

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to *The Ross-Allen Letters*, a publication for **COLONIAL GOTHIC**. In these pages, you will find a correspondence between one Woodrow Ross and Dr. Frederick Allen – a correspondence that tells a disturbing tale. *The Ross-Allen Letters* can be used in various ways.

Firstly, and most obviously, they can be read as a work of fiction in their own right. The correspondence between these two tells a tale of mysteries uncovered and deadly secrets, in the tradition of Bram Stoker, H. P. Lovecraft, and others. *Dracula*, for instance, is written entirely in the form of letters and journal entries, and this literary device is intended to convey character and information together, present multiple viewpoints, and create feelings of immersion and immediacy in the reader.

Secondly, the GM may have the Heroes uncover the letters during the course of another adventure, leading them to investigate the events mentioned. Letters are a common player handout in roleplaying adventures, although they are usually a simple means to convey information.

Finally, *The Ross-Allen Letters* can be used as an example of collaborative storytelling: a kind of long-distance roleplaying where two players – or two GMs – work together to create a story in the **COLONIAL GOTHIC** setting. This concept is explained at greater length in the following pages.

COLLABORATIVE STORYTELLING

Like the game in which each player contributes a sentence to a developing story, collaborative storytelling challenges each participant to maintain the tone and feel of an unfolding narrative while advancing it a little. Here are some of the ways in which collaborative storytelling can be used.

PLAYER TO PLAYER

The simplest form of collaborative storytelling is a correspondence between two people. Just as in *The Ross-Allen Letters*, the two players write to each other telling of their character's experiences and asking questions of one another. Essentially, they are pen-pals, but in character rather than in real life.

If both the writers are players in different gaming groups set in the same world (such as the **COLONIAL GOTHIC** setting), they can give each other first-person accounts of their characters' experiences in their respective games. This adds another dimension to the tabletop roleplaying of each group, by creating a sense

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that both groups are part of the same world, and that others are out there combating the British and other, darker forces.

GROUP TO GROUP

To take this further, two gaming groups can correspond with each other, either as individuals or through a designated “Secretary” in each group. Like player to player correspondence, this increases the sense of immersion and reality within the game.

BLENDING GAME & CORRESPONDENCE

Once established, correspondence between players and groups can enhance each party’s experience of the game in several ways.

CONTACTS & ACQUAINTANCES

In most roleplaying games – including Colonial Gothic – interaction between a player character and an NPC contact normally takes the form of a dialogue between the player and the GM, sometimes accompanied by dice rolls. By integrating correspondence into the game, this interaction can be taken to a new dimension.

Suppose a Hero in one group has an academic contact at Harvard University, and a Hero in the other group is an academic at Harvard. In a game situation where the first Hero writes to the second requesting information and advice, the two players can handle this via correspondence. Waiting for a letter and reading its contents can be a richer game experience than rolling a few dice and being fed information by the GM.

This kind of play is both challenging and pleasing for the GM, as well as feeding the players’ sense of immersion in the game world. Instead of simply giving the player a pre-written piece of information, the GM must be prepared to deal with whatever arrives. It may be tangential to the subject at hand, or it may touch upon things that the GM had not intended to make known to the players at this point in the adventure or campaign. A good GM is always prepared to deal with unforeseen player actions, and relishes this kind of challenge.

INTERWOVEN STORIES

Two gaming groups that are in correspondence with each other can create their own kind of shared narrative. A request for help from one group can prompt adventures for the other, and as their relationships grows both inside and outside the game, the stories of the two groups will begin to influence each other. The results can be as unexpected as the results of collaborative fiction. Nobody – not even the GMs – can know exactly how this shared story will develop, making it a revelatory experience for all concerned.

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Face-to-face meetings of the two groups, when both sets of Heroes are in the same location in the game world, can be held at conventions or simulated using conference calls or web meeting software. As with all kinds of pen pal, the experience of meeting a writer with whom one has had a lengthy correspondence can be a pleasant one.

CHOOSING COLLABORATIVE ADVENTURES

This kind of play is best suited to home-brewed adventures and campaigns, as problems can arise when using published adventures.

For example if one group is involved in a published adventure that the other has already played, the sense of a single world is broken and the more experienced group risks leaking important information and spoiling the adventure for the others. Likewise, problems can arise if both groups find themselves playing the same published adventure at the same time. Although the players are separated by physical distance, the two groups of Heroes may find themselves in the same place at the same time, which breaks the illusion of a single world.

ESTABLISHING CORRESPONDENCE

For players and groups that are not in touch with other **COLONIAL GOTHIC** players, online resources such as the **Colonial Gothic Gazette Yahoo** group and the **Colonial Gothic Facebook** group provide an easy way to make contact and set up correspondence.



THE COMMITTEES OF CORRESPONDENCE

Between November 1772 and May 1774, each of the Thirteen Colonies established a Committee of Correspondence to distribute information and rally opposition to the harsh measures Parliament was using against the colonies. Temporary committees had been set up previously to deal with specific problems such as the Currency and Stamp Acts, but had been dissolved when their specific task was over. With tensions growing between Parliament and the colonies, though, the need for permanent Committees of Correspondence became clear.

∞ The Committees of Correspondence served several purposes. The meeting that established the Massachusetts committee in November 1772 stated that its task was to reiterate "the rights of the colonists, and of this province in particular, as men, as Christians, and as subjects; to communicate and publish the same to the several towns in this province and to the world" – in other words, to make sure that everyone in the colony knew their legal rights, and that the world in general knew that they knew.

∞ Other functions included spreading the news of British actions in a particular colony, and of the colonists' responses to these actions. More radical committees also used their networks to spread revolutionary sentiment and propaganda.

∞ The Committees of Correspondence also formed the first stage in the process that would lead to the formation of the Continental Congress, by establishing contact between leading Patriots across all Thirteen Colonies. In individual colonies, Provincial Congresses took over most of the functions of the Committees of Correspondence between November 1774 and the end of 1775, as revolutionary leaders began to meet in person. The Second Continental Congress met in May of 1775, completing the process, and the Committees of Correspondence were no longer needed.