, people continued to make offerings to fairies or place wards upon their households and children. Victorian literature tended to portray faeries as tiny winged humanoids or small humans with stocking caps (these latter types were usually called elves). Sometimes these creatures would be portrayed as stunningly beautiful humanoids, especially in Scandinavia (it is this perception of the elf on which the d20 version is modelled).

The Imperial Age also saw the rise of another phenomenon, the practice of magic as a science. In previous centuries magic was considered the province of religion, either as miracles bestowed by the gods, or as a tool of demons or devils. Occultists in the Imperial Age, however, believed that magic was a natural force that could be harnessed through precise rituals (hermetic magic or "magick"). This led to a rise of occult organizations such as the Theosophical Society, the Martinist Order, and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Many of these organizations modelled themselves after the Freemasons, known for their secret gestures and rites of initiation. Members still met in secret, as practicing magic was still not acceptable to the general public. French author Leo Taxil caused quite a stir when he invented a black magic order, the Palladian Order, as a secret cult of Freemasons.

Spiritualism, or the ability to speak with the dead, was also prevalent in the Imperial Age. The American Fox sisters became world-renowned for summoning spirits that would make their presence known by rapping (a knocking sound). They were discredited in 1888 when one of the sisters revealed how she could make rapping sounds by cracking her toe joint. Still, spiritualism continued to be popular throughout the Imperial Age and gained some legitimacy in the scientific community.

Although a religion and not a magical practice, Christian Science, founded by Mary Baker Eddy in 1875, taught (and still teaches today) that, since man is made in God's image, man is perfect. It is man's own misperceptions of the material world that causes injury and through special prayers designed to see the spiritual reality man can heal himself. While not specifically banned, many Christian Scientists refuse medical attention, believing that all they need is the power of prayer.

GMs that wish to incorporate the occult into Imperial Age campaigns will have to determine whether any or all of these occult beliefs are true. It is possible for a campaign to have fairies while hermetic magic doesn't work. **Imperial Age Magick** provides a system for using hermetic magic in a campaign, while **Imperial Age Spiritualism** and **Imperial Age Alienist** add mediums and psychics, respectively.

IMPERIAL AGE GENRES

There are many different genres in the literature and of the Imperial Age. An Imperial Age campaign may centre upon one genre, incorporate a few genres, or even shift from one genre to the other between adventures. Some common genres are explained below.

One notable and very Victorian exception to this list is the historical novel. While very popular during the Imperial Age, the historical novel would be of little use to GMs running Imperial Age campaigns (unless used to flesh out the histories of Imperial Age characters).

FOREIGN ADVENTURE

With advances in communication and travel, the world was becoming a smaller place. As empires and colonies grew, more and more stories about these far away lands would intrigue those at home. H. Rider Haggard wrote stories set in Africa, many featuring British explorer and big game hunter Allan Quatermain and jungle queen She. Rudyard Kipling does the same for India in *The Jungle Book* and *The Jungle Book II*. Explorer Sir Richard Burton wrote many travel novels before and during the early part of the Imperial Age (he died in 1890). Sir Richard also translated *The Arabian Nights* and the *Kama Sutra*.

Foreign adventures provide escapist fantasies for those locked in the restrictions of society. They feature interesting protagonists in exotic locales, coming into conflict with savage tribes, scimitar-wielding Arabs, and cutthroat pirates. Major female characters, especially those in remote locals, tend to be strong, independent, and fierce, until the right man comes along to tame them. While these tales are prototypes of the later pulp foreign adventures, Imperial Age protagonists did not have to be especially heroic. Allan Quatermain cares little for Sir Henry's missing brother; he simply offers to guide Sir Henry and crew to *King Solomon's Mines* for money. In *Around the World in Eighty Days*, Verne's Phileas Fogg wishes to prove a point with his reputation on the line.



A subset of the foreign adventure genre is the lost world adventure. While lost world literature would hit its stride in the pulps of the following century, there are many lost world stories in the Imperial Age. While most are arguably "travel stories," albeit with the blank parts of the map fictitiously filled in, other lost worlds were more fantastic. Jules Verne took his readers to underground worlds (*Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864)), under the sea (*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1869)), and even to the moon (*From the Earth to the Moon* (1865)). In 1882, American author and politician Ignatius Donnelly would publish *Atlantis: The Antediluvian World*, contending that Atlantis really did exist and was now sunk beneath the Atlantic Ocean.

GMs running foreign adventures should keep in mind the cultural differences between the traveller (or colonial) and the natives. Some authors actually used native cultures to point out the flaws in their own. GMs running other types of Imperial