

8. They Came out of the Sea!

“When man entered the atomic age, he opened the door to a new world. What we may eventually find in that new world, nobody can predict.”

Dr. Medford in the movie Them! (1954)

This chapter deals with campaign design according to our *Classic Swedish Role-playing* tradition (see page 3). I'll do it hands-on with a campaign outline as an explanatory example. Let's start by looking at the three core components of such campaigns:

1. **Genre** provides the thematic backbone of the campaign, preferably expressed in one or two sentences, and explains what the adventurers are supposed to do. The original *Star Wars* saga's genre is “*Space opera with good rebels fighting a bad Empire*”. The thematic backbone of *The Hobbit* is “*defeat the king-slayer, enthrone the rightful heir*”, though with twists.
2. **Setting** is a genre-emulating environment for your adventures. Its description outlines powers, conflicts, locations, adventurers, and monsters in a manner that makes the readers quickly grasp its essence. *Example: The setting of The Hobbit is a fairy-tale wilderness populated by Dwarves, Elves, goblins, humans and a dragon with a huge hoard; its inhabitants are hardy, generally suspicious of outsiders and often greedy.*
3. **Scenarios** present events that challenge the adventurers as they take part in a storyline. Scenarios must be consistent with genre and setting, in *Star Wars*, for example, stealing secrets from an Imperial base to enable future adventures.

Check These Books and Movies!

Useful inspiration for your *They Came out of the Sea!* campaign:

- THE KRAKEN AWAKES, a 1950s science fiction novel by John Wyndham. The original trope maker for aquatic malevolent aliens.
- THE THING FROM ANOTHER WORLD (director Howard Hawks) is an SF film from 1951. The men and women of an Arctic research station encounter an alien monstrosity. It captures the spirit of the period – “Watch the skies!” – and displays what technology is available to 1950s adventurers.
- RAZORBACK (director Russell Mulcahy) is a 1980s Australian B horror flick. It takes place in the outback and features violent deaths, tough locals and a boar monster.
- THE THING (director John Carpenter) is a classic 1980s horror movie. A team of scientists in Antarctica encounters a cunning monster.

8.1 Genre: Fighting B-Movie Monsters

They Came out of the Sea! emulates the 1950s B-movie genre of fearsome monsters and cool-headed protagonists that strive to save the day. Or in more detail:

The octopoid Abyssals, denizens of the ocean depths, are alarmed by recent underwater nuclear tests. They want to know what's going on up there and whether those alien air-breathers should be exterminated. However, they can only explore the hostile surface by dispatching monstrous "bio-robots".

The adventurers are the first to investigate the Abyssals' activities. They will deal with several seemingly unconnected events and (hopefully) conclude that aquatic aliens are behind them, not the Soviet Union. Then they must convince others of the astonishing truth. That's a tall order for a thematic backbone, isn't it?

8.2 Setting: 1950s Australia

They Came out of the Sea! is located in a cinematic 1950s Australia derived from the TV-series *The Thorn Birds*, *The Flying Doctors*, and *McLeod's Daughters*, and the movie epic *Australia*.

The Commonwealth of Australia is a federation comprising Australia proper, Tasmania, minor outlying islands (such as the Cocos Islands), colonies in New Guinea and Melanesia, and a vast, uninhabited land claim in Antarctica. There are European-style metropolises at the coasts, e.g. Sydney and Melbourne, and rural settlements in the desolate outback. Hence, the country is a suitable scene for spy thrillers, pseudo-westerns, and monster action.

After World War II, Australia launches an ambitious program to attract European immigrants. It aims at a "White Australia", an uncontroversial stance in those days. Many Britons, Italians, Greeks, Cypriots, Yugoslavs, and Dutch arrive from the devastated Europe.

Australia is a significant actor in the Cold War. It hosts British nuclear tests and rocket experiments in remote places. When

Cold War: Paranoia and Big Bombs!

The Cold War is a ruthless era whose political rhetoric seems shrill to us. The Soviet Union is permeated by Stalin's paranoia, whereas most westerners regard the Communist bloc as an existential threat. Both sides brandish nuclear arms in their rhetoric, but when military commanders suggest (e.g. in Korea) using atom bombs, those ideas are quashed by political leaders.

Communists revolt in British-ruled Malaya in 1948, Australia dispatches army units in support of the colonial government. When North Korea invades South Korea in 1950, Australia contributes infantry and aircraft to the UN-led coalition fighting the attack.

The Soviet Union carries out many intelligence operations in Australia, for example the Petrov Affair. The Australian government is openly hostile to all kinds of communism and even tries to outlaw the Australian Communist Party. At a few occasions, these disputes shut down the diplomatic relations between the two countries.

The Abyssals

The Abyssal Zone is a scientific term for the depths of Earth's oceans. Life down there is based on hydrothermal vents, places where volcanic heat from Earth's innards penetrates into oceans. These geologic features and their flourishing extremophile life are unknown to 1950s oceanologists, who instead believe that the oceanic depths are dark, calm, and mostly lifeless.

Over aeons, peculiar floras and faunas evolved at hotspot oases and eventually a few species of giant octopus gained sapience; they are the Abyssals. As time passed, their mastery of their environment grew and they cultivated "cities", built empires, fought wars, and developed technology based on biology instead of metallurgy. The Abyssals learned how to manipulate the biological processes of more primitive species to manufacture materials or machines that their societies required.

Until recently, the Abyssals knew nothing of humanity. But in 1946, the United States carried out the first underwater nuclear tests at Bikini atoll. Shocking news to the Abyssals: an alien civilization suddenly demonstrated an unknown technology that can devastate their undersea realms. Therefore, the Abyssals began investigating the air-breathers. Currently, several rival factions, with different policies, goals and equipment, explore the hostile upper world without coordinating their efforts.

The Abyssals are initially incomprehensible and invisible. No undersea monoculture, though; they are diverse in their strangeness. They are supposed to remain enigmatic during much of the campaign: no contacts, no understanding. Investigators only encounter their machines or the consequences of their actions. The octopoidal way of thinking is not ours; if these beings deem it necessary, they will develop ways of annihilating us without compunction.

Adventurers and Patrons

The adventurers are stalwart, competent people who deal cleverly with strange challenges. Encourage the players to create a team with a wide variety of skills. Keep in mind that many Australians fought in World War II, so plenty of people have military experience. The following professions should prove useful in this campaign:

- a *pilot* for air travel
- a *detective* for urban operations
- a *paramedic* to treat injured people
- a *soldier* for close protection
- a *zoologist* to investigate odd creatures
- an *engineer* to analyze strange devices
- a *bushwalker* to ensure that the team survives in the outback.

The available equipment is familiar to you and me, though bulky and antiquated: black & white television sets, transistor radios, mechanical calculators, punch-card computers, and landrovers. Firearms are rare among civilians in Australia. Ownership of pistols and handguns requires registration and a permit, whereas hunting rifles and shotguns are subject to less stringent regulations that vary from state to state. In the outback, a farmer perhaps has a Lee-Enfield bolt-action rifle for putting down injured animals or a shotgun for hunting rabbits.

The organizations below are examples of Australian patrons that might employ the adventurers. Money is of secondary importance in this campaign; assume that the players usually have sufficient funds at hand.

A. Cops, Spies, and Diggers¹

Three federal services are suitable patrons: the Commonwealth Investigation Service, a small coordinating police force²; the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO), which deals with domestic security threats and counter-espionage; and the military.

Of these, ASIO is the most flexible option, in this case with logistic support by the Royal Australian Air Force. However, its main adversaries are KGB and GRU, so the adventurers will have a hard time convincing their bosses that the Abyssal activities lack Soviet connections.

1 Australian soldiers are known as Diggers, just as British ones are referred to Tommies

2 Most law enforcement is handled by Australia's states.

B. The Australian Herald

In the mid-1950s, Australia has no national daily newspaper. If you select this approach, create a fictional national morning paper, *The Australian Herald* in Sydney. Its ambitious Commie-hating publisher Alex O'Connor is keen on having the odd events of section 8.3 investigated.

He hires a few veteran adventurers to assist his journalists as they roam across land and sea in search for the great scoop. Sooner or later, they will run into uncooperative ASIO agents who detest "nosy amateurs".

O'Connor is a pro who wants solid evidence for his newspaper's stories: photos, eye-witness accounts, etc. Rumours and hearsay won't do, particularly when investigating the schemes of tycoon Peter Mikoian (see below).

C. Project Minerva

Peter Mikoian, a retired wealthy businessman, privately sponsors a team of investigators. He has

read about one or two recent strange events in *The Australian Herald*, and believes that the federal government is "up to something bad". Therefore, he recruits the adventurers to his Project Minerva and tells them to uncover the truth. "Money is not a problem."

However, Mikoian is slightly paranoid and worries about Masonic conspiracies. The adventurers soon discover that he is a meddlesome patron that occasionally sends them on a wild goose chase based on his convoluted misinterpretations of what is going on in Australian politics. Also, journalists of *The Australian Herald* are keen on finding out what strange business Mikoian is pursuing these days.

"Watch the Skies!"

The first observations of saucer-shaped UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS (UFOs) appeared in US newspapers in 1947. However, Allied pilots during World War Two had reported unexplained aerial lights over Germany, nick-naming them foo fighters.

During the 1950s, UFO-logy is mainly an abode for cranks and charlatans. Conmen publish fraudulent stories about encounters with benevolent Martians and Venusians, who provide trivial advice for solving the problems of the nuclear age. Therefore, a westerner who talks about UFOs risks being labelled a crackpot.

On the other hand, many air forces carry out serious secret UFO studies: "Could those sighting be of some super-advanced aircraft from the other side of the Iron Curtain?"

So even though there is no relation between the Abyssals and UFOs, many 1950s people will assume a connection because such an "explanation" fits their expectations of what aliens ought to be like.