









(a PDQ campaign in actual play)

by Chad Underkoffler

PROSE DESCRIPTIVE QUALITIES (PDQ) SYSTEM
DESIGN BY: Chad Underkoffler

Logo: Greg Holkan

PLAYTESTING & ADDITIONAL WRITING BY: Andrew Byers & Scott Kane

INTERIOR ART: Fred Hicks, Greg Holkan, & Scott Kane

COVER: Scott Kane & Greg Holkan

LAYOUT: Fred Hicks Editor: Eric A. Burns

ILLUSTRATION MODELS: Andrew Byers (p. 132), Mikayla DeMarino (p. 51 & p. 69), Allison Kaese (p. 129), Steven Solomon (p. 19), Aylish Walton (p. 90), and Nolah Walton (p. 120)

PEER REVIEWERS

Eric A. Burns Fred Hicks Patrick Sweeney
Kirt Dankmyer Ryan Macklin Eddy Webb
Michael Davis-Wilson Matt Rhodes Ross Winn
Tim Gray Tom Schoene Jon Zeigler

The Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System and all Zorcerer of Zo text is ©2006 Chad Underkoffler. All Rights Reserved. Artwork is ©2006 Chad Underkoffler. All Rights Reserved. Some images within produced using the Faeries and Goblins fonts from http://www.fontcraft.com/

Except for purposes of review, no portions of this work may be reproduced by any means without the permission of the relevant copyright holders. This is a work of fiction. Any similarity with actual people or events, past or present, is purely coincidental and unintentional. All mentions of copyrighted works within the text are for reference purposes only and are not a challenge of copyright or trademark.

[1st Printing]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents 11	Zorcerer of Zo Rules
About the PDQ System v	PDQ Master Chart 26
About Atomic Sock Monkey Press v	Qualities
About the Author v	Quality Ranks
	Special Moves!
Once Upon a Time vi	Difficulty Ranks 30
Personal Reflection vi	Upshifts & Downshifts 33
What this Book Contains vii	<i>Upshifts</i>
How to Use This Book viii	Downshifts
The Beginning viii	Shift Accumulation
The Deginning vin	Task Resolution 34
T : . 1	Simple Situations 34
Fairytales1	Complicated Situations 35
Fairytales	Conflict Situations 36
& Folktales 1	Basic Conflict
Fairytale Elements	Advanced Conflict
Fairytale Settings	Advanced Conflict Process
The Kingdom Entire	Initiative
Otherworldly Visitors 4	Actions
Talking Animals & Living Objects 5	Reactions
Fairytale Magic 6	Results
Happily Ever Afters7	Damage
Fairytale Tone:	Zeroing Out
Nice vs. Neutral vs. Nasty 9	
Fairytale & Nursery	
Rhyme Adventures 10	Damage Ranks
Bibliography 12	Gaining Hero Points 43
Filmography	Heroic Actions 43
Ludography 15	Affected By Weakness 44
	Something Bad Happens 44
The Zantabulous Land of Zo16	Good Roleplaying 44
Azul 17	Using Hero Points 45
Giallo 18	Learning Points 46
Rosso 19	Gaining Learning Points 46
Viola 20	Using Learning Points 46
Zo Proper 21	Digging Down Deep 47
The Return of the Wolf 21	ZoZ Magic 47
The Zorcerer! 22	Gifts
Who is the Zorcerer? 23	Magic-Star Qualities 48
What is Zorcery? 24	Magic in Play 48
,	Using Gifts 48
	Using Magic-Star Qualities 49

The Cost of Magic 50	The Stitchwitch 87
The Catch of Magic 50	Thud, Strong Guy 87
Tonal Effects 51	Timothy, the Marquis de Carabas 88
Enchanted Objects 52	Troll
Types of Enchanted Object 52	Shaykosch
PC Creation of Enchanted Objects 53	The Zorcerer of Zo 89
Example of Play 54	,
	Gamemastering ZoZ90
ZoZ Characters	General GMing Precepts 90
Character Generation: Build a	Speed
Hero 61	Running Notes 90
Name	Inspiration 90
Background (& Nationality) 62	Story Hooks 91
Qualities 63	Canned Texts 91
Gifts & Magic-Stars 65	NPC Plans91
Special Moves 66	Improvisation 91
Hero Points & Learning Points 67	Set Session Lengths91
Miscellany 67	Feedback
Justifying Why	Specific GMing Techniques 94
the PCs are Together	Only Roll When You Have To94
ZoZ Improvement 70	Stepping Through PDQ 95
To Increase a Quality Rank 70	Improvising
To Purchase a New Quality 71	Know Your Genre 96
To Purchase a New Magic-Star 71	Know Your Players 97
To Learn a New Special Move 71	Know Your PCs 97
Inhabitants of Zo 72	Know Your NPCs 97
ZoZ Player Characters (PCs) 72	Offer Both Opportunities & Obstacles 98
Deril, Talking Crocodile Drifter 72	Listening More Than Speaking 98
Horace Hogg, Gentleman Enchanter	Never Say No 98
& 4 th Little Pig 76	Rule of Three 99
Pipsqueak, Horace Hogg's Manservant 79	Reintegrate Dangling Threads 99
Non-Player Characters (NPCs)80	You're More the Cruise Director
Zo NPCs 81	than the Captain 100
Alphonse, Count of Colbaltia 81	
The Blue Hood, Outlaw Archer 82	The First ZoZ Campaign . 101
Blunder, Tough Guy 83	Session 1: August 26, 2005 101
Cesar the Swordsman 83	GM Prep
George Pieman, Ne'er-do-well 83	NPC Plans
Goblin (Dawn) 84	Actual Play 103
Goblin (Dusk) 84	For Next Session
Guardsman 84	Story Hooks
Happy Bandit 85	Dangling Plotlines
Murklebog, Human Wizard 85	Session 2: November 11, 2005 109
Shawn Gruff 86	GM Prep 109
Stig, The Ogre Tyrant 86	NPC Plans

80 iii 03

Actual Play 110	Bonus Material 160
For Next Session	Original Campaign
Story Hooks	Prospectus & Process 161
Dangling Plotlines	Player Input on the Campaign 163
Session 3: January 20, 2006115	Q: What do you want to see? 163
GM Prep	
NPC Plans	Q: What sort of game do you
Actual Play 117	want to play? 163
For Next Session	Q: How dark or light do you want it to be?
Story Hooks	
Dangling Plotlines	Q: How wacky fictional? 164
Session 4: April 28, 2006 121	Session Running Notes 164
GM Prep	Session 1: August 26, 2005 164
NPC Plans	Immediate Events
Actual Play 123	Festival Night #1
Breezedale (Andrew & Scott)	Next Day
On the Road (Chad)	Festival Night #2
Bugburg (Andrew)	Following Day
Iron Shoe Inn (Scott)	Festival Night #3
Home, Slop Home	Next Dawn
For Next Session	Session 2: November 11, 2005 166
Story Hooks	The Letter Reads
Dangling Plotlines	Event on the Road #1
Session 5: May 12, 2006 132	An Evening at the Golden Sheaf Inn .16%
GM Prep	Event on the Road #2
NPC Plans	Arrive at Carabas Manor
Actual Play	Viola Bridge and Its Trolls
Roderick's Story	Session 3: January 20, 2006 170
For Next Session	Session 4: April 28, 2006 172
	NPC Recap
Story Hooks	Blanca's Hut
Dangling Plotlines	Possible Sorties into Viola
Session 6: June 9, 2006 141	(Marquis de Carabas' Ideas) 173
GM Prep	Session 5: May 12, 2006 174
NPC Plans	Spicing Up the Mix
Actual Play 143	Session 6: June 9, 2006 176
Deril & Horace Hogg's	Roderick Says:
Happily Ever Afters	Guesstimated Outline Of Events 176
Deril	Castle Bluerock
Horace Hogg	Castle Slumber
Epilogue	Showdown With Shaykosch 180
II 1 E . A.C. / 1\ 176	Bonus Zo NPCs 180
Happily Ever After(word). 156	Quellabaum,
Post-Campaign Versions	King of the Winged Monkeys 182
of the Zo PCs	Captain Roderick Mus,
Baron Deril	Zo Imperial Navy
Sir Horace Hogg 158	Shaykosch, the Deathless Wolf 182

ABOUT THE PDQ SYSTEM

The rules inside this book build upon the Prose Descriptive Qualities (PDQ) System, suitably modified for fairytale play (the "Good Parts" version). PDQ Core is available as a free download from the following URLs:

http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies/di/pdq-core.pdf http://www.rpgnow.com/product_info.php?products_id=4175& http://e23.sjgames.com/item.html?id=ASM-000

PDQ has been designed for evocative simplicity, speed, and flexibility. It currently serves as the core game mechanics for Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption (DI); Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the Roleplaying Game (MNPR:RPG); Truth & Justice (T&J); and The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ).

Rules and concepts from all Atomic Sock Monkey Press games easily interconnect. For example, if one chooses to, the Soul Point mechanics of DI could be used to steal the soul of a ZoZ Princess, and the Powers rules in $T\mathcal{E}J$ could be used for ideas on how to interpret ZoZ magical Gifts into even more sharply-defined game mechanics.

ABOUT ATOMIC SOCK MONKEY PRESS

http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/

Atomic Sock Monkey Press is dedicated to high-quality, off-kilter, imaginative fun. That means tabletop games of both the "beer & pretzels" and roleplaying game (RPG) varieties. Check out the following webpages on the site for ZoZ resources and downloads:

http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/products/zoz.asp http://www.atomicsockmonkey.com/freebies.asp

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chad Underkoffler is an editor for a telecommunications standards body by day and a freelance game writer by night. He's been gaming since 1981, to the confusion of his family. His column "Campaign in a Box" appears in Pyramid Online at < http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid >; he has written material for Gamma World (Sword & Sorcery), GURPS (Steve Jackson Games), and Unknown Armies (Atlas Games); and he is the author and publisher of Dead Inside: the Roleplaying Game of Loss & Redemption; Monkey, Ninja, Pirate, Robot: the RPG; and Truth & Justice. Chad currently lives in Alexandria, VA, with his wife Beth and their two black cats.

INTRODUCTION

ONCE UPON A TIME...

Personal Reflection



have always loved fairytales, as a child and as an adult. There is something in them that drives right to the core of my reading enjoyment.

Perhaps it's the way they are told: spare in detail, but evocative enough to spur the

imagination. Or maybe it's the universal acceptance of wonders and miracles: talking animals, witches working enchantments, magic tinderboxes, houses made of gingerbread. Then again,

it could be the strong and boldly drawn characteristics of the denizens of such tales: noble princesses, lucky third sons, dastardly villains. Or it could be the rush of pure emotions and concepts that really exist in these stories: Revenge, Forgiveness, True Love. Or it might be that fairytales are *fair*: the broken will become strong, the silenced will laugh, the voiceless shall sing, and the wicked will be punished.

It's a heady mix of flavors, one that children find delicious, but most adults can find cloying. For my part, I like strong drink.

In late 2005, after the release of *Truth & Justice*, my players asked me to run a new campaign. Given my writing and work commitments (and those of my players), time was at a premium. I told them that we'd have to use *PDQ* for ease of preparation and speed of play in a "seat of the pants" sort of game. I'd provide a list of campaign concepts. We'd then vote to select one that we were all interested in. My players agreed. We voted, and a fairytale campaign idea came out on top. We began having monthly sessions of *The Zorcerer of Zo*.

It was great. Prep was easy, the characters were vibrant and active, and everyone was having a good time. There was a lot of laughter, snappy dialogue, and great fun that well-matched the genre. This ended up being one of the best

campaigns I've ever run.

One of my players started urging me to publish the campaign. "I'd hate to have the campaign and setting never see the light of day," he said. I wasn't sure that there was enough for an entire book, other than the very short sketch of a setting that I'd sent out as a game prospectus.

But then I recalled Aaron Allston's classic *Champions* supplement, *Strike Force*, which essentially detailed Allston's long-running campaign. I realized I hadn't seen many game books that stepped through an entire campaign from start to finish. Also, I thought of the increasing number of "Actual Play" campaign threads on Internet RPG forums.

Maybe I could produce a slim book providing a description of how our campaign came together: how ideas were incorporated into the game, how adventures were developed, and how characters and plots formed. The book would have information on a setting, yes, but unlike most RPG books, it could have "behind the gamemaster's (GM's) screen" type notes on how I assembled the system and setting elements, how the player characters (PCs) interpreted and altered them, and what the players thought of all this! Suffice to say, this would be a different sort of gaming product.

My players thought this was a great idea.

Thus, this book.

What this Book Contains

Inside *The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ)*, you'll find: a discussion on fairytales as a literary and gaming genre; the Zantabulous Land of Zo game setting with NPCs; a complete game system (the "Good Parts" PDQ); notes on how I started, developed, ran, and ended the first *ZoZ* campaign (and advice on how you can do the same yourself); two "DVD commentary tracks" of textboxes – one from me as the GM and one from my players; and an Appendix full of Bonus Materials.

How to Use This Book

If you are interested in using ZoZ to run your own fairytale campaign, read Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

If you are interested in reading about the ZoZ campaign I ran, concentrate on the Behind the Curtain and Player Commentary textboxes in Chapters 4 and Chapters 6 and 7, plus the Appendix.

THE BEGINNING

ZoZ came from my group voting on short, one-paragraph blurbs of campaigns I was interested in running. A short blurb on a "Faerie Tale Fantasy" campaign came up the winner. I asked some questions of the players, then sat down to write up a sketch of a setting. (This entire process is described in the Appendix, p. 160.)

The information in the textbox below is the *entirety* of the campaign design for the initial ZoZ campaign – before the players made up their characters, at least. All additional details in the description of the setting (see *Chapter 2*) or in the NPC descriptions (see *Chapter 4*) were either added during play or (rarely) the writing of this book.

BEHIND THE CURTAIN: GM (PROTO ZO)

THE ZANTABULOUS LAND OF ZO!

The magic empire of Zo is composed of five smaller countries:

- 1. **Zo Proper**: Jade City, ruled by the Zorcerer of Zo. Vaguely pan-Asian; metropole of the Zo Empire, though in practice never exercises his power. Zolanders are known for their keenness of observation and manners. Center of Map. Green.
- 2. **Azul**: Farmland and forest. Azulites are known for their industriousness and perseverance. East of Map. Blue.
- 3. **Rosso**: Port cities, trade and fishing. Rossons are known for their adventurous and romantic nature. South of Map. Red.
- 4. **Giallo:** Plains given to farmland (grain) and herding. Giallons are known for their courage and pragmatism. West of Map. Yellow.
- 5. **Viola**: Hills and mountains; mining and crafting. Violanders are known for their intellects and inventiveness. Viola has a slightly higher number of magical things and thus magic-users hanging around. North of Map. Purple.

Throughout the Zo Empire there are witches, dragons, ogres, talking and

dumb beasts, fairies, lucky third sons, princesses, evil step-mothers, the whole megillah.

NOTABLE NPCs (LOCATION; ATTITUDE)

The Zorcerer of Zo, Emperor and Magician (Zo Proper; Not Known)

The Great Bird (Zo Proper; Nasty)

The Sewer Creeper (Zo Proper; Neutral)

The Grovelin (Zo Proper; Neutral)

The Smiling Soldier (Zo Proper; Nice)

Count Alphonse, Brilliant Aristocrat (Azul; Nasty)

The Blue Hood, Bandit Queen and Renowned Archer (Azul; Nice)

Wickerwalker, Monstrous Construct (Azul; Not Known)

King Glamorgan, Aged Hero (Rosso; Nice)

Hella, the Fire Fairy (Rosso; Nasty)

Captain Mouse (Rosso; Neutral)

The Marquis de Carabas, Feline Aristocrat (Giallo; Nice)

The Roly-Poly Prince, Rolling Thunder (Giallo; Nasty)

Snow Witch, Mistress of Mirrors (Giallo; Neutral)

Princess Paige, Lost in a Good Book (Viola; Nice)

Quellabaum, King of the Winged Monkeys (Viola; Neutral)

Stig, Ogre Overlord (Viola; Nasty)

THE RETURN OF THE WOLF

Shaykosch, the Deathless Wolf, has once again returned from the grave. He and his numerous wicked followers sow discord throughout the Zantabulous Land of Zo. While every few decades a new hero puts the Wolf down eventually the creature rises again amidst the huffing and puffing wind. Beast, sorcerer, and shapeshifter, he stalks the land and wreaks havoc.

The Blue Tailor stopped him once, stitching his shadow to a rock with magic needle and thread, then dropping the rock into Bottomless Chasm. The Wooden Pirate filleted him on the Southern Sea, scattering the Wolf's guts as chum for the Lightning Sharks. Another time, the Horse Prince trampled him into the muddy fields of Giallo after a long, running battle. Theodora the Witch Girl

8080 THE ZORCERER OF ZO · INTRODUCTION CRUSCR

matched him spell for spell, and finally triumphed. And there are a dozen other tales of the Wolf's deaths and returns.

Who will stop him this time? And how? Will some brave soul beg the Zorcerer to stretch forth his power? Or would collecting the magical weapons used against Shaykosch in the past be helpful? Who knows?

PLAYER COMMENT ON PROTO-ZO (SCOTT)

Yep, believe it or not folks, this was the extent of Zo as we knew it!

With the five hundred words in this textbox, we were able to build an entire campaign that was fun and well received all-around.

How did we do that?

In Chapter 5, I lay out many of the gamemastering methods I used while running the campaign, but there's one underlying concept that I think is involved with regard to the brief sketch found in the textbox above. The amount of information that everyone has to know regarding the campaign and the world is *just right* – exactly as Goldilocks found all of the Baby Bear's goods (neither too hot nor too cold; neither too hard nor too soft). Providing less detail than is found above leaves everyone all at sea, unsure of what actually fits inside the game. Providing more detail than is in the textbox begins to set more down in stone, eliminating possibilities and requiring stronger continuity and remembering of facts by all involved.

As I mention in *Truth & Justice* when discussing the "Animated" style of superhero gaming, the key phrase developed by Chipp Kidd and Bruce Timm for the various DC Comics animated properties was "Limited detail for maximum motion." That is, verbal and visual shorthands were used to keep things fast, evocative, and ready for action. In a fairytale, *everything* – setting, characters, plots – is similarly stripped down to the basic concept or archetype: the Woods, the Wolf, the Woodcutter. The elements of the tale themselves are just seeds (powerful ones!). It is the telling of the tale that makes them flower into unique shapes. In an RPG, it is the decisions, actions, and performances of the GM *and* the players that cause these seeds to grow.

I urge you to take the information within this book, plant your own seeds, and grow your own adventures in the Zantabulous Land of Zo!

 $\infty_{\rm X} \alpha$

PDQMaster Chart

Level	As Quality Rank	Mod to 2D6 roll	As Difficulty Rank	Target Number
Poor	Notably Inept.	-2	A trivial task.	5
Average	Typical human capability.	0	Straightforward task.	7
Good	Better than usual; most professionals or talented newcomers.	+2	Complex task, requiring attention to detail.	9
Expert	Noted/famed professional; talent with skill to back it up.	+4	Intricate task, difficult and requiring sharp concentration, hard for a typical untrained person (Average).	11
Master	Acclaimed genius: talent with substantial skill behind it.	+6	Extremely difficult task, hard for most professionals in the field (Good).	13

Uses for Hero Points

වු

Clearing the Fog. Regain 1d6 lost Failure Ranks per 1 HP and 1 action/reaction.

Digging Down Deep. Convert 1 Learning Point into 1 HP.

Fairy Godmother. 1 HP to get ideas from other players around the table; 2 HP to get ideas from the GM; 4 HP for some form of in-game intervention.

Favor's Reward. 1 HP and a Scene to get information only; 2 HP and a Scene to get some other sort of aid; **subject to GM veto**.

Heroic Serendipity. 2 HP per plausible coincidence, or 4 HP per implausible coincidence.

My Heart is Pure. Gain an Upshift to Rank for next roll. 2 HP per Upshift.

Second Wind. Regain 1d6 lost Damage Ranks. 2 HP and one Turn per die of recovery.

 ${\bf Silver~Shoes.}~Ignore~damage.~1 HP~per~Damage/Failure~Rank.$

Strength of Ten. Add an Upshift (+2) to Damage only. 1 HP per Upshift.

Tale-spinning. Dictate a new fact: 1 HP per minor detail, 2 HP per significant detail, or 4 HP per major detail; subject to GM veto.

(Cr.	HER WOOD	- section	8537(7)
SX.		M's Player Notes	
			Jess a
	CHARACTER NAME		
B	LEARNING POINTS		
من (م	Hero Points		
ž	Story Hooks		
3			۲
	CHARACTER NAME		
	LEARNING POINTS		
	Hero Points		
	Story Hooks		
	CHARACTER NAME		
	LEARNING POINTS		
	Hero Points		
	Story Hooks		
	CHARACTER NAME		
	LEARNING POINTS		
ຼ	Hero Points		<u></u>
3	Story Hooks		2)
3			
			🚜
	RFWAR	d Hero Points for	
(X)	/ 3	1+ HP) • Affected By Weakness (1 HP)	Jan Jan
EX.	Some	ething Bad Happens (2d6 HP)	
	Hoteldon	Good Play (1+ HP)	

GM's NPC RECORD SHEET

NPC NAM	E:			
DESCRIPTIO	N			
QUALITY	QUALITY	QUALITY	QUALITY	QUALITY
M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6
E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4
G+2	G+2	G+2	G+2	G+2
A0	A0	A0	A0	A0
P-2	P-2	P-2	P-2	P-2

NPC NAM	E:				
Descriptio	N				
Quality	QUALITY	Quality	Quality	Quality	
M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6	
E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4	
E+4 G+2	E+4 G+2	E+4 G+2	E+4 G+2	E+4 G+2	
-					

NPC NAM	E:				
DESCRIPTIO	N				
Quality	QUALITY	Quality	Quality	QUALITY	
M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6	M+6	
E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4	E+4	
G+2	G+2	G+2	G+2	G+2	
A0	A0	A0	A0	A0	
P-2	P-2	P-2	P-2	P-2	

DIFFICULTIES

Difficulty Rank	DESCRIPTION	TN
Poor	A trivial task.	5
Average	Straightforward task.	7
Good	Complex task.	9
Expert	Intricate task, hard for an untrained person.	11
Master	Extremely difficult task, hard for professionals of the field.	13
<i>Improbable</i>	Beyond most masters of the field!	19
Impossible	Legendary prowess required!	25
ები —		50

натеd: whose ma		36					
Q UALITIES	* _{OR} !	MASTER	typer (COOD	AVERA	700gl	COME!
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
		0	0	0	0	0	0
as well as a va	ist MIS	cell	an	у ор	det	aıls, l	ıke:



lions and Tigers and Bears...



...and More!

Tanlabulous Torcerer

A FAIRYTALE ROLE~PLAYING GAME

Tailors face giants, enchanted queens dance with human peasants, talking creatures perform domestic duties, witches cast curses, and fairies grant blessings.

And all are seeking their happily ever after.

The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ) is a fairytale RPG by Atomic Sock Monkey Press, Publishers of Dead Inside and Truth & Justice.

www.atomicsockmonkey.com



The Zorcerer of Zo (ZoZ) contains:

- A discussion on the nature of fairytales.
- Me How to adapt fairytales to RPG campaigns.
- An evocative setting: the Zantabulous Land of Zo!
- 50 The "Good Parts" PDQ System!
- The initial ZoZ campaign: how it came to be; how player characters were created, how the game was run, and how the campaign came to an exciting climax (and how you can do this too!).
- From the author/GM and one from the players of the P(s on the Actual Play of the campaign.
- 20 An appendix stuffed with Bonus Material.

Go ahead: be zantabulous!



The Zorcerer of Zo Atomic Sock Monkey Press ASM-030 \$25.00