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New Realms of Fantasy

# ALYS

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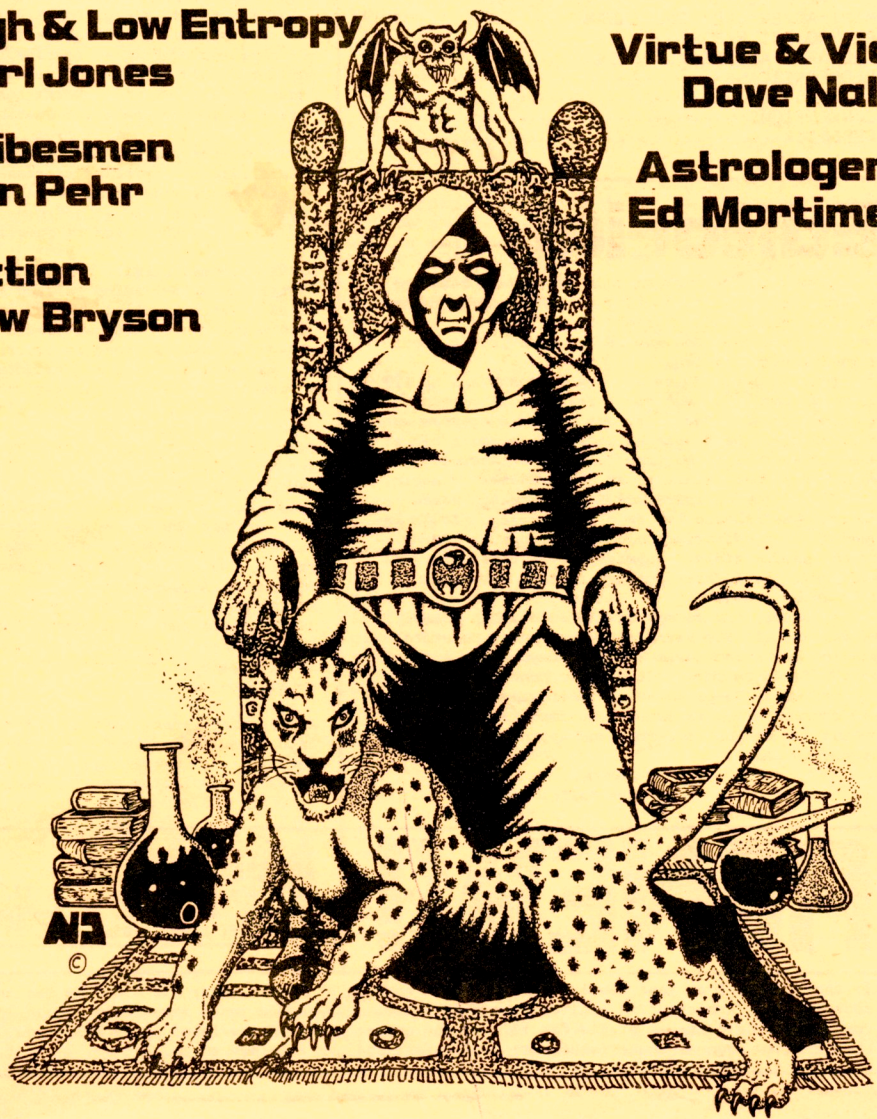
**High & Low Entropy**  
**Carl Jones**

**Virtue & Vice**  
**Dave Nalle**

**Tribesmen**  
**Ron Pehr**

**Astrologers**  
**Ed Mortimer**

**Fiction**  
**Lew Bryson**



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# Editorial

Summer is approaching fast and we are starting to catch up with the backlog of publications caused by the Ysgarth Rule System. This issue is a little behind schedule. You should be receiving it about a week later than usual.

This is a solid issue. Lew Bryson wraps up his long-running tale, but don't fear, he is working on another serial. Ron Pehr, one of our long-time contributors, is back with an interesting short piece. Also of note is Ed Mortimer's piece on Astrology, which adds some detail to an obscure area of magic.

This issue we introduce *BerserkerGang*, a new column which should run fairly regularly. It is intended as an editorial column on trends in FRP or the gaming field. Submissions in this vein are welcomed. Carl Jones' column in this issue can be used as an example.

As usual, try to spread the word about ABYSS. We can use all the exposure we can get. Do write with comments and ideas which go beyond the limits of the feedback form. It is your continued aid and support which keeps ABYSS an interesting magazine, and communication is especially important during a period of changes in format and approach. I Hope to hear from you.

Dave Nalle

# RENEW!

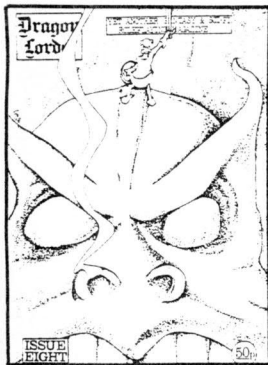
## ART CREDITS

Nequi Dharsee: Cover, 5, 16, 17, 18; Mike Cranford: 6, 12; Tom Curtin: 7, 8; Valerie Olson: 14, 15.

If there is an X on your label after the issue number, or in pen under the A on the return address, your subscription expires with this issue. You should renew immediately at the low cost of \$5 for 6 issues or \$10 for 12. If the number given on the label is 19 or 20 you should renew soon as those issues are coming fast and the rate may go up.

# IN THE SPECULUM

In the past few months we've been deluged with fanzines and APAs from all over the world. I've divided these into two groups for review, on more or less arbitrary lines. The first set are reviewed here in the format used in ABYSS #15. Ratings are on a 1-9 scale.



**DRAGON LORDS**  
5 Yew Tree Close, Broadstairs, Kent CT10 2LR ENGLAND  
Appearance:8, Content:9, Value:6, Personal:8, Overall:8

It's always encouraging to start with the best, and this is one of the best fanzines I've seen in quite a while. In many ways it is similar to ABYSS, with a lot of opinion articles and pointed commentary. DRAGON LORDS is highly satirical and very interesting, though many references are to obscure local events. It is a fine zine, but not, perhaps, for everyone.

An issue is 28 6x8 pages on standard paper with the cover on heavier stock. Subscriptions are £3.60 for 6 issues, and a copy is 60p. Write to get the exact rates outside of England. I have #s 8 & 9 on hand. They are of even quality, and feature a few known writers, like Paul Mason and Ian Marsh. Some topics covered include weapon fatigue, mages in society, sexism, games day, androids, and others. There are several adventure scenarios which are far above the normal fanzine level, and

none of the all-too-common listings of illogical creatures and magic items. The art is good for its type, though the preponderance of ducks is reminiscent of WYRMS FOOTNOTES. It took second place at Games Day this past year, behind THE BEHOLDER, though I think they could be switched.

On the whole this is a fanzine I would recommend to everyone who has a good sense of humor and wants to get a lighter insight into British FRP'ing, along with good, mature ideas and variants.

**PHANTASY**  
187 Quarry Brook Dr., South Windsor, CT 06074  
Appearance:5, Content:6, Value:2, Personal:6, Overall:5

This is one of a batch of new American fanzines. While it is a bit overpriced, and still limited in several areas, PHANTASY shows strong potential and



could become a first class fanzine with a little work and experience.

PHANTASY is 20 8 1/2 by 11 pages of full sized type with profuse, if rather sloppy illustrations. An unfortunate amount of space is given to advertising and filler material, and there are some problems, such as two introductory columns which would be combined. The art is passable in quality, but takes up too much space, and most of the articles are not really fully developed. There are a number of good pieces in #4, including ones on social standing and fumbles. Subscriptions are \$9 for six bi-monthly issues, a copy is \$1.50.

This is essentially a good fanzine, though it could be condensed and cleaned up a bit. I can recommend it in general, but I hope that it will continue to grow and realize its considerable potential. Reading it interested me, but I was left with an unsatisfied feeling when I put it down.

**QUASITS AND QUASARS**  
8 Highfield Ave., Herpenden, Herts ENGLAND  
Appearance:6, Content:8, Value:8, Personal:5, Overall:7

This is another good offering from England. It is a shade below DRAGON LORDS in quality of content, tending towards the annoying Monsters & Modules syndrome which is so common in some fanzines. Q&Q makes a serious effort to

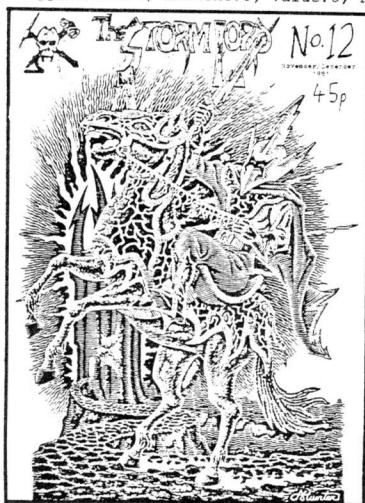


to cover a number of different rule systems with variants, scenarios, and commentary.

Q&Q is 36 6x8 pages on standard paper, xeroxed, with a cover on heavy stock. A copy is 60p, and subscriptions are £4.60 for 8 issues. You should query for US rates. Q&Q seems heavy on adventures, at least this is the case in #2. There are four in this issue, one each for D&D, RQ, Traveller, and Gangster. These are all short and seem reasonably well done. There are also monsters for several systems, reviews, magic items, and an article on lycanthropes. There is also a really useless article on geomorphs, though this is a personal dislike. On the whole I can't recommend Q&Q as highly as DRAGON LORDS, but it is a cut above most common fanzines, and shows a level of effort and interest which might lead to an eventual change for the better in content and style. It is certainly a good buy for those looking for more monsters and new scenarios.



THE STORMLORD  
25 Abbots Close, Onslow Village, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 5RW ENGLAND  
Appearance:7, Content:6, Value:8, Personal:4, Overall:7



This is one of the older FRP zines in England. It has improved since the last issue I looked at, but it is still not the best from the UK, though it seems to maintain a consistent level of quality, and has some excellent art, including some by Mike Cranford.

I have #12 on hand. It is 28 8x11 1/2 pages with heavy stock covers. Print is normal size. Most of this issue is devoted to a lengthy but interesting D&D scenario, so I have to reserve judgement on the magazine as a whole, as this issue may not be representative. In addition there are reviews, news, opinion, a brief piece on traps, and a bit of short fiction. SL seems to be in the same class as DL and Q&Q, but it is edited in a style which seems to be between those of the other two zines. It doesn't have the massive monsters and modules of Q&Q, but it has not reached the level of critical alacrity of DL. If anything, it seems too well balanced. It is certainly worth looking into, though I wouldn't recommend it with out reservation. It is 45p a copy. As usual, it is a good idea to write for costs. Most of the material is aimed at D&D and D&D variants.

# primitive tribesmen

## ronald pehr

It can be a challenge to play a character who is not only very different from yourself, but also unique within the context of the fantasy world. The Tribesman is such a character, a character from a savage, even stone-age culture on the fringes of the civilised lands. The Tribesman will have little knowledge beyond the limits of his training and tribal customs. He is more out of place in glittering, walled cities, among merchants and mages, than a player himself.

When a Tribesman interacts with other it will probably be in the context of an adventure in the delights and pleasures of civilisation, though as an adult he may be set in his ways and adhere to familiar methods and stratagems, rather than adopt strange customs and practices. Thus, the Tribesman might be in a somewhat sub-dominant position among civilised characters, not accorded full respect, but recognized and accepted for his special talents. An example might be the American Indian cavalry scout, or an African jungle guide. Sort of local talent to help "civilized" characters survive in primitive regions in which he is more at home than they are.

In combat Tribesmen should be handled in more or less the same way as any other warrior type, though it might be logical to modify skills and weapon use appropriately.

Primitive Tribesmen are superstitious and believe in magic, but they have not yet found the secrets of arcane power known to the civilized spellcaster. Thus, they should not be mages of any type, and might even have a small minus on their spell Saving Throw. Some few Tribesmen can be Shamans, with appropriate powers as given in D&D, or with general minor priestly or druidic powers.

Weapons preferred by primitives include spear, club, blowgun, knife, shortbow, and a number of unusual and specialized weapons appropriate to the needs of their society. Tribesmen are not comfortable with unfamiliar weapons, and should be given a minus with the sophisticated weapons preferred by civilized peoples.

Armor follows the pattern set by weapons. Light leather and animal skins are alright, but he will never feel at home in metal armor. They may use round, hide shields, or wicker shields, varying exact armor and shield design from tribe to tribe.

Tribesmen should be baffled by the workings of magic items, except those which work simply, require little puzzling out, or are automatic. They are mostly illiterate. Books or scrolls would be beyond their understanding or use.

What makes the Tribesman valuable as an adventurer are his special skills and knowledge. They should be allowed to hide in shadow, move silently, climb unusually well, and hear exceptionally. They should have the trailing skill of a Ranger type in addition to these thief-like skills. They also have limited natural talent in predicting weather and the like. As they are close to nature they can understand the actions of animals and hunt unusually well.



# ***Virtue & Vice: Fantasy Archetypes***

***Dave Nalle***

One problem which faces many GMs is that of giving character and life to the non-player characters of a fantasy world. It is easy of a player to make his few characters well-rounded and believable, with complete personalities, but the GM has to deal with hundreds of characters, each of whom is theoretically as real as any Player Character. Unfortunately, no GM has the time needed to work every encounter, monster, and NPC out completely. For encounters and incidents to be fun the NPCs really have to have personalities, but giving them more than rudimentary, knee-jerk responses is difficult even for the most industrious GM.

Fantasy Role-Playing is based in a tradition of great fantastical literature, and the answer to this problem can be found at the roots of imaginative fiction. Modern literature can give some ideas for characterization, but the best source for what can be called "stock characterization" are the works of early English masters, especially Chaucer and Shakespeare. These early writers used a popular technique for filling in the background characters who support the main characters of a tale. Through a good understanding of human nature and some common personality patterns they were able to isolate the principles and elements which call up the image of a personality in the reader with little more than a few key ideas. Such characters lie dormant in everyone's mind, all you need to know are the triggers which bring them out. With this technique you can define a NPC in a few words and let the complex connotations in the player's mind do your work for you.

An easy way to approach this is through the use of archetypes, especially the Virtues and Vices. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance characters were thought to be formed by their virtues and vices, and the level of intensity of these. This system can work very well for defining the personality of a fantas character. Virtue or vice in a character is significant in its intensity or its absence, and both virtue and vice are divided into 7 specific areas.

There are seven vices. They are: pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice, and sloth. Each person possesses these qualities to a greater or lesser degree, or has the negative parallel quality, such as: humility, even temper, complacency, chastity, moderacy, generosity, and industriousness. A good way to deal with this is to rate characters from 1-9 in each area, with 5 being an exact balance, 1 being the ultimate of the negative quality, and 9 the ultimate of the positive. For example a character rated 6 for pride would be slightly prideful, while one rated 2 for lust would be quite chaste. All 7 should be rated for a fully developed character, and the interaction of them and the next 7 can create a believable personality.

There are also seven virtues. They are: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperence. They also have their opposites, which you can determine. A 1-9 scale can also be used.

Thus, by defining these basic, general traits we can have a personality, even in numerical terms. For example, a character could be defined thus: Pride-7, Wrath-8, Lust 3, Gluttony-3, Avarice-4, Sloth-1, Faith-9, Hope-5, Charity-4, Prudence-4, Justice-5, Fortitude-8, Temperence-4. This gives us a good outline for a holy warrior type, with his physical vices subverted to his mental vices, and his physical virtues dominant. Note that his highest are Pride, Wrath, Faith, and Fortitude, while his lowest are Sloth, Lust, and Gluttony. Alternatively you can just list his top and bottom 3 or so qualities as a character definition. A normal person would have straight 5s.

This system can even be used to replace a traditional alignment system, and you could let players assign values in each of their areas for their characters. It gives a much better idea of what the character is like than any of the traditional polar alignment systems. For quick monster definition you can even replace Faith with Zeal, and use single letter definitions in writing the creature's personality. For example the character above might be PWFZ+/SLG-.

This is virtually an inifinatly flexible system, and you can go almost anywhere with it or with some minor modifications and changes appropriate to your campaign. Of course, there will still be instances where it is better to use detailed description to define the personality of an NPC, though this can be a great aid in many situations.



# THE LIBERATORS

## LEW BRYSON

Lew and his on-going story are back this issue, with the final instalment in the series. But fear not. Next issue Lew will bring us an epilogue to the series, and he will be starting a new fiction/humor series in #20. The illustrations in this installment and in the epilogue are by Tom Curtin, who you may know better as Mithrandir the Masked. Previous installments are in ABYSS #5/6, #7, #9, #12, #16, and #17.

One thought occupied Unferth's mind as he peered through the arrow-slit at the square; how the hell are we going to get out of this one? The square was ringed by 30 troops, in addition the 18 surviving soldiers of the late Baron were covering the back of the Inn of the Stunned Cow. Unferth loosed an arrow at a guard dim enough to stand to shoot another fire arrow, and watched abstractly as the arrow pierced the guard's throat. 29 in the square. The real problem was that the inn was burning. They couldn't escape through the trapdoors; Talo had tried and was almost skewered by a hobbit arrow. They'd have to fight.

"Hey, blondie! What're we gonna do?" Mithrandir stomped in from the kitchen, munching a mutton chop. "These guys are really pissed, and the damned building's burning down. Let's get hoppin', Captain Blood!"

Unferth's fingers twitched with the desire to wring the wizard's neck. "You magical maladroït! You got us into this, now get us out! I'm a master strategist, not a trench-trotting tactician!" He turned from Mithrandir. "Everybody! Get down here!" The mercs and Implotius came running from upstairs and thr front room, while Talos and Alroy came in from the kitchen. "Well, what are we going to do? Did anyone knock off any more guards?" The mercs had picked off three in the square and Alroy had nailed one in the alley. "Any ideas?"

"I do." Unferth stared. He hadn't expected to hear from Alroy.

"What is it, Alroy?"

"Let's kill them all and then leave." He grinned.

Unferth shuddered. "Very good, Alroy. Go kill some."

As the halfwit walked to an arrowslit, Implotius tapped Unferth on the shoulder. "Frey's piggy, I'm plagued by crazies! What do you want?" Implotius had a mug in his hand. He threw it up in the air, and it came down and hit him on the head. Unferth's jaw sagged as the Greek picked up the mug and handed it to him. "He's cracked! I've cracked!" Unferth went for his sword hilt. Mithrandir tackled him. "He's crazy alright, but he's not stupid! Let's see what he means before you scrag him." The wizard helped the Viking stand up.

Implotius drew Mimir and motioned for Unferth to throw the mug at him. With undisguised pleasurer Unferth hurled the mug right at the Greek's head, and they watched as it shattered in mid-air about three feet from him.

"Gilrod's gonadsm he's got missile protection!" Mithrandir crowed. The Greek smiled and bowed. Unferth felt sanity returning. With it came an idea. He turned to Talos. "Can you change into one of those bulettes?"

"Sure, I guess."

"Does anyone know if there's a trapdoor to the roof?" One of the mercenaries said he had seen one in an upstairs room. "Excellent!"

"Make it fast Nordic, it's getting smoky in here," grumbled Mithrandir. Unferth quickly outlined his plan and they took their positions.

They had spotted five of the guards huddled against one wall of a back room. Mithrandir stood by it, a nimbus of power glowing around his fingers. He shouted "Now!", thrust his hand through an arrow slit, and pointed along the wall down the alley, and fired. The bolt smashed into the knot of men, frying two and stunning the other three. Mithrandir raced to the front room.

At Mithrandir's signal Implotius popped out onto the roof. The smoke was thick, and he was coughing already. He loaded a special stone into his sling and looked down into the square. There were three men hiding in the abandoned oxcart and eight more behind the shelter of the well. He slung the stone in the direction of the well, drew Mimir, and ran to the edge of the roof, silent in his soft leather boots. He jumped over the flames into the oxcart. A man in the cart looked up just in time to see the heels of the boots which landed in his face, snapping his neck. Mimir took the head off a second guard, and Implotius heard a growl from the well. Talos had shifted from sling-stone to land shark and charged the troops there. Implotius casually parried the third guard's blows as he watched limbs flying from behind the well.

The screams of the guards and Talos' uncharacteristic roars could even be heard inside the inn. Unferth threw open the doors and led the charge. Implotius dispatched the last man and lashed his team. "YAAAH!!!" The cart flew past the doors as Alroy, Mithrandir and Unferth vaulted in an crouched down behind the barrels.

Implotius wrenched the oxcart up onto the porch of the neighboring house towards two guards who were hiding behind a door. They saw a half-naked berserker riding out of a hell of smoke and fire waving a blue sword. Unferth axed one and they ran the other down as he fled. Implotius bounced the oxchariot off the wall in a careening right turn and charged another guard, crushing his falling body as it sprouted two throwing knives.

Mithrandir hung to the cart as it bounced along the porch. There was another oxcart ahead on the right. There were guards behind it! Scum! He leapt,



shifting to bulette form. "RRRAAKGHRR!!" The four guards loosed arrows at the apparition, three went wild, and a fourth glanced off the tough hide. Mithrandir landed on the backs of the oxen and jumped from there on two more guards, clawing the guts out of one and shredding the face of the other. Standing in the steaming entrails, he saw the third guard crushed by the hooves of the enraged oxen, and the fourth folded over a penguin-hilted knife in his gut. Damn! Nothing to do! The Greek steered the cart around the corner towards the back alley. Accross the square Talos was bounding after five running guards. Mithrandir went to join in.

As the oxcart turned the corner, Alroy rose, buckling on his belt. His hands flew to two of the twenty knives hanging there as the two guards rounded the corner, drawing their bows. He jumped high in the air over their arrows, releasing his knives at the top of his leap. Unfortunately he forgot that he was leaping from a moving platform. All three men fell to the ground together, two dead, one very confused. He looked up to see the cart rounding the corner, and ran after it.

Talos was going wild. He had butchered eight men at the well and was closing with five more. He grabbed a straggler, crushing his spine with one snap of his massive jaws. He shook the body, throwing it high in the air, then went after the others. He saw another bulette rush by him, run over another guard, do a flamenco on his head, and leap on the next guard, snapping his neck with a back-kick. He'd show that amateur! He ripped the nearest guard's ribcage open and literally burrowed through his chest. They raced for the last target. Talos hit him low, snapping his legs at the knees, and Mithrandir hit him high, crushing the back of his skull. They slowly returned to their true forms. "Nice work, Talos! Didn't know you had it in you!" Mithrandir wiped blood from his face. Talos looked back at the trail of mangled bodies. His eyes rolled, his knees buckled, and he fell in a dead faint.

Implotius hauled the team to the left around the corner into the alley. The five men Mithrandir had zapped lay on the left and yet another oxcart was in their path. The Greek whistled and whipped his foaming oxen, while Unferth bounced in the back, hefting his last throwing axe. He saw an officer on the right and whipped the axe at him. It went wide, and the lieutenant shot at the right-hand ox, putting an arrow in its neck. Unferth kicked one of the kegs out of the cart and followed it. The keg bounced into the front of the other cart. The impact knocked a guard out of the cart and under the hooves of the charging oxen. The other oxen went wild and crushed a guard between them. Unferth rolled for the



back door of the inn. Two guards emerged from behing a watering trough with bows drawn. He dove under the hitching post, but caught an arrow in his left thigh. Rolling under the trough, he hit the guards' shins. Two mercs came out the door and fell on the guards, cutting their throats. One of them screamed and fell with an arrow in his chest from a guard in the trash bins by the kitchen. Unferth lay helpless under the dead merc.

Implotius knew he couldn't control the wounded ox much longer. He aimed the cart at four guards by the wall. Their arrows exploded in splinters around him as he jumped off the cart bellowing "For Kos and Mimir!" Mimir split two in the first swing, and the weirdsword was screaming as the others fell in a shower of blood and shattered blades, their parries futile against its unearthly sharpness. The Greek's nostrils flared wildly as he was drawn into the sword's frenzy. He screamed in inarticulate rage as he turned to find other foes. Two guards in a narrow side alley heard his roar and fled, only to find a dead end. The Greek dispatched them quickly.

Unferth watched helplessly as the guard nocked another arrow. Then the door swung open and one of the mercs smashed the guard's helm with a mace. The viking relaxed, only to stare in horror as Implotius struck the merc down from behind in his frenzy. "Implotius!" He shrieked. The Greek saw him. He strode



# Mini-Adventure 7

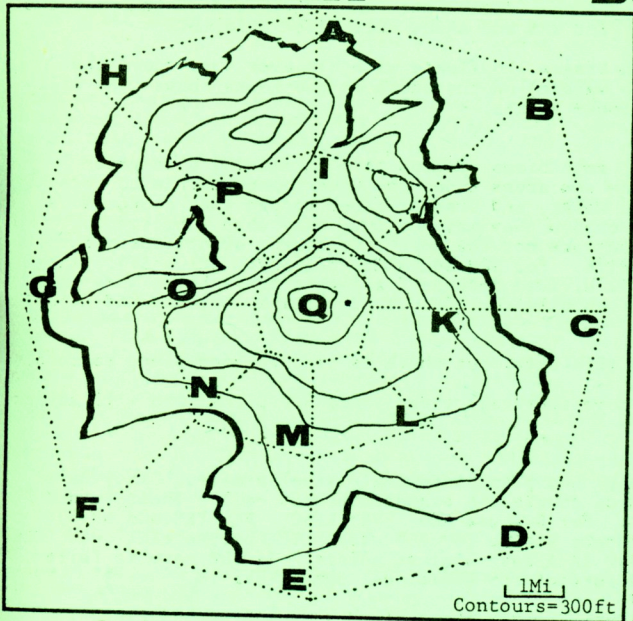
CHARACTER LEVELS: 9-12

TIME TO PLAY: 1-3 Hours

SKILL LEVEL: Advanced

## Gul Zadan

## Jan Mierik



### BACKGROUND

This scenario is set in a fantasy background parallel to the terrestrial middle-east of the early medieval period. This is a context parallel with and compatible to that of the WYRDWOROLD adventures. References are kept general enough to be fitted into any middle-eastern type world, or with a little bit of work to worlds of other types.

### INTRODUCTION

The characters (9th-12th level from YRS or D&D) are embarked on a voyage from the city of Carzal to the city of Sardis where they expect to make considerable profit in a mercantile venture. They are carrying considerable cash with them which they are to invest in Sardis for their patron, a merchant of Carzal, Ashid Al Harrad.

In the course of their journey the crew and captain of their less than totally respectable ship become aware of their large cash capital. They keep their knowledge concealed, but on the morning of the 7th day of the voyage the characters are rudely awakened and find themselves drugged and loosely bound, floating in a small boat. They have rations for 3 days with them, but all of their wealth and money is gone, as are any other valuables. The only land they can see on the horizon is an island, no more than 10 miles in diameter. They have no idea of their bearings, so it is obvious that they should land there, and they may choose their landing point.

Statistics and information for this adventure are given in terms of both the YRS and D&D, and can easily be adapted to several other systems. It should also be noted that encounters are on a regional system, marked in a web pattern. This means that a number of areas are marked out in a web shape, and encounters are keyed to these areas, meaning that a given encounter is possible in that area for which it is designated. That means that at some point while the characters are in that area they can have that encounter at the GM's discretion. Just which areas the characters move through is up to them, though their choice can be influenced by the GM and the terrain. It is possible to land their boat in any area on the outer ring of the web.

### ENCOUNTERS: THE ISLAND OF GUL ZADAN

This island is volcanic in nature, with a central, inactive peak. It is rocky but inhabitable, and unfortunately for the characters it is inhabited by a variety of powerful elementals who are ruled by Malik Kariz, King of the Marids, who has his home in the lake in the crater at "Q". More detail on the different areas follows.

A: This is the NNE coastal area of the island. It features a good, sheltered harbor at the mouth of a stream. In this area they will encounter a single Marid who lives in the water of the harbor, and tends a large herd of wild goat which live on the hills around it. The description given for the Marid below can be used as standard for most Marids. Other Marids with special characteristics will have these indicated. The Marid's name is Daryan, and he is a relatively simple soul. He is charged to watch for intruders and bring them to Malik Kariz for questioning.

#### MARID(Daryan & Standard)

These are the lords of water elementals. They can take human form, as tall, olive-skinned, dark-haired men. They can also take the form of a water-spout at sea, or up to 5 miles inland. Beyond 5 miles inland they start to get weak from not being near water. They are highly intelligent and fairly devious. They should have complete control over water and water spells, and limited power over illusions. In human form they use weapons, but they do 4D20 overall to all enveloped as a water-spout, and the victims must save against drowning. For D&D give them AC5, LV19, HP200. For YRS add AR20, DR11, AV0, DC15, ST2.

B: In this cove dwells a Sea Dragon who floats with his eyes just above the surface, looking for food to walk by on the shore or the rocks above. He will attack anything large that looks edible.

#### SEA DRAGON

These are medium-sized, amphibious dragons with shimmering blue-green scales. They live in shallow sea areas under the water, and surface to attack. They can fly once out of the water, and breathe fire, though they cannot do so under water. There is some chance they may be given away when submerged by bubbles or slight steam. They are not the most intelligent of dragons. For D&D make them AC-2, LV16, HP175. For YRS add AR18, DR3, AV6, DC10, ST4. They breathe fire at will for 5D12 divided between 3 adjacent areas hit. They also have claws for 2D8 base, or can bite for 3D6. Their tail is barbed, and hits for 1D20.

C: There is no encounter in this area, but there is also no good place to land.

D: In the rocks above this cove there are three Steel Scorpions, who will attack any intruders.

#### STEEL SCORPION

These are giant(3ft long) scorpions, seemingly steel-armored. They have powerful front pincers, and of course the standard barbed tail. Their joints are particularly vulnerable. For D&D use AC0, LV8, HP50. For YRS add AR14, DR5, AV7, DC6, ST8. The pincers strike for 2D8 each. The barbed tail does 1D20 and if it pierces flesh there is a save against poison. If the save is failed, the area begins to rot at a rate of 1D6 additional damage per CR.

E: This area can be considered to cover the entire bay which extends into F. Run up on the rocky beach here is a large row-boat. On examination it will be clear that the boat is intended for the use of beings of at least 8ft in height, and it is fireproof. Watching over it from a rock above it is Vaktalus, a Djinn, who has been set there by his comrades who are visiting Malik Kariz at the mount. He will try to stop any intruders for questioning.

#### DJINN

These are the lords of fire. They appear as tall(8ft+) humanoids with no hair and bronze skins. They have complete control over all forms of fire, and can create fire in any form at will, for 3D12 per round. They can also become a pillar of fire doing 3D20 to all enveloped. They move very fast, and also have considerable powers of illusion. They are very intelligent, sneaky, and bad-tempered. For D&D they are AC-4, LV18, HP175. For YRS add AR22, DR25, AV1, DC12, ST2. They will use weapons in human form.

F: Treat this the same as area C, with no encounter set.

G: This is the main harbor area used by the Marids. There are 3 Marids in the water of the harbor at all times, and possibly more. It is the best spot on the island to land.

H: In this area there is a nest of 10 vipers hidden among the rocks.

#### VIPER

The viper is a small, black snake with considerable leaping ability and sharp fangs. Its bite is poisonous, but not necessarily lethal, doing instead 2D20 overall damage, or half if a save is made. For D&D consider them AC1, LV1, HP10. For YRS add AR12, DR30, AV1, DC5, ST10. They do 1D6 with their bite.

I: In this rocky section of the volcano slope there is a small fissure from which steam rises. Should any pass too close a Steam Elemental will attack them with the intent of forcing them to fall to their death in the fissure, or just attacking them. It is subservient to the Marids.

#### STEAM ELEMENTAL

The steam elemental looks like a humanoid form made of animate steam. It is fairly thick, and attacks in three ways, two strikes for scald damage, and

one envelopment for overall scalding, doing double damage if a save against inhaling is not made. The damage on a strike is 2D12 bypassing armor, and overall it is 2D20. For D&D use AC-1, LV12, HP70. For YRS add AR14, DR18, AV0, DC5, ST7. All normal weapons and magical weapons do half damage, acting to dissipate the steam. Only cold or dehydration has full effect.

J: In a shallow cave on a ledge in this area dwell three mountain lions, who will leap on any passersby with surprise, for double damage, after stalking them for a bit to find a suitable opportunity.

#### MOUNTAIN LION

These are long, tawny cats who live in mountainous areas. They are climbing and leaping cats, and like to attack from behind from ledges and the like. They get two claw attacks for 2D8 each, and a bite for 1D10. For D&D they are AC6, LV10, HP60. For YRS add AR12, DR15, AV3, DC9, ST9.

K: There is a large, partially concealed cave in this area. Coming from it can be heard sounds of grunts and smashings, caused by a Sheitan who is smashing rocks with his fists to work out. He is in the employ of Malik Kariz, as a construction engineer, and feels it his duty to bring in any intruders.

#### SHEITAN

These are the greater elementals of the earth. They look like tall, extremely muscular humanoids with grey skin, craggy features, and very rough skin, almost as if they were made of rock. They are incredibly strong, the equivalent of 30 or so. They have all earth related powers, including every possible form of animation. They can merge with earth, and alter their bodily density. They are of human intelligence. For D&D treat them as AC-1, LV16, HP:200. For YRS add AR18, DR10, AV5, DC18, ST5. They do 4D12 damage with each fist, and can hug for 5D20 overall crushing if both fists hit and they choose not to use them as fists. They wrestle very well, and like physical sporting contests, and will wager hours of their service against hours of an opponent's service on wrestling and similar sports.

L: There are no encounters set for this area. It is rocky and barren.

M: In this section there are two Efreets seated on a tall rock playing craps with silver die. They will gladly welcome other players, and are part of a delegation to Malik Kariz. Rather than just take the characters in, they are interested in playing games of chance. They will bet in units of hours of time of service. They are exceptionally lucky (extra roll each at craps, extra hand in poker). They are good at spotting cheaters, and take vengeance. They will serve if they lose, and if they win they won't make service too horrible. They will use the threat of being turned in to Kariz to make the characters play.

#### EFREET

These are the lords of the air, and perhaps the most powerful of the greater elementals. They appear naturally as 10ft tall, bat-winged humanoids with black skin, red eyes, 2 human arms, 2 lion arms, horns, and eagle-clawed feet. They can take the form of a dark haired, sallow-skinned humanoid, a whirlwind, or a storm. In addition to weapon damage or hand damage, they can do 3D20 overall to any caught in the storm form, or 2 lightning-bolts for 3D10 each round in any form. They fly at incredible speed. For D&D make them AC-5, LV20, HP 175. For YRS add AR15, DR30, AV3, DC12, ST1.

N: In this area there is Chrola Magidos, a human mage serving Malik Kariz. He can be treated as a 15th level mage specializing in Weather and Water magic. In addition, he has a magical ring which grants him the power to teleport objects held into his hand into other objects, causing them to materialize inside the target, causing explosions of varying magnitude, depending on the density of the missile and the target. He is testing it when they show up, blowing up some rocks with lead pellets from a pouch. It has 5 charges. Some neat effects can be achieved.

O: In this area there are three Marids in a highly defensible observation area built into a cliff face.

P: Treat this area as identical to M, but with 3 Efreets playing.

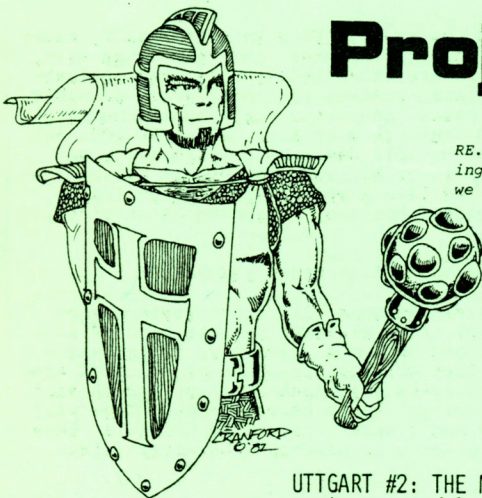
Q: This is the crater of the volcano. The lip is guarded by three Marids, and an Efreet flies ariel reconnaissance. At the bottom of the crater is a lake of clear water with an island in its center. On the island is an open palace similar in design to a Greek temple. Malik Kariz holds court there, and a spring comes from his throne to feed the lake. He is accompanied by 10 Marids, 2 Sheitan, 3 Djinn, and 4 Efreets. One Djinn is an ambassador, and is viewed with

some hostility. He is negotiating a treaty between his people and the Marids, lifelong foes. The hitch in their negotiations is the question of who's king will hold the honorary title of King of all the Greater Elementals. If the characters can help with this they will be looked on favorably. Otherwise, their general desire to get off the island will not be greeted well, and they may be abused, imprisoned, slain, or just ignored. Treat Malik Kariz as 1.5 times the power of the other Marids. Allow them several outs, such as providing amusement by wrestling a Sheitan, out-swimming a Marid, or out gambling an Efreet. Reward an outstanding effort with some small monetary or magical reward, and safe transport. Generally make them look moderately feeble, but don't kill them unless they act really foolishly. Reduce their chance of survival if they've already slain any of the greater elementals, though it should be made clear that most of them can escape on the brink of death by assuming their elemental form and regenerating slowly.

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# Project Report

Things are beginning to get going again here at RE. Given here are some of our recent or impending releases and some projects in the works which we would welcome comment on.



## THE YSGARTH RULE SYSTEM

As has already been exhausted elsewhere, the YRS is finally in print. Everything was completed one day in advance of the final deadline of March 17th, and it looks really good. Many favorable comments have already been received, and a large number of stores in several countries have decided to carry it. However, the best deal is still available to ABYSS subscribers, who can get the rules at only \$9.95 plus \$1 for postage and handling until June 1, when the price will be going up. Order now!

## UTTGAART #2: THE MOUNTAINS OF IKURNA

As announced last issue this scenario was pushed back on the schedule by the YRS delays. It is, however, ready, and is going to press right after this issue of ABYSS, so those of you who have been waiting can expect it in a couple of weeks. It should be worth the wait. It is \$1.50.

## FIELD OF HONOR

This is the tentative title of a new mini-game which is in the works for May release. It is a game of jousting in detail for multi-player, solitaire, or one-on-one play. It is looking great, along the lines of Duel Magical, which is receiving rave reviews. It should sell for around \$2.95, and you can place an advance order at that price. Title suggestions are welcome. Already rejected are Tilt and I've Got a Little List. Some other possibilities are Bend Sinister, Field of Glory, and Men of Iron. Drop us a line with your ideas.

## FLEX-FUTURES

This terrible tentative title will definitely be trashed before this one goes to production. It is scheduled for July release, and will be a SFRPG set in the near future, in the USA and space, with a number of unusual features. It will be a character classless system, with a large selection of skills. It is planned as sort of a cross between superhero, post-holocaust, and interstellar SF, similar in style to the fiction of Ron Goulart, Keith Laumer, and William Tenn, obviously in a lighter vein. Suggestions are welcome.

## PRODUCTION SCHEDULE

At this time a rough schedule of publication has been set through the end of the summer. Planned game releases include: April-Uttgart #2, Ysgarth #3; May-Field of Honor, Weirworld #7, ABYSS #19; June-Ysgarth #4; July-Uttgart #4, Weirworld #8, ABYSS #20; August-Mini-System #3, Ysgarth #5, Uttgart #5. June and July are light months because of convention work, and all is subject to massive alteration and variation.

over with murder in his bloodshot eyes. "IMPLORIUS!" He yelled again in desperation. The Greek faltered, and his senses returned. Mimir slipped from his grasp and fell in the trough with a hiss of steam.

They met in the square. Talos put out the fire as an ice elemental. Alroy had dispatched the wounded. Dawn was nearing, and they were all exhausted. "Let's wash up and get pretty. We're going to make this our town, so we have to convince them we're nice boys."

"What's that? Live here? What are you talking about? It's full of those little hobbits!" Mithrandir's voice sailed up into the falsetto.

Unferth set out to explain. "I've got this idea. Who have we eliminated? The lord, his troups, some hobbits of course, and some fat merchants. This is going to make us unpopular? How many people live here? Maybe 700. We've got 100,000 Djals. We can give each of them 20 Djals and still have 86,000 to invest and turn this place into a gold mine. We can make the castle into a brewery. We bring in brewers, bakers, carpenters, actors, musicians, courtesans, conjurors. We keep it clean, with minimal law and order, keep the beer flowing, and we've got a racket that can't be beat. Anyone with money to spend will be here, and that brings more money. We just invest some gold and it will draw in more. We'll call it...Brewski Gardens!"

"And what's in it for us?" asked the wizard.

"5% off the top, and all the hobbits you can kick."

"It's a deal, barbarian!" The wizard grinned and shook Unferth's hand.

After they had cleaned up, they sent the mercs through the village to announce a meeting in the square. When the crowd had gathered they emerged from the fire blackened building. Unferth walked to the edge of the porch. Implorius and Alroy walked through the crowd to the well. Talos and Mithrandir went around to the sides of the square.

"Greetings, townsfolk! Last night you saw me as the villain in a play, crushing rebellion in a village. Today you see me as a liberator, bringing freedom and prosperity to this village! My friends and I have broken the grip of Baron What's-his-name and his oppressive troops. We plan to make every one of you wealthy! Starting today, there will be no more taxes!"

A hobbit heckler broke in. "Yeah, we've heard that bullshit before. Next you'll tell us you're going to give us money! I don't..." His tirade was cut off when Implorius picked him up and dropped him down the well. The crowd laughed.

Unferth spoke quickly. "I am going to say that! In return for any damage which you may think we've done, we are giving each one of you 20 Djals!" The crowd gaped in silence. "Just pass through the inn and you'll get your gold." The villagers were reluctant and skeptical, but after the first shouts of joy they started to smile and press forward.

"I made a list of our take," said Mithrandir. "Want to hear it?"

"Yeah, go ahead." Unferth mumbled from beneath his broad-brimmed hat. They all held mugs of beer, and a barrel sat on the porch beside them. The square was full of dancing townsfolk. That afternoon runners had been sent to Cerngoth and the Empire with orders for material and skilled craftsmen. The castle had been inspected, the brewery discussed. Pipelines would run from the castle to every tap in the town. All had been explained to Implorius, who was delirious at the thought of unlimited beer. Riskless wealth did the same for Talos. They made Alroy Grand High Constable of Custodians. Mithrandir was Lord Mayor. Implorius, Unferth, and Talos were the board of directors. Even the name was changed, from Ballymoon to Lancaster, fabled city of delights. Mithrandir took out the list: "We have 50 Djals, one gallease, one Dharzi Dog amulet, one oxcart with oxen, two kegs of beer, three costumes...Oh, yeah, and one village." Mithrandir and Talos shook with glee, Unferth chuckled, Alroy drooled, and Implorius wondered once again just what they hell they were saying.

# THE ARTS ARCANE:

## Astrology Examined

## Ed Mortimer

*We are honored to present a new article by Ed Mortimer, who some of you may know as the editor of PEGASUS and a moving force behind the rebirth and general upgrading of Judges Guild. Ed's work has appeared in ABYSS before, in #16, and also in PEGASUS. I hope we will see more of his work here in the future.*

Astrologers are not really "Fortune Tellers", they do not use crystal balls, Tarot cards, etc., they construct star charts in order to interpret and apply the movements of the heavenly bodies.

The basic idea behind Astrology is that of Sympathy. According to most Astrologers there are Sympathetic Bonds between celestial and terrestrial things. From this stems a system of Correspondences. The most famous of these is between the signs of the zodiac and the human body. Sympathy is that power "which

circulates through all living nature, pervading all; disquieting all;...this universal sympathy or instinct(for all instinct is sympathy) is neither more or less than the secret but powerful influence of the heavenly bodies."<sup>1</sup> For example, "Saturn is by universal experience acknowledged to be the most powerful, evil, and malignant of all the planets." Among persons he represents(among others) grandfathers, paupers, monks, and gravediggers; among animals cats and dogs, "all creatures delighting in filth and breeding from putrefaction"; among plants hemlock, hellebore, poppy, mandrake, nightshade, and moss; among trees willow, pine, yew, and cypress; among birds the crow, owl, and cuckoo; among places deserts, churchyards, and all "muddy dirty stinking places, wells and nuisances of all description. His wind is the east wind and his mineral is lead."<sup>2</sup>

This concept is even extended to towns and countries, historical periods and hours of the day. For example, New York is assigned to Cancer, and the USA is assigned to Gemini. The days of the week are assigned to planets as follows: Sunday-the Sun, Monday-the Moon, Tuesday-Mars(French=Mardi), Wednesday-Mercury (French=Mercredi), Thursday=Jupiter, Friday-Venus(French=Vendredi), Saturday-Saturn.

Traditional Astrology is divided into many different forms. Natural Astrology is the fortelling of the motions of heavenly bodies, which has become the science of Astronomy. Judicial Astrology is the application of heavenly motion to earthly life. Mundane Astrology is the art of composing national horoscopes or those of national leaders. Genethiacal Astrology is the art of making horoscopes for individuals. Horary Astrology answers questions by making calculations based on the time of questioning or related events. Medical Astrology consists of medical analysis and treatments involving the 12 bio-chemical cell salts of the body by the influences of the 12 aspects of the zodiac. Electional

Astrology uses the horoscope charts to find the right moment for an undertaking, such as laying a foundation stone, christening a new ship, starting a quest, etc. Physiognomical Astrology concerns facial characteristics in relation to the influence of the stars. Talismanic Astrology is the system of the quadruple relationship of Star, Stone, Plant, and Talisman. There are also other less notable studies.

I hope this gives some idea of the historical nature of Astrology. It would take many articles to give a full, detailed treatment of the art, but this should serve as an introduction.

In a game context Astrologers can work well as Non-Player Characters. They can be treated as 0 level or 1st in systems with 1 as the minimum level. They don't carry any weapons, or if they do should have a minus of at least 3 to hit. They should be given HP on the same scale as Magic-Users.

Anyone can hire an Astrologer. For long term employment they must be salaried, and supplied with observatory, library, and living space, each of at least 200 square feet. There is also a minimum initial material expenditure of 5000GP for research materials, 10000GP for instruments, and 1000GP for general software. Salary should be 100GP per

level per month, plus food and clothing, research expenses, and special fees and bonuses for especially difficult tasks. Each extra 200GP for research adds 1% to a maximum of 20% on the table on Constructing a Talisman.

Short term employment is at 200GP/level per day. The length of employment and any additional charges depends on the difficulty of questions asked and the length of study needed. This is detailed below in the Length of Research Table. Astrologers employed briefly will not make Talimans.

The level of an Astrologer is directly related to the number of Major Areas of Astrological Knowledge he possesses. A 1st level Astrologer has 1 field, and can be considered as having minor knowledge of the others. Each year of study and employment for at least 20000GP adds 1 level and one Major Area. Nothing else can be done in a year of study. Generally only lower level Astrologers are available for hire. The Major Fields should be considered those given in the historical section.

To interpret the stars or make a talisman, consult the table given on the next page for each question. Roll 3D10 or 1D10 as needed to find the base chance to interpret the stars correctly. Medical queries are considered as a General



question, general remedies are considered Specific, and specific remedies are considered Exacting. The exact type of Talisman needed is considered a General question, constructing it is a Specific question equivalent. The 3D10 or 1D10 roll is used to find the exact percentage of accuracy added to the base percentage given above.

QUESTION IS:	GENERAL	SPECIFIC	EXACTING
In Major Area	73-100%	33-60%	13-40%
In Minor Area	51-60%	21-30%	11-20%

In addition, the time taken for research is variable, and can be found on the same basis from the table to the right.

QUESTION IS:	GENERAL	SPECIFIC	EXACTING
In Major Area	1-4 days	5-12 days	13-32 days
In Minor Area	5-12 days	13-32 days	33-60 days

Talismans can be created to perform a set magical function, depending on the material components of the Talisman, as certain elements influence sympathetic bodies. Talismans operate 7 times on command before crumbling to dust. The Talisman consists of the proper star sign engraved on the proper stone with the proper plant encased in the Talisman. Examples of related stars, stones and plants are: Aldebaran-Ruby-Spurge, Alhailoth(Rigel)-Sapphire-Horehound, Alhabor(Sirius)-Beryl-Juniper, Regulus-Garnet-Celandine, Alchimeh Abrameth(Arcturus)-Jasper-Plaintain. For an example of the effects, the Alhailoth Talisman can be made to perform one of the following functions: add 1 to INT and WIS for one day, add 1 to hit and damage on spiders, or add 10% to duration or area of one spell. If White Horehound is used: add 1 to Save against venoms, add 1 to save against pulmonary disease, cure coughs. If Black Horehound is used: add 1 to movement to 1 day(also ages person 1 year), stop hemorrhaging, effective wormer. To find exact powers for different Talismans, find a good Astrological text, or use pages 26-27 and 220-221 of TSR's Dungeon Master's Guide. Talismans cost 12000GP each, plus materials. 12 days are needed to construct one, and GM discretion and judgement is advised.

Astrologers are able to cast one Divinatory spell per level, and have a 20% chance of Psionic Powers, but these will be oriented towards Divination. Alternatively allow them one spell each from the Divine and Mystic classes in the Ysgarth Rule System. Astrologers should have characteristics falling in the following ranges if possible: STR 3-12, INT 13-18, WIS 13-18, CON 3-12, DEX 6-15, CHA 7-16.

**NOTES:**

- 1From Raphael, a 19th century English Astrologer, actually named R.C. Smith.
- 2This quote is from a book entitled Astrology by Louis MacNeice, published in 1964 by Aldus Books Ltd. in London, and distributed in the US by Doubleday. This can be a good source of more detail.

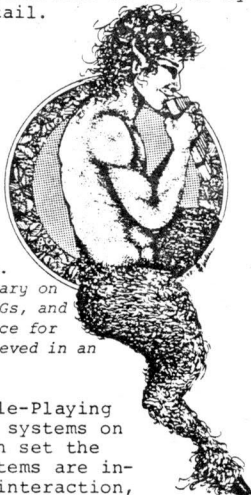
# Ysgarth Rule System

## An Examination

*The Ysgarth Rule System is our newest major release. Though it is usually not our practice to publish commentary on our own material, the YRS is a significant new step in RPGs, and thus of sufficient general interest to merit a little space for an examination at a level of detail which cannot be achieved in an ad or a plug.*

The Ysgarth Rule System is a new Fantasy Role-Playing Game System released this March. Among the many systems on the market there are several unique aspects which set the YRS apart from most other games. While most systems are intended to handle the mechanics of player and GM interaction, the YRS is the first system which is intended to actively encourage growth of character personality and the creation of realistic campaign background.

The YRS is 168 pages of text, divided into 6 booklets on the major areas of play. The pages are 8½x5½, with reduced type. There are a variety of charts and maps, and examples of all of the major play systems. There are numerous illustrations by various artists. The rules feature some 330 skills, over 300 spells, 29 character classes, and over 50 characters and creatures. The books are in a wrap-around folder with an introduction and general table of contents. The whole package is in a zip-loc bag, and sells for \$9.95 plus \$1 postage and handling.



The best way to get to know the system is to look at it piece by piece. As the YRS is divided into 6 books, we can look at the books, what they contain, and what they cover.

**Book #1: The Fantasy Character:** This is a 28 page book on setting up a character under this system. It includes all the charts and tables for determining characteristic application, plus all needed information for set-up. Of particular note are the extensive racial and tribal background sections, the large selection of native skills to round out the character, and the unusual characteristic generation method, which allows the player to literally make just what he wants of his character. Also included is a complete, worked out, character sheet, and a blank sheet for copying. On the whole this book gives a good basic understanding of the system and is a great start to building character.

**Book #2: Battlecraft:** This 32 page booklet covers combat-oriented characters. It includes skills and background for Warrior, Berserker, Thief, Assassin, and Martial Artist classes, with full information on a variety of weapons. The last third of the book is devoted to the combat system, which one playtester described as "elegant", and which is without question the most accurate and realistic combat system available. Of particular note and originality are the division of the thief class into 5 sub-classes by area of expertise, and the unusual flexibility and completeness of the combat system, especially in the area of armor and damage adjustment. It has to be seen to be understood. Also of note are the guidelines given with each class as an aid for understanding and for role-playing.

**Book #3: The Arts Arcane:** This is the longest book, at 40 pages. It has 15 magic using classes, with some basic skills and spells as well. Each class is individually designed and has its own internal systems, but they all fit into the overall magic system quite well. Some classes are more highly magic oriented, and some verge on physical science. Magic is divided by areas, and includes 4 elemental mage types, Necromancers, Sorcerers, Conjurers (Illusion), Alchemists, Beastmasters, and many others. The actual magical mechanics are simple and very effective, featuring both a highly flexible fumble system and a complementary system for spell interaction. Success in casting depends on skill and attributes, and each spell cast has a short-term cost in Fatigue, and a long-term cost in Mana. Of special interest are the Alchemy, Enchantment, Necromancy, and Demon Summoning systems. There has never been a system which has come so close to setting out empirical laws for magic.

**Book #4: Holy Orders:** This 24 page book is on Priests. Particularly interesting are the brief descriptions of 155 deities, and the large amount of background material on religions and priesthoods. A number of priest types are described and instructions are given for setting up a virtually unlimited number of other orders along the same lines. The mechanics of priestly powers is similar to that for magic, though a bit simpler. A lot of space is given to making sure that players and GMs understand the nature and role of gods in the FRP world.

**Book #5: The Fantasy World:** This 24 page book is a real standout. No GM, no matter what system he uses, should be without it. It is a compilation of scientific and practical information on every aspect of creating a realistic, economically and historically accurate, world for play. It is divided into sections on the world, people of the world, and fantasy adventures. Of major note are the excellent maps and examples from Ysgarth, including climate, flora, fauna, migration, and political maps, plus a detailed map of the city of Ptolemeias. Also excellent are the many demographic formulae and examples. There are many invaluable facts here which any GM could use.

**The Last Song of Hergest:** This is an introductory scenario, something no system should be without. It is 20 pages, of which only 6 or so are actually taken up with the scenario, which is a brief introduction to the system and really draws the players into the background and action. Most of this book is taken up by the appendices of Characters, Creatures, and Magic Items, a good selection detailing a variety of possibilities and types. On the whole it is a useful aid and introduction.





An important consideration in these times of inflation, especially in the game market, is price. The YRS literally shines here, as the most reasonably priced game or game aid on the market. At \$9.95 for 168 pages it is as low as half the price of its competitors when taken by the page. It comes out at 5.9¢ per page, as compared with Runequest's 10¢/page price, AD&D's 8.3¢/page, and Tunnels & Trolls' 9.4¢/page.

The Ysgarth Rule System is the first truly advanced system to be published. This does not mean that it is unbearably convoluted. It merely means that it is a system that has grown up, and approaches FRPping from a mature perspective. It is the ideas in the YRS which are advanced. "Advanced" D&D is not so much advanced as it is over-complicated. It is a presentation of simplistic ideas in a labyrinthine format. The YRS is the opposite end of the FRPping spectrum. It is a set of complex ideas in a simple and practical format.

The YRS is not for beginners. It is a system for the role-player who is looking to get something more from his role-playing. Even for those who are unwilling to take the step to a whole new system it is an excellent buy, because many of the sections are independent and can be adapted to most other systems with a little bit of thought and effort. Buy the YRS if you are ready to take the step from playing a fantasy game to living a fantasy adventure.

# BERSERKERGANG: ENTROPY WARS CARL JONES

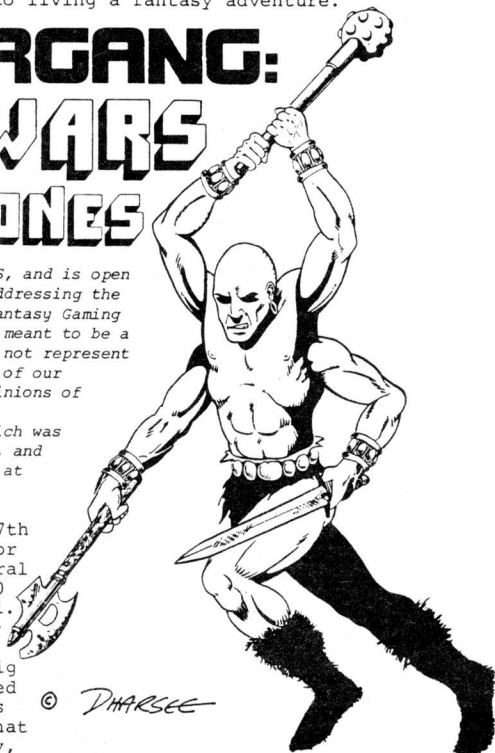
Berserkergang is a new column for ABYSS, and is open to submissions. It is an editorial column addressing the most pertinent and controversial issues in Fantasy Gaming at the time. Naturally, as the articles are meant to be a bit controversial, the opinions expressed do not represent those of ABYSS, Ragnarok Enterprises, or any of our editors. They may not even represent the opinions of the author.

This first column addresses a topic which was once the rage of the APAs and letter columns, and seems to be making a resurgence this Spring, at least in THE DRAGON.

Two players: One boasts of his 47th level Paladin with 3 Holy Swords, Armor of Purity, a Helm of Brilliance, natural missile reversal, two pet dragons, 300 mile estate, and 5 million GP bankroll. The other boasts that his 2nd level warrior has a Potion of Healing, 200GP, is almost at 3rd level. There is a big difference here, one which is reflected to varying degrees in campaigns across the country. It is a difference in what has come to be called Campaign Entropy, and it is a subject which can drive players and GMs to distraction. It can be the cause of derision and scoffing, One-True-Wayism, and culture shock when a player moves from one campaign to another.

In a High Entropy campaign, anything is possible. There are no limits. Magic Items are handed out like candy, advancement is rapid, multiple character classes are common, and each character can acquire great power. Such games can be extremely violent, with massive destruction, often to the level of whole worlds being destroyed, or even gods being slain. High-Entropy gamers believe in their philosophy because they think there is more potential for fun in those situations where great powers are pitted in mortal combat and magic flies fast and free. Opponents of this approach object to its tendency to dehumanize the characters so that they may become nothing more than humanoid tanks, reaping mass destruction with little thought or personality.

In a Low Entropy campaign everything is strictly limited by the GM. Such things as Magic Items are rare, advancement is very slow, there are many limits on what a character can be or do, and there are few openings to positions of power in the world. Adventure takes place in remote areas against more common creatures, and characters are fairly vulnerable. More magic is usually in the



hands of the NPCs than the PCs. Low Entropy gamers prefer this style because they feel that their situation is closer to reality, that advancement and acquisitions should be prized, and that living in danger brings out the best role-playing. Detractors of this style maintain that Low Entropy gamers tend to be imaginationless drudges, slavishly following exactly what is laid out in their rule system, never really seeing the broad vistas of a world, or building characters with any depth or complexity of character.

While it is cheering to see FRPers degenerate into two armed camps, one has to observe that holders of both of these positions are ludicrous fools. Let's talk in offensive generalities. I've seen both types of players and feel fairly confident commenting on them. High Entropy players tend to be obnoxious, pushy, victory-oriented egotists. They brag endlessly and never tire of telling stories about their old campaign, their killer character, or their other moments of faded glory. Low Entropy players are dull-witted, boring, introverted, unimaginative losers. They are chronic rule quoters, tend to shrink from the unknown and prefer to plod along in familiar patterns. Both types of players have similar reactions when playing in a campaign of the opposite type. High Entropy gamers will deride the game and chafe at the bit for more power. Low Entropy gamers will become withdrawn and quietly disapproving and eventually leave for slower grounds. Both types are unable to cope in unfamiliar circumstances. A similar problem exists with GMs, who share most of the attitudes of their players. The High Entropy GM will tend to be a vicious power-tripper, introducing chaos to his campaign to stimulate more wild reactions in the players. The Low Entropy GM will be inflexible and unoriginal, relying heavily on modules and standard material, and ignoring or discouraging original action and initiative.

Now, these generalities do not really give an accurate representation of the two styles. There are High and Low Power games where these standards do not apply, and where rationality and flexibility have opened minds. These examples show the stand outs in the field, the ones who write outraged letters to THE DRAGON, not the good role-players at the far ends of the spectrum.

Now, we've shown how foolish both High and Low Entropy fanatics are. What is left? Good Role-Playing. While the Yahoos of FRPing are arguing over high and low power levels, bearded female dwarves, and interpretations of the DMG, there are many gamers out here who are just playing along, having a good time, and smiling wryly at the antics of the Entropy Warriors. They have realized that FRPing is meant to be fun, and it doesn't matter what style you play in as long as you enjoy your play. High Entropy and Low Entropy are of equal value. Neither is better than the other, they are just different. These players are not wedded to any one system or style, and are open-minded enough to enjoy the variety of playing at different levels of power.

Some role-players have hit on what I think is the answer to the entropy question, though no answer is really needed. They have found the point of Entropy Balance, taking the best elements from High and Low Entropy styles, dropping the useless and pointless parts. At this balancing point is Medium Entropy, the style which seems most likely to encourage role-playing, because it is in the pivot where it can swing higher or lower to take advantage of the best ideas and situations. Medium Entropy players can take on any situation with confidence and won't shut out or reject the unfamiliar. They are moving forward on the route to great role-playing and more enjoyable adventures.

This all comes down to open-mindedness. Which camp do you stand in in the Entropy Wars? Are you crushed under the weight of your ego with the High Entropy players, wandering around in blinkers with the Low Entropy gamers, or looking forward with clear eyes among the Medium Entropy gamers. Perhaps the High and Low Entropy gamers will be converted to Krishna or Vid-Games and the future of FRP will be ours alone, to play with tolerance and flexibility.



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## Conventions

We will be participating in GENCON EAST (June 17-20, Chester PA), and in ORIGINS '82 (July 23-25, Baltimore MD). These are two major conventions, and we will be running events and selling in the dealer areas. If you want to GM or help out to defray convention costs, write us. We hope to see you there.

# FEEDBACK

### RESULTS #17

ARTICLE	RATING	CHANGE	ARTIST	RATING	CHANGE	
Creative Magic	94	--	Malin	74	--	Cover: 90, Titles: 96
Arduin Dawn	86	--	Jones	70	--	Convention Articles:
Assyro-Babylonian Mythos	96	--	Zivek	59	-5	No-22% Yes-78%
Dramatic License	83	-3	Olson	97	--	Overall, this issue was
In the Speculum	84	+7	Nalle	69	--	rated 83, a bit better
Vidar's Forge	73	-6	Stewart	56	--	than last issue. It
Apprentice & Adept	90	+24	Mortimer	54	-29	looks like we will be
Arts Arcane	77	+27	Cranford	75	-21	having convention cover-
Backgrounding	71	-11				age, though it may
						not be too extensive.

In general this came off as a pretty good issue. The art was fairly well recieved, and the cover and title designs met with overwhelming approval, so they will be continued and improved if possible.

### QUESTIONS FOR THIS ISSUE

Rate the items given below 1-100, with 1 awful and 100 great. Answer those to the right Yes or No.

In the Speculum \_\_\_\_\_

Mini-Adventure #7 \_\_\_\_\_

The Arts Arcane \_\_\_\_\_

Berserkerfang \_\_\_\_\_

Primitive Tribesmen \_\_\_\_\_

Virtue & Vice \_\_\_\_\_

The Liberators \_\_\_\_\_

YRS Examination \_\_\_\_\_

Titles \_\_\_\_\_

Cover \_\_\_\_\_

Valerie Olson \_\_\_\_\_

Tom Curtin \_\_\_\_\_

Negui Dharsee \_\_\_\_\_

Mike Cranford \_\_\_\_\_

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Would you like to see more Magic Items? \_\_\_\_\_ Fewer? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like more fiction? \_\_\_\_\_ Less? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like more humor? \_\_\_\_\_ Less? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like more commentary? \_\_\_\_\_ Less? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like more variants/systems? \_\_\_\_\_ Fewer? \_\_\_\_\_

What other Fanzines, Proazines, or APAs do you read? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like a letter page instead of Feedback? \_\_\_\_\_

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