

Media Club: Buckaroo Banzai



Adam Simpson:

Hello, Mage fans & welcome to Mage the Podcast. The podcast that works hard towards Ascension, so you don't have to. I'm your host Adam & I've got the other 2 members of the Media Club trio with me today, Jenna & Pooka. After we discussed the movie Sneakers, we generated some interest online. Listeners suggested the film we'll cover today. Jenna! Pooka! How are you doing?

Pooka:

I mean, bearing up in this wintry world in which we live.

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Adam Simpson:

Yeah, the cold weather takes its toll.

Pooka:

For real.

Adam Simpson:

Jenna, how are you?

Jenna:

I'm staying warm with all my cats and I'm ready to talk about some people in the eighth dimension.

Adam Simpson:

Today we unlock the esoteric secrets of *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension* from 1984. This light-hearted science-fiction adventure hit theaters like a Ford pickup truck with a jet engine bolted on the back. To judge from online discussions, movie fans still haven't recovered.

Buckaroo Banzai is a multi-talented genius who has made headlines with scientific discoveries, popular rock music, martial arts achievements & a large fan club. He has attracted other talented men who make up the Hong Kong Cavaliers, those hard-rocking scientists who assist Buckaroo in all his endeavors. The movie opens on Buckaroo driving a high-speed vehicle through the Texas desert to test the oscillation overthruster. The experiment is televised so mad scientist Emilio Lizardo, stuck in an insane asylum, takes interest in Buckaroo's success. Lizardo knows the experiment is using the same technology from his failed experiment in 1938. That experiment trapped half of Lizardo's body in the 8th dimension for a few minutes, long enough for John Whorfin, evil dictator of the red lectroids from Planet 10, to possess Lizardo's body. Remember, listeners. When traveling to alternate dimensions, don't do it halfway. Lizardo breaks out of the asylum & sends his red lectroid minions, disguised as humans, to steal the overthruster. A spaceship of the peaceful black lectroids is hidden in orbit & is observing everything. They don't want the red

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lectroids to cause problems on Planet 10 again so, rather than risk their own necks on an unfamiliar planet, they tell Buckaroo Banzai if he doesn't stop the red lectroids they will start a nuclear war between Russia & the U.S. Caught in the middle of an interstellar crisis, Buckaroo doesn't waste a minute. He tracks the red lectroids to their hideout at Yoyodyne, a company contracted to build a bomber for the military. Breaking into their hideout, he discovers the bomber was really a spacecraft for their escape from Earth. Buckaroo rescues his new girlfriend, raids the enemy headquarters & shoots down the red lectroid spaceship as it launches. The audience is left with the lesson that science, heavy firepower & the power of friendship really can save the world. Pooka, Jenna, anything to add before I mention the movie's roots? There was so much packed into an hour & 43 minutes I didn't have time to mention the watermelon.

Pooka:

The watermelon is all important, so I hope we'll get to it.

Jenna:

No, I think that covers it for what a madcap ride it is. I think that was great.

Adam Simpson:

The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the 8th Dimension has been called a cult film. It has its fans but many people say they don't get it. In interviews, stars of the movie say to this day people still ask them to explain the movie. This confusion comes from 2 things. First, many people expect an action movie or a comedy. This movie is a light hearted adventure that lies somewhere in-between the 2. As *Guardians of the Galaxy* proved, this kind of movie can be popular but Buckaroo Banzai's humor was less overt. Less in your face. The second objection, the multi-talented, much accomplished characters seem unbelievable to some. This clears up when you look at Buckaroo Banzai's roots: the pulps. Pulp fiction from the early 20th century was an inspiration for 80s movies. *Indiana Jones* & the first *Star Wars* trilogy were pulp inspired. Pulp heroes were smarter, bolder & luckier than your average bear which made for larger than life stories. Doc Eon, hero of the *Sons of Ether* in *Mage* books, was based on Doc Savage, a pulp hero of the 30s & 40s. Buckaroo Banzai is also based on Doc Savage. Like Doc, Buckaroo Banzai is an expert in many fields, an accomplished athlete, a public figure & the leader of a talented team. Doc was a surgeon & airplane pilot. Buckaroo is a neurosurgeon & test pilot. Buckaroo was supposed to be an

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updated, 80s hero so his team is also rock musicians, Buckaroo knows Japanese martial arts & aliens & their spaceships are brought into the story.

Buckaroo Banzai promised a sequel in the closing credits titled Buckaroo Banzai Against the World Crime League. The iconic closing credits hinted strongly at a sequel but, alas, it never came. In 1998 a computer graphics promo video was created for the new TV show Buckaroo Banzai: Ancient Secrets & New Mysteries. The show never made it into production.

Jenna, Pooka, is there anything more to add before we enter our discussion?

Pooka:

Thanks for the background about the TV show. I had never even heard about that. I knew about the World Crime League sort of backstory that didn't end up turning into a sequel, but it shows you just how much love and development they put into this a cute little movie.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, my DVD had it as an extra, so I watched it, and it has some subtitles saying it was a popular feature at science fiction conventions for years in the late 90s. So, yeah, there's that.

Pooka:

Nice.

Jenna:

I just wanted to tell listeners that if they wanted to watch the movie right after, it is free streaming on Tubi. That's where I watched it. So they can grab it right after they listen to this.

Adam Simpson:

Well, are we ready for a couple of discussion questions?

Pooka:

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I think I've got room for about six.

Adam Simpson:

Sounds good to me.

Jenna:

Yeah, I'm ready to go. So let's just start off with something simple. What did we like about the movie? What made us want to watch this?

Adam Simpson:

Who's up first?

Pooka:

I mean, I can say that once in a while, I think you need to just watch a movie that takes itself just the right amount of seriously and no further. And I think Buckaroo Banzai is very much one that fits that bill. Like, you can't stop and think too much about the plot or the backstory or the characters or any of it, because it's just pulpy, goofy, sci-fi action nonsense that treats its own material with affection while also realizing how ridiculous it is. Like, John Lithgow with that hair and that accent. Jeff Goldblum in a cowboy outfit for no apparent reason. An 11-year-old showing up to do a helicopter rescue and then toting a rifle around. Like, it's just madcap and beautiful.

I also really appreciated the design for being this kind of unpolished and cluttered space. So when they enter Yoyodyne Propulsion, the sort of headquarters of their antagonists, it's just - there's stuff all over the floors. There's stuff on the walls. It's tight hallways and locked doors. And then you have their tour bus. Kind of this claustrophobic space. The alien ships in their interiors have this very... unique kind of feel. It's like they threw every idea they could into the mix, but that roughness and that occasional claustrophobia really works to make it feel like this weird little setting that's thoroughly lived in.

And Adam, you mentioned the end credits. Work of consummate genius. I had a roommate in college who this was one of their favorite scenes in all of cinema. And we used to just watch the

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credits without watching the movie so that the closing music is like embedded in my head forever. I noticed when doing the rewatch, that motif kind of peeked through in other scenes. And I'm a sucker for synthy 80s movie scores. I think I like them better than the actual music that Buckaroo and his band play. So props to the score for this one.

Adam Simpson:

That soundtrack is hard to track down. I was going to buy on CD and I'm still having some trouble finding that one.

Pooka:

Oh, really?

Jenna:

I agree. I'm going to jump in here. I love the music. Give me a good synthesizer any day. The visuals are what got me. You know, I'm judging a book by its cover and I liked the movie poster a lot. I like the screen cap that they put on the streaming services.

They got me with the cast, you know, wanted to see what happens. And it's the aesthetics that really kept me through the movie. And, that feeling that, Pook was saying where it's kind of messy and everyone's running around and it's super science. It did, it does have that like RPG feel to it. Like, this is someone's session come to life.

Pooka:

Mm-hmm.

Jenna:

I think Guardians of the Galaxy is a really great example from Adam where it was one of the first ones to do that like comedy, comedy-action, but like, but crazy ideas, you know, like we've had buddy cop movies before, but this is, you know, we're throwing the sci-fi into it and stuff like that. And so that's what I enjoyed of it. And there's ridiculous things like they have Reno, who is one of

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the characters, gets hurt early on and he still goes into the fight with his broken arm and is like climbing ladders. And it's just nuts. It's just like they've just got to save the world like that's what they do. So you're just really rooting for all of them. And so that's what makes it fun. Like you just have all these different characters that are good at their one thing and you just want to see them shine.

Pooka:

Yeah.

Adam Simpson:

What did I like about this movie? Are you kidding me? I loved this movie. The humor, the pace, always something going on. There was plenty of plot revelation mixed with action. The humor was not out of place for me. It enhanced the wide-open, active vibe of the movie. They took every element that was cool in the 80s & rolled it together. Being in a rock band was every young person's dream in the mid 80s. The Hong Kong Cavaliers were snappy dressers. Cutting edge science, lots of guns & teamwork vs. alien technology & a frenetic villain that was an entertaining caricature of Benito Mussolini. John Lithgow gave us a performance no other actor could match. This movie was loaded with stars. Peter Weller as Buckaroo was great but I also enjoyed Lewis Smith as Perfect Tommy & Clancy Brown as Rawhide, both Hong Kong Cavaliers. Christopher Lloyd did most of his scenes through a thick rubber mask but he still hit it out of the park. I think that actor is just talented.

To this day, I've got a Buckaroo Banzai Institute patch sewn onto my fanboy jacket. The few times I have taken my jacket out to conventions or other events, it's the Buckaroo Banzai patch that gets the most compliments from people. People walk over to me saying, where did you get that patch? So yeah, a lot of fond memories of this movie and watching it through again was just a treat.

Pooka:

Does that mean you're a blue blazer regular?

Adam Simpson:

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No, I aged out before I could join.

Jenna:

He's just one of the official crew now. He's allowed in the headquarters.

Pooka:

Okay. Yeah. Even better.

Jenna:

That's what happens. That's because there's so many members of the Buckaroo Bonsai team. They just keep appearing throughout the movie. So we talked about the visuals being great, the music, the 80s nostalgia. But we'll start with Adam. Where did it fall short?

Adam Simpson:

Well, Buckaroo didn't invent anything besides the overthruster. As a prominent Son of Ether, I would have liked to see more of his inventions. Rawhide's death scene didn't fit well for me. With the fast pace & humor, the death of Buckaroo's number 2 man didn't flow well. Also, too many characters. The cast of a long-running TV series was squeezed into one movie. A lot of characters that looked interesting & had good actors didn't get a chance to stand out. Most of the Hong Kong Cavaliers faded into the background. Little more than guys with guns & guitars.

Pooka:

Yeah. And I'm going to add on to that. Much as this film has a place in my heart, it's not really Oscar material or anything. Like, I want to be honest about this. You can't go into it expecting the best acting you've ever seen. There are good actors, but it's not, you know, it is what it is. And it's not even a terribly coherent story, really. Like, there are little touches of genius, but if you write down the plot of this movie beat by beat, it is all over the place. We get lots of scenes that are 10 seconds long and have some relevance to the plot sometimes.

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And you just kind of have to suspend not your disbelief, but your expectation of narrative cohesion that I think movies tend to try to have. There's also definitely some nineteen eighties cringe in terms of stereotyping here and there, and it very much sticks to a classic defeat the bad guy, get the girl kind of narrative. So your mileage may vary with that. But while the movie does follow this kind of predictable plot in terms of story beats, the actual elements are so bonkers that you stay engaged so like yes, there's a classic villain doing classic villain things but that villain is John Lithgow hooking up a car battery to his tongue and casually killing people who get in his way to escape the insane asylum and reclaim his rightful place as a ruler of the eighth dimension so to me that's maybe one of its saving graces.

Jenna:

For me, it was the pacing, like Pook said. The science plot line for it as kind of simple as it was, was you forgot about the overthruster sometimes. You were like, why don't they just fly back home rather than going through the eighth dimension? There were some, they justified that. But like I said, it was it was hard to keep on pace. And also, I was mentioning earlier kind of, Peter Weller, not the actor, but the way Buckaroo Banzai was written.

He is not a a suave hero. He is not, I feel like, socially adept as Indiana Jones or a Bruce Wayne character. He's very matter of fact. He's like, I do my samurai training.

I fix people's brains and I fix the super science and I babysit the president about the Cold War. And so he's trying to be romantic in certain scenes. We mentioned a love interest and it is so awkward. Even his friends are like, this is really awkward. This is not how you sing to a girl or whatever. And so that combined with, them kind of like breaking up a lot of different personality traits over so many characters and then not getting enough screen time kind of diluted the whole brand for me and so that's where I really see why it didn't do well in theaters. I think the pacing was the first one and then the biggest thing for me again is that Buckaroo Banzai I don't think had the same place in everyone's hearts as like let's say an Indiana Jones to kind of bridge that gap from classic pulp to sci-fi pulp.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, that was one element of the original Doc Savage character that did not translate as well. I've read the first 12 novels of Doc Savage, and I can see where in those novels, Doc Savage had a

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reputation that preceded him. And so when he walked into a room, everybody knew, hey, it's Doc Savage. He's so good at this. He's so good at that. He did this famous thing. He helped the government at this point. And so they're all impressed by him, but he doesn't exude a lot of charisma because he's very, very focused on what is today's dilemma. Who do I need to help today? He was so focused that it kind of carried well in those original novels. In the Buckaroo Banzai movie, it doesn't work as well because Buckaroo kind of comes on the scene and he's focused on the problem. He's thinking, how do I stop the bad guys? And he's not interacting as well with the other characters. And I think the script writers really even more than the actors should have understood that better. So that is a shortcoming.

Jenna:

I agree. We mentioned Perfect Tommy before. Perfect Tommy seems to be set up to play the diplomat, and he kind of never does. There's literally a scene in the movie where Buckaroo Banzai has to tell the president of the United States that you know there's an alien threat, an extraterrestrial threat with a laser, and the script literally tells him to be annoyed by everyone's inability to deal with that news. And he's kind of like, I got to go think about it. You know, I have to actually save the world. And so it's this funny commentary. But at the same time, it just doesn't translate well on screen. You know, I feel like the script.

The way it plays out on screen is like almost a literal translation of a comic book. How it's paced. And that kind of got a little choppy.

Pooka:

And something else with the the background, Adam, when you were talking about that like the character of Buckaroo Banzai was in development for so long and across so many different possible stories and across so many different possible media that a movie cramming it all in like you mentioned, cramming an entire series worth of characters into a movie. It also crams all of their storylines. It's like an entire season of TV or an entire run of comic books crammed into an hour and 40 minutes. And so what you lose in the exchange is the time to really hit those notes properly or those characters to develop the reactions that would feel natural, that kind of thing.

Adam Simpson:

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Mm-hmm.

Jenna:

Okay, so we said what we liked, we said what we didn't liked, but how do we Mage-ify this?

Pooka:

Well, so obviously this movie goes hard with some right vibes. But while we have these mad scientists, we also have cool geniuses. So to me, Buckaroo and the Cavaliers are like Society of Ether with high appearance and charisma, who took dots in performance and medicine, who have the cult background in the form of their fans. And given how the landscape of eighties sci-fi media where you had either misfits like in *Weird Science* or the really dramatic stuff, like a few years after this, Peter Weller would go on to star in *Robocop*. So it was a choice to have the rocket cars being driven by neurosurgeon rock stars, you know, and *The Guardians of the Galaxy* connection, I think is good for talking about the tone of this film, but another, I guess, potential MCU connection, you have like *Iron Man* being another example of this sort of Renaissance man doing a bunch of things.

So in the context of a Mage setting, it gives me ideas for this new generation of Etherites taking up the torch. There's still brilliant and still chasing crackpot theories, but they make it fashion. So that's one element. I think it's also a good example of the fame background in action. I suspect not many Mage players take dots in fame, but if you want to and you have an Etherite, well, here's one angle.

And the benefits and consequences of that pop up. So Buckaroo gets recognized at various points by random people. Aliens try to break into his compound, but he has his crew kind of defending the land and whatnot. And speaking of aliens, it's not just the Void Engineers who deal with them. So sure, have an interdimensional proxy war fought between your groups of aliens and then this hip Etherite caught in the middle and see how that shakes out.

I've also had this idea for a Wonder that I've been kicking around and I wanted to share that with you.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, let's hear it.

Pooka:

So basically it's a VCR belonging to a cabal of eighties pop culture obsessed Hollow Ones in the living room of their Chantry. When you pop a VHS tape in, there's an effect that allows each mage, let's say it's, i don't know, capped at five or six of them, to take on the abilities and personality traits of one of the characters in that film, kind of like having an accessory identity and then being able to pull on mythic threads for their magic that relate to the film in question.

Jenna and I were chatting about Sphere requirements for this. I'm kicking around like Prime 3 Mind 4, maybe a dash of Entropy or Correspondence.

Although this is in Mage 20 it wouldn't be a dash of Correspondence since that has to match the highest Sphere. But yeah. And then the effect would last until the tape ends. So if they need to sustain it for longer, they have to set the VCR on a loop or something. That's where I'm at with it. I'm just kind of playing around with that for random use.

Adam Simpson:

I like that.

Jenna:

You have to get those, you have to get those auto rewind, VCRs.

Pooka:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jenna:

Remember those were the fancy kind, you know, like automatically reroute.

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Pooka:

Be kind, rewind.

Jenna:

Yeah. I like it.

Pooka:

And everyone has to like pause for a minute while it rewinds before they can start again. But importantly, it has to be a VHS and that's where it gets tricky. So.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, my Betamax won't work. Time to upgrade.

Pooka:

There's a 90s obsessed cabal that has a Laserdisc version.

Adam Simpson:

No, that's cool. I like that. I can see getting the villain to sign the paper. And then all of a sudden there's a disconnect. The hero is just sort of glass-eyed looking around and the guy next to him says, "It'll rewind in a second, everybody. Just calm down".

Pooka:

Perfect.

Adam Simpson:

Ideas for Mage. Mage has this expectation in the background: mages are supposed to influence society in a direction that helps their faction or personal goals. Buckaroo, like Doc Savage before

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him, made headlines with his discoveries & inventions. There's a Buckaroo Banzai comic book that young people read. Older people are listening to his rock albums. The Blue Blazer Regulars is an organization of youth clubs that encourages science & good citizenship. Buckaroo Banzai is living the dream of influencing the world for Science with a capital S. This can inspire all kinds of ideas for players to pursue in your games. Apart from that, the weird science inventions are great. Lizardo's flashback machine at the beginning of the movie is a quintessential Sons of Ether device. The oscillation overthrunder. Lizardo's lie detector machine at the end of the movie. I wish I had one of those. If you watch this movie & don't get ideas for the Sons of Ether, you weren't paying attention.

Jenna:

I agree. It's almost like a perfect setup. You can copy paste all the super science into your game. And what I love about Buckaroo Banzai is kind of what Pook was saying with taking different backgrounds that maybe normally people never would have. Because a lot of times the world of darkness automatically means like gritty streetwise. No one knows about mages. You're underground. But this is like... This gap, you know, it's almost like a Traditions versus Technocracy. The Sons of Ether are bridging the gap in the Consensus. People are fine with watching a televised broadcast of super science, you know, and no one's freaking out that he went into the eighth dimension. They're like, okay, what's next? And so that's what I like about it is it's kind of bringing the secrecy of Mage down and kind of like the action of Mage up, which is not what you get in every game, but sometimes players need to be the heroes and this gives them an opportunity to do that. I really liked the aesthetics of the aliens of how they kind of had different technologies battling back and forth like the aliens even though they lived on Earth for quite a while they didn't have guns they still used like these kind of weird starfish that poisoned you. It was kind of all over the place but it worked and so that's what's great about this movie is that it really lets you be a mage like albeit within the Sons of Ether paradigm but everybody was there doing their own thing. Where at one point, Buckaroo Banzai goes, what do you mean you don't know how to fly a plane? to a character. And he goes, I failed pilot school, but I was good at diplomacy. So, it gives everybody their time to shine, you know, and adding the component of being rock stars or being super scientists or, you know, etc.

Pooka:

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I loved that.

Jenna:

Kind of a lot of people have been asking, like, well, what about day jobs? What about this? Your day job can be something cool, like, you know, being part of a band. So I like the cooky crazy.

It was definitely turned up to 11, but you can see very clear delineations for my part for how to make it Mage. And how definitely, I feel like personally the second edition Mage, and we'll get to that later, but that's kind of like the aesthetic, the more kind of like cooky go nuts Mage that has the potential.

Okay, great. So going from how do we Mage it, what does it give us an insight into gaming in general? Pook, do you want to start with that?

Pooka:

So for me it made me think a little bit about the individual characters balance between having a concrete role in the party and having a memorable impact on the story. Buckaroo's cavaliers we can pick and choose favorites but at the end of the day it wasn't always clear to me what some of them were doing as part of the team and some of them were just kind of forgettable so at the game table you'll have players who want to be the healer or the tank or the face. And then you're going to have players who want to have great scenes and little quips, regardless of who they're playing.

It's like function and form. I don't think this movie necessarily gives enough depth or responsibility to any of the protagonists besides Buckaroo. But as a Storyteller, I'd want everyone to feel valued for what they contribute to the action or their role playing chops or both. So it's a good reminder to kind of evaluate how much focus your Chronicle gives to different players and to be attentive to how it involved everybody's feels.

It also occurred to me you could catalyze a story like this movies with professional jealousy. So leaving aside the whole alien possession angle, you could frame the plot as Emilio Lizardo sees that

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Buckaroo Banzai succeeded where he failed using theories developed with his former partner, who's now Buckaroo's mentor, and he decides to get revenge and prove himself.

With pride, hubris, and honor as key themes in *Mage*, that's a really easy, organic way to kick off a Chronicle without having to shoehorn the players into the old, you all meet in a tavern kind of way.

And it doesn't have to be weird science, either. That angle can work for hermetics and Akashics as well as it works for Etherites. So have your players, as you're developing your story, have them talk about their recent achievements as mages, and then have the first villain be this rival who they didn't even know about, whose shoulders they didn't even realize they were standing on. And then, you know, throw in alien possession if you want. But yeah.

Adam Simpson:

Don't forget the details.

Pooka:

Yeah, those are the important little things. It's pronounced Big Boutte.

Adam Simpson:

I'm making light of it, but no, those really are strong points. I wasn't thinking of that when I was watching this movie, but I can see it now. And I think that can be a great catalyst to get some games started. So does that cover your insights?

Pooka:

Yeah, I mean, those are the main things. There are other little bits that I would... Do not include saxophone solo is another one that I would say.

Adam Simpson:

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Well, insights into gaming. Buckaroo Banzai is so quotable. I get insights into life. In the concert scene Buckaroo says, “No matter where you go, there you are.” Every time I watch the movie I have to pause there & contemplate those words. But insights into gaming. The movie was so fast paced & carried along so many characters that most of the Hong Kong Cavaliers faded into the background. It made me think of player groups where everyone has a character concept but many of them don’t know what they’ll offer the group. In play, they often become passive & wait for something to happen to their character. A Storyteller can reduce this by talking with the players about how they support the team. If you have a charismatic or “take charge” player in your group, ask them to encourage the other players to take on roles for the team. Encouragement often goes a long way towards including timid or quiet players. Remember, many people come out of fantasy RPGs where the character class is their role. In Mage, every character is “a mage” which isn’t so well defined. People new to Mage might be uncertain & go quiet. One player might organize the cabal’s resources or keep the hideout stocked & operational. Ask a player to be the information gatherer or check on helpful NPCs. For most players, when they know what they’re doing for the team, they will become more active. This is less work for the Storyteller because the players start suggesting new scenes & ideas.

Jenna:

I will jump on and say that saxophone solos are for Lost Boys.

Pooka:

Exactly.

Jenna:

So saxophone solos can exist in your game, but somehow they’re a little bit more dark and brooding the way this goes.

Pooka:

Those are for first edition Vampire Toreador. That’s who gets a sax solo.

Adam Simpson:

Ooh, you're right.

Pooka:

Deep cut.

Jenna:

So I wanted to touch back on what Pook was saying as a science versus science plot rather than a highly action pulp plot. They kind of use a classic character here where John Lithgow's character was possessed by an evil dictator basically. And sometimes it's not as copy and paste in every game. So I really think the idea of changing the villain to what your characters might be like good at being heroes at is really kind of a great insight. You can always tweak that. And kind of jumping off from other things that Adam had said versus making sure like when you make these characters and a lot of the points that we're hitting home with Buckaroo Banzai is that it has a diverse cast of characters you need to give them something. One of the examples was that they had a scene where Buckaroo Banzai apparently can't hack, or he wasn't in the house to hack, and so someone else had to type in all the codes in the computer. And that really gave them a huge list of names and where to go and addresses, and they found out a plot point. And they were able to bring in a little bit of weird science back in with... they liked to use the

War of the Worlds with Orson Welles was true. That was like a whole cover story for the aliens. So they had like a nice sprinkle of weird science, gaming, and then kind of like little conspiracy theories in the real world to mix it all together. So if this movie just goes to showcase that if you have the right setting that allows things to happen, they can all kind of flow together and create this really great story.

And so then we go into, does it change how you want to run Mage? And I'll start with that in terms of, no, Buckaroo Banzai is kind of how I run Mage. I've said it on every podcast. I feel like take a shot if that's what you do. My end game is to write an adventure where you're all Archmasters and you end up in the picture that is the second edition Storyteller screen with like Dante running through a teleport door and there's space aliens and ships and motorcycle lasers,

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etc. So I feel like Buckaroo Banzai was a justification for my style of gaming. But what about everybody else?

Adam Simpson:

It brings back the compelling idea from 1st edition of a mage as a larger than life figure. Buckaroo Banzai can do so much & be so amazing because he's quietly using Sphere magic. I want to remember to not only think about the immediate result of a Sphere effect. Think of the long-term results. If the player is using Mind magic to charm people & get what she wants, have NPCs approach her & express admiration or offer her things. If the player is using Matter magic to make his tools more effective, have companies offer help with patent applications & new product lines. The player may become well known without trying or even wanting to. The consequences of being the smartest man in the room are hard to predict but always interesting.

Pooka:

I think for me, it makes me think that I could be more like Jenna, add more bombast to my games.

Adam Simpson:

Ha ha.

Pooka:

And especially with Etherite, like I've seen people play Etherite where the science has to make some kind of internal sense. And I think that's great. But I think it's also good to just technobabble your way from one plot twist to the next. Apart from the press conference scene, I'm not sure that there's even an attempt to really explain the theories or the many, many gadgets we see throughout the film. Adam, you mentioned a few of them.

Another one that I was thinking of was when they communicate with the one alien leader and it's like a little turntable and they all have to wear these bubble wrap goggles to see what's going on. And they're not, it's just like, oh, we have to put these on. It's not explained at all.

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Jenna:

Super science chef's kiss.

Pooka:

Yeah. So it showcases how wacky science stories can run on vibes and beats just as well as they can run on coherent logic.

Jenna:

So good.

Pooka:

This is also definitely a movie filled with Easter eggs and in-jokes and little blink and you miss it moments from the infamous watermelon to in the denouement when they're all like kind of trying to get on the ship and there are these background announcements from some random disembodied voice. There's also, I noticed on this watch through, some of the graffiti spray painted around their headquarters refers to plot points. I said before that I loved the design of the film, and part of that is how much they snuck into the background on top of all of the haphazard stuff that is meant to draw our attention.

So from a game running perspective, I do tend to be kind of a maximalist planner, creating backstory and side quests and little tidbits that my players might not ever even see. But creating it means it's there. So if they get five successes on their alertness roll, or just if you want to call something out as a red herring, give them those little elements that indicate other people have been here before you. Other people engage with this space in ways that you don't.

By the same token, try not to lead them down too many garden paths or leave too many loose ends. This movie... It gave me an idea of something not to do in a game, I guess, introducing something of no consequence in a way that players fixate on it. So particularly in Mage, where everything can be investigated 9 spheres to Sunday, the smallest detail you drop in for flavor might be the one that players get latched onto. And in a film, you can indicate its unimportance by having the camera move on. Buckaroo Banzai had me going, wait, what? A number of times, but

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then it didn't linger. And I was too caught up in the action to pause, rewind, rewatch, puzzle out. You don't always have that luxury in a tabletop session where your players are in some part helping to set the pace of the story. It kind of points back to the gazebo problem that we talked about before. As fun as it is to introduce quirky bits, portion them carefully if your players are going to read more into it than you intended. To the point that they'll derail the story to find out who spray painted that or whose voice is that on the loudspeaker and so on.

Anyway, that's me.

Jenna:

On the flip side, just to follow up with Pook, whereas like we were talking about the fame background et cetera, adding Easter eggs doesn't always mean red herrings or extra plot or whatever. A lot in this movie that people had was the love interest that ended up being the twin of Buckaroo Banzai's possibly dead-slash-maybe just ex-wife.

Pooka:

Oh, right.

Jenna:

She had in her book... A novel or a textbook that was like a book he wrote with the other scientists and stuff. So you can always-- It's like adding things to your game to have your players springboard off of. If they need a moment or they have extra people that they need for a distraction, give them an autograph signing session or whatever. You can drop random things that you can piece together but you don't need maybe X Y and Z. Maybe you just have X and Z and then just go together and you can skip Y, kind of thing. So it's like that kind of adding that fast pace to Mage with this like heightened aesthetic 80s sci-fi movie, I feel is like a benefit.

You just have to make sure that, you know, if you have a lot of speed ups in your game, you have a little bit of slowdowns too. So your players know what's going on.

Pooka:

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Yeah.

Jenna:

And going into that can we recommend the movie for Mage and if so, which editions. So, Adam why don't you go first with that one?

Adam Simpson:

This movie is vital inspiration for Sons of Ether in any edition of Mage. The inventions. An example of an Etherite influencing culture. We see a clear example of a member of the pulp heroes, or adventurers, opposing a mad scientist. Some Mage fans might say "mad scientists? Aren't they kind of silly?" Emilio Lizardo would reply "Laugh while you can, monkey boy." After seeing this movie a chill will go down your spine every time you think of mad scientists.

Pooka:

I'm glad you're dropping the quotes because I forgot to think about and talk about that. But there are so many great quotes. "Where are we going? Planet 10. When are we going? Real soon." Like, perfect.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, that scene was towards the end of the movie where Lizardo is giving a speech to rally everyone, kind of motivate them to the great push of escaping Earth. And there were some lines in there... History is made at night. Character is who you are in the dark.

Pooka:

Yeah.

Adam Simpson:

And then he just kind of carries on. I was laughing. It's like, okay. Yeah.

Pooka:

It makes me wonder how much of that was improv too, because, you know, and that's actually just very quickly, Jenna, I wanted to go back to the the last thing you said on the previous point. If you trust your players enough to also participate in this improv, like, you know, I open my bag and I pull out random thing. In as much as it won't derail what you're trying to do as a Storyteller, roll with it, because I think that will get people more engaged if they're also able to throw these quotes or throw these little easter eggs in. So I think that's important.

But to the question at hand, yes, I agree. Absolutely. This is good Etherite inspiration. Edition wise, I mean, first edition through and through. Second with an open mind, but even something like Revised, when we talk about Revised as being street level and a little more grounded on Earth. I love those moments in the headquarters at the end. I know I keep circling back to that. Really. I think they told every extra bring everything in your garage, put it in this soundstage. And then if you're just an extra, like do whatever, there's a scene where you see one of them just like lying back on a lawn chair, maybe it was a vampire? So,

You know, that level of grit is present. And I appreciate the film for that.

Jenna:

Yeah, I agree. It's pretty yet unpretty in the same way. It's kind of like pretty but tattered at the edges. Like it's not a fully formed idea. And that's kind of what collective storytelling is like. You're all kind of getting there towards the end and you're bringing pieces together. I definitely agree that straight out of the DVD case, VHS sleeve, blockbuster, whatever you want to call it, Buckaroo Banzai is definitely hinting aesthetically towards the earlier editions of Mage. You can fit it into kind of any edition of Mage because the Sons of Ether have, I feel, such a broad characteristic to them but I feel like if you want to just definitely copy paste Buckaroo Banzai you're looking more into the earlier editions on how they deal with super science and the Technocracy.

Pooka:

Right

Jenna:

So that's, like I said before, that's what I liked about it. That's how I usually go with it. And that's why it holds a special place in my heart. But for all those who maybe haven't seen it one, two, three, or infinity times like Adam, maybe we can just explain a little bit what the Easter egg of the watermelon is. Because that might be something fun to add to a game, too.

Adam Simpson:

Oh, should I take that one, Pooka?

Pooka:

Go for it. Yeah.

Adam Simpson:

There's a scene towards the middle of the movie where the Hong Kong Cavaliers are going through a laboratory. They're searching everywhere for the villains. And two of the Hong Kong Cavaliers rush through a laboratory. And in the center of the laboratory, there's like a special pedestal set up. And there's a watermelon sitting there with some sort of a vice, like just about to squeeze it. It's obviously the focus of some experiment. And so the new Cavalier who was just hired looks to the older one. He says, what's with the watermelon? And the other one says, I'll tell you later. They run out of the room. There is no more mention in the movie of the watermelon. And so, of course, you know fans are like, so what is with the watermelon? I looked into it a bit online and there was a situation during the filming of the movie where one of the producers was pushing a lot of demands and annoying questions to the crew working on the movie. And then that producer just stopped. And so the crew working on the movie were wondering, do we have to keep pleasing this guy or can we just get on with pursuing our ideas? So in the filming process, there's the dailies, which is the raw footage of today's filming. They just put it in a place where everybody involved with the movie can go and watch the dailies. And so that way they can refilm scenes the next day before they take down sets.

So they put in the watermelon scene and they said, look, if we get comments from this producer, then we know he's still active. But there were no comments. They never got a question about the

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watermelon. And so the crew working on the movie said, hey, we can just do what we want now that that producer is leaving us alone. And so they continued on with the movie. And when it came time to editing, the people editing the movie said, watermelon, that's funny. Let's just leave it in. And that's why it's in the movie.

Pooka:

I editors tend to have a better sense of humor than producers for sure.

Adam Simpson:

I think so.

Jenna:

It also gives like a little bit of a world building aspect. Actually this a bit, but I liked it in a sense where it was. Like Adam had said, they were introducing Jeff Goldblum's character who is the cowboy on the front cover. The only reason he is a cowboy is he likes to dress up like a cowboy and he is from New Jersey that is it. They make fun of him for that too like all the cool kids are like what's with your outfit and so it gives that kind of like sense of wonder in games when you're introducing a new place and the possibilities of introducing some things that don't make sense and they're just like the Technobabble super science or, you know, just different thought processes that we haven't figured something out for like, so I feel like it's a nice nod to world building to when you're looking at this to make a game as well.

Adam Simpson:

Yeah, and you just know that if you take your players to the Gernsback Continuum Horizon Realm, there's going to be a big watermelon somewhere in a public square, and your players are going to ask, so what about that? And as a game master, you're kind of compelled to say, you know, it's a long story. I'll have to tell you later.

Well, does that wrap it up? Did we cover this movie? The esoteric secrets have been sussed.

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Pooka:

I think a sufficient number of secrets have indeed.

Jenna:

We figured out how to go to the eighth dimension and saxophones are for sad boys. So wait till next time on the next Reality Deviant Movie Club, you know?

Adam Simpson:

I loved the announcer's voice in the villain's hideout at the end. "Monkey boys are detected in the facility."