Ancient gods and modern myths rub shoulders in night clubs, ghosts and goblins ride the subway, and the faeries are ready to rock and roll! Dreaming Cities is a comprehensive core rulebook for playing and game mastering urban fantasy games, introduced with an astute and informative essay to this popular role-playing genre by Jo Ramsay. In addition, Dreaming Cities features three archetypical urban fantasy settings by a talented array of authors: Jason L Blair and Elizabeth Rich, Jamais Cascio, and Phil Masters.

Dreaming Cities, developed by Tri-Stat guru David L. Pulver, also details new rules for fantastic races and magic. With a plethora of occupational and racial templates, magical spells and rituals, and adventuring equipment, you can create your character and be ready to play in minutes.

Evocatively illustrated by Sam Araya, Greg Boychuk, Marta Dahlig, Kelly Hamilton, Anne Rouvin, and Melissa Uran, Dreaming Cities raises the bar for urban fantasy role-playing.
ROLE-PLAYING GAME MANIFESTO

These rules are written on paper, not etched in stone tablets.

Rules are suggested guidelines, not required edicts.

If the rules don’t say you can’t do something, you can.

There are no official answers, only official opinions.

When dice conflict with the story, the story always wins.

Min/Maxing and munchkinism aren’t problems with the game; they’re problems with the player.

The Game Master has full discretionary power over the game.

The Game Master always works with, not against, the players.

A game that is not fun is no longer a game — it’s a chore.

This book contains the answers to all things.

When the above does not apply, make it up.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Ancient gods and modern myths rub shoulders in nightclubs, ghosts and goblins ride the subway, and the fairies are ready to rock and roll! This is the world of urban fantasy.

I was first exposed to the urban fantasy genre when a good friend loaned me his copy of Charles de Lint’s novels Malengro and Moonhaar. Here were fantasy stories that hit me where I lived — literally, for the stories of people being caught in a world of Celtic druids, sorcery, and native American shamans were set in the very real city of Ottawa, Ontario, only a few hours drive from where I lived. Later I would read the words of authors like Emma Bull, Terri Windling, Tim Powers, Neil Gaiman, Michael de Larrabeiti, Bill Willingham, and many others.

Urban (or “mythic”) fantasy shares roots with the popular “horror” genre — but it is as much about learning to see the wonder as well as the horror of the unknown ... to awaken a hidden power in an unexpected place, to discover the reality of magic, if only our eyes and ears can open up to notice it. In Dreaming Cities: Tri-Stat Urban Fantasy Genre we have tried to capture the feel of this exciting genre, through the work of five talented role-playing authors.

Jo Ramsay wrote a comprehensive overview of the urban fantasy genre’s history and themes, and went on to create practical guidelines for designing archetypal characters, magical rituals, and continuing campaigns. In conjunction with the Tri-Stat dX rules that we’ve included, these guidelines provide the resources for Game Masters and players who wish to develop their own urban fantasy campaign.

This book isn’t just rules and campaign advice. It is always better to show rather than tell, so we’ve also provided three stand-alone campaign settings that illuminate different aspects of the genre.

Phil Master’s “The Small Folk” is simultaneously a satirical spoof of both the traditional legends of the little people and a play on the conventions of contemporary “gothic horror” role-playing. It is also an excellent setting for adventure, as the hard-boiled but pint-sized protagonists live like rats in our walls, balancing ancient traditions and rivalries with the perils of modern-day urban survival.

Jamais Cascio’s “Nightmare Chronicles” explores the darker end of urban fantasy with an epic struggle in which people act locally and think globally in their battle against demonic forces. As with much urban fantasy, magic empowers both the good and the bad, and Cascio’s work makes this both literal and explicit, showing how the monsters exist in a symbiotic relationship with their foes.

Jason Blair and Liz Rich’s “World at Twilight” explores how the denizens of a typical mid-size American city cope with the return of myth and magic to the world. Legendary archetypes and creatures of Faerie cause havoc when they are reborn into the modern city streets, but human ambition may prove even more dangerous in the end .....

Welcome to the worlds of Dreaming Cities. The magic has returned!

— David Pulver, December, 2004

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

JASON L BLAIR

Jason L Blair is a firm believer in expanding both the content and presentation of role-playing games. His first design, Little Fears ~ The Roleplaying Game of Childhood Terror, was nominated for a 2001 Best RPG Origins Award. His second design, the street-level game of inner-city magic Wyrd is Bond, was released in 2004. He is also a fan of board and card games, and has designed several that he hopes will see the light of day. Jason L Blair lives with his wife, his daughter, chinchilla, dachshund, Maltese, y dos tortugas. He spends his time drafting new games, being with his family, and telling folk there’s no period after the L in his name. He was honored to be contacted for this project.

JAMAIAS CASCIO

Jamais Cascio is a freelance world-builder, a writer specializing in the creation of speculative futures for entertainment and foresight projects. He produces scenarios for science fiction TV shows and movies, multinational corporations, and non-profit organizations, and his essays on the future appear regularly at WorldChanging.com. He is also a part-time game designer, and wrote two books for the Transhuman Space series. This is his first non-science-fiction effort. He lives just outside San Francisco with his wife, two cats, and four Macs.

PHIL MASTERS

Phil Masters is a British author who’s been playing RPGs for more than a quarter of a century now, and writing them for a lot of that time, on and off. He has previously worked for, among others, Hero, Steve Jackson, White Wolf, and more magazines than he can remember. This is his first project for Guardians of Order.

JO RAMSAY

Jo Ramsay is a DSP Engineer and nethead who has been an avid player of various board, card, computer, and roleplaying games for at least 15 years. She has a Ph.D., which besides allowing plenty of spare time to design and run MUDs, also gave her research expertise which came in surprisingly useful in her work on GURPS Screampunk, GURPS Dragons, and contributions to Steve Jackson Game’s In Nomine line. She and her husband share a house with six computers in Reading, England; a town which is well known for its swans, but not its swan princesses.

LIZ RICH

Liz Rich has been an avid gamer since that first time in elementary school, when she realised that group of boys in the corner of the classroom who were always talking about dragons and elves were playing a game. She muscled her way into their group, and has been gaming ever since. When writing, she shamelessly steals material from her travels and studies; many adventures have been based upon tombs and temples she explored when living in Greece or wandering through Turkey, or learned about while studying history. She loves chocolate, cheesecake, and ancient deities, all of which have made it into her writing.
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The World of Urban Fantasy

Welcome to a world where ancient myths and magical creatures stalk the streets, and where legends peek out from behind facades of the everyday and the commonplace. Many people and places are not as they first appear, and even the familiar has unexpected revelations to offer. Supernatural creatures hide their true faces from humanity, and mysterious cults hoard forbidden knowledge. Magical factions conspire and fight secret wars away from the eyes of the mundane world, while ordinary people are plunged into epic quests. Bustling modern cities harbour tales of heartbeat and heart’s desire, depression and elation, secret joys and forgotten mysteries ... and reveal the true prices that people set on their souls.

These stories do not take place “a long time ago and far, far away” as with traditional fairytales, but right now, or perhaps tomorrow. Is the woman with the faraway look in her eyes in the next train a swan princess who aches to return to the skies? Is the busker with his tinsy harmonica the incarnation of a fabled god of music? Perhaps, in the dreamscapes of a city’s restless slumber, they really are.

Urban Fantasy in Literature

“Urban fantasy” is the modern term for fantasy stories that use myths, magic, and fantastic creatures in a setting contemporary with the author. This doesn’t just apply to novelists writing within the last generation. Writers have used similar devices for over two centuries, stretching back to the origins of modern fantasy among the Romantic Movement of the late 18th century. This was a backlash against the Enlightenment, celebrating the empathic over the logical, guts over brain, and dreams over reality. Romantics were fascinated with the beliefs of the past, with all of its folklore and mythology and ritual.

In the 19th Century, several classics were published that dipped heavily into the fantastic: Lewis Carroll’s Alice in Wonderland, published in 1865, followed by Through the Looking Glass in 1871, created striking images that still resound today, especially the Cheshire Cat and the Mad Hatter’s tea party. Twain contrasts his modern world of electric lights and telephones against an anti-romantic Medieval England.

In the 1950s, C.S. Lewis placed another keystone for urban fantasy by writing the Chronicles of Narnia. The first book, The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe, published in 1950, shows a fantastical, medieval world paralleling then-modern-day Britain. The story focuses on four children — Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy — who are sent to stay in the country due to the air-raids over wartime London. They discover a wonderful land in the grip of the White Witch, and must fight her evil domination. Lessons abound for the children, including the notion that magic is not something that can be easily controlled, or turned off and on at will.

Over the next decades, many fantasy, science fiction, horror, and speculative fiction writers (as well as several non-genre writers!) have dabbled in urban fantasy. Some pieces — like Roger Zelazny’s Chronicles of Amber,” are more entrenched in a medieval world of godlike beings. The focus on the mundane is sometimes lost. Others, like the gothic horror of H.P. Lovecraft or Robert E. Howard, run to the darker and more terrible — in these, the nightmares inevitably win out, presenting a vision more grim and morbid than many urban fantasy pieces. Of course, some writers defy labels, like Harlan Ellison and his collection of a new pantheon of modern gods, Deathbird Stories, published in 1975.

Key influences in modern urban fantasy are Charles de Lint’s Moonbeam, and Emma Bull’s War for the Oaks. Both books are set in a modern city and tell the story of humans who are drawn into the magic that exists side-by-side with the world they have always known. Both authors were also involved in Terri Windling and Mark Alan Arnold’s Borderland, an influential anthology that later became a series. Borderland stories are set in Bordertown, a place where elves and humans live together and where runaway youths try to live their dreams.