

Tastes Like Phoenix
presents
A joint venture between the Food Channel,
Web TV and ESPN2

Imported to Los Angeles from the depths of Wisconsin comes...

IRON
GM

FADE IN.

INT. CONVENTION CENTER - LIVING ROOM STAGE

Forty thousand screaming fans cheer as the camera sweeps overhead. Flashbulbs go crazy as the commentators, JOHN and MIKE, who have no last names because fully half of all game company employees are named John or Mike, take their positions at the podium.

EMCEE (V.O.)

Joining us live from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, it's "Iron GM," with your hosts John and Mike!

JOHN

We're here at the Living Room Stage in the Milwaukee Convention Center, where this capacity crowd has gathered, and this year it's a big one.

MIKE

Mighty Wisconsin, the United States' premium producer of cheese, known to RPGers as the origin state of Dungeons and Dragons.

JOHN

And I'm not touching that parallel.

MIKE

Hopefully the cheddar won't rub off on the incredible variety of role-playing plots we'll be seeing today. And where does our challenger hail from, Johnny?

JOHN

From the college LARPS of Los Angeles comes the Sista of Systems, the Mistress of Mind's Eye, the Playah from La Brea, Dee Rosebee!

Something by the Sisters of Mercy BLASTS the crowd with the quintessential Goth music as a surprisingly chromatic figure streaks down the aisles: blond hair, red tank top, black fingerless gloves. Gamer hands brush her like aroused grass.

APPLAUSE swells to the ceiling as John meets her stage-side.

JOHN (cont.)

Dee has extensive experience in costuming, amateur theater, and the blood-soaked mayhem of her job as a tenured professor at UC Santa Claus. Just how many campaigns have you run, Dee?

DEE

More well than you can imagine.

JOHN

I don't know-

DEE

And if you quote Han Solo, I'm taking you down.

JOHN

Right, I guess that means you include Star Wars in your list of live-action games.

DEE

Star Wars, Call of Cthulhu, Feng Shui-

A storm of applause for each game drowns her out.

JOHN

You ran Feng Shui live?

(oooh)

How did you keep the story going in such a combat-heavy game?

DEE

Well, these were all at once.

(laughter)

Seriously, the violent guys, we told them Ryl'yeh was the secret island fortress of a deranged martial arts master and never saw 'em again.

JOHN

Okay, I'm clearing out, because the challenge is about to begin!

GONG

With a HISS of steam and two CHORDS of Ozzy Osbourne's "Iron Man," three gamemasters, one in red, one in blue, and one in black, rise from concealed lifts in the floor.

EMCEE

Presenting the Iron GMs! Makobraku Kotei:

Iron GM Horror!

(applause)

Gunnubune O-Shito: Iron GM Science Fiction!

(applause)

And Ishiskrashi Hokei: Iron GM: Fantasy! Dee Rosebee, who do you challenge?

DEE: I challenge Iron GM Science Fiction!

GONG

A GASP of surprise and applause permeates the convention floor as the two contestants meet and bow.

MIKE

It doesn't look like Dee's afraid of anything down there, John.

JOHN

Indeed, you could hear the hush come over the crowd. Science fiction GMs tend to be tradition-bound when it comes to violating physics, and Gunnubune in particular is an expert at giving rationalizations to players why things will and won't work. He's one hell of a rules GM, but I have yet to hear a player complain about his lack of spontaneity. But it looks like we're ready for the revelation of this weekend's special ingredients.

The emcee stands before a table with a drop-cloth over it. Both Dee and Hokei stand at attention. Dee's eyes flick down, but the Iron GM's are hidden behind mirrorshades.

EMCEE

The surprise ingredients that you must use this weekend are -- ten-sided dice and a wild animal attack!

GONG

CUT TO:

An enormous superimposition of their faces CRASHES together: DEE ROSEBEE VS. GUNNUBUNE O-SHITO. A sweet, feminine VOICE:

VOICE (O.S.)

Ten-sided dice have long been in use by mathematicians, but the role-playing game industry made them popular.

CUT TO:

A die-making factory with a grandfatherly guy hard at work, shaving fist-sized D10s out of wood.

VOICE (O.S., cont.)

Call of Cthulhu and other percentile-based systems have always enjoyed the fruits of the D10's versatility, and the World of Darkness series uses them exclusively for success-based die rolls.

CUT TO:

A table of young kids dressed for a near-Goth-experience, rolling dice with little roses where the "1" would be.

VOICE (O.S., cont.)

Game designers the world over agree that unless the system is D6-based, the mighty ten-sider will be on the table somewhere.

CUT TO:

The studio, where our gamemasters have grabbed the D10s and pencils and started cooking.

MIKE

All right, as our gamemasters scribble notes, we can sweep the studio audience, where Dee's boyfriend and her home campaigners are watching.

PAN ACROSS the aforementioned GUYS, and an early-thirties man sweating bullets. CUT TO the judging players.

JOHN

I'm here with the sixty-four playtesters dragged from our studio audience. What roleplaying games do you all play?

PLAYER 1

Dude! I'm on Web TV! This is so fuckin' cool!

PLAYER 2

AD&D.

PLAYER 3

You mean there's something besides D&D?

PLAYER 2

Oh, he probably meant Diablo. You play Diablo, right? Diablo-

PLAYER 3

Diablo.

PLAYER 2

Yeah, and Final Fantasy-

JOHN

No, no, paper and pencil RPGs-

PLAYER 4

Does Pokemon count?

JOHN

Fuck you with a goat.

(looks at camera)

Uh, I mean, back you you, Mike.

MIKE

Okay, it looks like Dee's gonna have her hands full with that crowd. But she's been hard at work planning -- no, those aren't GM notes, they're improvised character sheets. I can't tell the system and she's discarded the -- wait, Life 3, Prime 2 -- she's gonna make somebody play Mage!

JOHN

Without the books?

MIKE

I don't see any in that outfit! Ow!
Any game where the players can turn someone's
soul into a small chocolate bunny and throw
it to the moon is asking for headaches, in my
opinion.

Dee herds eight players off and they start setting up a GM screen and
dice around a big purple book.

JOHN

Yeah, but all you play is Species: The
Roleplaying Game.

MIKE

It's controllable.

JOHN

Come to think of it, I've never actually seen
you game.

MIKE

The Iron GM, meanwhile, is-

JOHN

You just have a really dog-eared copy of that
page with Sil in her underwear.

MIKE

The Iron GM has gathered his forces together-

JOHN

Not gettin' any from the wife, are you, Mike?

MIKE

Hey, I'm not the one out cruising DragonCon
looking for thirteen-yea-

JOHN

THE IRON GAMEMASTER HAS STARTED! His players
are filling out character sheets for
themselves, a very bold move. If these guys
don't have some chemistry, we're gonna be
hearing accusations of who's chaotic evil and
who isn't-

MIKE

Yeah, but though he's got a lot of dice,
there I don't see them writing down anything
-- oh, that's freaky.

JOHN

What?

MIKE

He's running Star Wars with the Deadlands
system! That's gonna be a lot of rules to
keep in mind, I have no idea how he's gonna
handle the Force with those cards, but if
anyone can pull it off, it's the Iron GM.

JOHN

Meanwhile, Dee's got her people assembled for a LARP with one enormous ten-sided die she's gonna hurl on the floor, but it looks like it doesn't have numbers on it- oh, my GOD! I see "Coalition," "Vampire Kingdoms" -- this is gaming history, friends and neighbors!

MIKE

(flat)

The woman has lost her mind.

JOHN

Oh, my God! Only using the ten-sided die to decide factions, Dee Rosebee is gonna run a Rifts LARP! No one said it couldn't be done! No one even thought of it! My God, she's got name badges for the Glitterboys!

MIKE

Glitterboys have names?

JOHN

And she's showing them "rock, paper, railgun!" More of this incredible innovation when IRON GM returns!

FADE OUT.

END ACT ONE.

ACT TWO

FADE IN.

EXT./EST. MILWAUKEE CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

MIKE (O.S.)

Welcome back to Wisconsin, where the second day of Iron GM is going strong. What have we got, John?

INT. CONVENTION BREEZEWAY - DAY

Dee races from table to table, flushed with Mountain Dew. She settles down B.G. and hits "play" on some music.

JOHN

(whispering)

Well, the first day ended with strong ratings for both contestants. The buzz in the halls is that the Rifts LARPerS were cheering by the end-

MIKE (O.S.)

Did it devolve into mass combat?

JOHN

Well, certain measures of roleplaying snobbishness aside, uh, the standards of success is that players had fun-

MIKE

Get out the hip waders, huh?

JOHN

Yeah, a Cyberpunk player evidently thought a Glitterboy was some kind of rock star-

MIKE

And called him a prissy queen?

JOHN

No, a Celine Dion wannabe. You know how it goes, initiative roll, flying MDC, small gods being picked up and spanked -- the players were so psyched I'm told there was mob activity around Dee by the end. Uh, I believe it involved cellular phones.

MIKE

Don't tell me she led a Rifts Whazzap?

JOHN

Uh, no, they called Palladium and demanded a live-action supplement, and C.I.A. Cartella answered the phone.

MIKE

I see. And what was his reaction?

JOHN

Rumor has it he expressed some doubt that there was actually a girl who played Rifts,

and once they convinced him, he, uh -- he's flying out here to propose marriage, Mike.

MIKE

Well, I hope his wife isn't watching. Any word on what's behind you there?

JOHN

Dee's started to integrate the animal attack portion of the requirements. Now, personally, I would have expected her to go with a game with a lot of crazy wildlife, uh, Blue Planet comes to mind. But it seems Dee saw Gunnubune with two of the Biohazard guys at his table, and she's not competing. So, of all-

PLAYER 1

Ahh! Get it off me! He's got my face!

DEE

The dog is sprinting down the cobblestones with a good-sized chunk of your cheek in his mouth.

PLAYER 1

Get my cheek! Get my cheek!

PLAYER 2

Okay, I lose it completely, I'm developing a dog phobia-

DEE

Caniphobia.

JOHN

Yes, Mike, I think she's got wild dogs savaging a Cthulhu character now. Dee, if we can interrupt for a minute-

Dee pulls the cheese off her pizza with her teeth, flapping its "skin" and worrying it. Tomato sauce spatters.

DEE

Grrrr! Achrrr! Rrrr!

PLAYER 1

Gha gog's got by face! Gha gog!

JOHN

Oh-kaaaaaay. Remaining in-character, uh, obviously a very good sign, no sense troubling them here. Mike?

INT. LIVING ROOM STAGE

The Iron GM is gesticulating wildly to six players with ten-gallon hats with cap pistols.

GUNNUBUNE

As you yank Jabba's chain-

PLAYER 4

Don't forget, I got a blaster to his head-

GUNNUBUNE

Oh, got it. As you yank Jabba's chain, he says, "DO UROTO WOOKIE BET-AH MO RO," and the subtitles read: "I know something you do not, Wookie..." And with that, you see the Stormtroopers rise up, and the one without the head picks up his helmet in this hand and his head in the other-

PLAYER 5

Holy shit-

PLAYER 6

I get on the com unit and scream "The Stormtroopers are Harrowed! The Stormtroopers are Harrowed!"

PLAYER 5

I knew we shouldn't have landed on this planet!

PLAYER 6

The Empire's mining ghost rock!

ALL PLAYERS IN UNISON

Abandon barge!

The camera swings to include Mike and PUDDLEFORGE, a harried game designer who wears the years like Kevlar and leather.

MIKE

For those of you just joining us, Gunnubune is in the final legs of his fourteen-hour Star Wars game, which has evolved into a Deadlands crossover. With me is industry expert Mike Puddleforge, who says that is possibly the most unholy pairing since AD&D put in Gamma World conversion stats in First Edition.

PUDDLEFORGE

That's right. A few hours ago, Gunnubune was throwing polyhedrals left and right, and I think he even threw in some of the Shatterzone card system-

MIKE

What is the Shatterzone card system?

PUDDLEFORGE

Uh...the cards said "Shatterzone" on the back, I, um...

(pause)

Well, somebody had to have printed them up sometime.

MIKE

You ever get the feeling there are too damn many RPGs out there, Mike?

PUDDLEFORGE

Well, I don't want to discourage anyone from trying to innovate, but some days, you know, I think about Gatewar or DarkUrth and ask,

did we really need another fantasy RP-hey-
Two MEN in dark suits and sunglasses are behind Puddleforge.

GAMA AGENT
Excuse me, Mr. Puddleforge, we're with the
Game Manufacturer's Enforcement division.

GAMA AGENT #2
Could you come with us, please?

PUDDLEFORGE
Where the hell are we going?

GAMA AGENT #1
We're not at liberty to discuss that.

VOICE (O.S.)
Twenty-four hours remaining.

MIKE
That's a wrap for the Dead-Star-Land Wars,
and quite possibly for Mike Puddleforge as
well.
(applause)
Behind me, it looks like Gunnubune is laying
the groundwork for a game of HOL...hey, wait,
HOL can be played?

GONG

CUT TO:

BLACK SCREEN

TITLES:

Day Three

INT. LIVING ROOM STAGE - ON THE SCORECARD

Mike and John gesture to the rising electronic bars. Dee's ratings are 19 out of 20 in Rules, 20 out of 20 in Innovation, and 18 out of 20 in Addiction Rate.

MIKE
The marathon rages on, and I think it's safe
to say Dee would not get voted off of any
island these players were on. What's the
latest field report?

JOHN
I was there at two A.M. this morning, and I
was in awe. Gunnubune ran a Feng Shui game
without a single media reference or quote-

MIKE
I trust he's under investigation?

JOHN
-and Dee was getting two guys to confess
their sexual inadequacies to her.

MIKE

Huh. In or out of character?

JOHN

It was difficult to tell. At first, I'd say in, but, uh, the boat don't row without the oars to go.

MIKE

So she was using roleplaying to work through their troubles?

JOHN

Exactly the way psychologists do. Well, except maybe for when she made one roll Pathos and he botched.

MIKE

A touching moment, I'm sure.

AUDIENCE

Awwwww.

MIKE

Candy-ass goth boy.

(laughter)

But now we're coming down to the wire, and the last twelve hours are the blowout to be sure. Dee says she's saved the best for last. And here she comes!

An enormous caterpillar of human flesh floods the avenue to the stage as thirty-two players carry Dee in on their shoulders, dumping her off the end in crowd-surfing style.

PLAYERS

Rose-bee! Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

JOHN

It looks like you've made some new friends, Dee.

DEE

Yeah, I whipped out my stash of monster jokes late last night at the bar.

JOHN

What kind of monster jokes?

DEE

They're like lightbulb jokes. Like, how many L5R players does it take to kill a monster?

JOHN

I don't know, how many?

DEE

Five. One to kill it in one stroke and four to yell "Was this in the card game?"

(laughter)

Seriously, though, I'm gonna take the Iron GM down today.

(cheers)

JOHN

And how do you plan to do that?

DEE

I'm gonna take the Mage players from my first round and make them go back to AD&D.

JOHN

Uh, interesting, I think I tried that once.

DEE

Yes, John...but I'm gonna make them like it.
With Spelljammer!

Stunned silence. You could hear a wraith fart. Then, the stamping begins...and the chants of the crowd favorite.

CROWD

Rose-bee! Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

The Iron GM remains cool behind his mirrorshades.

CROWD

Rose-bee! Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

John and Mike get near him and motion for silence.

CROWD

Rose-bee! Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

JOHN

And how do you plan to counter for the next twelve-hour game, Iron GM?

CROWD

Rose-bee! Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

The Iron GM raises a hand, and it dies down.

GUNNUBUNE

Dee has been good competitor. AD&D very popular game. But I am specialist. And I will run Rolemaster.

(OOOOH of crowd)

From MEMORY!

CROWD

Gun-bun-ee! Gun-bun-ee!

GUNNUBUNE

No book! No chart!

MIKE

Whose game will remain untamed? Whose fame will be put to shame? Stay tuned for the exciting conclusion of Iron GM!

FREEZE FRAME: OFF GUNNUBUNE'S RAISED FIST-

FADE OUT.

END ACT TWO

IRON GM VOTING

Who do you think should win the first IRON GM competition?
Is it harder to make Mage players dig AD&D again, or to memorize all of
Rolemaster? (that includes Space Master an' stuff, dude...) If anyone
can pull this off, it's these two GM's! Let's see them broken down!

VITAL STATISTICS

GUNNUBUNE O-SHITO
(Iron GM: Science Fiction)

Height: 5'7" (but the camera
makes him look 6'4")

Weight: His voice carries it
throughout the gaming community

Sex: Dunno. It's creepy how good
he is at playing female NPCs.

Turn-Ons: Applause from players,
buck-a-book bins, entire universes
he fits in his head.

Turn-Offs: Preponderance of skimpy
gaming supplements, fact that nobody
plays Shatterzone or Earthdawn any
more, inconsistent game designers,
fact that academia won't recognize
gaming fiction as legitimate literary
sub-genre, nor gaming fiction writing
up to the dubious quality of most SF&F.

Favorite System: As he puts it,
"IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOUR GAME IS!"

DEE ROSEBEE
Height: 5'1"

Weight: Like to make a
drow elf bulimic.

Sex: Yeah, right. Work your
way through a box of tissues
like the rest of the con.

Turn-Ons: Laughter, original
thought, creativity...really anything
other than vocal paralysis and
clumsy verbal pawing by misogynists.

Turn-Offs: You, but she actually
has social skills, so she won't

blurt it into your face.

Favorite System: Legal (a girl
needs her restraining orders)

EXT. MILWAUKEE CONVENTION CENTER - DAY

TITLES:

Day Four

INT. BASEMENT STAGE - DAY OUTSIDE

Sunlight streams in through the eastern window, lighting the early morning fog seeping inside, mixing with the smoke from Mage players who are busily defying the "tobacco kills" part of our consensual reality.

Dee, having learned First Edition overnight, has made full use of it and has models of the Millennium Falcon chasing a Neogi Deathspider through a tunnel with trees on every side.

DEE

The light gets brighter, and you can see the city on the edge of the sun at the planet's core. At hyperspeed, it's gonna take two minutes for the spider-ship to hit it.

MAGE PLAYER 1

Hurry, damn it!

MAGE PLAYER 2

I can't hear you, there's a silence spell on the musket ball. Dee, I'm done loading the +4 arquebus and I'm aiming at the biggest fleshy part on Van Khytanos there.

MAGE PLAYER 3

Wait, if we're going lightspeed and he's going lightspeed, doesn't that mean the bullet will increase in mass once it leaves the spelljamming helm's radius of effect, since it itself doesn't have hyperspeed properties?

DEE

Actually, no, since one of the effects of the spelljamming helm is to alter atoms at the superstring level. Everything on this ship is fundamentally vibrating in ways that create and manipulate both photons and gravitons, thus getting around the properties of Newtonian inertia. Even if the bullet leaves its radius, it will take a fractional instant of time to regain those properties throughout its subatomic structure, but the bullet, when affected by the helm, is already cutting through spacetime on the hyperspace plane, which is inherently trans-light, meaning it'll go much farther across Prime Material spacetime in that same instant before such an effect occurs.

MAGE PLAYER 2

Tha fuck you just say?

MAGE PLAYER 1

Take the shot, hoss.

Dice clatter. A 19 comes up, and THUNDER sounds as the open-ended d10 of 1st-edition arquebus damage falls. CHEERS.

MAGE PLAYER 2

Boo-yah! Professor Plum with the gat!

MAGE PLAYER 1

Early modern fly-by!

DEE

The bullet tears through Malodor van Khytanos, and you can see his moray-eel mouth try to scream, but the silence spell on the bullet prevents him from yelling to his crew. His spider legs go limp and as he collapses to the deck, the wheel of the deathspider cranks to the right-

MAGE PLAYER 1

Oh, shit! Evasive!

MAGE PLAYER 4

What?

MAGE PLAYER 1

I don't remember you fixin' no deflector shields last round.

DEE

-and as it begins to turn, the deathspider's legs catch on the treetops of Arborum's pine forest, shattering the ceramic beams like safety glass. The main body bounces off the earth on one side of the tunnel, crashes up to hit the other, and slows down to sub-light speed-

MAGE PLAYER 1

See?

DEE

-and comes crashing toward you.

MAGE PLAYER 4

Fuck that! Wall of ice, around us like a shell. It's all I've got.

DEE

POW! The chunks hit the Falcon everywhere but the cockpit, not that you had much of one left, but you've separated, tumbling end over end. You slow to sub-light the second the Falcon's spelljamming helm breaks contact, which is good, 'cause the captain's chair of the deathspider slams against the wall of ice and you can see the prismatic bombs, now caught by the sun's gravity.

MAGE PLAYER 3

We can see them?

DEE

Maybe fifty feet away, re-entering. When they hit the sun's surface, they will start the planar hole, eventually extinguishing its light and condemning Arborum to a cold, dark demise.

MAGE PLAYER 2

Telekinesis.

DEE

These things weigh about a ton each.

MAGE PLAYER 2

Yeah, but we don't. I'm taking us as close as we can get. Gimme your hands.

A look passes between the players, and they know what to do.

MAGE PLAYER 1

Right on.

He takes Player 2's hand.

MAGE PLAYER 4

Whither thou goest, I shall go.

MAGE PLAYER 3

No better way.

P.A. SYSTEM VOICE

One minute remaining.

DEE

You heard it. What are you doing?

MAGE PLAYER 2

He's grabbing on to her, who's grabbing on to him, who's grabbing on me, and we're trying to get within ten yards of the lead bomb.

DEE

You swoop closer to the bombs, a cluster of metallic gold spheres-

P.A. SYSTEM VOICE

Fifteen seconds remaining.

MAGE PLAYER 3

Where are those announcer guys, anyway?

DEE

Right, you enter into what seems like a heat shimmer behind them, but you feel a slight nausea as you get closer. They aren't hot - they're giving off ripples in space from the transplanar energies within-

The team leader checks over each of the players - exhausted, sweating, and with their hands locked around each other's wrists. They're not going anywhere alone.

MAGE PLAYER 2

I snap the staff.

DEE
Arborum is saved.

A GONG sounds and the players let loose a bellow of victory-

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. DRESSING ROOM - EMPTY - STEADICAM SHOT

WEeping is heard as NICK TECHNOPOLOUS, the assistant director, searches for the source of the noise. We follow him amongst the bright lights, fake beard bits, and makeup jars. Behind a row of costumes sits Mike.

There is a sobbing lump on his lap that might be John.

TECHNOPOLOUS
Oh, man, what's, uh- you guys are on in ten.
Um, John?

JOHN
Urrrrgaaa...nooooooooooooo...

TECHNOPOLOUS
Um, I realize something awful musta happened,
but you've gotta be up for a few minutes.
Um...if I could apply a little base-

There's a frenzied blur.

JOHN
NO MAKEUP! NO MAKEUP EVER AGAIN! I'll kill
them. I'll kill him. His guiding vision. His
goddamn blue lipstick!

MIKE
Down, John! No kill!

TECHNOPOLOUS
Whoa, I just thought you'd look-

JOHN
NEVER! I'm NEVER gonna look good again!
They'll laugh at us, Mike-

TECHNOPOLOUS
Did he smoke my stash?

MIKE
No, the staff said to take off from ten to
two-

TECHNOPOLOUS
Oh, God, you didn't-

MIKE
We figured, hey, we'll go catch a midnight
show, we'll have fun-

JOHN
Seven million dollars! Seven million dollar
opening weekend, that's like, like, "Son In
Law!" It's like "Battlefield Earth!"

MIKE

-and see you-know-what.

John grabs Technopolous, face a bright red mess.

JOHN

Jeremy Irons can act! I saw him in "The Chinese Box!" He was dying of blood cancer or something, he fell in love with a street kid, IT WAS MOVING!

TECHNOPOLOUS

John, you can rant later-

JOHN

I met Thora Birch at a comic con! She looks good with her hair down!

TECHNOPOLOUS

That's, um-

JOHN

She went on about how she wants to do more upbeat roles, and how Prague was cool and COURTNEY SOLOMON SAID HE WROTE IT AS A TRILOGY! THERE MIGHT BE MORE OF THEM!

MIKE

John!

(softer)

He doesn't know, John. He doesn't know. He hasn't seen it.

JOHN

Yeah.

John lets go of Technopolous' shirt and smooths it out a little.

TECHNOPOLOUS

So I guess you saw the D and D-

MIKE

We don't use that name any more.

TECHNOPOLOUS

Oh.

JOHN

No...I'm fine, it was just...you know, you think you've seen it all, and then along come some ear tentacles.

MIKE

(to Technopolous)

We'll, uh, we'll be out in two. Gimme a...uh...

TECHNOPOLOUS

Move quick. Rosebee's finished.

MIKE

Sure.

Nick leaves, but the camera stays. John examines himself in the mirror...not just to figure out where to apply base.

JOHN
I want to distance myself from this industry,
Mike.

(then)
Any ideas?

Mike's eyes are on the desk, as if he's forgotten something. But then it's gone.

MIKE
About a billion. But I'm staying.

JOHN
Why?

MIKE
Because it is as Margaret Mead said.
"Do not doubt that a small group of concerned
individuals can change the world. Indeed, it
is the only thing that ever has."

Mike grabs a few jars of blue, black, and red makeup on the way out.

JOHN
That's actually kinda deep.

MIKE
Yup.

JOHN
Can you do that in a Jeremy Irons voice?

MIKE
Put on your facepaint.

INT. LIVING ROOM STAGE - DAY

Rosebee and O-Shito fans are kept apart by fences and cattle prods. On the stage, a squad of IRON GM DANCERS dressed in the unholy outfits of Goth cheerleaders shake pom-poms of black pleather. They split and fall gracefully around John and Mike, suddenly in the middle of the stage.

Gone are the mild-mannered game designers we saw before. They wear the red and blue facepaint of Gameamaniacs everywhere, and are dressed surprisingly like Kiss, GWAR, or the uncountable legions of pro wrestling tag teams who wear leather and spikes.

JOHN
Silence, fanboys!
(the crowd goes nuts)
It is time to see who knows the LIE!
(crowd goes silent)
On the scoreboard will be the totals by the
players for...

CROWD
LIVE!

JOHN
Interactive!

CROWD
ENTERTAINMENT!

MIKE
Watch that screen.

CUT TO

Gunnubune O-Shito, drinking Gatorade amongst his players, who are busy watching the Lord of the Rings trailer on somebody's laptop and praying for the salvation of Western fantasy movies at the unlikely altar of New Line Cinema.

ON SCREEN

-come the ratings for the O-Shito game: 20 out of 20 in Rules, 19 out of 20 in Innovation, and 18 in Addiction Rate.

JOHN
Looks like the Middle Earth Role-Playing was a hit, Mike.

MIKE
No surprise there, really. Gunnubune claims science fiction as his specialty, but the anal-scientist urge helps him with Rolemaster players a great deal. Now it's Rosebee's turn, and yes, her point total is one higher! What a race!

ON SCREEN, the numbers come up: 18 out of 20 in Rules, 21 out of 20 in Innovation, and 19 in Addiction Rate.

JOHN
Uh...what the hell? Twenty-one?

MIKE
The voters have spoken! It's Dee!

THE CROWD starts stomping at the illegitimate result.

CROWD
Re-count!
(clap clap)
Re-count!

JOHN
Oh...it's the goddamn Mage players. They broke the paradigm!

MIKE
And one could say there's a backlash coming.

JOHN
If you were trying to be funny.

NEWS MEDIA FOOTAGE immediately takes over.

CUT TO:

Dee steps up to a podium in front of many flashing cameras.

DEE
Obviously, this situation needs to be handled

with the utmost care to preserve the integrity of the traditional Iron GM voting procedure.

CUT TO:

The Iron GM sits at a table with his gamers, looking nonchalant.

GUNNUBUNE

The result is obvious. My opponent should concede. This program was founded upon the principles of fair entertainment.

CUT TO:

Dee examines the circuitry of the electronic balloting.

DEE

The count is obviously influenced by the perception that anyone with the title "Iron GM" is the better gamemaster, but there is no system of accreditation. We must ask, "What would the founders of the web site have done?" The answer is, of course-

CUT TO:

EXT. GLADITORIAL PIT - DAY

DEE

-a duel.

At one side of the ring, Gunnubune enters in a SPARKLY EFFECT as he beams into existence as a photonic being. On the other, Dee rides in on a cybernetic horse.

CLOSE UPS on their big brown and blue eyes, as they mentally roll a contested Awareness + Iaijutsu in a joke that only a few people will get. We hear their thoughts.

GUNNUBUNE (V.O.)

Death to the demon Dee Rosebee.

DEE (V.O.)

You're an overgrown munchkin, Shito.

A GONG and battle is joined with no further ado. With a rustle of her cloak, Dee leaps into the air, burning it all in the Spirit of the Fray and a Blood Point for Celerity. Gunnubune kicks in a move-by-wire system, lets loose a stream of PHASER FIRE, and it's over faster than a Blue Planet combat round.

Temporal blasts insure we see Dee's agonized face three times, like the triple-kick angle in every Jean-Claude Van Damme movie ever made.

She crumples to the concrete, and the crowd cheers at the death of a gamemaster. John and Mike descend from the ceiling by wires.

The crowd constantly cheers, then lulls.

JOHN

Well, that was a pretty mean phaser shot into the competition, O-Shito.

GUNNUBUNE
I crush! I kill! Science fiction wave of
future!

Nutty crowd. You know the drill.

MIKE
You certainly had the advantage over Dee in
the firepower department.

GUNNUBUNE
Smartlink 2 with Federation Anti-Borg
technology! She say it not fair in
deposition. Lies. She use magic!

Behind them, unnoticed, Dee's left hand twitches. CLOSE ON it as we
realize it is doing something to the sand in the arena with faint
CRUNCHING SOUNDS.

MIKE
You know, John, this reminds me of the old
living-room-versus-basement advantage debates
of the early '80s.

GUNNUBUNE
She not on Astroturf, either.

JOHN
But this brings up the question, O-Shito,
what do you plan to do now?

GUNNUBUNE
Always land of commercial mouse who must not
be named, but I think vacation, maybe Las
Vega-AARRRGH!

A long, curved sword juts through his chest, then rends him in a bloody
mess as we SPLIT SCREEN with a metallic WHINE. Gunnubune turns to see
the pale face of Dee, glaring at him with big eyes and a small mouth.

Both GMs suddenly speak in subtitles.

GUNNUBUNE
Cannot believe...

DEE
You picked the wrong genre, Iron GM. I have
one last pop culture reference on you.

JOHN
Uh...and now, we gratefully thank our
sponsors, including-

MIKE
Fricking RUN!

The two announcers take off as Dee raises her left hand, and on it is a
human face, busily chewing on sand from the arena floor.

CLOSE ON THE HAND as it INHALES, sucking the air from the room, and the
soul from O-Shito's body in a sequence that took far too many animators.

GUNNUBUNE
You cannot be...No! Not death by awful pun!

He expires as the newly revealed VAMPIRE HUNTER DEE sucks him into the mouth on her hand and replaces her fingerless glove. Putting on an over-large hat, the newly crowned Iron GM walks off into the credits...

...and a pretty day drawn by Yoshitaka Amano.

CROWD

Rose-bee! Rose-bee!

FADE OUT.

END ACT FOUR.