

abyss 15

OCTOBER 1981

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EDITORIAL NOTES

This is perhaps one of our most varied issues to date. In our constant quest for high quality we present two of the top writers on Fantasy Gaming in this issue, David Dunham, with a piece on Magic Items, and David Jacobson with a piece of short fiction. We also welcome an impressive new artist, Mike Cranford, whose work we hope to feature in future issues as well.

We are still looking for submissions, both for ABYSS and for other projects. We are especially interested in good art, which seems to be in somewhat short supply.

Other things of interest include the back page where we have some notes on a new project from RE calle A Crown of Stars. This opportunity to playtest a new game might be of some interest to those who like Science Fiction Strategic games.

There are many more good articles in this issue and I hope that you enjoy them. Your comments, suggestions and gripes are welcome, as always.

Dave Nalle
 Washington, DC
 September 1981

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STORES CARRYING ABYSS

BOOKS UNLIMITED
 (The Wizard's Corner)
 Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
 CANADA

PEGASUS GAMES
 Madison, WI

STAR REALM
 Omaha, NB

THE DRAGON'S DEN
 San Angelo, TX

ALLIED HOBBIES
 Lancaster, PA

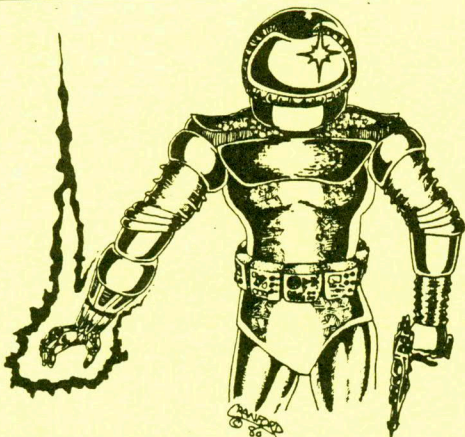
DREAM WIZARDS
 Rockville, MD

GAMES OF BERKELEY
 Berkeley, CA

THE LEGIONAIRE
 Honolulu, HA

THE KING'S CROWN
 Overland Park, KS

THE FLIGHT BOX
 Lancaster, PA



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SHOULD MAGIC ITEMS BE CROCKED?

DAVID R. DUNHAM

Many referees seem to think that the magic devices in their campaigns should have something wrong with them. Perhaps the device won't always work, maybe there is some random factor involved, or there may be an unwanted negative feature. A magic item is said to be "crooked" if it has one of these characteristics.

Why should the referee want to design an artefact like this? One reason may be play balance. Generally, characters in the campaign become more and more powerful, especially as they get hold of more and more magical goodies. A crock in one of these goodies will help keep the group of characters from becoming too powerful relative to the others who live in the same area. A magic tomato which can kill anything it hits is powerful, but if that tomato requires the body of a willing sacrifice for fertilizer, it may never be planted. The power is still there, but the crock balances it and inhibits indiscriminate use.

Another reason might be the belief in TANSTAAFL (there ain't no such thing as a free lunch). Notwithstanding, the point that the item probably was not in fact free (it probably wasn't easy persuading its previous owner to part with it) it should have negative points to counteract the positive points. Unlike the previous example, where the crock provided campaign balance (to keep the tomato from being lobbed at the Empress), the TANSTAAFL crock is designed more to insure that a price is paid for everything. Perhaps each time you use your Elven Cloak your ears get longer and pointier (the question of whether Elves do in fact have long, pointy ears will have to be discussed elsewhere).

Significant precedent for crocking magic items can be found in literature. The treacherous sword is very common—although it is a really nifty weapon, it will eventually be responsible for its owner's death. Certain Rings of Power have been remarked to have similar problems. The inclusion in a campaign of crocked items can help bring about some of the feeling of epic literature.

However, a large proportion of literary magic items are not crocked. Many magic swords and shields work quite well without inconveniencing the user. The Chaos Shield Elric uses in his final battle never fails him, nor are there any nasty side effects. The Vial of Galadriel is another example of a benevolent item.

One thing which always bothered me is why anyone would make a crocked device. Perhaps an artificer who enjoyed practical jokes would create something with such drawbacks, but this sort of things would cut down on the number of people willing to buy his products. Certainly anything made for his friends would not have any disadvantageous features (or he wouldn't have many friends).

It's possible that a flawed magic item is made by mistake (there are a lot of things that could go wrong in such a complicated process...). This item might be sold anyway (probably as a factory second and at a discount), but it would be thrown out if the maker wanted to maintain his or her reputation for quality work, or if it had any really serious problems.

To conclude, it is best not to indiscriminately crock items. There are some cases where it can be justified (an excellent example is potions—real-world drugs are notorious for side-effects), but the creator of the item must be considered. People will try to make good magic items, unless there is a specific reason not to. Have a reason for anything you do in your world—don't do something just to balance your campaign or introduce some laughs. Do something because whoever made it wanted it that way, or because it was the only way he could make it.

IN THE SPECULUM

DAVE NALLE

A few unwise people have asked me to take over this column for an issue to do a special segment on major Fantasy Gaming magazines. My review of APAs and Fanzines in THE DRAGON set them off and they wanted to see the major magazines of the field examined by the same standards. That's why you have this special column. I'm going to look at 5 of the 8 major Fantasy Gaming magazines exactly as I did in THE DRAGON, including numerical ratings on the same scale. I suspect that some of the magazines will be familiar to most of you, and some may not. I'd be very interested in your response.

ADVENTURE GAMING

Manzakk Publishing, Inc. POB 12291, Norwood, OH 45212

Appearance: 2, Content: 4, Value: 4, Overall: 3

First the bad news. ADVENTURE GAMING runs 46 8½x11 pages on glossy paper. It is variously illustrated, has fairly attractive type, and is published monthly. It is edited by Timothy J. Kask, late of THE DRAGON, with the help of a staff of unknowns. It is currently in its second issue. Circulation is a mystery, but I asked Kask at GENCON EAST, and he said he expected to hit 10k+ by next year. I doubt it.

This magazine attempts to meld together Boardgaming and Fantasy Gaming, and does some interesting things in this direction. However it is exceptionally weak in content, mainly, I think, because of poor editorial guidance. This is clear in the most recent issue, which while it has a couple of very short, useful pieces on Diplomacy and Medieval History, is largely devoted to the examination of two games, "Ace of Aces" and "Titan". There are several pieces on each, and both are covered far too much for a single game. "Ace of Aces" is a brilliant new game, and almost deserves this coverage, but "Titan" is a cypher in the field. I've never seen it mentioned anywhere else, and from what it says here I'm not surprised.

This is a very shakey magazine. It tries to do the things which a lot of other magazines like STRATEGY & TACTICS or THE GENERAL do better, and in another area it shows a poor second to any other FRPng magazine. The magazine might get pulled together, but having seen Kask's work in THE DRAGON does not make me hopeful. Notable writers in AG include John Prados, Glenn Rahman, Ronald Pehr, and Lewis Pulsipher. Subscriptions are \$29 for 13 months, a copy is \$3.00.

DIFFERENT WORLDS

Chaosium, Inc., POB 6302, Albany, CA 94706

Appearance: 3, Content: 5, Value: 7, Overall: 5

This magazine is 48 8x11 pages on matt paper, with a full-color cover on heavy stock. It looks excellent graphically, though the art is not too good. The editor is Tadashi Ehara. Subscriptions are \$21 for 12 issues, and a copy is \$2.50. DIFFERENT WORLDS has recently gone monthly. Circulation is a mystery again, but I'd guess from rumours that it is no higher than 5,000.

DIFFERENT WORLDS tries to cover the field, and it does a painfully conscientious job. The reasons are clear. It is fighting a pull towards being a house organ and it seems to be a very strong pull. DW is strong because it tries hard and attracts some excellent writers. At the same time it is weakened by the fact that several writers provide the majority of the material, and it is slanted too much towards RUNEQUEST. This is less bad than it was in the past, but even the most recent issue features a 9 page article suitable only to RQ. In addition, though many like him it is easy to get tired of John T. Sapienza. He is a tireless fount of FRPng articles, and as far as I know he has had at least one article in every issue of DW. Other writers who appear with some regularity include Larry DiTillio and David Nalle.

In spite of weaknesses I can see my way clear to recommending this magazine, especially as I have articles in each of its next four issues.

THE DRAGON

Dragon Publishing, POB 110, Lake Geneva, WI 53147

Appearance: 6, Content: 6, Value: 5, Overall: 4

This is the big one, and it doesn't come off badly in comparison, rating in the middle of the field.

The magazine is edited by Kim Mohan, who has done a lot to move the magazine up from a very questionable status. Each issue runs about 80 8x11 pages on glossy paper. The cover is usually very slick, in excellent color. The interior art is mostly indifferent. Subscriptions are \$24 for 12 monthly issues. A single copy is \$3.00.

THE DRAGON has always suffered from the stygma of its days as a blatant house organ. It has gotten better, though it has relapses. It makes an honest effort to cover the field, including some board-games. There is a natural tendency to give a bit too much space to TSR games, such as "Top Secret", "Divine Right", and of course "AD&D". Such wasted space tends to be passed by in a magazine of this size. Other clear weaknesses are a habit of aiming for the juvenile FRPer in many articles, and the over-abundance of advertising. This is definatly the most commercial magazine in the field. They do what sells, and do it as well as they can. They've identified their market and play up to it. In spite of these problems TD is a good magazine, because it maintains a standard of quality and presents that quality in high quantity as well. There's no need to go into writers. Most of the good ones who have been able to overcome old grudges are featured.



SORCERER'S APPRENTICE
 Flying Buffalo, Inc., POB 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252
 Appearance: 8, Content: 8, Value: 7, Overall: 8

Outstanding ratings for an outstanding magazine. SORCERER'S APPRENTICE is a clear choice as better than any of its competition. It is shorter than most at 42 glossy 8½x11 pages, but it costs less at only \$2.25 a copy or \$10 for 6 bi-monthly issues. In the past it has been irregular, but the trends seem to be going in favor of magazines, and recently SA has been holding to its schedule rather well. The editor is Liz Danforth, who also provides some outstanding art.

The first thing you see about an issue of SA is the art. It is usually breathtaking. From the rich tones of the cover to the clean interior art it is the best, featuring fine artists like Lee Brown Coye, Liz Danforth, Paul Jaquays, and Gary Freeman. Its generally equally good inside. Articles are usually of the highest quality, by top writers like David Nalle, John Sapienza, and Mike Stackpole. It also has fine fiction by Manly Wade Wellman, Roger Zelazny, and others. While this is a house organ, it has shed the stigma, and an occasional article on T&T doesn't really detract. They have made a successful effort to keep articles general enough to fit any type of FRP'ing.

The only problem with the magazine is not really its fault. SA has not had much support in the field. Circulation is low at around 3,000, and it has been a steady money loser because of its high quality. Its standards are also so high that it is often short on material. It pays more than many other markets, and may be able to draw some of the writers from other magazines. In any case I recommend SA without reservation for anyone interested in the art of FRP'ing.

THE SPACE GAMER
 7207 Onion Crossing Dr., Austin, TX 78744
 Appearance: 4, Content: 7, Value: 2, Overall: 3

This magazine is 40 8½x11 pages with little art, and most of it not too good, but with dense type. It is edited by Forrest Johnson and published by Steve Jackson. It was originally the house organ of Metagaming, but it split off to become a self-proclaimed "independant magazine". However, it seems that temptations were too great, and now it is becoming the house organ of Steve Jackson Games. It is \$2.50 a copy, and \$21.00 for a 12 issue year.

TSG has a lot of weaknesses. Articles are of uneven quality and the editing is done by die roll. However, it has a significant strength in its emphasis on review's. Every issue features dozens of long and short reviews on new releases in every major FRP'ing related area. This makes up for many of the weaknesses of the magazine, and if you are looking for good reviews this is the place to look. Most of the reviewers are competent, and they try to be fair. This is a useful if specialized magazine.

FROM VIDAR'S FORGE

SWORD OF PAIN

These swords are formed from wood and look somewhat like training swords. They do only 1D2 points of damage when they strike, and they are treated as clubs rather than blades, but the wood has unusual tendency to splinter. The wood is very hard, but fragments easily. The splinters will pierce the flesh of the target on striking, causing intense pain which must be saved against each CR. The splinters can be eliminated at will by the wielder of the sword, or when he leaves sight of his victim, dies, or loses the sword. (G. Knobl)



SHIELD OF HYPNOS

This shield is painted with an enchanted design which has a hypnotic effect on the foe of the bearer in combat. The victim must make a Saving Throw against magic or he will be tranfixed where he stands for 1D4 CR or until he is struck. The power of the shield has 25 charges good for 1 CR of use each. After the charges are expended the design fades. It is not rechargeable. The power of the sword is brought into effect at will on command of the bearer. (Byron T. Estes)



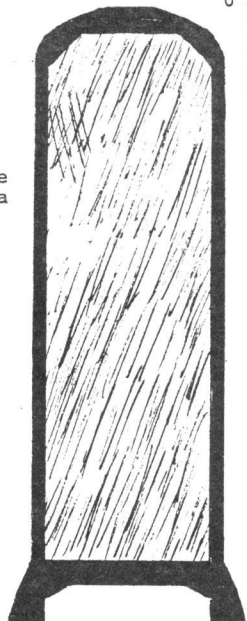
LIQUID ROPE

Liquid rope is found in a ground a strong rope will form slower the flask is moved and the thicker will be the rope that is created from the liquid. The flask has an unlimited supply of Liquid Rope, but it will not work if poured into another receptacle. (Chris Crotty)



MIRROR OF SCRYING

This is a full-length mirror which responds to mental commands to activate its magical powers. These powers are primarily associated with vision. On command it can allow the user to see with it at unlimited range, including into other planes of existence. It allows the user to see any object or person which he can name or is familiar with. It only shows the object and the immediate area, as if he were standing 10ft away looking at it. There is a chance that a powerful being may notice the magical presence of the observer. Magical powers will work through the mirror, but only towards the user, and only non-physical attacks. It is excellent for keeping track of an enemy and his activities. (Jon Schuller)



SWORD OF ADAPTION

This is a well-made magical rapier. Normally it strikes for 2D4 as an edged weapon or 1D8 as a point weapon. Its additional power is that it can take the form of and strike as any type of bladed weapon, from a dagger, to a falchion, to a greatsword, provided the bearer can use that weapon effectively. In any of the possible forms, the sword is made of a light weight metal and is +3/+3 for use in combat. The sword possesses no other magical powers. (Chris Crotty)



ARMOR OF ADAPTION

This appears as a flimsy suit of plate armor made of a bluish alloy. It will enlarge or shrink to fit any size, and can become any type of armor, though in any form the armor can never be more than +1. It can also be reduced to be only a part of a suit of armor, and expanded at will by the wearer. (Chris Crotty)

FANTASY ROLE PLAYING AND THE FANATICS

STEVE PARISH

*"Frankly, I know...it's Satanic!"
--a mother in Utah*

It seems that as those self-appointed watchdogs of our morals, the "Moral Majority", begin to feel their power they are looking around for new fields in which to express their archaic philosophy. Not satisfied with banning abortion, putting women back in the kitchen, and making T.V. wholesome, Jerry Falwell and his glassy-eyed followers have turned their sights on Fantasy Role Playing, a movement which they feel destroys family virtues, promotes violence, and requires devil worship.

You may wonder how anyone could gain such a ridiculous impression of the nature of FRPing. It is characteristic of the tunnel-vision paranoia of these self-appointed arbiters of morality that they should lash out against anything which does not fit within the narrow strictures of their revealed doctrine and practices.

In California and Utah already reactionary elements in local communities have acted to stop school and local programs which participated in D&D campaigns. These programs which were formed with the most innocent intentions of pursuing leisure amusement have been terminated by people who had only the vaguest idea of what D&D and other FRP games represented. This attack took on a national element when a major religious broadcast ran a special examination of gaming, with the not unsurprising conclusion that Fantasy Games were an example of the Satanism which is pervading our society.

Now we all worship Satan with a human sacrifice now and then, right? The Moral Majority has made the outrageous assumption that what we do in our gaming lives can be associated with our real lives, and that we become our character in more than play. All of their attacks show a total lack of insight into their foe and no attempt to really come to terms with the real nature of FRPing. They have taken a quick look at lurid covers and overheard conversations and concluded that we are practicing some kind of perverse, unholy ritual.

It is much easier to capitulate as people in California and Utah have done than it is to resist this opposition. Yet, if we do not resist the gaming hobby may be crippled, misunderstood, and ghettoized out of existence. FRPing has had a problem with being misunderstood in the media and by uninformed people. With the new power that the Moral Majority is building for itself they could be the source of our most severe difficulties yet.

To counteract this movement we need to act. People need to be informed about Fantasy Gaming. Parents, community leaders, clergymen and other influential persons would probably have no objection to FRPping if they actually understood it. Too often in the past we have been unclear and incomplete in explaining just what we were doing with all those funny-looking die. Unless we make the effort to communicate more about gaming people will continue to misunderstand and shake their heads. When someone understands something he cannot fear it, and those who are close to us, like parents or friends can be brought around to our side when a bible-thumper calls us devil-worshippers. Fanatics of this sort prey on ignorance. If we can eliminate popular ignorance of Fantasy Gaming we will leave them nothing to shape into a tool against us.

SKILLS AND TRAINING—NATIVE AND LEARNED SKILLS

CARL JONES

In skill systems presented in this column and elsewhere in the past there has been a particular weakness. All of these systems have lumped all types of skills together in a group, though with subclasses. There has been no provision to assure that characters will not become one-sided in the direction of combat and magic, to the reduction of skills in more passive areas. I have seen this tendency in play over and over, and it is about time something is done to eliminate this unrealistic tendency.

This system is derived from the Nalle/Shaw system in ABYSS #11, with certain key modifications which make it more balanced and believable. All skill costs remain the same, however skills are divided into two groups, Native and Learned, and Skill Points are generated to fit each area separately. Native Skill points cannot be applied to Learned Skills, but Learned Skill Points may be applied to Native Skills instead of Learned Skills. The two types and their point generation are described below.

NATIVE SKILLS

This group consists of those skills which a character could be expected to have learned in his youthful life before he began adventuring. These are primarily those practical skill groups, such as languages, craft-skills, woodsmanship, and similar skills. Points from this group start high and do not advance at a great rate and they may not be applied to learned skills. Learned Skill Points may be applied to skills in this group if the character wishes to study in this area. Costs remain the same as is stated in old ABYSSs and in the NYR.

Given below is a table for finding Native Skill Points from the characteristics SOC and INT. In D&D SOC is to be replaced by CHA in using this table. There are two numbers given for every cross-indexing. They are separated by a slash. The first number represents the initial NSP that the character has. At each new level after the 1st, the second number is added in finding his total. This is shown clearly in the example

INT	SOC (CHA)					
	4	8	12	16	20	24
3	19/4	21/5	23/6	25/7	27/8	29/9
6	21/5	23/6	25/7	27/8	29/9	31/10
9	23/6	25/7	27/8	29/9	31/10	33/11
12	25/7	27/8	29/9	31/10	33/11	35/12
15	27/8	29/9	31/10	33/11	35/12	37/13
18	29/9	31/10	33/11	35/12	37/13	39/14
21	31/10	33/11	35/12	37/13	39/14	41/15
24	33/11	35/12	37/13	39/14	41/15	43/16



Using this table the following example can be derived: Jokalla is a sorceress from Cythera. She has a SOC of 15 and an INT of 16. Thus she has 35 initial SP and 12 more with each additional level. At 1st level she would have only 35. at 2nd she would have 47, and at 7th she would have 107.

Native Skill Points can be spent in a large number of skill areas. Some of these are given below, with costs. Skills can be increased by expending additional SP, at a rate of 1 additional level for each half-again times the base cost. Thus a skill with a base cost of 4 would be 4 for the 1st level, plus 2 more at 2nd level for a total of 6, and so on. At 5th level it would be 4+2+2+2+2, or 12.

SKILL	COST	SKILL	COST	SKILL	COST
Languages	3 to 8	Swimming	4	Wood Carving	6
Writing	10	Sewing	5	Bricklaying	3
Illumination	8	Farriery	4	Fishing	2
Calligraphy	6	Ironsmithying	6	Trapping	4
Illustration	12	Silversmithying	7	Climbing	5
Mapping	4	Goldsmithying	8	Cooking	2
Diagraming	5	Jewelsmithying	10	Brewing	6
Navigation	7	Bronzsmithying	5	Vintning	8
Helmanship	5	Fletching	5	Carpentry	5
Hunting	1	Bowery	6	Butchering	3

There are many more skills which could be added to this list. They should be clear to the GM if he puts a little thought into it. If 2 times as many NSP are spent on the skill, for example 8 for mapping instead of 4, the proficiency of the character with that skill is increased. There is no limit to how high it can be increased. For example 20NSP would get 10 levels of cooking and make the character a master chef.

LEARNED SKILLS

This group is very different from the preceding type. These represent those things which a character learns later in life while pursuing an adventuring career. They are the skills which are not primarily used for practical purposes, and which distinguish Player Characters from the other occupants of their world. They are such skills as combat ability, magic use, and priestly training.

For learning these skills each character has a set number of Learned Skill Points and a set rate of advancement per level. The table for finding LSP is given below. They are found from Judgement and Will-Power, or in D&D use Wisdom and Intelligence respectively.

	<u>JUD</u>							
<u>WIL</u>	3	6	9	12	15	18	21	24
4	11/10	13/11	15/12	17/13	19/14	21/15	23/16	25/17
8	13/11	15/12	17/13	19/14	21/15	23/16	25/17	27/18
12	15/12	17/13	19/14	21/15	23/16	25/17	27/18	29/19
16	17/13	19/14	21/15	23/16	25/17	27/18	29/19	31/20
20	19/14	21/15	23/16	25/17	27/18	29/19	31/20	33/21
24	21/15	23/16	25/17	27/18	29/19	31/20	33/21	35/22

There are many skills possible to be learned, primarily those specific to different character classes, such as Thief Skills, Spells, and Weapon-use skills. The costs of most of these have been detailed in the pages of ABYSS in the past, but an example for your use follows. The cost to learn a spell is its level.

SKILL	COST	SKILL	COST
Dagger	4	Picking Pockets	8
Epee	6	Purse Cutting	7
Scimitar	5	Disguise	5
Short Sword	3	Move Silently	5
Broadsword	4	Backstrike to Kill	8
Bastard Sword	6	Poisoning	9
Greatsword	7	Garotte	11
Buckler	8	Riding	4
Longbow	8	Rapier & Dagger	10
Javelin	4	Bolo	8

There is a great realm of possibility for other skills here. As with NSP the level of proficiency can be increased by investing additional LSP in the skill. In D&D levels of increase can be treated as bonuses in combat, or as a percentage chance of success when multiplied by five for non-combat skills.



CONCLUSION

Taken as a whole this system is easily added to another system, and has the advantage over other skill systems of encouraging characters to become more diversified and expanded into areas of practical use. The system works well when combined with systems put forward in this column in the past.

ON DESIGNING MAGIC ITEMS

JON SCHULLER

Why is there such a fascination with magic items in Fantasy Role Playing campaigns? There is little support for widespread magic item presence in most fantasy literature, yet many campaigns are afflicted with literally hundreds of magic items, sometimes as many as 30 to a character. Think about it. In most Swords & Sorcery stories there may be one or maybe two magic items, and these are considered rare and fabulous prizes. In many stories there is nothing which could be strictly defined as a magic item at all. This magic item proliferation rises from a desire for increased power on the part of the players, and a fascination with creating potential for unusual magical effects on the part of the GM. While it is not realistic, this practice of loading a campaign with magic items is not totally without merit, as it does add variation when handled properly.

However, whatever the number of magic items in a campaign, it is the nature of the items more than the number which can make a shambles of a campaign. In AD&D and a number of other systems there are tables for rolling to determine the powers of a magic item randomly. This is the mentality which can destroy the internal integrity of a campaign. While too many magic items will always make a campaign frustratingly over-powered, it is invariably true that if you use items which are internally consistent, whatever the number, your campaign will be more enjoyable than if your magic items are born from die rolls.

This pronouncement may seem extreme, but I have seen repeatedly that players just cannot respect magic items which have no logical reason for existing. A serious player thinks less of his GM and himself if he is carrying around a +3/+3 sword which controls snakes, creates light, shoots fireballs, and raises the dead.

This is not a magic item. It is more like a catalogue. A sword which had related and complementary powers would be more believable. If you don't take the time to make magic

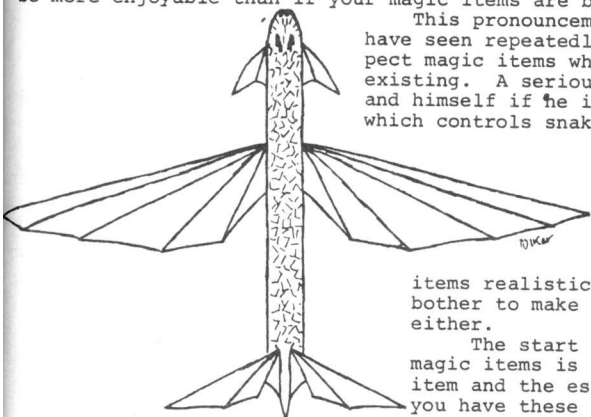
items realistic your players may decide not to bother to make their character's realistic either.

The start towards creating believable magic items is to determine the origin of the item and the essential nature of the item. If you have these two aspects in mind you can use them as a core around which the build the actual

powers of the item. Examples of the core elements are easy to find. For example you could choose "Light" as your theme, and create a shield, shall we say, with such light-related powers as blinding light to any who look on it, and protection from light-type attacks. It could even be on charges generated by exposure to the sun. Almost any word or concept can be used for the core idea for an item, some good examples are "Age", "Cold", "Speed", or other descriptive words.

The origin of a magic item is just as important. Who would make an item? There are a variety of reasons for creating items, but they can be divided into two groups, one for Artifacts, and one for more mundane items. Artifacts should be created for reasons somewhat beyond human ken, and should have a reason which animates their actions. Good ideas for artifacts include giving them a curse or a mission which is appropriate to their nature and to the power from which they came. More mundane items are of human origin, so it makes sense to give them functional powers which are closely related, but at the same time limit them by charges and the like because of the lesser power of their creator. It should be easy to employ a bit of imagination and make your items well detailed and internally consistent if you think about them a bit.

Putting random or unrelated powers in magic items is a ridiculous concept. Nature may be random, but magic items are not natural. They are made for clear purposes and within the limitations of their makers. They are functional tools and should be designed to serve their function realistically. A few well-made items will do a lot more for a campaign than a jumble of illogical toys.



BACKGROUNDING—THE SECULAR GOVERNMENT OF PTOLEMEIAS

ROY NICOL

THE EMERGENCE OF A MERCHANT NOBILITY

Historically it has been common for the mercantile leaders of a region in which there is little government to assume the functions of regional government in many areas especially those where it already is involved administratively. A great deal has been said of guilds in the Apprentice & Adept column here in ABYSS, but little has been said about their role in municipal government. Our examination of Ptolemeias will make this role clear.

Ptolemeias was established in a disputed area on the Bay of Cynfael in the year 123. A settlement of some sort had existed there for centuries, but it first came to some note in the 2nd century. The city was founded by a group of merchants from Carzal, some 1,800 miles east by sea. Ptolemeias was opened as a center for trade between the remote east and the emerging civilisations of Western Ysgarth.

The city was originally established as a walled port, safe from the armies which fought in the surrounding country. Its value as a source of rare goods and crafts was quickly clear, and treaties with neighboring rulers quickly established its status as a free city. At this point there was little need for government in the city. The collective of merchants ran the city as they saw fit, and there was no threat to their authority in the small and busy population.

Naturally, with its ideal trading position and some shrewd arrangements, the population of the city grew and it entered into a new phase. Ptolemeias quickly became a center of manufacturing as well as trade, and it began to attract religions, artisans, and hangers-on. The walls were expanded in 286 and again in 430, after which suburbs were allowed to grow up.

With crafts and manufacturing came workers who formed into guilds. At first these were designed like private militia to patrol the ghettos in which the tradesmen worked, but they soon took on administrative and regulatory capacities. Eventually some 40+ guilds were created, all controlling commerce in a small region.

The craft guilds were not the only powerful secular force which grew up in the city. The original merchant families which founded the city had grown and prospered with the city, and they came to control large fleets of ships and many factories. Occasional entrepreneurs would strike it rich in the city and become great merchants, and some great old families fell from power. These merchants had often worked together in spite of some friction and occasional factional violence. For self-governance they formed into a Guild Merchant after a series of riots in 253, during which commerce was disrupted by rival manufacturers. The Guild Merchant existed primarily to settle disputes between the major merchant houses.

A democratic tradition grew up in the Guild Merchant, establishing the post of Guild-Lord, an elective office roughly equivalent to mayor or even king. As the society developed, noble houses came to dominate the Guild Merchant, and in the same way the position of Guild Lord became a sort of monarchy, held by a succession of families of unusual mercantile strength, sometimes for many generations. The controlling house often changed in the midst of violence, though elections were held every time a Guild Lord died. It was the usual practice in these elections to choose the old lord's designated heir. At times this was not a member of his family, and on occasion the Guild went against his choice.

In 585 there was a partial economic collapse in the city because of the loss of several large fleets in a hurricane. As they began to be laid off the craftsmen of the city rose up in open rebellion. Among their demands was that they be given representation on the Guild Merchant as equal members. The city was torn by violence, the Merchant Princes were cast out for a period of 3 months, and trade came to a standstill. Guild Lord Marshik Kolios returned at the head of a mercenary army, but he was wise enough to make some concessions which not only pleased the craftsmen, but consolidated his power. While he did not grant them positions in the Guild Merchant, he created a "Guild Council", on which sat representatives of each of the Guild Masters. This council was granted a theoretical level of power roughly equivalent to the Guild Merchant, so that the two groups balanced each other off, thus increasing the power of the Guild Lord. This is the way affairs have stood in the city for some 200 years.

THE ROLE OF THE GUILD LORD IN THE CITY

Satral Kutillis, the second consecutive Guild Lord of his line, now reigns in Ptolemeias. He is still young, and an able administrator. His interests lie in expanding the international intelligence network developed by his father, and in encouraging trade.

The Guild Lord's court is an extensive bureaucracy developed to administer the city. While the individual guilds cover much of the running of the city, the Guild Lord governs trade, imports, exports, militia, and relations with other countries. The government is supported by a tax of 5% of all monetary exchanges.

The Guild Lord's Court controls the minting of money and the maintenance of city services, as well as the supervision of services provided by the craft guilds. They also keep tabs on transients and foreign traders. They administer taxes, tithes, and tariffs. They generally maintain surveillance of all trade and business in the city. There is some conflict in this area with the Thearchy, as they deny the right of the Guild Lord to tax religious institutions. The Court has a veritable army of pen-packing assessors and inventory takers, and keep track of everything that enters the city.

An additional function of the Guild Lord's Court is to actually sit as a court of Justice, composed of three High Magistrates appointed for life by the Guild Lord. They have no administrative role, but the hear appeals and petitions on administrative matters. They have no role in criminal justice.

The City Guard is directly under the command of the Guild Lord, and it is responsible for keeping civil order. It is assisted in this task by a large selection of magistrates, and the Wardens of the Craft Guilds. The Guard is also responsible for the defense of the city.

All cases, both civil and criminal can be appealed to the Guild Lord, who has ultimate authority of high and low justice.

The secret arm of the Guild Lord's authority is an organization called the "Grey Wolves", who maintain internal security and gather intelligence. Their role is very important because of the devious forces within the city and the threats from neighboring nations.

On the whole the Guild Lord keeps a watchful but loose control of the city, encouraging trade and taking a reasonable share of the profits. In return he keeps order and arranges for the protection of the city in a symbiotic relationship.

CONCLUSION

Governments and Guilds are created to impose order and protect their members. It is logical that a government should, therefore, grow out of the guild structure. In a large and wealthy city a popular nobility is also a realistic possibility. These tendencies have been manifested clearly in history, most notably in Venice, Florence, and London.

While this is a bit of specific campaign history it represents trends which could easily be adapted to a big city in any campaign. Human nature is constant from world to world and throughout time, so organizations which develop in one framework might be mirrored in another.

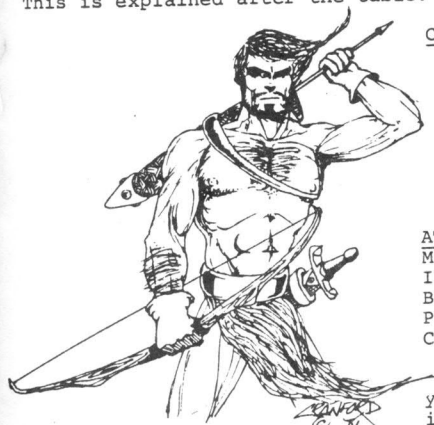
CHARACTERISTIC BASED SAVING THROW SYSTEM

DAVE NALLE

One area which has never been adequately examined is that of Saving Throws. Both Old D&D and AD&D have Saving Throw systems, but in both cases they are only given for certain types of attacks, and are based mainly on character classes. Now, this practice is not only unfair, in discriminating against some classes, but they are also insufficient, as a GM often finds himself having to guess at the save for an attack not included in the tables.

This system gives a single universal matrix for finding Saving Throws. If the GM can determine which characteristic is appropriate for the type of attack, he can consult the table and find the proper Save, by cross-indexing with the character's level. This gives a mark. Equal or better on 1D20 means you've saved.

The table is given below and to the right. It is important also to note what certain characteristics relate to for determining what affects the save. This is explained after the table.



CHARACTERISTIC	CHARACTER LEVEL									
	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20
4	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11
8	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10
11	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9
14	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8
17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7
20	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6
22	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5
24	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4

ATTACK	NYR CHARACTERISTIC	D&D CHARACTERISTIC
Magic	TAL	INT
Illusion	JUD	WIS
Breath/Ray	AGI	DEX
Poison/Shock	CON	CON
Charm	WIL	WIS

Other saves can easily be determined if you think about the function of the characteristics which you use. Roll Saves on 1D20.

THE ARTS ARCANES—PHYSICIANS

MIKE RAKOCZY

A class which has infinite practical application in Fantasy Adventuring is that of the Physician. This is a class which has a very solid rationale for its existence. Some classes have only a tenuous claim to legitimacy, but the role of the Healer has been clear throughout history and in fantasy fiction. It is clear how important such a person would be in a violent society.

Presented here is a dense system for running Physicians, concentrating on healing aspects. Basic spells are given with brief descriptions. The class is ideal for a somewhat passive character, or as a second character class if they are permitted in your campaign.

Physicians are on Experience Table #1, the same as Thieves. They are frequently non-religious, but they may also be priests of healing-related gods, with appropriate medical ethics. They may also subscribe to an ethical philosophy. On the other hand they may be totally mercenary in the use of their services. The key spells for Physicians follow.

ANAESTHETIZE-This spell makes a single area of the body painless. However, though it is numb, the person can still move it. As he has no feeling in that area he might damage it without knowing it. Level:1, CT:3.

CURE WOUNDS-By laying on his hands the Physician may cure damage to a single subject at a time. Each casting level or use of the spell cures 1 point of damage, and all curing must be done as a single spell on a single subject. If you use a system where curing is not adjustable, it may be cast repeatedly. Level:1, CT:5.

CURE DISEASE-This will cure any disease with which the Physician is familiar, though some may be more resistant than others. Level:5, CT:8.

CURE PARALYSIS-This removes the effects of magical or neural paralysis from any normal cause. It will not work against psychological paralysis. It will not heal a break in the back, though it will cancel the paralytic effect, until the spine is severed again. Level:6, CT:12.

CURE INSANITY-This will restore a derailed mind to mental sanctity if the source of the insanity is normal. Level:4, CT:8.

KNIT BONE-This is a key Physician spell. It mends one break in a single bone. It must be thrown repeatedly to cure multiple fractures or separate breaks. It makes the area fully functional again. Level:9, CT:15.

NEURAL BLOCK-This stops neural impulses from passing beyond the point where it is set by touch. It will make the areas beyond the point numb and immobile. The area between the head and the block is unaffected. Level:3, CT:5.

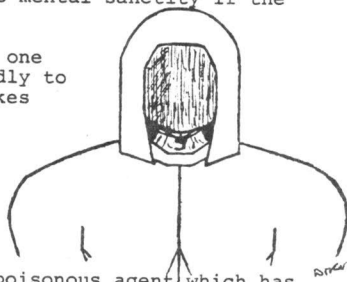
NEUTRALIZE POISON-This counters the effect of any poisonous agent which has been introduced into the body. Some poisons are more resistant than others. Level:10, CT:5.

RAISE DEAD-This raises a dead body which is up to WIL² hours old. It cures only the wound or wounds which were directly responsible for the death. It only returns the body to life, and any other repairs must be done separately. Level:12, CT:25.

REGENERATE LIMB-This will cause a new limb to grow in the place of one which has been severed. The limb must have been severed in the last 24 hours. It cannot have been cured by magic, or cauterized. It is O.K. if the bleeding has been staunchured or arrested. The new limb will be regrown in (30-CON)x3 days. Level:15, CT:20.

Additional useful information on Physicians can be found in Skills & Training in ABYSS #11, where non-magical healing is examined.

This class figures frequently as NPCs, as each village probably has its village healer or medicine man. Such a practical skill is always needed, especially in a relatively primitive society.



TWO TRAPS

CHRIS CROTTY

These two traps could spice up an adventure and give a bit of a challenge to your players. A few good traps always serve to break up an adventure and keep it from getting bogged down in Hack & Slash.

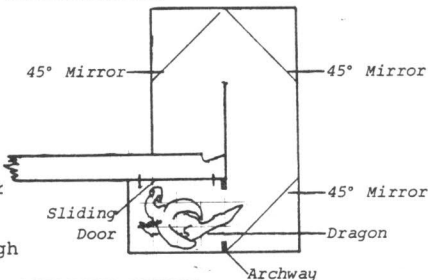
The first trap uses a complex arrangement of mirrors to create a lethal illusion.

When the party enters the door to the room they will see a 30' x 60' area separated by an archway from a 40' long and 30' wide. In this area is a dragon. The apparent image of the room is shown to the right. The dragon is seated on a treasure. He has his back to the door. When they open the door it speaks, saying "Better go check on my other hoards." The dragon will then seem to go through the wall on the right.

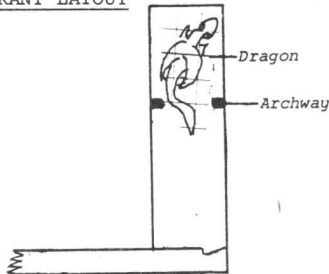
In actuality, after the dragon goes through the wall, he will be in the hall behind the party, and attack them from behind.

This trap is created by the use of 3 very highly polished mirrors set at 45° angles, so that the curved room looks straight, allowing the dragon to use the sliding door for a surprise attack.

ACTUAL LAYOUT



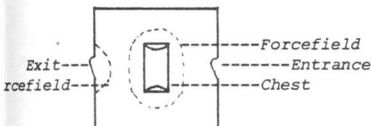
APPARANT LAYOUT



The second trap is a bit simpler. It takes advantage of the volatile nature of Sodium and Water, and the eagerness of many adventurers to eliminate obstacles hastily.

In this 50' x 50' room there is a plain chest. There is a door by which the party may enter, and a door across the room. The chest is surrounded by a forcefield, the exit is also protected by a force field. Set in the ceiling, and visible as bars, is a crosswork of hollow

forcefield tubes. The tubes going one way are filled with sodium, and the tubes going the other way are filled with water. If any forcefield in the room is dispelled, all will be, including the ones on the roof. When the sodium and water mix, they will cause an explosion, sending large amounts of rock shrapnel through the room. Only those in the doorway or outside of the room are safe.



FILLING THE PENTACLE

RON GLAVIER

For those of you who are unfamiliar with this column, we usually use this space to give information about demons and imps for use in summoning. They work particularly well with the Sorcerer character class as presented in ABYSS #10.

LUMIKAK, DEMON OF LIGHT

LVL:12 ST:8 Attacks:Auric Bolt for 3D10 overall
 HP:75 AC:1
 AR:5 D&D AC:7
 DR:8 WR:150

Lumikak is a demon whose essence is light. He appears as a handsome, gold-skinned man, with glowing eyes. He is bathed in an aura of powerful light which he can project in an attack. He can also glow with blinding light. Anyone who comes into contact with his body takes 5D12 overall.

He may be summoned, and while he cannot grant any powers to the summoner he will serve. After serving for a day, or performing one major deed he may return to hell.

TORISHAL, DEMON OF THE SKIES

LVL:13 ST:7 Attacks:2 Claws for 2D10 each
 HP:50 AC:1
 AR:7 D&D AC:6
 DR:15 WR:150

Torishal appears as a tall, feathered humanoid with large wings. His wings

and feathers are multi-colored, primarily blue, green, and red. He can fly at great speed, and his legs end in large claws which he swoops down and attacks with.

He can be summoned only with a pentacle of fixed smoke in the sky, and can grant power to speak with birds and of superior vision to summoners.

MORKISIAN, IMP OF SILENCE

LVL:5 ST:14 Attacks:Dagger for 1D3
 HP:20 AC:3
 AR:3 D&D AC:7
 DR:3 WR:65

Morkisian appears as a short humanoid with black skin and red eyes. He is exceptionally thin, and he has large, flat feet. He moves with total silence, and has limited ability to blend with his background. He likes to delude himself into thinking that he is an assassin.

He may impart total silence to a summoner for a period of up to 1 hour per day.

LORSTIK, IMP OF POSSESSION

LVL:4 ST:10
 HP:25 AC:1
 AR:1 D&D AC:8
 DR:1 WR:45

Lorstik appears as a smallish, extremely fat man. He doesn't move around much, and always looks like he's concentrating. He may assume a non-corporeal form at will.

Lorstik has the power to extend his will and attempt to possess and control anyone of the summoner's choice. He may end the possession at will after two hours. At this time, or if he does not possess successfully, he may return and try to possess his summoner, but with his WR tripled.

GRESTIAR, DEMON OF THE MYRIAD PLANES

LVL:17 ST:7 Attacks:Disintegrating Touch for 3D8
 HP:70 AC:1
 AR:5 D&D AC:4
 DR:25 WR:200

Grestiar appears as a tall man in dark clothes, with a pale complexion. He has a number of powers related to planal travel. He can travel between planes and open gates to other planes. He is very hard to hit, because he exists in part in another plane. He may come without being summoned, and may leave the plane if he is losing a will battle, and return to re-initiate it one time per day.

He may use his powers of transport for any summoner, or take them with him on a tour.

A SUMMER'S DREAM

DAVID JACOBSON

For a bit of variety a bit of fiction is sometimes presented here. This piece is by one of the top writers from ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS, who has appeared in ABYSS in the past.

"Barogo, your watch is over," a voice drums. Barogo snaps out of a day-dream and without thought wheels into a battle stance with his battle axe at ready. He stands about five foot tall with very broad shoulders. A stringy beard grows from his chin and sways about half way down his chainmail surcoat.

"Legalido, you should know you never do a foolish thing like that. If it wasn't for the calm in the air you might not have a head now." The two dwarves standing on the watchtower could be twins but for the red plume on Barogo's helm.

"I know it was a foolish deed, but I thought you might want some rest. The other guards changed over an hour ago."

Barogo looks at the other dwarf apologetically and then turns away from him. "Yes, I do need some rest, but something tells me the attack will come tonight," he says as he looks across the river. There is a bridge over the river. On either side of it are dense woods and a road that leads away from the far bank passes between two wood and stone guard towers. "Be on your toes," Barogo warns, "and remember to call out if you see anything. The whole camp should be able to hear you."

"Don't fret about me," Legalido laughs. "I can take care of myself. It's the Elves I would worry about. If they do attack there will be many elven widows."

Barogo leaves Legalido and climbs down from the tower. The river runs calmly, quietly and Barogo is lulled by its lazy motion. Large fires have been built at the edge of the bridge to keep away the darkness. A few clouds drift across the stars and moon in the night sky. Bridge and river are bathed in an eerie silver light. The forest stands black under a leafy canopy.

"How dark," Barogo thinks as he looks at the forest. "How thick and black it is over there. Damn your Elvish hides." He turns away from the river and shifts his grip on his axe. He scans the forest behind the towers. The Dwarf camp is plainly in sight with guards posted and fires blazing. He straightens the five feet and an inch of his Dwarven body and marches steadily back to his camp.

The Elves have been at each other's throats for almost 200 years. During this time small skirmishes have rent their mutual borders. More recently their enmity erupted in war when the Dwarves unknowingly built a fortress two and a half leagues inside the Elven territory. The Elves attacked without warning. The fortress was razed, and none of the Dwarvish garrison survived.

The Elves set the destruction of the fortress as a warning to the Dwarves of what would happen to them should they try to 'invade' Elvish territory again. Infuriated by these high-handed deeds, the Dwarves decided to show them what a real invasion would be like. Over 20,000 Dwarves marched against the Elves. The doom of the Dwarvish force was assured when an inexperienced Lieutenant panicked in the face of battle. Casualties were high on both sides, high enough to delay an Elvish counter-attack for two months.

Barogo thought back to what his father would tell him about those dark, pressing trees beyond the river. "The forest has eyes. Never trust the forest for cover, for it is deceiving with false cover." Now more than ever he believed his father.

While walking Barogo hears, or imagines, the twang of a bowstring. He is no more than ten yards from the guard tower. He hears another and turns, re-adjusting his battle-axe. He looks first at the towers and then to the bridge. The bridge is empty, the fires still burn at its edge. The guards are in place on the tower. "I almost thought the attack had started," he thinks, trying to comfort himself. He looks quickly around the area and gazes across the river. Nothing seems unusual, so he turns back to the camp. He is so relieved to see everything normal that he doesn't notice that the guards both have bows slung on their shoulders.

Axe still in hand, Barogo approaches the camp, where a heated discussion is brewing among his comrades. "I'll bet you he did. Look, here he is now," says a Dwarf named Lorin. "This guy here says you couldn't have ridden a horse Barogo." He points out another Dwarf, one Thuri. "Why don't you tell him the story of how you escaped from the Elves?"

"If you insist Lorin, but I don't really think..."

"Just tell it."

Barogo draws a deep breath, letting it out slowly. He looks around the small fire and spots a stump. He sits, laying his axe across his knees. "It was during the last battle with the Elves," he starts. "I'm sure you all know the background so I won't give you a history lesson, just my role in it all."

A small crowd starts to gather as Barogo enters into his story. Many of the Dwarves have already heard this tale but they all like to hear it again and again, they are a race strong in the oral tradition. "I was in an ambushing squad, forty soldiers including myself. After the start of the battle we were supposed to move around the flank of the Elvish force and attack from the rear. There were other squads trying the same thing. Hopefully we'd get a fair-size group behind their lines to cut off their retreat."

"We started early and used the cover of arrow fire to work around them. We judged everything perfectly, except the depth of their line. Well, we got caught in a skirmish with a small group of their archers. We slaughtered them easily, but during the fight our lines had pulled back and we were left stranded.

"When we got out of the woods the only elves nearby were attacking the standard of Prince Tako III, the heir to the southern provinces. Well, we still had thirty healthy fighters and we joined in. With the aid of surprise and the lack of reinforcements for the elves we were victorious again, I got seven personal kills I might add.

"The Prince was wounded. We were cut off from our main lines by about 15,000 Elves and we had nowhere to go except on to the elves capital, which was unguarded.

"We soon decided that only twelve of us could not make a frontal attack on the capital so we tried to think of a way to save the Prince's life. The only plan we could think of was to ride the Elves' horses, a prospect which we dreaded.

"We drew lots and I was one of the three who lost. The losers got to ride the horses, which we barely managed to do. We made it past the elvish checkpoints by night and saved the life of the Prince.

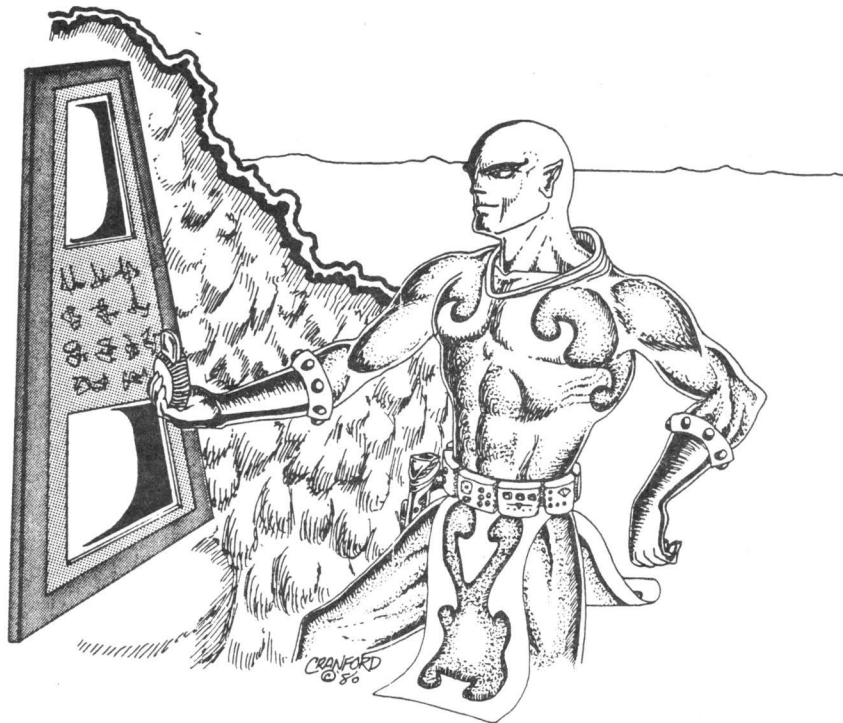
"I only found out later about the horrible outcome of the battle."

The story finished, Lorin looks over to Thuri and says victoriously, "There, I told you he had ridden a horse." Awe shines on the youth's face at actually being with one of the famous three who had saved Prince Tako. He starts to apologise when an arrow pierces his throat. His words are lost in a gurgle of blood. More arrows fly out of the woods and Barogo and Lorin lunge towards a group of five elvish archers, their axes ready for the kill. The first two elves fall before they can drop their bows, both the heads cleanly severed from their torsos. The other three quickly follow, two more left headless, and the other bleeding from the stump of a severed leg.

"To arms," yells Lorin, but an instant later he falls among the bodies of the Elves he just helped to kill, a dozen arrows piercing his body. Elves swarm from the woods meeting little resistance to their surprise attack. A group of five Elves rush Barogo. He snatches up Lorin's axe and throws it at the leading foe. The Elf drops with the axe in his chest. Half a dozen more arrows fly by Barogo's head to shatter against a nearby tree. He whirls and drops to the ground feigning death. He rolls behind a tree in the confusion. The rushing Elves pass him by and he stops the last with his axe. The Elf falls heavily. He is among the many to die that night.

Barogo runs away from the river through the chaos of the battle, hoping to meet with the main body of the Dwarvish force. Instead he finds two more Elves with bows. The first Elf falls before he knows what has happened. The second hesitates for a moment, but that is enough for Barogo. He runs ten feet between the two enemies, carried with surprising speed by his short legs. They fall to the ground in a death dance grapple. Hands close on necks and both combatants struggle for air and an advantage. Barogo reaches for a knife at his hip and drives it into the skull of the Elf. A red torrent of gore floods from the wound, but the Dwarf does not relax, not yet.

He rolls off the body, groping for his axe that is still embedded in the skull of the other Elf. A hate-filled voice shouts from behind, "Die Dwarven Filth!" Rolling to his back Barogo sees an Elf with an arrow notched and aimed at his head. The Elf looses the shaft and it pierces the Dwarf's eye. The Barogo reels, his nerve endings scream their warnings to his brain, but too late. The battle is over.



MIXING IN SCIENCE FICTION

BRIAN MACAFFEE

Whenever someone comes up with an adventure which smacks a bit of Science rather than Sorcery murmurs of "Obscenity", or "that's not magic" tend to disrupt the flow of play. While Science Fiction is just as much a part of the greater world of Fantasy as Swords and Sorcery is, many people feel that the two realms must be kept eternally and totally separate, and react poorly if they are mixed. Yet, there is a point where even experts acknowledge that Magic and Technology become inseparable.

This prejudice is even reflected in many rule-systems. There is no way that you could take the general rules from a system like RUNEQUEST, AD&D, or CHIVALRY & SORCERY and run a campaign which is outside of the medieval and magical framework. These systems are too fixed in the pattern of Fantasy Role Playing which emphasizes magic and hand-to-hand combat.

Yet, many of the finest Fantasy novels hover in the grey area between Science Fiction and Swords and Sorcery. For example Nine Princes in Amber and Creatures of Light and Darkness by Roger Zelazny, Marion Zimmer Bradley's Dar-kover, Andre Norton's Witchworld, or Larry Niven's The Magic Goes Away. All of these excellent novels mix genres to achieve a superior effect.

Traditionally Fantasy Role-Playing has been either Science Fiction or Fantasy Adventure, never both together. Many players react adversely when you bring in technology in a Swords & Sorcery adventure, partly because they are unfamiliar, and partly because most rule systems do not work well for both types of adventure.

I'd like to suggest the option of mixing these two genres, or playing on the edge where the two meet. This allows play in new periods and new circumstances. Instead of the traditional Medieval analog world you can enter into something unusual like the modern magic world of Randall Garrett's Lord Darcy series, or Poul Anderson's Operation Chaos. Because of the unadaptable nature of most systems you will probably have to enter this new realm by deemphasizing the rule system and encouraging role-playing and world-interaction. This is not a bad idea, as rule-emphasis often discourages role-playing. Fantasy adventure is mostly a game of the mind, and if players cooperate, a good GM should be able to get by winging it where the rules don't serve. Some systems can adapt to other milieu as well. TUNNELS & TROLLS is general enough to be fitted to any world, and THE NEW YSGARTH RULES are realistic enough that they cover almost any contingency.

The real challenge in doing this is to the GM, who must break out of his accustomed field of play and develop something really new and challenging for his players. To get ideas for this I heartily recommend reading several of the modern fantasy books listed at the end of this article. They give some new perspectives on different time periods for play and on mixing SF and S&S. Try this. If it is done logically and with a lot of thought it can end the blah aspects of traditional FRPing.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

Murder and Magic, Randall Garrett
Too Many Magicians, Randall Garrett
A Plague of Nightmares, Adrian Cole
The Hostage of Zir, L. Sprague De Camp
Creatures of Light & Darkness, R. Zelazny
Nine Princes in Amber, Roger Zelazny

The Virgin & The Wheels, L. Sprague DeCamp
Operation Chaos, Poul Anderson
Waldo & Magic, Inc., Robert Heinlein
The Maker of Universes, P. J. Farmer
The Gates of Creation, P. J. Farmer
A Private Cosmos, P. J. Farmer

CHALLENGE OF CHAMPIONS

MARC LECOS

This is the first in a series about a series of events in the world of Ysgarth as taken down from notes by various GMs and players. It is an example of strategic level play where high-level players interact in the campaign society, rather than normal characters on a more structured adventure.

Manaluch tapped his long fingernails on the enameled inlay of the arm of his throne. He surveyed the domes and towers of the Holy City as he looked out towards the west, where Ptolemeias seethed with activity just beyond the horizon. Much was happening in Ptolemeias, events of concern to him and all the other followers of the Sacred Flame. Great events shook the Street of the Gods in the City, and he saw the opportunity to advance his faith.

In Ptolemeias Thane Ormsson also sat on a throne. He sat at the head of a table in the Hall of Odin feasting with the Asar and his Sword-Brothers in the faith. The deft hands of slaves brought food and drink, and all eyes were fixed on the dancing slave-girls in the middle of the hall.

Thane clapped his hands and the girls scurried away. Two large warriors came through the door, dragging an unwilling burden into the hall. They were

followed by two very worried-looking priests in blue robes, and a tall man in a black cloak and hood. The dirty man in chains was cast on the tiles at Thane's feet as the table was removed. Lokar, Chief Asar in the city stepped forward and whispered in Thane's ear.

a black cloak and hood. The struggling package, a dirty man in chains was thrown to the floor and the two unhappy priests came forward to flank him. The table was removed, and Lokar, Chief Asar in the City whispered a few words in Thane's ear.

The burly Champion of Odin took out his sword, the Brihtsbrand and laid it across his knees. A look of almost perverse pleasure curled his lips and he spoke:

"Val Thalion, you stand before me, champion of the false god Hastur. I commend your bravery in battle and regret your choice of the wrong faith. For having the wisdom to yield I will offer you a boon. If you choose to convert to the true faith of the Aesir, I will not take your life, and you will only suffer exile from the City for five years, naturally the faith of Hastur will also be exiled, as is the practice for a faith whose champion loses a challenge. Well, what do you say, death? Or conversion and exile?"

For the first time the prisoner looked up. The two priests of Hastur looked down on him disapprovingly. As he raised himself to his knees his scars were clear, fresh sword-cuts down his brow and across his chest, the signature of Thane's blade. He turned a bruised eye to the two priests, first one, then the other, spat blood on the floor and spoke:

"Very well, Ormsson, I've no love for a god too weak to let my arm prevail. Your master must be stronger, sign me up!"

Lokar said a few words over Val Thalion as the Priests of Hastur were ushered out. Val Thalion followed soon after. After a few jokes and a bit more meade the party dissolved and started out across town to sack the temple of Hastur. To the victor go the spoils.

In the Holy City, mountain fastness of the Flame Gods, Manaluch paced his tower chambers. With Val Thalion exiled the hold of Odin on the city was even more secure. Something would have to be done to restore the glory of the flame, but what?

Without even a knock, his door burst open. "Hola, Manny, how's the High Priest business?" With a laugh a short, gaudily dressed man sauntered into the room, his long sword slapping on his thigh.

"Well I'll be....Eye of the Demon, Girithaur!"

"You know me? I'm flattered, why it must be...well, weeks at least. How goes it?"

"You've heard about Val Thalion? Thane just gloats more. Something must be done."

"I know," he patted his sword, "I and Wraithmaster have the answer."

"So you've decided. I'm pleased. I was afraid we would have to call in the Dark Pursuer himself."

"No, let that mouldy pissant rust in his castle. I've had a visitation, Manny, Amon Ra himself spoke to me and pressed the mission on me. I will fight Thane Ormsson, and with the power of the Sun I shall be victorious. Once again the symbol of the Sacred Flame will shine in Ptolemeias, and all the true gods, Ra, Horus, Osiris, Anubis, yes, even Gilrod, shall be properly honored."

"Well," Manaluch motioned him to a seat, "If you're so fired up to fight, what are you doing here, so far from Ptolemeias and your challenge. Don't tell me you've finally decided to take my advice and make Gilrod your oath-god?"

"No, Son of Pwyll, I am still loyal to Ra and still his champion. To be truthful," He lowered his voice, "I've come to ask you a favor..."

FEEDBACK RESULTS: ABYSS #14

ARTICLE	RATING	CHANGE	ARTICLE	RATING
In the Speculum	64	+9	The Burnout Magic System	84
Backgrounding	95	+23	Quo Vadis?	85
Guess What's Coming to Dinner	53	-2	Glossary	62
From Vidar's Forge	63	-9	A Balanced Experience System	75
Apprentice & Adept	66	-7	The Ninja	70
Mini-Adventure #5	90	-3		

Worst Article: Burnout Magic System

ART:Mark Wiker 56 +31
 Karl Zivek 95 +36
 Byron Estes 51 ---

This issue got fairly even response. Two articles tied for 2nd worst, GWCID and the Glossary. The issue came out with an overall rating of 72, which puts it 4 points higher than #13, but still not as high as #12 which was a 75 overall. It is 7 better than #11 which was only 65. Regular features were up by 11.

A CROWN OF STARS

There are many Science Fiction play-by-mail games on the market. We're testing out our entry into the field and are looking for people interested in playing in the prototype game. ACOS is similar to games like STARWEB or PELLIC QUEST, but it has several interesting and unusual features, such as 3D coordinate movement, nine-separate character classes, and individualized ship design.

The cost for ACOS is only \$10.00 to set up, about half of most similar games, and the cost per turn runs between 1 and 2 dollars. Turns are processed about once a month. The set-up fee includes the rules and \$3 towards the turn cost.

If you are interested in trying ACOS out, send in a note and we will get a sign-up form to you with all possible speed. This prototype may run a bit roughly at first, but it should be an interesting experience.

THE YSGARTH RULE SYSTEM

This is an updated revision of the NEW YSGARTH RULES, simplified and made more consistent. It is scheduled for December release. It will be a complete system in 6 20+ page booklets covering every aspect of the game. Book 1 will be on character creation. Book 2 will be on combat and Warriors. Book 3 will be on Magic Using characters and magic use. Book 4 will be on Clerical characters and religion. Book 5 will be on world and adventure design. Book 6 will be a complete adventure with a good selection of monsters and magic items. Some of the highlights of the system are the excellent skill system, the large number of character classes, and the realistic systems for combat and magic.

Each booklet will sell for \$2.00, but the complete set will be only \$10.00 plus \$1 for postage and handling. If you order before December there is a special \$1 reduction off the price for the set.

RAGNAROK ENTERPRISES T-SHIRTS

These unusually attractive T-Shirts are still available, though only in a limited quantity. They bear the striking dragon logo by Karl Zivek, and come in Green, Orange, Beige, White, or Yellow. Sizes are Extra-Small, Small, Medium, Large, and Extra-Large. They are all color-fast, washable cotton. There may be some delay with some orders because of lack of supply, but we will re-order in those cases, but our printer is not fast. The cost is \$7 plus \$1 for Postage and Handling.

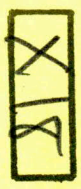
FEEDBACK

Please respond to the following items and send in the form. Rate all of the items on a 1 to 100 scale, with 100 as great and 1 as horrible. Indicate your favorite and least favorite articles in the spaces indicated. Send in the form by November 1st. Answer any other questions as well.

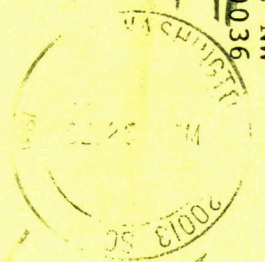
In the Speculum	_____	Should Magic Items be Crooked?	_____
From Vidar's Forge	_____	Fantasy Role Playing and the Fanatics	_____
Skills & Training	_____	On Designing Magic Items	_____
Backgrounding	_____	Characteristic Based Saving Throw System	_____
The Arts Arcane	_____	Two Traps	_____
Filling the Pentacle	_____	A Summer's Dream	_____
		Mixing in Science Fiction	_____
		Challenge of Champions	_____
ART:Mike Cranford	_____		
Karl Zivek	_____		
Byron Estes	_____	Best Article	_____
Mark Wiker	_____	Worst Article	_____

Other Magazines which you read regularly _____

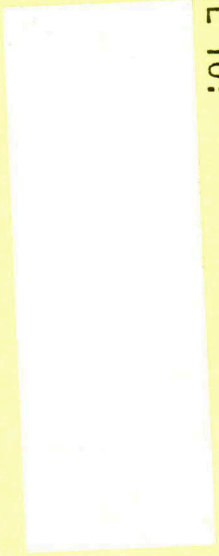
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