

# A Short Interview with Jason Soles & Nicci Vega, Imprimaturs of *Unhallowed Metropolis*



Aether Emporium: *There are several well established Steampunk role-play games currently on the market, what makes the game unique from these other titles, what sets it apart?*

Jason: Strictly speaking, *Unhallowed Metropolis* is not a steampunk game, though I guess it fits into that broad genre. It is more precisely a Tesla-punk or surgery-punk game, but steampunk has a better ring to it.

We take our subject matter very seriously. We did not plunge into writing the setting haphazardly. Before we began to write the game we spent months researching the Victorian era including history, society, politics, sciences, etc. It was only after we had a firm grasp of the subject matter that we felt comfortable really digging in. *Unhallowed Metropolis* is very much an alternate history, rather than a fantasy game with Victorian trappings.

This is also a game of science! The alchemical principle is at the core of the setting. The game borrows far more from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* than it does from any contemporary writer. In addition to hunting zombies and vampires through the streets of London, players also have the opportunity to brew strange elixirs, chemically and galvanically reanimate the dead, and engineer life itself!

Nicci: The science of this game isn't 'steampunk' in the usual sense, though the spirit is the same - we have a world of science unchecked, of Things Man Was Not Meant to Know. The engines of this science are much more alchemical and galvanic than gears-and-steam, though we will admit to being sincerely in love with the gearpunk aesthetic. The biological and alchemical focus of our tech does change the feel and function of our ultratech - it's more stochastic than steampunk, messier, less smooth brass and more sutures and scars.

Aether Emporium: *Can you explain the role of the "Undertakers" and how they came into being?*

Jason: Undertakers are licensed bounty hunters that track down and exterminate the abominations of the Neo-Victorian world. They evolved toward the end of the Reclamation when the cities were retaken from the animate dead. Originally intended to supplement the military forces of the era, undertaking became a sort of Neo-Victorian establishment that persist into "modern" times.

The Undertakers themselves are among the most deadly individuals to walk the streets of the metropolis, that is, Neo-Victorian London. They are like the bastard offspring of Stoker's Van Helsing and Clint Eastwood's "Man with No Name" in a gas-mask and top hat and armed with the most advanced weapons known to man, including pneumatic stake guns and lightning cannons fueled by the city's tesla-array.

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Undertakers are not the only option for players, by the way. Players can also play Mourners, Doctors, Aristocrats, Criminals, and half-lifers. Mourners are the silent and lethal watchers of the dead, think gothic-lolita assassin in mourning wear... These ladies are as dangerous as they come. When not sitting vigil, they serve as the spies and assassins of the aristocratic houses. Half-lifers include the likes of Dhampir vampire hunters and vat grown Anathema, artificial life-forms that would be at home on the *Island of Dr. Moreau*.

*Aether Emporium*: *The Victorians had a very highly developed sense of social standing. How much of a part does the Victorian Class system play in the game, can the player rise up the ranks of society and is there still a Royal family?*

Nicci: First, yes, there is still very much a Royal Family, as well as an aristocratic class (which is available to player characters). We tried to be certain that the class system in Neo-Victorian society would be apparent and very real to players; social standing is intended to be very much a part of a character, and we've tried to make it natural to incorporate that into play.

That said, there is some degree of social mobility that is possible. It is easier to fall from social standing than it is to rise, of course, and Neo-Victorian society does not make it easy for a person to forget humble origins, but the rags-to-riches story can exist in this world. The reverse process can be an extremely interesting story as well.



*Aether Emporium*: *It would seem the Victorian metaphysical obsessions of life and death, Spiritualism and un-death for that matter (Zombies) are staples of UnMet. What place does the Church have in the world, are there factions, splinter groups, heretics and what is its relationship with the scientists of the world?*

Nicci: This is a question that is not completely addressed in this book. We have started writing the next book, which will cover spiritualism and psychic phenomena, in which this question will be addressed in greater detail.

In the setting as it stands, the Church is still very much a player in the Neo-Victorian world, and the Victorian clash between doctrines of spiritualism and the Christian faith has been resurrected in a very different arena - the existence of spiritual phenomena has been established without doubt, giving fire to the debate over life in the world beyond. The relationship between science and the Church is complex - the reluctance of scientific exploration to be confined by the prejudices of conventional morality is something of a theme in this world.

There are heretical factions within the Church. One such is the Forsaken, a group of faithful who believe themselves to be living in a world after the Christian Rapture."

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*Aether Emporium*: I imagine the science of the world is rather anachronistic, what level of technology has the society achieved, what weird science powers the world and are there airships?

Nicci: Anachronistic? Yes and no. In the real world, the innovations in materials and mechanical science that occurred concurrent with the world wars did a great deal to direct the evolution of the global technology base. In this world, it was the war against the undead that reshaped the course of technological evolution. Biological science developed to an extreme degree in the years following the first outbreak of Plague, as the scientists of the time struggled to understand the nature of the new contagion that was depopulating the world. Consequently, Neo-Victorian medical and associated sciences became phenomenally advanced. Medical technology is capable of making extensive alterations to the human form, extending the lifespan past three hundred years, even growing reengineered human and human-type organisms artificially... for a price.

And yes, there are airships. Prussia is the major air power of the world as it stands, though Britain has recently begun developing their capabilities in this arena. A clash of empires seems unavoidable.

*Aether Emporium*: Edgar Allen Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Nikola Tesla are cited as influences on the game; can you expand on this, what made you look towards these individuals for inspiration?

Jason: I'm not sure we looked to them for inspiration so much as without them there would be no *Unhallowed Metropolis*. From the start we invoked names like Shelley, Stevenson, Lovecraft, and Poe. Those writers created the language and ideas that are at the foundation of the setting. Tesla is the great real world proto-type for the "mad scientist". He was a man so far ahead of his time that his patents are still being rediscovered. Given the chance to play "what if", Tesla's ideas were a natural fit for the setting. The man's personality and legend are utterly infectious.

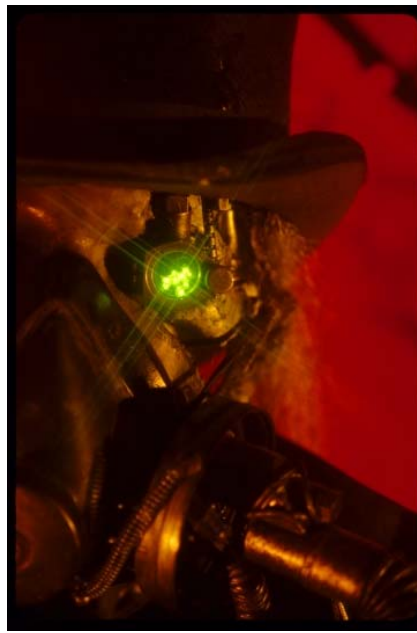
Nicci: The authors have a very rich language and perhaps a morbid aesthetic - we wanted to capture that, to make use of the thick lingering language and the feeling of living in the midst of death that is so much a part of the Victorian experience in conveying this world to the reader.



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*Aether Emporium*: *UnMet* is illustrated with not only black and white art but also with, unusually, a large amount of rather nice photography plates, what prompted this choice?

Jason: Last October, we had a Neo-Victorian theme party. At the party, Marc17 and Eliza Gauger took some amazing pictures. Eliza took some of the pictures and applied some stunning digital manipulations. Looking them over as a group, it occurred to us that we had hit on another element of the book. We were looking into *Unhallowed Metropolis* in a new way. From the start we knew we wanted art that was immersive, something that made the metropolis as real to the reader as it exists in our heads. The *Unhallowed Metropolis* cover image is a photo of a sculpture created by the very talented George Higham after all.



*Aether Emporium*: The game was originally meant for a 2006 release, why the delay in publication?

Jason: To be honest, we underestimated the scope of the project and its demands on our time. Nicci and I are both fantastically busy people.

Nicci: Very true. Jason's time commitments at Privateer are heavy, and I finished a master's degree during the development of this game.

Jason: By the time the summer of 2006 the convention season was upon us (I travel a lot for Privateer Press), it was evident that the game would have to be pushed back. Later, we made an impassioned plea to Hsin Chen and Brad Elliott at Eos Press to push the game back again. We could have made an April release, but we wanted the time for a little more polish. Thankfully, they gave us the time we needed and I think it really paid off!

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*Aether Emporium*: Will there be any follow up publications for *UnMet* and what other publications can we expect to see from EOS in the coming months?

Jason: George Higham's *Wormweird Tarot* is due any day from Eos Press! I cannot actually say enough good things about it. George is a proper artistic genius. I love his work. The tarot features his wonderful dark sculptures along with stunning in-camera effects. No digital manipulations here, this is the old stuff.

As far as *Unhallowed Metropolis* goes, as Nicci said, the first supplement will feature psychical phenomena and the spirit world. The book will introduce lots of new character options, a highly detailed rules set for psychic powers, and a fresh look at Neo-Victorian technology.

Other than that, you'll have to wait and see...



See The Website for which this Interview was commissioned  
And first appeared!

<http://etheremporium.pbwiki.com/Unhallowed%20Metropolis>

Jason Soles & Nicole Vega appear courtesy of Eos Press  
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