

FEEDBACK

QUESTIONS ON THIS ISSUE

Rate all items given on a 1-100 scale, with 1 totally awful and 100 as excellent.

ARTICLE	RATING
Berserkerbergang	_____
In the Speculum	_____
Challenge of Champions 3	_____
Scottish Creatures	_____
Trollpack Review	_____
The Vedic Devas	_____
Games in View	_____
Shapechangers	_____
Gaming Duration	_____

ARTIST	RATING
Mike Cranford(7C,16,15)	_____
John Mortimer(7,17,18)	_____
Nequi Dharsee(3,13,16,19)	_____
Paul Vinton(8)	_____
Max Gilbert(8)	_____
Eric Heinsoo(10,11)	_____

Cover _____
Titles/Graphics _____

What conventions, if any, do you expect to attend this year? _____

(Why not make an order with the form on the back when you send this in?)

RESULTS #20

ARTICLE	RATING	CHANGE
Retirement Benefits	92	---
Middle Sea Review	82	+2
Gencon East Report	74	---
In the Speculum	88	+5
Gods of Roman Gaul	97	==
Tomb of D'Haere	70	+3
Product Reports	65	---
Typewriter Takeover	68	-12
Challenge of Champs	88	+13
Fanzines Featured	82	-1

Eric Heinsoo	59	---
Photos	50	---
Kevin Fortin	57	---
Paul Vinton	67	---
Nequi Dharsee	86	-6
Mike Cranford	97	-1

Cover	87	-5
Titles/Graphics	91	-5

Overall 80 ==

Computer Gaming? No(72X)
Play by Mail? Yes(60X)
Comics? No(55X)
News/Gossip? Yes(54X)

Some of the question results are marginal, though Computer Gaming is definitely out, and PBM is probably a possibility.

1402 21st St. NW, Washington DC 20036

ABYSS

ABYSS

21

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V4,N6

October 1982



Shapechangers
Ed Mortimer

The Vedic Devas
Michael Johnson

Non-Violent Gaming
Dave Nalle

Reviews
David Hargrave

Fiction
Tom Curtin

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BERSERKERGANG: Non-Violent Gaming

Dave Nalle



There is a common element which joins role-playing campaigns the world over. It is a grim spectre which lurks behind so much of what takes place in most campaigns that players and GMs no longer even see it or realize that it rules over every aspect of play. It is always there and always overlooked, the all-pervading power of violence inherent in role-playing as it exists today.

Even the best developed fantasy campaigns depend on interludes of violence to keep play flowing. Even the finest, most inventive GMs fall back on violence to carry them through rough spots. Players aren't stupid either. They know that if they can't think their way out of a tight spot, bravery and a sharp sword speak louder than words.

Almost all role-playing situations in adventures and scenarios depend on violent conflict to resolve difficulties. Think about it. On a quest there are always infedels to vanquish. Buried treasure is always guarded by bodily peril from traps or monsters. Role-playing grew out of wargaming, reaching towards fantasy and SF fiction, but it has yet to really reach that goal. Most campaigns and game systems retain a great deal of martial-orientation, without parallel development of the social aspects of role-playing. Few GMs or players even realize that the combat system is just a background prop, and that adventures need not be punctuated with battles to be enjoyable.

The next step in role-playing, now that we are crossing the frontier of real character role-playing, is to move on to role-playing in the social rather than the martial context. The vast range of non-violent adventure possibilities offers many times the opportunities and challenges as are found in traditional adventures, so long as players and GMs are mature enough to play in this realm of alien interactions.

The possibilities are virtually unlimited. Consider some of the new areas in which adventure can be found: Mercantile maneuvering, wheeling and dealing in many areas of trade; Exploration and discovery, both territorial and scientific; Diplomacy or court intrigue; Politics and religious hierarchy, in fact, any profession; Espionage and thievery; and thousands of sub-divisions of these groups. Of course, these adventures will not be familiar to many gamers, but you will find that there is as much excitement in intriguing and trading to amass wealth, as in hacking monsters into bloody messes.

Just as less-violent contexts are important, it is also useful to examine specific instances where force has traditionally been over-used. In many campaigns, especially in D&D, which seems to encourage it, the best way out of an encounter or situation is to fight, unless the odds are over-whelming. Too many treasures have monsters as guardians to be vanquished, and too many situations lead to a violent resolution. Yet, if you set up the proper elements you can get players to deal with challenges in a realistic and mature manner, using their wits instead of their swords. When met with a monster, talking can be as effective as fighting, and the mere threat of violence is often more powerful than the real thing. Surely there is more adventure in two bragarts trying to back each other down than in two grim warriors tearing each other to shreds with only slight provocation.

This is not to say that violence is intrinsically bad, but it has been over-emphasized. It has a proper place in the role-playing world, just as it does in the real world. It is an element of ever-present danger which shapes actions by its potential, but is most effective when held in reserve.

In addition, in most systems which feature realistic combat, it tends to be lengthy and fairly time-consuming, the kind of thing which is great on occasion, but a burden when engaged in non-stop. Cutting down on the frequency of combat means that when it does come into play it can be run using a more detailed system.

Take your gaming into the social context, where violence becomes secondary to character and story, fitting in where it is natural, not whenever things start to drag. Look at literature, such as Shakespeare and Dumas, and you can see where adventure can go supported by only a little conflict. Certainly the romance of Romeo and Juliet would be as fun to play as the duel between Tybalt and Mercutio.

Editorial

Welcome once again. This issue I hope that we have some interesting features. Of special note is the new installment of our ongoing series on gods and mythology, this time brought to us by Michael Johnson.

Next issue will be our last issue in the current format, assuming everything goes as planned. Of course, to support a larger number of pages it would certainly be nice to have a larger number of subscribers, so go out and tell everyone you know to sign up now. Don't be surprised when #22 comes to you dated January, although it will actually be released in December. You are not going to lose any issues. We just want to get the issues back in phase, so that the first issue of each volume comes out on the first of the year.

Things go well here at RE. Changes in the FRP market seem to be working in our favor, as more and more gamers are looking for products with a little more of an imaginative audience and aimed at a more mature and sophisticated audience. If trends continue as they are we should have sold well over 1000 copies of the YRS by the time it is a year old, and the favorable reviews which are starting to come in should push it on even farther. If we were charging competitive prices for the rules we'd actually rake in a sizable profit, but we plan to keep the price low for the time being.

Abys still needs contributions, and we are paying more than before. If you can't send us an article or artwork, we'd be glad to hear your ideas for changes and improvements to make in future issues. Try to use the feedback form and keep in touch.

John Mortimer

RENEW!!

If there is an X on your label next to the issue number, your subscription is up with this issue. You should renew immediately at the low cost of \$5 for 6 issues, \$10 for 12 issues, or \$15 for 18. The number on the label indicates your last issue. If it is 21 or 22, RENEW!!!

IN THE SPECULUM GAMES:

RECON: THE RPG OF THE VIET-NAM WAR

This is a first release from RPGinc. As the title indicates, it is a role-playing game, set in the Vietnam and post-Vietnam era. It is presented in a 44 page booklet with large print many illustrations, and rather attractive graphics. It can be ordered from RPGinc, Box 485, Lincoln, AR 72744. The price is not given, so query first. The designer is Joe F. Martin.

Recon is a compact game, primarily a combat and encounter system, with brief scenarios given both for Southeast Asia and later Mercenary operations. These are described very loosely, but are generally interesting. The mechanics are as good as any modern-period inter-personal system, but they are dismayingly poorly organized. After puzzling through the rules they seem realistic and efficient, actually staying in the desirable border between realism and playability. Taken only as a game system this is a fairly good try.

Where Recon falls down is on the support material, which is weak in two ways. First, many areas are glossed over. The skill system is at best perfunctory, and almost seems tacked on. A large number of the campaign-related items seem to be rudimentary and not really developed. The rules seemed very unbalanced, going into great detail in some minor areas while ignoring even such major items as military structure and procedure. Another example is the fact that no options are provided for playing a Chinese or Viet-Cong character, or any other insurgent or terrorist for that matter.

The second problem is one of attitude. While a good feeling of atmosphere of the place and period is created, the degree to which derogatory slang and specialized terms are used is to some extent bewildering, and at the same time sort of offensive. Such designations as 'Luke the Gook', 'Snoopin' and Poopin'', 'frag', and 'blooker', don't do too much for me.

On the whole, this is a game to consider buying, but look it over first and weigh the obvious incompleteness and omissions against your need for a good but not outstanding modern combat system. (J. R. Davies)

MAGAZINES:

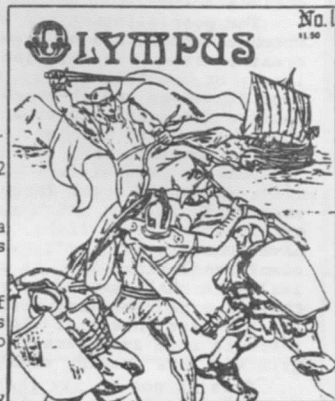
OLYMPUS
Olympus Publishing, 3114 Riverfalls Dr., Northbrook, IL 60062
Appearance:5, Content:3, Value:5, Personal:5, Overall:4

This is another of the huge crop of new fanzines. The first issue is on my desk, and some obvious comments are clear on looking it over. This issue is 32 pages. A copy is \$1.50 and a subscription is \$8.50 for 6 bi-monthly issues.

Unlike many new fanzines, OLYMPUS seems to have a strong and enthusiastic organization behind it. This is fortunate, because it will need a lot of support. Statistics show that 90% of all new fanzines fail in their first year, and judging from the first issue of OLYMPUS, this is a clear and present danger. Serious changes will be forced on the magazine if it hopes to survive.

In short, OLYMPUS is about 5 years behind what most gamers are looking for. Material is exclusively suited to D&D and TRAVELLER. It suffers from acute 'Monsters & Modules' syndrome in that most of the material is new monsters, magic items, modules, and adventure write-ups. The best I can say in this area is that at least these things are well worked out, though they show little originality. This sort of material was Okay in '77 when gaming was young, but modern gamers seem to be looking for greater imaginative challenges. There is one good, if not very deep, article on Thieves Guilds. Most of the material seems to be by the editors.

On the whole I can't recommend this magazine, unless you are sufficiently devoid of imagination to need new monsters and magic items desparately. I wonder what possessed Task Force Games to take out a full-page ad. (D. Nalle)



THE ORACLE

Horizon, Intl., POB 27513, Salt Lake City, UT 84127
Appearance:9, Content:5, Value:6, Personal:7, Overall:7

This is a new semi-prozine which looks like it has a lot of money behind it. It is edited by Chris K. Bigelow. Each issue is 32 pages and it is released 8 times a year. A copy is \$1.50. Subscriptions are \$8 for 8 issues.

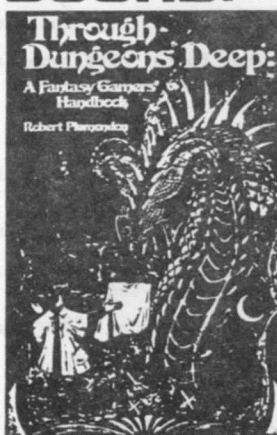
We have on hand issues 1 and 2. The improvement from the first to the second is marked, especially in visual aspects. The contents are fairly well balanced, with a tendency to feature a lot of review-type material. Unfortunately, although the reviews in these issues were interesting, and they covered a number of areas, most of the non-review material was not particularly inspired. #2 has an article of ready-made NPCs, monsters, and magic items. It looks like modules will be added soon. There's a fairly interesting letter/article from Ken St. Andre as well.

ORACLE looks really good. The art, graphics and design work are all nice. The writing is of unusually high quality, but right now the magazine seems to lack direction. It has the potential to do outstanding things, but until editorial policy becomes more resolved it is hard to make a fair judgement on what ORACLE will become. The cover of #2 is attractive, and the use of brown print on beige paper looks very snappy. On the whole the initial impression is of a serious professional effort with a lot of promise.

I would certainly recommend looking into ORACLE. If it gets settled successfully it could have quite a future. It is certainly the first gaming semi-prozine to join ABYSS in the curious void between amateur and professional magazines. (D. Nalle)



BOOKS:



THROUGH DUNGEONS DEEP: A FANTASY GAMER'S HANDBOOK

This new hardback is an overview of Fantasy Gaming by long-time ALARUMS & EXCURSIONS contributor Robert Plamondon. It is published by Reston at \$18.95. There are some 324 pages of text and several nice illustrations by Signe Landon, who also did the cover.

This is by no means the first attempt at a survey of, and introduction to the gaming world. However, it is certainly the first which is competent and the first to be written by someone who has at least some grasp of the real trends in gaming.

The book surveys all of the aspects of playing in a fantasy role-playing game, from rolling up characters to creating a world, all in general terms understandable to laymen. From there Plamondon goes on to review major game systems, magazines, and fanzines, all fairly briefly. Every aspect of play is given some attention, often quite intelligently, with good suggestions and ideas. In addition he explains how to start a campaign and begin to play.

While there are some new ideas on FRPping presented, they are not really enough to make the book worthwhile for experienced players, at least not at the price. It is more than worthwhile for new players, though. Any GM who has new players coming into his campaign who have never played any FRPG, could get quite a bit of help from letting them look over some of Plamondon's suggestions. It is an excellent introduction for the uninitiate.

Particularly strong parts of the book are those on role-playing characters and on the mechanics of setting up an adventure or campaign. He is not as strong on some of the more complex aspects of world design and developing world background. One rather weak section is that on gods and religion. An over-all flaw with the book is that the author seems to be a little bit behind the state-of-the-art in FRP. It seems that, although he mentions more modern games in the book, he is for the most part D&D-oriented. This flavors his writing, and means that there is no detail on such things as skill systems, which could have filled several pages if treated on a parallel with other aspects of the book. In addition, there is some emphasis on traditional D&D techniques, such as traps, magic items, treasure, and violence-oriented situations. However, there has been a clear effort to keep the discussion general, and aside from a few moments when it is too general or seems lacking, this is well done. In anycase, new players won't know what to look for. I suspect that Reston held up publication for a while, as the listing of games and magazines is a little bit out of date, and this may account for some of the stylistic anachronisms.

This is a good book for new players, because it introduces them to gaming without binding them to one system, while it encourages role-playing to a fair extent, something a game-system might hide behind mechanics. In short, this is a must for gaming clubs and large campaigns to inform new players. (Dave Nalle)

This is the third installment in Tom Curtin's ongoing fiction based on strategic-level events in the Ysgarth campaign. It was started in #15 by Marc Lecoc and the second installment was in #20. Future parts are planned, but they may alternate with a related epic by Lew Bryson.

CHALLENGE OF CHAMPIONS 3

TOM CURTIN

Mannaluch I, the first Pope of Gilrod's church in Ysgarth, sat deep in thought. His long nails slowly traced the ornate inlays in the arms of his huge marble throne. The news of Val Thalion's defeat and disgrace had already reached the holy city, and now Mannaluch considered the options for the forces of the Flame. The Pool's popularity was growing alarmingly with the renown of the sword of Thane Ormsson. The Flame would have to answer his presumptuous challenge, but who could assume that dangerous duty.

The somber silence was shattered by Girithaur's abrupt entrance. Palace guards moved to capture the invader as he passed through the doors of the audience chamber. A horde of hobbit shock troops charged him, brandishing miniature halberds.

"Halt!" Shouted Mannaluch, "It's Girithaur. Back to your posts!" The hobbits shuffled back to their positions around the throne. Mithrandir strolled through the doorway surveying the display of hobbitine discipline.

"Well, Girithaur, I hope they passed inspection."

"Not bad, Mith, reaction time was good."

"That's only the half of it! They fight like the possessed in battle."

Girithaur cast a skeptical eye at the hobbits, "Really? Do you put hormones in their rations?"

"Enough of this cocktail talk!" bellowed Mannaluch, "I don't have time for buffoonery. So, Girithaur, what brings you here so soon? We haven't been able to requisition new courtesans yet." He sneered down at his manicure.

Girithaur bowed low, "O Pompous Pontiff, thou abhorrent and blustery windbag, may your cuticles never break. I have come for a humble favor from the grace of your immenseness."

After some effort Mannaluch lifted his portly form from the throne. "How much will it cost me?"

"Not a thing. Now that I've got your attention, I thought I'd let you know that I've decided to accept Thane Ormsson's challenge, but I will need Gilron's aid to bring final glory for the flame."

Mannaluch was startled, "Girithaur, you're an assassin, not an arena fighter! You should leave this matter to Tottenjager."

Girithaur's jaw dropped. Mithrandir frowned at the bulbous prelate, "I wish you hadn't said that."

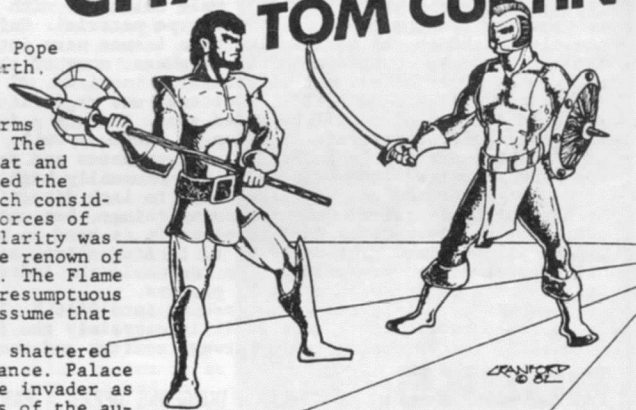
His eyes afire, Girithaur leapt into his littany, "The Moldy One?? That wimpy, worm-eaten recreant? That grotesque, loathesome toady?..." He stopped short when Mithrandir slapped a quickly summoned magical muzzle on his mouth. Mithrandir chided his mute friend, "Now do you promise to be a good boy?" Girithaur nodded reluctantly. With a wave of his hand the mage dispelled the muzzle. "One more unnecessary adjective and I'll shut you up for a week."

Girithaur went back on the offensive, "Let Tottenjager rot in his tower! I'd sooner sleep with a neo-otyugh than let him take this challenge from me!"

Mannaluch's doughy features sagged into a disapproving frown. "Girithaur, he is your sword-brother in the Flame. You are both bonded by your demon-swords. Do not address him in such a disrespectful manner. He is the Champion of my God, and shall not be compared to a neo-otyugh! I forbid it!"

Girithaur wheeled to face the pudgy patriarch. "And why not? Tell me Pope Porky. Isn't it a known fact that Tott smells as bad as a neo-otyugh if not a good bit worse?" Mannaluch glowered at his long fingernails and nervously tugged at an adamantine ring on his left forefinger.

Mithrandir tried to smoothe the uneasy mood, "Mannaluch, Girithaur has already approached Lokar and has accepted the challenge publicly. He seeks to serve the Flame. You both serve the same purpose, support him in his challenge. Tottenjager can be kept in reserve in case..."



Girithaur shouted the wizard down, "There won't be a need to bring that feculent fleabag into the challenge. I'll have Thane's head before that fatuous, craven..."

"ENOUGH!" thundered Mannaluch. His voice echoed through the hall. This sudden outburst knocked Girithaur into an uncharacteristic quiet. "Give your lungs a rest, you sun-loving simpleton, before I give it a retreat. You want something from me, so keep a civil tongue in your hollow head." He twined his fingers together and grinned slightly, "Now, Sycophant of the Sun, what can I do for you?"

A deep sigh came from the Soldier of the Sun, "Yes, Manny, thou Pontiff of Pyrotechnics, thou Imam of Incendiaries, I need your god's awesome powers in order to battle the offensive Ormsson."

"That's more like it. Continue."

"Thane Ormsson has the power to move and attack with twice the speed of a true human. Rumor has it that he acquired this while adventuring in the wilderlands of the plane of Uttgart, in the form of 'Speed' gems."

Mannaluch interjected, "Yes, my father, Pwyl ap Glyn, has a small collection of these so-called 'Speed' gems. His recollections of Uttgart are horrific, yet it is the home of our god, and where Gilrod himself achieved the power to manipulate time. How can we help you?"

"I was hoping that the Fair-Headed One could somehow either negate Thane's unusual speed or give me the ability to match it. Of course, such aid would be generously rewarded."

A sly grin crossed Mannaluch's face, "What are you offering?"

Girithaur felt as helpless as a child. He knew the bottom line. Flame or no Flame, these Gilrodites were always looking for a fast Mark. He meekly offered a 20% cut of the sacking of Odin's temple in a modified profit-sharing plan.

"20%," Mannaluch laughed, "You've been out in the sun too long."

"But we're only talking about a loan, Manny!"

Mannaluch wedged his corpulent form down in his throne, "That's fine, but it's 30% or you can go talk to Ptah." He pulled out his nail file. "Let's cut the shit, Sun Boy. I've got to make a living somehow. A church doesn't run on prayers alone, y'know." He punctuated this with a jab of the file.

Girithaur paced the audience chamber. 30%, what would his temple say? As for the Ptahites, they'd screw Ra's Right Hand for 35% minimum. This had to be his last favor for the Flame. He stalked aimlessly, lamenting the pitfalls of a free market.

Mithrandir was worried. His friend was up the proverbial creek without the proverbial paddle. He approached Mannaluch to attempt arbitration.

Mannaluch held up his file to stop the Cardinal, "Not to worry, my nasty little nuncio, I'm just letting him steam a little." He gestured for Girithaur to approach.

"Mithrandir has advised me to throw in a boon." He pressed a stud with one of his Fu Manchu fingers. A secret compartment popped out of the arm-rest. After a bit of rumaging he produced a scarlet jewel and an eyeglass case. "Attach this gem to theommel of your sword. It will negate any 'Speed' gems within 100 yards." He handed the gem to the Champion and pulled a pair of mirrored sunglasses from the case. "These glasses were captured in the plane of California. They are not magical, but will protect you from the blinding glare which Thane emanates. They are called 'shades'. There is one drawback: while wearing them you may feel compelled to act like a native Californian. Try to resist these urges, but they are silly, not harmful. Both of these for 30%. Is it a deal?"

Girithaur slipped the 'shades' over his eyes, "I can't see anything!"

Mithrandir shot back, "That's the general idea. With these glasses, Thane's brilliant radiance will seem the flicker of a feeble flame."

Girithaur stumbled into a hobbit sentry, "These things are cool, fer sure! You've got a deal, gluttinous gastro-nome of Gilrod: Hey, Mith, let's bop down to the beach and catch some rays. This place is really beat, man. Let's get wasted, like, and wax our stix, and like, explore some green room, fer sure."

Mannaluch sneered at the would-be surfer, "Git. He's liable to degenerate, Mithrandir. Get him out of here before he falls out a window. I'll send a contract down to Ra's temple." He rolled his eyes heavenward, "Gilrod, deliver me from boneheads."

Mithrandir directed the errant Holy Torpedo toward the exit, "What's next on the itinerary?" Girithaur pawed the air looking for his friend, "I though I'd just cruise over to the Abyss, like, and drop in on Zaedukrom. Like, man, I figure he can give some cool hints on walkin' the nose and throwin' the 'bee, fer sure."

Mithrandir reached his tolerance. He snatched the glasses. "Do me a favor, wear these only when you have to. I'm not going with you to the Abyss. I hear Zaedukrom has a penchant for ripping out eyeballs, and I like mine, thank you."

Girithaur squinted in the light of the sun, "All lies, but suit yourself. Could you at least beam me over?"

"My pleasure. Now the courtesans can come out of hiding." He sawed the air in preparatory incantations while Girithaur spoke into a scarlet amulet at his throat.



"This is Little Bo Peep. Come in Momma Bear. Momma Bear, come in please." A throaty hissing came from the amulet, "Momma Bear here." Girithaur addresses the talisman, "Bo Peep is beaming over to the Big Hole. Prepare to relieve. Over and out." The malevolent hissing came again, "Momma Bear copies. Ready to relieve."

A bewildered Mithrandir stopped in mid-incantation, "What?" "Zaedukrom has read too many of Savak's cheap detective novels. When he gave me this amulet he made me promise to use this lingo. I don't know what it is, but I don't argue with a twelve foot tall Demon Prince with long, sharp claws and nasty fangs."

"Good point." Mithrandir was always an astute observer of the obvious. He made a few more passes and the spell was cast. A shimmering field of mana gathered about Girithaur. His stocky figure slowly dissolved into a cloud of light. Mithrandir smirked, "Catch you later Bo Peep."

Girithaur managed to make an ancient obscene gesture before he vanished completely into a blaze of light and flashed across the sky and out of view.

Scottish Creatures

Max Gilbert & Dave Nalle

As an experiment, these creatures are being presented without statistics for any system so that you can use them with a little adaptation in any campaign. Let us know how you like this format.

THE SAMHANACH

This is a Scottish goblin of sorts, which emerges from unknown places at the festival of Samhain, or All-Hallows-Eve (October 31). They usually appear in large numbers, swarming around unwary travellers who they will abuse in any of several ways. They are primarily mischievous, and will attempt to play annoying tricks, such as turning houses around, releasing animals which are penned, or directly annoying abuse of travellers. Sometimes they can become violent and even kill the unwary. They appear as small humanoids with pointy ears and bushy hair. Their skin is dark brown and leathery, and they have sunken, glowing eyes. They travel silently, and always in groups, only at night. They speak no languages, but will gibber at anyone they catch. They can be driven off by Rowan branches. These can also protect houses or barns, usually when attached by red ribbon. (Dave Nalle)

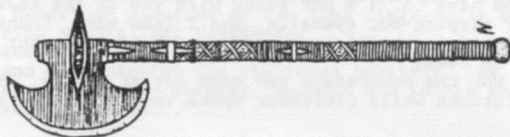
THE FACHAN

This is a highland creature, a malicious faerie of the mountains. They usually travel alone, and are cruel and malicious by nature. They are of diminutive stature, and don't fit the traditional humanoid form, having no body, only one leg, and one arm, not to mention only a single eye. They appear as a single-eyed head, supported by a single leg, with an arm sprouting where the two meet. Fachan will steal things from camps, create noise when a party is trying to be silent, and generally make life unpleasant. It is considered bad luck to kill one, so they should be driven off by other means. (Max Gilbert)



THE GLASHTYN

The Glashtyn is a creature of the Scottish islands, the Shetlands, and even the Orkneys, as well as of the Isle of Man. It is found exclusively in boggy areas of sea-wash, where tidal marshes are created in coastal depressions. It appears as a small, shaggy colt, obviously lost from a wild herd of horses. He will position himself in the middle of the worst footing of the marsh, perhaps in an area of false ground with water beneath, or even quicksand. He can, of course walk on water. When a soft hearted passerby hears his plaintive neighing, and comes to rescue him, usually sinking into mud or water and either drowning or getting stuck, the Glashtyn will sink into the water with a neighing laugh, leaving the victim to his doom. It is important to remember that the GM will have to either convince the player or persuade him, somehow, to be charitable and careless, in order to have him fall prey to the Glashtyn. (Dave Nalle)



FEATURED REVIEW: RQ TROLLPACK JON SCHULLER

Trollpack is the newest supplemental package for RuneQuest. It is available for \$18.00 in a boxed edition from CHAOSIUM. It consists of three books of 64, 64, and 48 pages, plus about 24 pages of additional information, player handouts, and a scenario, and a large map. The package was designed by Greg Stafford and Sandy Petersen.

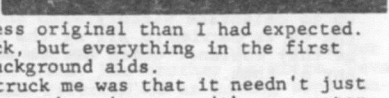
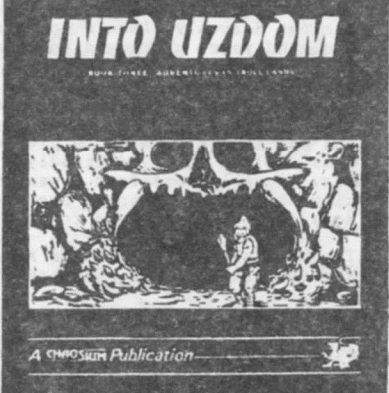
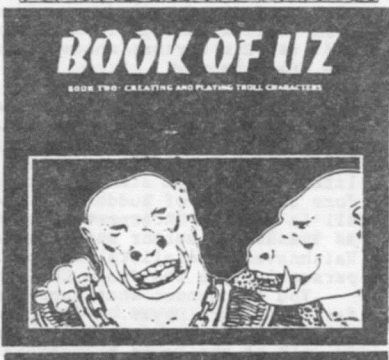
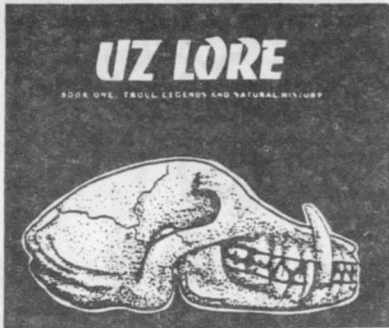
Trollpack is one of very few truly background-oriented role-playing aids on the market, and is quite an impressive work. Of all of the excellent RuneQuest supplements and aids, this is easily the most detailed, and certainly the most interesting. Trolls are certainly one of the most interesting aspects developed in RuneQuest, and one aspect which carries over well into other games. With the release of Trollpack they have been lifted up and beyond the limits of the parent game.

There are three books to Trollpack, each on a different level of the life of trolls. First there is "Uz Lore", which gives extraordinary detail on troll history, anatomy, culture, and other aspects of their nature. The second book is "The Book of Uz", which gives guidelines on playing trolls, and is particularly good on developing an understanding of troll lifestyles and society. The last book is "Into Uzdorn", a collection of 3 or so fully developed scenarios which draw on additional encounter material included in the book. The scenarios are of different length and on different subjects. In addition there is "Munchrooms" a short scenario which can be played from either an adventurer or troll perspective. There is also an excellent map on durable paper showing the domains of the trollkin in Dagori Inkarth. On the whole the package is well-produced, attractively illustrated, clearly written, and outstandingly useful.

The great value of Trollpack is in its comprehensive nature. It really tells you everything about RQ's version of trolls. For example, there are anatomical charts, habitat maps, maps of important areas, legends, history, national detail, tribal detail, religious cults, social analysis sections, looks at troll organizations, and much more. There is detail of everything, so much so that, after reading the material a good GM should be able to run scenario after scenario off the top of his head even without the supplied scenarios.

The weaknesses of the books are few. Too little is said on giving personality to trolls encountered in play and examples are too general. There are random encounter tables in Book #3 of the sort which are gradually being phased out in favor of regional or judgemental systems by many GMs. Actually, the scenarios and much of what was in Book #3 were disappointing. The scenarios didn't fall into traditional traps, and were quite believable, but they were less interesting than I would have expected from the quality of the other material. The 'Munchrooms' scenario was a good idea, but the content was less original than I had expected. It's hard to point out the highlights of the pack, but everything in the first two books was outstanding, a model for future background aids.

You should buy Trollpack. An aspect which struck me was that it needn't just be for RQ players. Such background material can stand on its own with any system.





THE VEDIC DEVAS

MICHAEL JOHNSON

Michael Johnson is a well known name in *Alarums & Excursions*, and though this is his first piece for *Abys* we hope it will not be his last. This issue he presents an informed look at the Vedic Devas. He speaks from knowledge, having spent five years as a Brahmachary (monk), under the name Mayapur Chandra, and later ordained Brahmin (priest) by his acharya (teacher by example), the late A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada. Although he has since become a christian, he has retained an interest in Vedic Literature, and is certainly eminently qualified to critique and correct the garbled account of the Devas found in TSR's *Deities & Demigods*.

After five years in a Vaishnava Hindu Ashram (a combination temple-monastery-school), I was surprised at the poor treatment of the Vedic Devas in TSR's *God's Demi-Gods, and Heroes*. At first I wasn't too worried as I had heard a better treatment was planned for the then up-coming volume *Deities & Demigods*. I shouldn't have kept up my hopes. The new volume was even worse than the first.

This is a shame, because the Vedic literature is an excellent source for lots of material ideal for a fantasy campaign. Romance, adventure, a foreign culture already fully detailed, exotic monsters, magic, and an atmosphere different enough from Medieval Europe to be fascinating, it's all there. If you don't believe me, just ask Lin Carter, who wrote six 'Thongar the Mighty' books by rewriting one of the *Upa Puranas*.

First, the very title of the section in *Deities & Demigods* is incorrect. There are no 'Gods of India', per se. A God, yes. Many gods, no. This is defined differently in the three major vedic philosophies. These are the beliefs held by: 1/ the Vaibashikas (Darwinists) who hold that there is no God or spirit, and that all life evolved from atoms. This school of thought was around for some centuries before the birth of Buddha; 2/ the Mayavadi (pantheists), who believe that all is one all is god, an interpretation that can be read into the veda, but should not be, as Vyasadeva, author and final editor of the vedas was of the third group; 3/ the Vaishnava (personalists) who believe that there is one god, Vishnu, and that he is personal, like the Judeo-Christian god. There is no polytheism as such.

You may wonder what happened to Indra, Brahma, etc. Aren't they gods? No, in fact, they are Devas. A Deva is best compared to the Catholic concept of Saints or Angels. Either as folks who have made it, so to speak, or as assistants to God.

All of the Devas started as human beings and earned their way to Devahood by their faith and deeds, and all will eventually grow old and die when the proper time comes. They are not like normal men, but the qualities which make them unique will become clear as we look at them individually.

INDRA

This is the King of the Heavens, which means not only the sky, but also the various Heavenly Planets to which the souls of the pious are sent to enjoy a few thousand years of reward for their good deeds. He appears as a tall, slightly pale, flashily dressed (lots of jewels!) warrior type. His most unusual physical feature is that his whole body has eyes (1000 of them!), thus making it impossible to sneak up on him. He is fairly vain, and his inflated ego is occasionally deflated by Vishnu in a harmless, but embarrassing, manner. He has full control of the weather, and can change form as he pleases. He has no control over animals, plants, or humans. Vajra, while admittedly a good bow (+5 to hit), does not shoot thunderbolts. They actually come from a weapon shaped like a sword made in the form of a lightning bolt by Visvakarma, the devine architect, from the bones of the sage Dadhici. Some of his helpers and friends are:

The Meruts: Marichi and the Meruts are the storm bringers. There are 49 of them, and they ride flying chariots through the sky. They look like ordinary men.

The Gandarvas: These are the Heavenly Musicians. After a particularly good fight where the forces of good defeat those of evil they will shower you with flowers, sing your praises, and in general hold a celebration.

The Apsaras: These are the heavenly dancing girls. Like the Gandarvas, they show up to celebrate victory with showers of flowers and improvised ballets. Each of the 44 is married to all of the Gandarvas and the Meruts, plus an occasional hero, as they couldn't quite decide which one to marry, and didn't want to dissappoint any of them.

Airavata: Indra's elephant. He has 4 tusks.

The Vasus: Indra's 8 servants. Also married to the Apsaras.

Vayu: This is the wind. When Indra is not riding his elephant, he rides in a gold chariot driven by Vayu, his chariot driver, and one of the few people not married to the Apsaras. He is always trying to show off his strength, and once ripped a mountain from the Himalayas, and through it into the ocean, where it became the island of Sri Lanka (Ceylon). Vishnu once challenged him to blow away a straw (one made of Vayu's pride) and he failed miserably. It was too big and heavy.

Sachi Indryani: Mrs. Indra, chosen by Indra from a number of competing Devis, because she surpassed them all in 'voluptuous attractions'.

AGNI

This is the Deva of Fire. His body is made of flame, with three legs, three heads, seven arms, and seven tongues. The seven tongues of fire are used to lick the ghee (clarified butter), his favorite food at sacrifices.

SURYA VIVASVAN

I find no reference anywhere in the Vedic literature for anyone named Salilri. I have no idea where TSR got the name from. This is the Deva of the sun, and is nothing like TSR's description. Far from being "10ft tall, has dark red skin, long golden hair, 3 eyes in his semi-human head, and 4 arms..." allow me to quote from the Vishnu Purana, where it says that "Satrajit (the sage) beheld Surya in his proper form, of dwarfish stature, with a body like burnished copper, with slightly reddish eyes." He has no power to put people to sleep at any level (come on guys, the Deva of the Sun putting people to sleep??). The lack of armor and the light sword are fine, but he has no ability to disbelieve illusions or dismiss them.

Ushas, Sanjna and Chhaya: These are Surya's wives. Ushas (Dawn) (Again I find no reference to Vasha), is the mother of the twin brothers, the Aswinikumaras, the Devas of medicine. Sanjna (Conscience) gave birth to Yamaraja, Deva of Death, and Manu Vaivaswata, the Vedic parallel to Noah, who not only saves the animals and his family, but also seven sages who had memorized the Vedas, so that they would not be lost. Chhaya (Shade) birthed Revanta, chief assistant to Kuvvera, Deva of Wealth. Since the information given in D&DG on Vasha doesn't match anyone real, it can be thrown out. It certainly isn't Ushas, who is described as fond of the human race, hating no-one, and never growing old.

Surya's Chariot: This vehicle is made of gold, not a piece of the sun. It is also pulled by one red horse with seven heads, not seven horses the colors of the rainbow. Aruna Vivaswat is his charioteer.

YAMARAJA DHARMA

Yama is the Deva of Death and Dharma. Dharma is a hard word to translate, though it is, in general idea, a combination of religion and duty, even of the secular type. Yama is a green skinned man with copper eyes who likes to wear red.

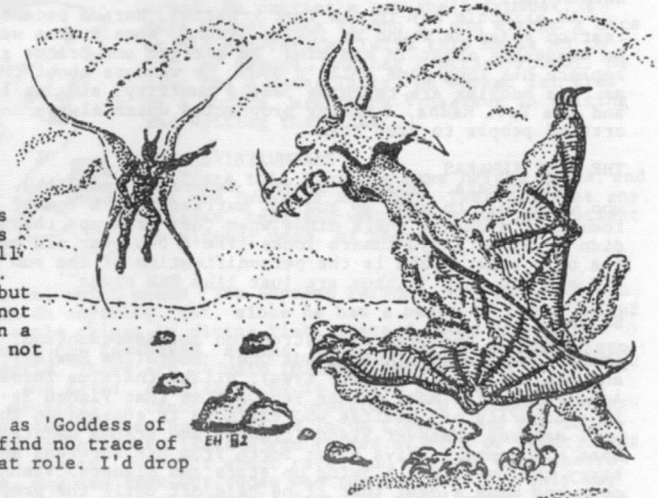
He was the first man to ever die, and as such, and because he had led such a pious life, was asked to be the judge of those who followed him in death. The theory behind this was that since he had lived through a full human life he was best qualified to understand the lot of man. His noose kills instantly, as it is what he uses to pull the soul out of the body. His mace is not a mace, but a royal scepter, and is not a weapon. He does ride on a water-buffalo, but it is not giant sized.

RATRI

TSR lists this deity as 'Goddess of the Night', but I could find no trace of her or anyone fitting that role. I'd drop her.

VARUNA

This is the Deva of the Ocean, not of cosmic law and justice, which is rather the realm of Yama. His wife is Mada Sura, Devi of Wine. His brother is Mitra, Deva of Contracts and Daytime. Varuna is also sometimes referred to as having some con-



nection with night, thus splitting the day with Mitra. The most amusing thing about Varuna is that when he walks about the sea bottom, he keeps dry with an umbrella!

VISVAKARMA TWASHTRI

This is the Deva of Mechanics and Architecture. While he made most of the weapons of the Devas, he himself has none and wears no armor. He doesn't fight himself. Instead, he builds someone to fight for him!

CHANDRA SOMA

This is the Deva of the Moon. Also the Deva of Soma, a magical liquor that the Devas and Pitirs(human ancestors) drink. It is intoxicating, but gives no hangover. It increases health and slows aging. Amrita is a stronger, rarer Soma, which will extend life to 10000 years from a single drink. In one place the Vedas state that the moon is a large bowl of Soma. Some Devas spend 14 days drinking it dry, then Chandra spends 14 filling it. This explains the phases of the moon. Some is spilled to earth and becomes dew, which nourishes vegetables. He has 28 wives, one for each day of the month.

BRAHMA

This is the Creator. He was born from a lotus flower which grew from Vishnu's belly-button. He created the universe after being taught how by Vishnu. He has 4 totally human heads, not "slightly human, more bestial" as TSR states. He most certainly doesn't have blue skin, though he does have 4 arms. He can teleport others, but not himself. He doesn't bother with nonsense like shapechanging or levitation. Far from being "impervious to any type of heat damage", he used to have a 5th head which was burned off by Shiva. He does indeed not wear armor, but as for "he fights as if hasted" and "fighter ability: 19th level", this is drivel. He is the original pacifist, and there is no record of his ever fighting anyone. Whenever something happens which is too tough for the Devas to handle, they come crying to Brahma, who calms them and takes them to Vishnu, who handles it. The water pot is a bottle of water from the holy river Ganges. The 'Bracelet of Beads' is not to allow him a wish, but is a rosary. At least one head is always praying to Vishnu and he uses it to count his prayers.

Hansa: Brahma's pet goose which he rides. Also a pacifist.

SARASWATI

This is the Devi of Music and Knowledge. Wife of Brahma, Inventor of the Sanskrit language and the alphabet. She also built the first Vina, a guitar-like instrument, which she gave to Narada Muni. She was originally made by Brahma to be a wife for one of his sons and start the human race, but he had made her too well and fell in love with her himself, so he made new wives for his sons. She can answer any question.

NARADA MUNI

As a little boy in the last creation, Narada became a saint. When the last reation ended he wound up inside Vishnu. When Brahma was born, Narada came out to be wandering about in his mind. He emerged and Brahma gave him an adult body to replace his long gone child's body. He wanders about the planets teaching the Vedas. His hobbies are teaching people humility, singing love-songs about Krishna and the Devi Radha, & making prophecies which always come true because of the efforts of people to stop them.

THE FIVE KUMARAS

Sanatkumara, Sananda, Sanaka, Sanatana, and Ribhu, are the five sons of Brahma, who when told to grow up and get married took a vow of celibacy. When Brahma told them they'd change their minds when they grew up, they vowed not to grow up, and didn't. Since Ribju Kumara looks like a 5-6 year old boy dressed as a sage, and the only other Ribhu is the personification of the sun's rays, I fail to see how TSR can say that "Ribhus are just like D&D elves".

SHIVA

Shiva is the Deva of Destruction and Reproduction. He is also called: Linga (Maleness), Shankara(Auspicious One), Rudra(The Howler), Bhuteswara(Lord of Ghosts and Goblins), Trilochana(3 Eyes), Nilakantha(Blue Throat), and Mahayogi(The Great Ascetic). While most of the Veda states that Vishnu is the Supreme Being, there is a minority of Shivites who claim he is supreme on the ground that he can and will destroy whatever Vishnu creates and Brahma maintains. The only time Brahma lost his temper, Shiva burst forth from his forehead and immediatly started to destroy the universe, blowing up stars and planets. Vishnu and Brahma calmed him down and made a deal that if he held off until the proper time, they would give him the office of Kala(time) and control of entropy. His normal form is that of a man with long matted hair, grayish skin, and sprinkled with ash from a crematorium. He wears only a tiger-skin, and rides a white bull named Nandi. His preferred weapon is a trident(Pinaka). His secondary weapon is Khatwanga(not Khatunganga) and is topped with a skull, but a human one not a demon one. No sword is

ever mentioned, certainly not one which works as a Staff of Wizardry. His bow shoots arrows, not curses. His third eye is always closed. The only two times it has opened it emitted light which burnt up Brahma's fifth head and Kama(cupid). He will eventually burn up the universe in a dance(Tandava) in which he will build up enough friction to burn everything.

Rudra: This is just Shiva as described above. The gold and such is totally out of character, and there is no justification for skull, hole or box.

Devi: This merely means female Deva, not a particular entity. From the description they may mean Durga, one of the forms of Shiva's wife Parvati.

PARVATI

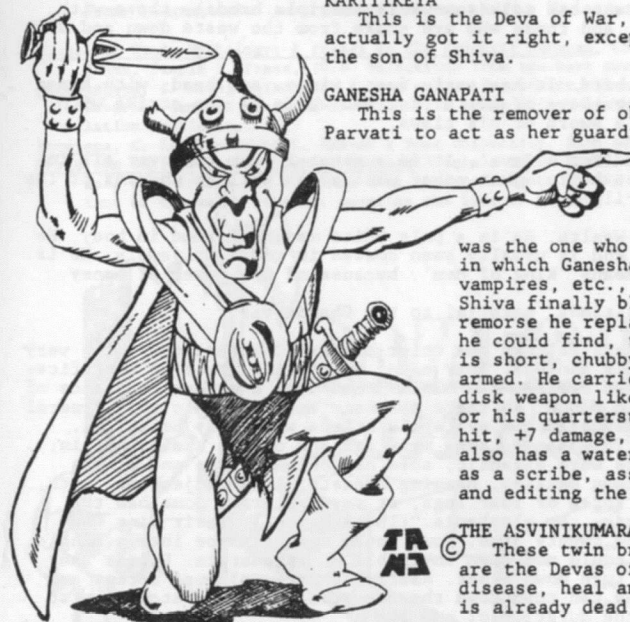
This is the Devi of Matter, called Maya(Illusion), Shakti(Femaleness), Prakriti(Material Nature), Durga(Inaccessable), Kali(Black), Sati(Virtuous), Ambika (The Mother), and Uma(Light). As nature is both benign and deadly, so is Parvati in her different forms. In her normal form she is a female Yogi. She became Shiva's wife through severe austerities. As Maya she has full control of all illusions and cannot be fooled by one. As Durga, the 10 armed form, she rides a tiger and bears 10 different weapons. In the AD period a depraved cult worshiped her as Kali with human sacrifice, prostitution, and various other rites even more obscene. This group, the Thugee, slew one person eachmonth by strangulation, because blood is unclean and would offend the Devi.

KARTTIKEYA

This is the Deva of War, also called Skanda, and TSR actually got it right, except for the spelling. He is the son of Shiva.

GANESHA GANAPATI

This is the remover of obstacles. He was created by Parvati to act as her guardian and doorman to keep out



Shiva's less desirable visitors. Unfortunately, her first order to him was to keep everyone out during her bath. Naturally, Shiva was the one who showed up. A battle ensued in which Ganesha slew all sorts of ghosts, vampires, etc., with his quarterstaff, but Shiva finally blew his head off. Later, in remorse he replaced it with the first one he could find, that of an elephant. Ganesha is short, chubby, always smiling, and four armed. He carries a sea-shell trumpet, a disk weapon like Vishnu's, and either a mace or his quarterstaff(with this he is +5 to hit, +7 damage, and has 7 attack/round). He also has a water lilly. He worked for free as a scribe, assisting Vyasadeva in writing and editing the Vedas.

THE ASVINIKUMARAS

These twin brothers have horses heads, and are the Devas of Medicine. They can cure any disease, heal any wounds, unless the patient is already dead, of course.

VISHNU

Vishnu is called Bhagavan, which means 'The Supreme Person', or 'God'. Vishnu has unlimited power and can do anything. Yet, since he has a sense of humor and of adventure, he won't just settle things by divine fiat. Instead, when things get really out of hand, like with the Rakshasas, Asuras, etc., he will incarnate into the universe to save the world. There are 24 main incarnations or Avatars, including Krishna, Rama, Buddha, and Kalki. As Vishnu, he is a blue skinned young man with four arms, bearing a mace(+2), a conch shell trumpet(used to announce his arrival, moralizes good guys, demoralizes bad guys), a lotus flower, and the Sudarshan Chakra. This is a wheel which looks like a 45rpm record of fire or light, made out of time. It is an edged weapon, does not shoot rays, and can and will destroy anything. It is self-aware, and can seek out those who run or hide. The only way to escape if it pursues you is to fall at Vishnu's feet and plead mercy, which he will not always grant, though he prefers to forgive, and will kill only as a last resort, and then in a fair fight. In fact, he fights so fare that he will lose on occasion if you please him.

LAKSHMI

This is Vishnu's wife, the Devi of Fortune. TSR did okay here. She will rarely leave Vishnu's side and even when he incarnates she will show up as his wife or girlfriend.

KAMA

This is the Deva of Love. He is the son of Vishnu and Lakshmi. Although he was once burned to ashes by Shiva, Vishnu gave birth to him again when he incarnated as Krishna by his chief wife Rukmini, which made him Krishna's first born son Pradyumna. He is the Deva of all kinds of desires, including love of pizza, power, sleep, etc. His wife is Rati, the Devi of Sexual Desire. He is a young man who looks like a two armed Vishnu, armed with bow and arrows. The bow is made of sugar cane, the bowstring of a line of bees, the arrows are tipped with flowers.

ANANTA SESHA NAGA

This is the Deva of Snakes. Ananta is a 1000 headed cobra who Vishnu uses as a bed. Each of his heads holds up an entire universe. He occasionally incarnates along with Vishnu as his brother or best friend.

Nagas: These are intelligent snakes. Their king, Kaliya is a 101 headed cobra. He can pollute an entire river with his venom, killing all the fish, plants, etc. that live in or near it, and making all who drink the water extremely sick, with a 10% chance of fatality. He has a running feud with Garuda. Vritra is the Asura of the drought, and the Naga Ahi is his assistant. He can drain lakes, ponds, and streams by drinking them, and his bite can mummify a human. The rest of the Nagas come in three types: ordinary snakes who can talk (some with multiple heads), those with snake bodies and human heads, and those who are snake from the waste down and are human from the waste up.

Garuda: This is Vishnu's pet bird. It has eagle feet, wings, and head, with human arms, legs, and body. It is the Deva of all birds, and while he can strike with his wings, he prefers to use a sword or his claws.

Asuras: Asura literally means 'Not a Deva'. It is a general term to cover all inhabitants of lower planets (not hells, just other worlds) as well as enemies of the Devas. Asuras aren't necessarily evil.

Kuvera: This is the Asura of Wealth. He is a pale white man, deformed in body. He has 3 legs and only 8 teeth, and is usually seen coated in gold and jewels. He is also called Nararaja, which means 'King of Men', because of the power of money.

Kinnaras: These are Asura musicians, parallel to the Gandarvas.

Rakshasas: These are 8-10ft tall fellows the color of dark thunderclouds with very pointy teeth and claws on their fingers. They haunt cemeteries, bust up sacrifices, harass devout men, animate dead bodies, eat humans, and make a general nuisance of themselves. They are a chaotic bunch, so there are many exceptions to this general description: "some of them disgusted the eye while others were very beautiful. Some had long arms and frightful shapes; some very fat and others skeleton thin; some were dwarves while others were gigantic; some had only one eye and others only one ear. Some had monstrous bellies, hanging breasts, long projecting teeth, and crooked thighs. Some had three or four legs, or several arms. Some had the heads of snakes, donkeys, horses, or elephants." (The Ramayana). Their king was Ravanna, who had ten heads and twenty arms. Some could change shape into a single other sort of creature. They could not turn invisible or regenerate. Unless they are Ksatriyas they can easily turn down a bet. Ksatriyas (Warriors) must accept an invitation to gamble, but they can turn down the amount of a wager, etc. Even so they can only be forced for the duration of one bet.

Yakshas: These are the attendants of Kuvera and resemble Tolkein's Uruk Hai.

Ogres: Another name for Rakshasas.

Bhutas: Ghosts. Any magical weapon will hit one.

Ishtipachas: Stealers of offerings, imps.

Raktapas: Blood drinkers, Vampires.

Ganas: Goblins.

HANUMAN

This is the Deva of Monkeys. He is a son of Vayu, the Wind Deva. As the general of an army of monkeys, he aided Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu to defeat Ravanna, King of the Rakshasas. The monkeys are intelligent and fully civilized, led by Surgriwa, their king. They are civilized, wear clothes, and build towns.

They are the size of dwarves, but the orangutans are human sized and greater apes about a foot taller. Hanuman wears a plate armor breast and back plate and carries a mace(+5). He can leap great distances, and once leapt all of the way from the shore of India to Sri Lanka. He also knows herbal healing and wrote a book of grammar. The Ramayana names him the 9th best authority on the Sanskrit language of all time. His temples in India also serve as animal and bird sanctuaries, where all animals, especially monkeys, are tended, fed, and cared for, safe from danger.

JAMBAVAN

This is the Deva of Bears. He is the king of his kind, and also helped Rama out with his army. The bears are also intelligent and civilized, though they stick to forest life. He once owned the Syamantaka Jewel, which would produce 8 times its weight in gold daily. The previous 7 or 8 owners all died nasty deaths or had it stolen from them. Krishna followed the trail of dead owners to find the jewel, which Jambavan had given to his 6 month old cub for a toy. After a 28 day fight, Jambavan realized that Krishna was another Avatar of his old buddy Rama and gave him the jewel, plus his daughter Jambavati as a wife. Fortunately she could assume human form at will. After another half dozen murders the jewel was given to Vishnu who wears it as a necklace. Since he can't be killed everyone figured it would be safe there.

FINAL NOTE

When I refer to the Vedas I mean all of Vedic literature, which includes the four Vedas (Rig, Sama, Yajur, and Atharva), 18 major Puranas, 18 minor Puranas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. Together these form a massive collection which includes aspects of what we would consider myth, ritual, history, and literature.

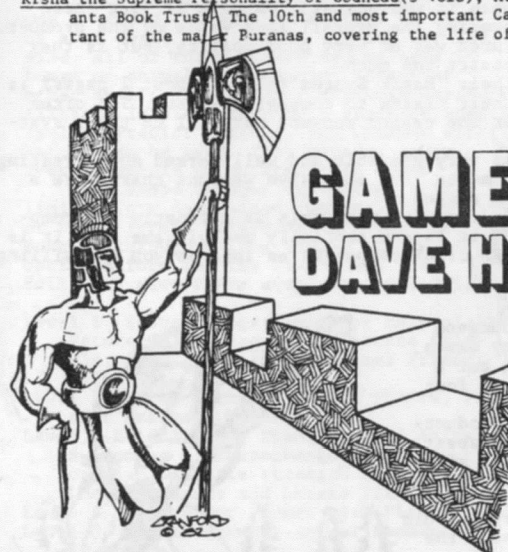
Some recommended sources relevant to the Vedas and other related material are:

Classical Hindu Mythology: A reader in the Sanskrit Puranas, Cornelia Dimmit and J. A. B. Van Buitenen, Temple U. Press, 1978. Selections from the best parts of Major Puranas.

Mahabharata, C. Rajagopalachari, Bhavan's Book University, 16th edition, 1976. This is by the first Governor General of India from India, a close friend of Mahatma Gandhi. The best short translation available.

Ramayana, C. Rajagopalachari, Bhavan's Book University, 20th edition 1980.

Krsna the Supreme Personality of Godhead (3 vols), A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, the 10th and most important Canto of the Shrimad Bhagavatam, the most important of the major Puranas, covering the life of Krishna.



GAMES IN VIEW
DAVE HARGRAVE

David Hargrave is the creator of the Arjun system, one of the best selling and earliest Role-Playing systems, and a model for many games to follow. His new system, Arjun Bloody Arjun! will be out soon, but in the meantime, here are some of his views on some recently released games and aids.

DUEL ARCANE

This is a mini-game from Game-lords, Ltd. It retails at about \$4.00.

This game comes in a small zip-loc bag, consisting primarily of a single booklet in 8.5x11 format, and not the highest quality of production. It resembles nothing so much as the 'gamettes' which were produced some years ago. There are 27 pages of rules, plus an additional computer-printed errata sheet. They are easy to read and understand. The computer generated 'Character Sheet' is functional but not particularly exciting.

The buyer should be aware that these rules pertain only to a specific 'kind' of role-playing gaming: that of magical combat between two 'shape shifting' magicians, and the entire 'scenario' revolves around this sort of action. While this may be of interest to campaign FRP'ers, the value is definitely limited, as it is a source for only one real idea. It is best suited for the novice gamer or for one who wants to try a little fantasy gaming but doesn't want to take on the expense and involvement of a real game system.



Most hard-core fantasy gamers will find this game overly simplistic, but I see this as its greatest asset, as it allows them to be integrated into many systems with reasonable ease.

I find this game to be poorly produced, but still quite interesting, though of somewhat limited appeal. All in all, I'd recommend it.

INFINITY

This zip-loc packed game sells for about \$7, from Infinity Game Co. It contains a 3-hole punched, 35 page rule book and an errata sheet which doubles as a drop-in cover.

The producers state that the game "Combines past, present, future, and fantasy into one comprehensive role-playing system." This statement gave me a definite pre-prejudice, and was, I felt, extremely presumptuous, if not downright smug. It was partially correct, although not for the reasons which the authors intended.

The rules are a homogenized and simplified amalgam of practically every system on the market. The closest resemblance is to Squad Leader.

I found that it concentrated primarily on combat, and gave short shrift to practically every other aspect of role-playing. For that

reason, I found it an easily assimilated combat system, usable with practically any available game. While this one system was complete and comprehensive, this is definitely not a complete and viable role-playing system which could stand on its own. It simply doesn't have enough information in other areas.

There were a few minor production glitches, such as listing the section on 'magik' on page 29 in the contents, when it was actually on page 27, but these were all minor and infrequent, not lowering the overall good value of the product. What small amount of artwork was featured was of very poor quality, but as they were just a few spots, they didn't detract too much.

The amount of space allotted to their 'Magik System' (all of about 2 pages) is a clear indication of how unfounded their claims to completeness are. Too often the authors lapse into suggesting that the reader convert material to their system or ad lib.

I found that the combat system was very playable and well worked out, creating a fast-paced, if somewhat unrealistic melee. The extensive weapons charts are a major encouragement to buy it just as a source.

I would advise potential buyers to remember that this is definitely not complete, but that given that reservation, it is a potentially useful game aid. It is easy to play and could enhance many FRP or SF campaigns as long as you are willing to sacrifice realism for playability.

ALCHEMISTS ABODE

This purports to be a complete 'dungeon' module, for about \$4.50 from Adversary Games. It comes in a zip-loc and has nothing but a single sheet of text folded in four and four very large (22.5x18) map sheets.

To start, I have to say that the production standards are without doubt the cheapest and least well-done of any game or game aid I have ever seen. The 'maps' are standard one inch hex grid maps drawn on with felt-tip pen and copied by a blue-printing machine. I could do better with my eyes closed at a third the price.

It purports to be a "25mm floorplan for use with any and all fantasy and SF games using miniatures." I guess it is just that, however I think it isn't nearly worth the price charged. For only a token effort it could be 100% better done.

The hit point system for the monsters is patterned after the old D&D system, and the room encounters are so inadequately written up that they might as well not even be described. All this certainly is not inspiring at the price.

I cannot recommend the purchase of this game, except as a shelf piece for the collections of the most obsessive 'compleatists'. It is of amateur quality in content as well as production.



SHAPECHANGERS
ED MORTIMER

The editor of *Pegasus* is back with us this issue with another D&D character class, this time one suited by nature more to NPCs than to PCs. His previous articles have included one on Astrology and several contributions of creatures for GWCTD...

Shape Changers are a race of intelligent demi-humans which inhabit certain of the parts of the Prime Material Plane. A Shape Changer has the following minimum ability scores: STR-13, INT-13, WIS-13, CON-15, DEX-15, and CHA-13.

The nature of the Shape Changer is to assume other species. In addition they can cast other spells, and are immune to all charm, hold, mental, hypnotic, psychic, and illusion-type spells, except those specifically designated as affecting monsters, for example 'Hold Monster'.

Each Shape Changer has a number of Shapechange Points equal to the total of his 6 basic ability scores. These are expended for changing shape or casting of spells. These costs are: 10 SP for each shape change, a number of SP equal to the level of the spell when it is cast. SP are restored by: Sleeping-10/hr, Eating 10/full meal (up to 4/day), Relaxing-4/hr. A Shape Changer who is not in his human form and is down below 10 SP will automatically return to human form, expending all remaining points. Each change, both from human and back to human costs 10 SP. All shape changes take 2 rounds to work, as do all spells.

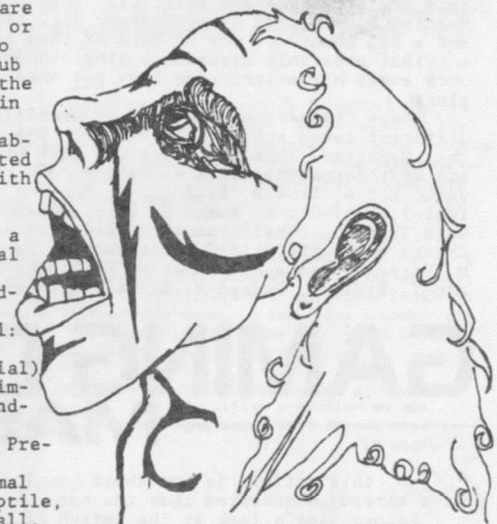
When in human form they can track as a Ranger at -20%. When in animal form they track as a Ranger at +20%.

Shape Changers cannot use Scrolls, Books, Rings, Wands, Rods, Staves, or Potions, but they can use those miscellaneous Magic Items designated for any class, and artifacts available to any class, as long as the alignment matches. They have total disdain for armor or weapons, so will not use any, even magical ones. In combat they use the 'Creatures Struck Only By Magical Weapons' chart, as they are 'Monsters' and not usually PCs.

They use D12 for Hit Points. Their HP and level do not change when they change form. Note that attacks in human form are almost always by Pummeling, Grappling, or Overbearing (See DMG p72-73). If they do use a weapon, it will be a stick or club of some sort, with damage varying for the size. All of their powers can be used in human or animal form, except speech or other skills beyond their physical capabilities. In plant form only plant-related spells, Predict Weather, and Commune with Nature can be used. They have no power over insectoid or mutated life forms.

Each Shape Changer can change into a limited, pre-determined number of animal or plant forms, according to level. He must go through a long ritual before adopting a form for the first time. The following powers are available by level:

- Level 1: Shape Change (Mammal or Marsupial), Nature Call (Dragon #18), Locate Animals, Speak w/ Animals, Animal Friendship.
- Level 2: Animal Command, Locate Plants, Predict Weather, bonus 5 SP.
- Level 3: Hold Animal, Plant Growth, Animal Summoning 1, Shapechange (Avian, Reptile, or Fish), double strength Nature Call, Locate Animals and Locate Plants.
- Level 4: Hold Plant, Speak with Plants, Speak with Magical Beasts, bonus 5 SP.
- Level 5: Animal Growth, Animal Summoning 2, Call Woodland Beings, Shapechange (Plant).
- Level 6: Commune with Nature, Detect Poison or Disease, Animal Summoning 3, Cure Light Wounds, double duration Speak with Animals, bonus 10 SC.
- Level 7: Neutralize Poison, bonus 5 SP.
- Level 8: Cure Disease, Anti-Human Shell, double strength Predict Weather, bonus 5 SP.
- Level 9: Heal, Weather Summoning (Magical Creatures), bonus 20 SP.



LEVEL	EXPERIENCE NEEDED	NAME	LEVEL	EXPERIENCE NEEDED	NAME
1	0-5000	Cub	6	80001-240000	Shape Changer
2	5001-10000	Yearling	7	240001-480000	Speaker
3	10001-20000	Hunter	8	480001-1000000	Sub-Chief
4	20001-40000	Master Hunter	9	1000001+	Chief
5	40001-80000	Guardian			

To gain a level once he has the needed EP, a Shape Changer must spend a month in retreat, with animals, in animal form.

Legends portray Shape Changers as Lycanthropes, but they are definitely not. As most of Humankind and other intelligent races, believe these legends, there is little interaction with them. A chart is given below which details the likes and dislikes of Shape Changers. Above racial preferences, their motto is "If you help me, I'll help you—If you hurt me I'll hurt you twice as bad." A Shape Changer will return any help or hindrance he receives from others. They never forget their friends or enemies.

Shape Changers are essentially human, but they prefer to live away from other humans. They prefer the company of animals or their own kind. They disdain money or commerce, and survive from the scavenging and hunting which they can do in the form of a beast. They have little material treasure, except an occasional artifact, kept hidden in a sacred place known only to the Chief and Sub-Chiefs. These are usually of an absolute and cataclysmic nature, and held as a last resort.



They live in tribal groups, which are few and far between. In each area there will be no more than 3 Speakers, who speak for the people to the Chief, 2 Sub-Chiefs, and 1 Chief. Tribal hunting grounds usually cover 1000-3000 square miles. Shape Changers living wild, outside of a tribe, or Shape Changers not performing any political/social function cannot rise above 6th level. In each of the tribes there will be 10-30 families, totalling 20-100 adult males, actively patrolling the area near the main encampment, which centers on a 'Meeting Place', usually an outstanding geographical feature, often associated with tribal legend. They meet in conclave 4 times

a year, when outlying sub-tribes and families join with the main tribe to celebrate the equinoxes and solstices. The Chief and central tribe are always near the Meeting Place. Each Shape Changer will have several animal friends living near him and a 50% chance of one or more of them being magical-type creatures. Outside of a tribal area only occasional single Shape Changers will be encountered, except once every millenium, when they all make a holy pilgrimage to an unknown gathering place.

Shape Changers can be Good or Neutral, but not Evil. Their feelings towards different races are as follows, with G=Goodwill, T=Tolerant, N=Neutral, A=Antipathy, H=Hatred. This indicates who they will attack, who they will associate with, and what forms they will willingly take: High Elf-N, Wood Elf-T, Grey Elf-T, Aquatic Elf-G, Drow-H, Half Elf-A, Gnome-N, Dwarf-N, Tallfellow & Stouts-N, Hair-foot-T, Half-Orc-H, Human-H, Other Humanoids-H, Giants-H, Titans-T, Were-Bear-N, Were-Tiger-G, Other Lycanthropes-A, Treant-N, Nature Spirits and Most Magical Creatures of the Wild-G, Locathath-T, Sahaugin-H, Troglodyte-H, Troll-H, Wolves-H, Harpy-H, Lamia-H, Sphinx-N, Manticore-H, Dragons-A, Leucrotta-H, Lammasu, Shedu, etc-T, Nixie-T, Undead-H, Animals-G, Shape Changers-G.

GAMING DURATION

MASON JONES

Now we welcome a writer who has been absent from these pages since #17.

No, this article is not about how long it is healthy to play for. Most of us have already discovered that the hard way.

Rather, let's look at the length of the game itself. Does your group usually play in long-duration campaigns, or single-adventure games?

A long-duration campaign is certainly not for everyone. Such a game takes a great deal of planning, far more than a single adventure, obviously. I don't really see a campaign as simply a number of adventures strung together, either. A true campaign is a series of related conflicts which, when looked at as a whole, can be seen as part of a long story. A group of adventurers travelling about, becoming involved in many adventures is not the same, as each adventure is a discrete unit, and hasn't anything to do with the others.

Such an approach need not be bad. I am just defining my terms. A series of adventures is not a true campaign, but it is also not the same as single adventures, forming instead a neutral zone between campaign and adventure play. Like a campaign it requires a good deal of detail, with at least some world design, much more so than for single adventures, but less than with a full campaign.

Duration is not limited only by the number of 'adventures' involved, however. There are many full-scale campaigns which are single-adventures. These adventures are usually of epic scope, like the Odyssey or the quest from Lord of the Rings,

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TO CHALLENGE TOMORROW

This unusual SF role-playing game has finally finished playtesting and is in production. It is a skill-based system with a simple but extremely realistic combat system. The emphasis of the game is on non-violent and social interaction, and playing in unusual situations. The game includes full rules and a scenario. Orientation is towards space exploration, time-travel, and paratemporal exploration. It is inspired by the works of H. Beam Piper, Randall Garrett, and Keith Laumer. It should be finished by December, and can be ordered in advance for \$5.95.

MIDDLE PASSAGE

This is a new boardgame of trade in the Atlantic during the 17th and 18th centuries. It is a detailed game which can be played on any of a number of levels, from pirates preying on merchant shipping, to national struggles to control shipping lanes, to profiteering in the slave trade, to a combination of these elements. It is an economic and diplomatic game. Included are a number of counters, plus a 84x17 map, record sheets, and rules. The game won't be ready until late December or early January, but can be advance ordered for only \$3.95, certainly less than the final cost.

All of these items can be ordered on the form above and to the right, where you can also renew your Abyss subscription.

(Gaming Duration, continued)

all one unit, of great duration. Such an adventure would take many sessions to complete, but the action would be continuous in game time. Whether these form true campaigns or not is hard to say, so they could fit in the neutral zone.

Before you start gaming, consider what you are setting out to accomplish. Not everyone has the patience and stamina to build an entire adventuring world, and you need not do so before starting to GM. If you feel the need for a whole world, make one, but don't be afraid to start from the basic adventure unit and build out.

Go ahead and try a few adventures. Even if you are not cut out to design worlds, you may be a good GM. Work out some one-shot adventures. They can still be as much fun to play in as more developed worlds, and they may lead you on to bigger things, while providing experience and useful practice.



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