

ABYSS 25

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**Bryson, Davies, Mayhar
Nalle, Schuller & Others**

INSIDE

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CONJURINGS

Another late issue, inspite of promises last issue. It becomes annoying, but it is hard to keep writers, printers, money and myself to a strict schedule. We will get out six issues per year, but some may have to be a little late. We're going to try to get the next issue out a bit early, but no promises. If it comes early, it will come very early, so look for it.

We continue to need more circulation of ABYSS. If we don't get more readers we will have to start cutting back, returning to 20 pages and the like. Tell all of your friends(you must have some) to subscribe. Renew your subscription. Take copies to local stores and get them to order copies. We need your help. If you believe in the kind of varied and mature material which we try to publish, please do what you can to spread the word.

This issue you should find some interesting new material, particularly the return of Lew Bryson's fiction, some interesting contention in 'Echoes from the Abyss', another annoying bit of bile from Jon Schuller, and fiction by Ardath Mayhar, author of How the Gods Wove in Kyrran and other novels. I hope you enjoy the issue and will send in the rather expanded Feedback section.

Next issue should also be a winner, with such dreaded items as a new installment in the 'Challenge of Champions' series(with a possible change in authors: we have sections 5 and 6 by Rick Shaw, but section 4 has yet to come out of Tom Curtin), and the awesome return of that idol of the 12-year-old crowd, Mort Munchkin, plus some other new and intriguing material, including a massive slug of reviews from Eric Olson.

Ye gods, gotta go. May the cruel winds of fate never blow down your chimney.

UTHERCON 2

UTHERCON is the premier gaming convention in Texas. It is a one-day convention with a broad selection of game tournaments, lectures and demonstrations for role-playing and strategy games of all types. The convention runs for 18 hours on Saturday November 12th at the University of Texas in Austin. There are over 70 gaming sessions already scheduled for such games as Dungsons & Dragons, Ysgarth, Field of Honor, Diplomacy, Kingmaker, Champions, Call of Cthulhu and Traveler, as well as demonstrations of the newest releases and seminars by noted guests. Advance registration is only \$3, but it will go up to \$5 after November 1. All events are only \$1 for each round. There are extensive facilities available for overnight accomodation and many other benefits of the university community. Write now for the pre-registration book which will be available in September. UAGS/UTHERCON, 3212 Red River #109, Austin, TX 78705. (512/477-1704)

ILLUSION & REALITY

DAVID NALLE

There is a fine line which divides illusion and reality, one of several fine-lines which divide some of the unclear areas in fantasy role-playing games. In *Dungeons & Dragons* and a number of other systems these fine lines are marked by various mechanical systems, such as saving-throws and other numbers a player must beat or roll within to avoid adversity, or to determine success or failure.

The problem with saving throws and the whole breed is that they are too cut and dried. When a player can look on a character sheet and see exactly what he needs to roll to survive something, or when he even makes the roll himself, it takes away a certain important aspect of mystery from play, and also takes away the GMs ability to play situations a little loose in order to make the adventure run as he has planned it and as is most enjoyable.

There are many situations in which a character might be against unbeatable odds or at a seeming advantage when it might be better for the adventure for him to beat the odds or slip up and take a fall. In too many games the division is too sharp. In a dangerous situation saving throws and combat rolls allow only success or failure, nothing in-between. Characters are rarely captured, and rarely surrender. They either conquer or die. In games which are played strictly by the numbers there is too little room for 'fudging' on the part of the GM, either in the player's behalf or to enhance the plot.

Many GMs are too cautious about being unfair or arbitrary and thus managing to lose out on a lot of the fun of hair-line situations. The key to solving this problem is to manipulate situations and chances without letting a player think that he has any less control than he might. You have to make it look like he has a chance and have him fail, or make it look like he's doomed and then give him a lucky out.

This isn't easy to do, but there are several ways to help it along. The first and essential step is to establish absolute authority so that there can be no debate when you decree something which is contrary to the expected. In addition to this you have to take control of the rolls away from the players. This can be done by taking the dice away from the player, but this tends to make him lose his sense of involvement in play. The better way to do this is to take tables and charts away from him. Instead of saying 'make a dragon breath saving throw', say 'roll a Die 20', and tell him if he makes it, leaving in the possibility of minuses on the save and the like, and letting you do what you want.

An area in which this problem has particularly strong and useful application is that of illusion. In most campaigns GMs let players make saving throws to 'disbelieve' illusions. This is ludicrous. What use are illusions if players can choose to try not to believe in them. This is one case where they shouldn't get to even know what they're rolling for. You might even have them roll in advance for the illusion and never tell them what they rolled for (this adds mystery). But in the case of illusions, why give them a save at all? Illusion means nothing if it can't pass for real, so don't let them save until something happens which puts the reality of the illusion into question. If it is in a logical place and situation there should be no reason to doubt it without close examination. Some campaigns are plagued by constant attempts to disbelieve everything. Tell them when something seems false to them, don't tell them when they have no reason to doubt.

Role-playing is a game, but it is also an attempt to simulate the adventure and experience of heroic fantasy fiction. In this genre there are narrow scrapes and overwhelming odds, and there are things which seem real but are not, and other deceptions. A key to many of these stories is the character's bad luck or gullibility (often more than the player's), and the key to the character's survival may be a stroke of divinely inspired luck. To simulate these factors adequately, fine-line mechanical systems are not enough and the burden must rest on the judgement and story-sense of the GM.

The idea here is not to remove mechanics from the game, but to soften the role of mechanics at key points, so that players get the feeling of a story rather than a mathematics quiz. If you do this properly, it will lead to a less realistic, but more believable game, truer to the model of heroic fiction.



IN THE SPECULUM

MAGAZINES

MOONSCAPE

Box 1858, Swan River, Manitoba, CANADA ROL 1Z0

Appearance:9, Content:4, Value:6, Personal:5, Overall:5

Moonscape is a new Fantasy/SF fiction magazine edited by Mogens Brondum. The first issue is 52 pages in an 8 1/2 x 11 format. It is published quarterly at \$2.75 per copy or \$10 for 4 issues.

It is an attractively designed and laid out magazine with some excellent artwork, including a very nice spread of Stephen Fabian's work. The titles are a bit monotonous, but the art is very nice. However, the fiction content does not inspire the same kind of positive reaction. If one word could describe it, that word would have to be 'amateur'. The stories are all fairly short, and none are by major writers with the exception of a piece by Jessica Amanda Salmonsson, whose work has always left me rather cold. There is also a poem by Janet Fox, but most of the fiction is rather obvious and inexperienced. The highlight of the issue is the 'Artfolio' by Fabian. Generally the fiction just doesn't match up to the quality of the illustrations. There is some clear evidence of talent and effort here, but it is hard to attract really talented writers for a first issue, so there are still plenty of possibilities for improvement. It might be worth while to order an issue if only for the art, and look for improvements in the contents in the future.



NIGHT VOYAGES

ISSUE NINE



NIGHT VOYAGES

POB 175, Freeburg, IL 62243

Appearance:8, Content:9, Value:6, Personal:8, Overall:8

Night Voyages is now in its ninth issue. It is in an 8 1/2 x 11 format, with 60 pages of text at \$3 for a copy. Subscriptions may not be available, as it is liable to go out of business after #10 (a true pity if it does happen).

NV features a mix of material by first-rate writers of several sorts, including in this issue Glen Cook, Ardath Mayhar, Fred Singer and Darrell Schweitzer. In the past the art has been outstanding, but it is a bit off this issue. The cover is a mess and the interiors are of varying quality, but there are some very good points. In addition to fine fiction there are also reviews, interviews and news, making an interesting and informative mix of material. The layout and graphics are generally very good, as are the titles, and about half of the art is really outstanding. Its a pity that the illustration on the back cover is better than the one on the front cover. Generally NV offers some of the best new writers around, catching them as they rise towards true professional status. Most of the

back issues are available, except for #6. When ordering, include \$1 for postage in addition to the basic cost which ranges from \$2-\$3. Write for a complete list of issues and contents. On the whole, I heartily recommend NV to all, and urge you to give it the support it deserves.

GAMES & AIDS

NUCLEAR ESCALATION

Flying Buffalo Inc., POB 1210, Scottsdale, AZ 85252(\$12)

This is an interesting and long-awaited expansion to the enormously popular game **Nuclear War**. It is an updating and augmentation of the original game, but can also be played independently. It comes boxed, and includes 6 player sheets, rules (including expansions), a 'radioactive fallout' die, and many new cards. It brings the original game up to date and adds many new aspects, including replacing the obnoxious self-destructing spinner with a new die-roll chart for combat resolution. This, like the original



is based on the assumption that nuclear war can be fun, and if you suspend prejudices it is fun. The cards are the key to this new set, and they include some interesting ideas and additions, such as spy cards which let you steal 'secret' cards, and a variety of new delivery systems, of which the highlights are the Cruise Missile and the Orbital Space Platform.

Nuclear Escalation plays acceptably on its own, and is a fun, easy to learn game, with the same flavor as the original. However, it works even better in combination with the original Nuclear War game, as it adds many variables and all of the additions are compatible with the original. It adds a lot of depth to the game and the combination of the two is better than either taken separately. It is a fun, easy to learn and rather amusing game which plays quickly but still has many variables. The only real annoyance about the game is the art, which seems to be deliberately poor, to match the amateurish style of the original set, however, it is just ugly, unlike the original set's art, which has an unsophisticated charm to it. I still recommend it highly. (David Nalle)

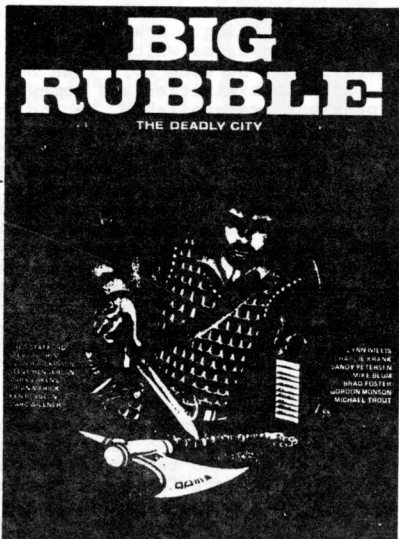
BIG RUBBLE

Chaosium, Box 6302, Albany, CA 94706

This may not be the time or place, but I am going to indulge myself and express some personal opinions in this review. I have been an avid RuneQuest player, an admirer of the system, and I still play a number of the spinoff games, but I feel that Big Rubble typifies the major conceptual failings behind RuneQuest and the world of Glorantha as a playable FRP campaign.

Big Rubble is an attractively produced package designed for expanding a Gloranthan campaign to include adventures in the ruins of Old Pavis, which are known as 'Big Rubble' (a descriptive epithet). There are five items in the set. These are a book of 'Episodes' (scenarios), a book of 'Knowledge' (player background), a 'Guide' book of information for the GM alone, a very nice map of the area, and a one-sheet bribery table. A lot of nicely developed background material and information is given for both players and GM, and in addition to the 7 major adventures given, the information is extensive enough to run an almost infinite series of interactions and encounters. It is well put together, clearly presented and easy to run and understand.

The main complaint I have to register is that Big Rubble is incredibly boring and unimaginative. It is exactly the same sort of stuff which has been produced to use with RuneQuest for years, with the same old obvious, more or less static or random settings and encounters removed to the background of a ruined city. Detail and development of fantastic background are not a substitute for imagination, innovation and originality. I've decided that the place names of Glorantha are symptomatic of the problem which surfaces so much in this aid. Just as the names are obvious and purely descriptive, Big Rubble is obvious, consisting of most mundane background. Here as in many other recent RQ aids, we see lots of exhaustive and fascinating detail with very little life to it. FRPing is supposed to be fun, but if a world or background is inherently stagnant, as Glorantha seems to be as it develops, it is hard for even the best GMs to make the material anything but a dull and repetitive parade of obscure information and tedious trivia. The considerable talents at Chaosium could be used better on something more innovative and exciting. (John Davies)



SHERLOCK HOLMES CONSULTING DETECTIVE

Sleuth Publications, 2527 24th St., San Francisco, CA 94110

I picked this one up at ORIGINS, and before that I hadn't heard anything about it, but it is a remarkable game and worth looking at. It comes in a neat little loose-leaf folder which is a container for the 'Clue Book'. In addition, there is a large, nicely done map of London with a directory, a Quiz Book, brief rules, and a 'Case Book' with introductions to the 10 basic cases featured. There is also a book of newspapers appropriate to the cases. All of these are inexpensively, but attractively produced, with appropriate illustrations and well-placed quotes from Conan Doyle's works.

The game is playable by any number of players. The object is to solve a crime from clues which are either presented and freely available in the newspaper, or can be researched by reference to other sources or by interviewing various witnesses by reference to the clue book. Success depends on the player's observational and intuitive abilities. The map, directory and case book are general references to aid in locating witnesses and finding basic clues to lead to more advanced answers. The newspapers hold essential clues to start off many of the investigations. When he

thinks he has the solution to a crime a player may answer a quiz set up for that case and establish a score based on his answers to those questions and on the speed with which he completed the case. A score is given for Holmes for comparison, and the player may do the quiz at any time. Note that the player may only investigate one clue per turn, and this limits how soon a reasonable solution to the case may be found.

The detail worked out for the game and the complex ideas behind it are excellent. It is fun to play, easy to learn, and actually involves careful thought and gives a good feeling for the ideas behind the Holmes stories. It is the first game on this sort of topic which really makes a mystery truly mysterious and allows the player to do some serious sleuthing. However, there are some notable problems and areas which could be improved. Cases really can't be done more than once, so with only 10 cases possibilities are somewhat limited, through expansions are available. Second, your options are also limited, and if you take an unorthodox route to solving a case and it is not covered by the clue book, you lose out. The most serious flaw is the total lack of player interaction, which means that you are really just competing against each others' scores. Some interaction and cooperation might be a good addition. On a pickier level, it is very hard to look up clues without glancing at others which you have not found yet, as they are all given together. Also, the quizzes to solve the case include some questions on Holmes trivia. I'm afraid I've never been a trivia buff, and I think their inclusion detracts from the interest which some players will have and from the validity of the scoring system. One the whole, this is an excellent game and I can recommend it with few reservations. (David Nalle)



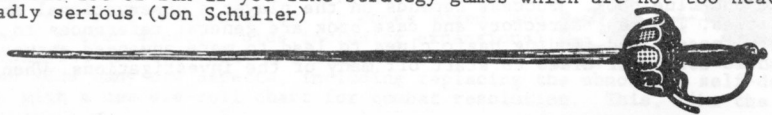
JUDGE DREDD.

Games Workshop, 1 Dalling Rd., London UK

This is a remarkable little boardgame based on the popular British comic 2000ad. It is for up to six players who take the rôles of law-enforcing Judges in Mega-City One, and bop about the board to find Perps (criminals) and stop them from committing various futuristic crimes and put them out of comission. Crimes and Perps have various combat values, and the player who has the most dangerous selection captured at the end of the game wins. There is extensive background material provided, much of which is quita humorous and a bit grim. Included in the game are a simple sheet of rules, 2 map boards and a large selection of cards. The cards are very important, as they apply in combat and other situations and modify the outcome of various occurances. The game is very open ended and most of the cards can be used at any time to alter any of the parts of play, and many even have multiple functions in different game situations. They also all have amusing backgrounds and even personalities.

The artwork is great, and the best thing about the game is that it is simple and you can do anything you want within the limits of the cards, and the atmosphere of the game makes it particularly fun because players can identify with the odd characters and situations easily and really develop a mood and feeling of good-hearted competition. This is probably largely because of the special vocabulary used to describe various parts of the game, which immediatly put the players into the context of the game. Judging from this simple, playable boardgame and the background it has, I would say that Judge Dredd and the whole milieu of 2000ad would make an amazing role-playing game, and I suspect that they will quite soon. Games Workshop would miss a great bet if they didn't do such a RPG, which would combine elements of a number of the most popular games on the market.

I heartily recommend Judge Dredd. It is easy to learn and quick to play, and just a whole lot of fun if you like strategy games which are not too heavy-handed and deadly serious. (Jon Schuller)





MISSION OF TEMPERANCE

PART TWO

LEW BRYSON



Pwyll saddled the horses while Girithaur put out the fire and woke Gorgar. The two demi-deities mounted and started down towards the ford, bidding farewell to the enchanter.

"Goodbye? Hold on, boys, hold on, I say! Where you goin' without ol' Gorgar? Y'said y'were goin' after a drink, didn't cha, hey?" Gorgar peered at them with an anticipatory grin on his lopsided face.

"Well, yes, we told you the whole thing," Pwyll agreed. "But I thought you were headed for Ptolemeias?"

"Root and Worm, boy, why do you think I was headed there? There, that is! The whole country up this way is dry, dry as a fire giant's fart! That fella you're aimin to filch some from is the only source of tonsil oil for 50 miles! 50 Loki-lovin' miles, boy! It's a Hel only a mad god could imagine, son, but I'm willin' to go to its heart just so's I can say I got a drink there!" Gorgar's smile broadened. "Of course, only so long as you two fine gentlemen'd be willing to put your marks on a document attesting to the fact!"

The two looked at each other. "I'm willing if you are, Welshman," Girithaur said. Pwyll flicked his reigns. "Well, come on then! There's wine that's cryin' to be drunk and we stand here talking! Let's go, you old boozehound!" The three crossed in high spirits.

As they rode along the flower-lined track in the bright summer sun, it came to Girithaur that he was feeling better than he had in a long time. He missed the open road, the open heart and the open schedule it brought with it. The life of a pet deity was not what he'd imagined. Out on the road he wasn't chivvied and ordered by imperious priests who only had prestige and profits on their minds. By the Orb, they had Ra himself cowed, the one god, the sun god! It never ceased to confound him. Granted, gods need worshippers, and priests kept the worshippers coming around, but a demi-god had no such need. Didn't that somehow make him more than a god, even while he was admittedly less? And did he really need the whole priest-subdued pantheon. He could cut out the middle man. Why not just—

"Hey, dreamer! Look alive, we're almost there. And it's about time, too! My thirst could kill a daddy dragon." Pwyll wiped the sweat from his lined face. He had led them to the top of a ridge, from which the castle was a clear target in the valley below. "Ha! Look at that! I can almost hear it slosh!" The castle stood by Stollac River, its solid keep backed right against the bank, strong and square in the certain walls.

Well, boy, what are we going to do? Do, that is!" Gorgar was flushed, mopping his brow with a huge ragged handkerchief. "We just got to get in there soon, or by Sleipnir's ninth leg I'll curl up and die. Die dry, boy, hardly, I say, hardly a fate for one such as me."

"Come on, I've got a couple of ideas," Pwyll elucidated as they rode down to the castle. They reached a copse a mile from the castle on the far bank of the river and set up camp. Gorgar was finally convinced that he would have to wait until it was dark, and promptly cast a spell on himself to induce sleep, "to pass the time, boy." The two fighters got out talus and cup, and by sundown Pwyll was ahead 2000 Marks. "Ha, ha, that's four month's salary you owe me!" he crowed. "And I want it in money Walt will take, too, none of those Ynisgalean guano shekels. I'm going to buy enough of that batpiss wine as I can and pour it in the street. So relax, your poverty is in a good cause."

Girithaur glared suspiciously at Pwyll's dice, not for the first time. "Don't you ever lose, you Celtic conniver? Don't you ever feel like you should lose? Does it ever bother you?!"

"Not often, not really, and not at all, your most worshipfulness." Pwyll scooped the dice into cup and stood. "Wake the old boy up, it's time to do some work."

Half an hour later the three stood by the ford upstream from the castle. Gorgar sat on his ever-patient horse, dressed in his "performin' duds," a motley and moth-munched collection of faded silks and smashed velvet. Pwyll and Girithaur stood by him, dressed in black tights and singlets, their faces blackened with ash and grease. Pwyll was putting on a large black rucksack and explaining to Gorgar.

"Just get in, I really don't care how you do it! Tell them you're a disguised maiden running from bandits, tell them you're rich, tell them you're Thor if you

want to, just get in and get to the kitchen! Great Gwyn, what's so difficult!" Pwyll handed Girithaur a black glove and slipped on his own pair. "Get into the kitchen, and when the bats start coming in, holler a lot and open the window. Try to put out some torches, if you can. Now get goin'! C'mon, Gir." They dove into the water.

Gorgar took Pwyll's advice and went to the gatehouse of the castle. He animated several rocks along the way, and they ran around the horse's legs in a crazy game of tag as he came up to the gate. "Hallooo! Hey, boy, open this gate! Gate, that is!"

A helmeted head looked out a window. "What's the problem, bud? Bandits out?" "No bandits, boy, just one enchanter! I've got a show for you folks, and all it'll cost is food and bed for one old goat!" How's about it?" Gorgar waved as he spoke and the rocks lined up in front of him and made a chorus line bow. He waved again, and a mouth appeared in the stone by the guard's face. "I'd let him in. He's great, I caught his act over at Earl Kaviss's. He's a scream!" The guard looked at the mouth and then at Gorgar.

"All right, fella. Come on in." The gate swung open and Gorgar and his escort entered the courtyard.

"This was a brilliant idea, you old fool. Float downstream and spider up the wall. No problems, you said. HAH!" Girithaur lunged with his long weirdsword. "Got 'im. Well?" he said over his back where Pwyll crouched on the same rock.

"Look, I'm—HAH!—sorry! I didn't know about the jawfish. It doesn't hurt that much, does it!"

"Only when I move. Don't you have anything in that sack?"

"The only thing I can think of us a Thunderball. It might scare them away, hang on," Pwyll muttered, and started rumaging in the pack.

"Hang on, he says. Like I have a choice. I'll never listen to you again, Welshman, not if it means a life without liquor—HAH!" he lunged again. The sword came up with a two foot fish which was mostly fangs and fury. He waved the fish at Pwyll. "Look at that thing! We were swimming through them, you loon!"

"Get it out of my face!" Pwyll thrust the skewered fish away. "When the ball goes off, we swim for it. Here goes." He threw the small white sphere in the water. There was a splash, and then the surface of the water rose a foot all around them. In surprise, they dove, as stunned jawfish rose to the surface. Stroking strongly, they made it to the castle wall and clung there with the spider gloves.

"What the Hel was that?" Girithaur gasped.

"It was just a lousy little Thunderball," said Pwyll. "Those things must be more powerful in water. Let's go." They climbed the sheer wall in deep shadow, the bright square of the kitchen window above them.

Gorgar walked into the main hall of the castle, his rocks running after him, squawking and squeaking in thin little voices. "Who, I say, who's in charge here?" he bellowed, looking around. A tall bearded man stood up at the head of the table.

"I am in charge here, knave! Who are you and—Hey!" The man started pawing at his beard, which was tying itself in knots. A plump woman beside him laughed.

"HA-ha, Boyarth, that's one on you, ha-ha—Whoohoo!" She jumped straight up in the air as one of her chair's arms goosed her. The forks and knives on the table began dancing a fast waltz as Gorgar bowed low. "Your forgiveness for a spot of levity, your honor. For dinner and a bed, the great arts of Gorgar the Animator are yours, m'lord."

The baron, who had not stopped laughing since his wife had shot into the air, waved Gorgar on. "Have your dinner, old one. If you're as good as this, you can stay on!"

Pwyll and Girithaur clung to the window sill, waiting. "He won't show, you know. We were crazy to trust him. And here we are, stuck to the wall, soaked to the skin, and, need I remind you, still thirsty." Girithaur shook his head, trying to get water out of his ear. "We couldn't just go to the Singing Weasel or the Wobbling Marmoset, on on, we had to go on some for-Set's-sake expedition!"

"Ye of little faith...He'll make it, don't worry. Want to make a wager on it?" Even in the deep darkness, the gambling glint shone in Pwyll's eye.

"Pass. You've made me a believer. If you'll bet on it, it'll happen." Girithaur relaxed. "Where are you getting the bats, anyway?"

"Oh, that's easy. I picked it up at the enchanter's shop." He pulled a two foot long tube from the rucksack.

"Are you crazy?! We're trying to be quiet and you bring a bellfree?" Girithaur was frantic, waiting for the instrument's characteristic tintinnabulation.

"Don't worry, this one doesn't have bells." Pwyll put the tube to his lips and blew. A bat flew out the other end and fluttered away.

"What's good to eat around here? Food, that is!" Gorgar bellowed, whacking a serving wench's butt. "Ha-ha, Gorgar's here, I say, Gorgar's here!" He looked quickly around the room, spotting the window and the three torches that lit the room. Now where are those boys? Oho, there's a bat! "Holy Odin, a bat! There's a bat, I say, a bat!" The kitchen help screamed, and as two more bats slipped in through the slats, Gorgar started to wave. "Great Freyr above, don't let one of them touch ya, they'll suck your blood out in a flash! Flash, that is!" He beckoned, and a torch threw itself into the wetsink. "Bonds of Fenris, they're fierce! Carry disease, I say, disease!" Another torch fell in the soupkettle. "Whoohoo, look out! One's in the soup!" The last torch toppled from its bracket and plopped in the pud-

ding. "Hey, one's got me! Get out, they turn into ghouls in the dark! Save yourselves—GGAAAANKH!" Gorgar gargled horribly as the serfs ran for the door. He went to the window and threw it open. Pwyll and Girithaur clung to the wall, giggling. "Well, come on!"

"Don't want to. Scared of those killer bats," Girithaur said as the two men vaulted in and ran to the door of the larder.

"Now remember, old boy. Put yourself to sleep, say you fainted, then meet us at the ford tomorrow." Pwyll turned from the enchanter as Girithaur eased open the door and drew his sword, gesturing down the stairs with it. A guard stood there, leaning against the railing.

"That's a good sign. Must be good stuff. Don't worry. I've got a gadget." Pwyll dipped into the rucksack again and drew out a small golden sphere with a ring attached. "Shushsphere." He pulled the ring and there was silence. Pwyll slipped his invisible Ithildin sword from its sheath and leapt down the stairs. The guard spun about and caught a firmly planted foot in the groin and a follow-up hit to the temple. Not a sound was heard!

Girithaur closed the door and trotted down the steps."---- --," he said, smiling. He grabbed a ham from the overhead beam, carved a slice and offered some to Pwyll.

"-----, - ----," he said, and the two of them walked to the door of the wine cellar, munching ham. The door opened, and they saw a huge cellar, rack after rack of bottles and eight massive musty barrels along one wall. "Jackpot!" chortled Pwyll, gleefully rubbing his gloved hands. "We'll have a bottle now, a bottle then, and then we'll have a bottle! Hee-hee!"

Girithaur grabbed a bottle, dusted off the lable, and moaned. He fiddled with the Hell Lance and a corkscrew flipped out. He began to open the bottle.

"A corkscrew?"

"Yeah. It slices and dices, cuts and pares, and comes with a corkscrew and full set of lock picks. Got a lifetime money-back guarantee, too." Girithaur grunted as the cork came free. "Here's to crime, Welshman." He drank deeply. "Ahhhh...A fine chablis, light and refreshing, cooling to the palate, and definitely too good for a Welsh philistine such as yourself." He chuckled as Pwyll shot him an ancient Cymric gesture and grabbed a bottle of his own.

"A red, undoubtedly too full-bodied and mature to be appreciated by a sun-loving sybarite like you," Pwyll stated after an exploratory sip. "Let's have at it, eh?" He set aside the bottle and drew the five flasks of infinite capacity from the rucksack. "Oh, no. Only five. I guess we'll just have to taste test and make a selection. Tough luck, I'd say."

"Never say that Girithaur backed down from a challenge, no matter how towering! Come, Pwyll, if it's test we must, then test we shall!" Arm in arm, bottles in hand, they proceeded to the task.

Many tests later, the flasks were bulging, and they were selecting bottles. As each passed their scrutiny it was fitted into a small netting sack on the special ropes and lowered into an extra-dimensional holding compartment in the rucksack.

"'At's one for me... 'At's one fer you... 'At's one fer Walt, that tightfisted bastard... 'At's one for Rolf, that pearl among men, that tiptop tapman, that—hic!—divine dispenser... 'n' 'at's fer Ra—That fink god! Yeah... Fink!... 'at's fer Uncle Gorgar, and that's for 'is bats! Ha-ha, here's to Gorgar's bats!" "Yer, that's fer his bats!" They drank deeply, and tossed the empties onto a small but steadily growing heap of broken glass.

"Hey! What was that?!" Girithaur whispered suddenly.

"What was what?" Pwyll asked, still loading bottles.

"I heard something. Somebody's coming!"



"Oh, Hel. There's still room for 20 bottles." Pwyll looked truly dejected.

"To Hel with that, 250s enough! Let's get out of here! Hey...how do we get out of here?" Girithaur turned to Pwyll with a blankly astonished face.

Pwyll waved away his question. "Never fear. I have thought of everything. Get in the sack. I will fold it, set off this shrink spell, pocket it, and then just sneak out. Get in, get in!" Pwyll gestured frantically at Girithaur, who quickly lowered himself into the vast reaches of the sack. As Pwyll put it into his pocket he heard a scream in the next room as a serving girl discovered the unconscious guard.

"Time to disappear," he said to himself, and popped a small capsule which held off another shrink spell. He and his equipment rapidly shrank until he was little more than an inch high. "Hee, hee, they'll never catch me now!" He squealed, and ran for the open door. The serving maid still stood screaming. Pwyll noted her black skirt and ran for her, keeping in shadow.

The guards came thudding down the stairs just as Pwyll leapt for the skirt. He gripped the coarse fabric tightly as the girl was roughly shoved upstairs. She ran into the kitchen, and Pwyll dropped and ran under a table. When everyone crowded around the girl, he climbed the wall to the window. He dug into the rucksack and found what he was seeking: a gliding cload. He slipped through the louvers, and was off on a very uneven flight to the ford.

As he came coasting into the previous day's capsite he was quite surprised to see Gorgar standing there. "Come on, boy! Come on, I say! The baron's mighty suspicious, had to get out before he got nasty. Hey! Sober up, boy!" Gorgar picked Pwyll up by the cloak and held him in front of his face. "Grow up, boy! Get big! We gotta get movin'!"

Minutes later the three were riding southward through a providential thunderstorm. Girithaur leaned towards the still tipsy Pwyll. "Well, Pwyll, what do you think we should do with all this wine?"

"Several ideas are running around my head. How pissed at the priests are you?" Pwyll blinked as the Hell Lance roared Girithaur's reply into the roiling clouds. "I thought so. Look, we're demigods, right? So we can open temples on the Street of the Gods. I've got an incredible idea. You quit at Ra's place. Tell 'em you've received a vision or something. I'll close down my temple, we renovate it, and make it a tavern!" Pwyll's face took on an aura of wonder as he spoke. "We'll call it Pwyll and Girithaur's Place. Or maybe the Breaking Bottle! The only other place on the Street with booze is Dionysus'. and decent people won't go near that den. I'll steal Rolf from Walt, we'll put that bastard out of business! What do you think?"

"Ha-ha, I love it! You're a genius, a Welsh wizard! Free at last from those damned priests, no more audiences, no more hemorrhoids, no more CRAP! Just one thing, though. We have to make these little expeditions occasionally. I'll go nuts just sitting around Ptolemeias." Girithaur shook an unsteady finger at Pwyll. "But the name, let's try simplicity, why not just 'The Temple'."

"The Temple", simplicity, that's it, I say, it!" Slurred Gorgar. "I'm in the presence of vine-inspired genius, inspired!"

"We've got to have more than wine and a name. We'll have to make many expeditions. We need to get some beer, brandy, maybe some lotus and opium, definately some cordials, oh, lot's of stuff. I figure we'll get the beer first. My son Manneluch knows this guy named Implotius..." and they rode to the south, schemes, plots and grand ideas fermenting in their sozzled minds.

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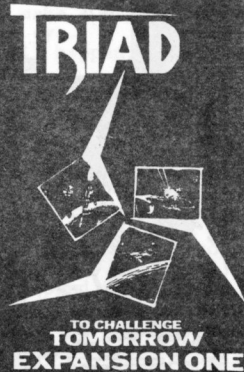
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THE WORLDS OF THOMAS BURNETT SWANN

JOHN R. DAVIES

This is the first (sort of) in what we hope will be a series of articles examining the works of specific, perhaps less well known SF/Fantasy authors, with specific suggestions on developing their ideas for use in role-playing campaigns. Write if you have ideas or would like to suggest some subjects. Previous articles of this sort have been done, particularly 'Lord Darcy's World' in #22 and 'Call of Khalk'ru?' in #19.

Thomas Burnett Swann (1928-1976) was a professor at various southern universities during the 60s and 70s, and wrote a number of short stories and novels during this period, establishing a distinctive style and high reputation at a relatively early age, only to have a promising career cut short by cancer at 47. The Swann Foundation was established at Florida Atlantic University after his death, and promotes fantasy in various ways, including an annual conference.

Swann's work is particularly interesting for his dreamlike, mythical style, and for his practice of setting stories in legendary/historical backgrounds adding an element of fantasy. He was particularly taken with looking at the transition from a world of magic and myth to one of a more mundane reality, especially the fading of the creatures of legend and the rise of humanity as a dominant species, and the conflict between myth and reality.

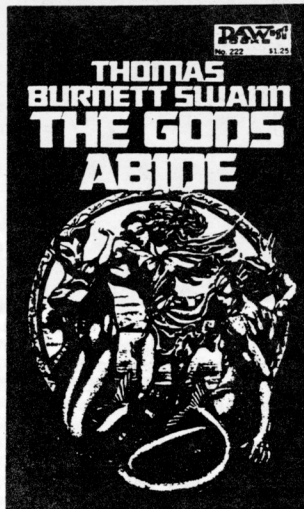
His preferred setting and mood seems to be drawn mostly from classical literature and legend. Thus, many of his stories are set in Classical Greece, Imperial Rome, Mycenaean Crete and Dynastic Egypt, periods where there are many known facts and characters but also a good number of legends and fantasies to draw on.

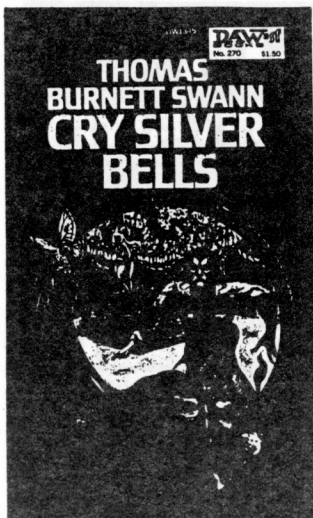
Swann's style may be a bit formal and indirect for some readers, but it establishes strong moods and images, and his ideas and settings are well worth the effort of a little reading.

Most of Swann's best novels and stories are set in the period ranging from the start of classical antiquity to the fall of the Roman Empire. This period includes several of his major settings, and is covered in such novels as *The Gods Abide*, *Cry Silver Bells*, *The Day of the Minotaur*, *The Lady of the Bees*, *Green Phoenix*, *The Minikins of Yam*, and *Wolfwinter*. All of these involve interaction between human characters who are striving to control and understand their environment and ancient, intelligent mythological creatures who are slowly losing power and slipping from the earth as humans become dominant. These stories are filled with strong characters and well-developed relationships. The characters have depth and personality and the relationships between humans, especially children, and the world of mystical creatures and powers are particularly good and believable. There are also strong feminine roles featured in a number of the stories, and many of them bring out an impressive range of historical and social background and detail.



Three novels are set in Crete and share a number of common characters. These are *Cry Silver Bells*, *Day of the Minotaur*, and *The Forest of Forever*. All of these concern the retreat of mythological creatures in Crete into an area in the center which exists outside of time and space where all manner of 'beasts' can live safe from man. They also concern the dangers faced by these creatures at the hands of humanity which wishes to persecute and exploit them. *The Lady of the Bees* and *Green Phoenix* can also be fitted into this group, at least on the periphery. The two central characters in the Cretan setting are Zoe, an ancient Dryad, who narrates the tales, and Eunosotos, the last Minotaur, who is her protege and the main subject as his experiences and maturing are traced through the stories. Other major types featured include Harpys, Satyrs and a Sphinx, among many others. The bit-players are particularly well done, with interesting and appropriate personalities suited to





in many of Swann's books, magic, mystery and unseen fate figure rather strongly. In this particular set of stories there is also a very strong element of religious and philosophical conflict as different fates struggle for dominance.

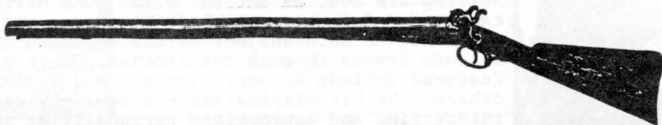
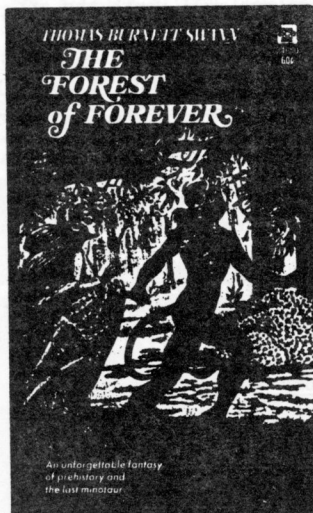
From mere description it might seem that Swann's world is full of silly little creatures prancing around in the woods, but there is really much more to it. There are fundamental evils and hatreds running through the works, and significant elements of conflict, intrigue and treachery. Swann's worlds are not nice cheery lands. They are worlds where the elements of peace and harmony are being driven out and in many cases have been forced to adopt harsh methods to survive. There is an air of doom and desperation throughout his works, almost all of which depict a noble society in decline.

I have run a campaign drawing many elements from Swann's work, especially from The Lady of the Bees and Green Phoenix. The situations which Swann develops and the very nature of the material and settings really encourages the growth and development of role-playing and character development over traditional hack and slash type activity. The emphasis is on the conflict of philosophies, attitudes and personalities, rather than more obvious physical or good/evil conflict. Few characters are purely good or bad, and every one has a complete persona and rational reasons for being and behaving in a certain way. Special work for non-human characters is essential, as they may make up a majority of the characters, but that is not too hard. Also, magic follows traditional lines, rather than the artificial systems of D&D and other games. Magic is weak and unreliable, except for certain subtle, indirect magical powers and the natural abilities of various creatures, so an adjustment of the magic system and some strict limiting is needed.

Swann's worlds are very playable and a lot of fun, with a mixture of all of the elements which make great fantasy, with enough unusual aspects to make for a pleasant change from most FRP campaigns. There is much which is familiar to gamers who know their classical mythology but the rational explanations, plots, and applied nature of the creatures are different enough to keep players guessing and maintain an essential level of suspense.

SUGGESTED BOOKS

The Lady of the Bees (1976), The Day of the Minotaur (1966), The Forest of Forever (1970), The Weirwoods (1965), Moondust (1968), The Goat Without Horns (1970), Green Phoenix (1972), Wolfwinter (1973), How Are the Mighty Fallen (1974), The Not-World (1974), The Minikins of Yam (1976), Tournament of Thorns (1976), The Gods Abide (1976), Cry Silver Bells (1977: Posthumous), Queen Walks in the Dusk (1976), and Where is the Bird of Fire? (1970: Anthology)



GRAPHOMANCY

Joseph Teller

Graphomancers or Calligraphers are a class of mage akin to Runists, but with some interesting possibilities. They deal with the creation of effects by the use of magical symbols painted drawn or laid out with sand on a surface. They are required to have the Clerical Skills of Research and Preparation, the Enhancement Skill Control and the Native Skills of Writing, Calligraphy and Mapping.

Most of their magic deals with setting out on scrolls intricate spell designs which will be activated by the touch of an intelligent being. The reason for this, according to ancient masters of the art, is that the body of an intelligent being possesses a highly magical aura which can interact with the magic. Once activated the symbols usually vanish on completing their function and thus cannot be used more than once.

Creation of a symbol on a scroll is carried out with the use of ink and a set of calligraphic instruments. Symbols in sand are done with colored mixtures of sand and last at best for a day if unactivated and take three times as long as the listed CT to create. They are common among primitive cultures, and may be made without knowledge of Writing. They may often be accompanied by blood rituals, but these are not actually necessary. Blood is often mixed in to dye the sand.

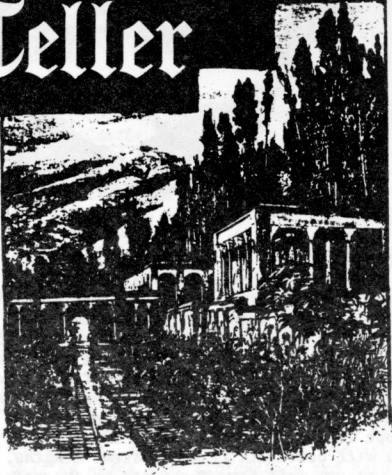
Although there are basic symbols taught by the masters, all Graphomancers develop their own style. Variations and combinations of existing symbols are possible, but may produce unexpected results. Casting requires relative seclusion, and an interruption will cancel a casting.

Most Graphomancers carry about a number of blank and prepared scrolls. Many earn their living by preparing defensive inscriptions to protect from theft or intrusion. A selection of basic spells is listed below in standard format.

SPELL	LEV	CT	RAN	DUR	TYP	SAV	DAM
Alarm: This emits a gong-like sound audible to all nearby, used as a warning of intrusion.	2	60	T	5M	G	---	---
Fatigue: Halves the FP of the activator for the duration.	3	70	T	15M	M	WIL	---
Paralysis Bands: Activator is held in place by bands of mystic force, unable to move from the neck down.	5	90	T	1H	F	CON	---
Flame Ring: This surrounds activator with a 6' high ring of magical flame that will harm all who pass through. Offensive or defensive.	6	100	5R	2M	D	AGI	8
Pit: Opens a pit 20' deep under activator (damage is from fall). If victims are not removed they'll be crushed when it closes at end of DUR.	6	100	10R	1H	D	AGI	5
Calli-Creature: This is a variety of symbols on the same principle, to create an animate magical creature in the caster's control. The symbol must be drawn in desired proportions and must be something the caster has seen. Each must be researched separately. It will vanish if slain. It has standard characteristics.	8	250	T	1D	J	---	---
Teleportation: Into this symbol is placed the description of a specific place. It will instantly transport the activator and all he/she holds or bears to the location. It will not teleport someone into another object or being. Each location must be researched separately, but duplicate copies may be made at a CT of 200.	8	250	T	1S	L	---	---
Graphic Vision: This symbol produces a 2 dimensional image of a single location, person or object and all activity in the area. The name or description is part of the symbol, with separate research needed for each subject. A symbol may be duplicated at 1/2 CT. There may be other spells to block observation.	7	300	3R	1H	H	---	---

These are, of course, but a few of the basic possible symbols which can be created. Many spell effects found under other classes can be copied or adapted to this type, generally at the same level, but with somewhat increased duration and 10 to 20 times the CT. Spells of types D, E, F, H, I, J, K and M should generally be possible.

The class is not suited to those interested in violent conflict, but is for those who prefer subtlety. It is also useful for the GM for creating magical traps and wards in a castle or other building to keep out intruders of all kinds.



ECHOES

FROM THE ABYSS

Dear Mr. Olson,

It was with great interest that I read your 'Review' of The Castle of Ramoth in your March issue. Unfortunately, the only point upon which we agree is that the cost was higher than one would wish. Happily, this is a problem which we, too, have been aware of and are able to rectify as our production costs have recently been lowered.

I feel, however, that you have not only been rather cursory in your examination and hasty in your resulting judgement, but that you have, indeed, failed entirely to grasp the point of the series. Evidently you have seen only one unit (which has since been incorporated into a larger unit, enclosed for your critical examination and possible re-evaluation). Since you state that you would 'love to know' what is unique about the series, I have written the following elaboration. I hope you will bear with it if it seems lengthy.

As you well know there are on the retail market dozens of commercial 'scenarios' and 'campaigns', each complete 'to the smallest detail' (an exaggeration, but you are familiar with the 'hype') including treasures, monsters, dungeon and terrain maps, lurid packaging, etc. Most of these are intended for use only with specific systems. Many contain rules supplements of greater complexity as well as the actual scenario.

As far as I am able to determine there are relatively few aids for the designer or GM who has a real interest in creating his or her own campaign. One of the ingredients often thought to be useful is realistic graphic and visual aids in the form of maps, plans, etc. However, many of those involved have expressed to me their lack of artistic/graphic talent as well as their disappointment with available commercial products. Some GMs use only part of a rules system, combining it with aspects of other systems, trying to combine the best features. I have even heard occasional complaints that players in a campaign have purchased their own copy of a scenario and are aware of the surprises that await.

Far from being a weak point, the very 'emptiness' of the DWR maps and plans is their strength, if not their reason for existing. It is up to the GM to provide denizens and all other corroborative detail he desires. This will not only allow him to distinguish his own campaign from all others, but guarantees that no player will have access to secret information. Neither does use of these maps compell one to populate an entire city with monstrous residents of improbable number and incongruous mixture as in City State of the Invincible Overlord or similar scenarios. The GM may, if desired, use any other scenario simply by placing it in an appropriate geographical location. Since the DWR series will include maps of an entire world, units from various sources may be linked to each other in many different ways.

The DWR Dungeon Design Aids, which include map symbols, miscellaneous room listings, building and shop function keys and other not-yet-released items such as a universal calendar, are meant to be just what they state, AIDS, nothing more or less. Their use can enable a GM to fill in an empty room, castle or town as needed and no more than necessary. They are not intended to be, nor will they ever be 'scenarios' in the normal sense, until the GM makes them.

When the DWR room furnishing symbols are used the major contents of a room are seen at a glance. Written notes are only required for important, unusual or secret items or inhabitants. It is rare, or should be, to encounter a truly 'empty' room.

All the maps and plans may be xeroxed, or manually copied or traced before filling in detail. Of course, additions or changes in the actual geography can be made prior to use.

I am unfamiliar with the FGU castle design book that you mention, however, if there is any resemblance perhaps it is because all DWR plans are derived from existing structures, ruins, plans, etc. and are both historically and architecturally 'correct'. I have seen many rather humorous 'castles' and 'dungeons', etc. in modules for AD&D and others. More often than not they have no relation whatsoever to real architecture, or even good imaginary architecture. Castles (dungeons too) and other structures are built of more than graph paper and ink, are they not? Some of the strongest, historically, have been of relatively simple design. We do have more complex designs in the works, though.

As for our 'glad bag', you are close. But why does this upset you? I fail to see by the GM, or anyone else, should have to pay for an expensive, four-color print job and fancy box, when the contents are expressly designed for insertion into a loose-leaf notebook. We will continue to use these bags unless we can find a cheaper way to package these units.

I hope that examination of the combined unit I have sent will not outrage your sensibilities any further. Perhaps you might try actually using the maps as they were intended and create your own scenario. If not, please lend them to a GM of your acquaintance for that purpose.

I do hope that I have helped you to better understand our purpose (I assure you that no one is getting rich) and if you have any further questions, suggestions or criticisms feel free to call or write. I would be most happy to arrange a personal visit if you would be interested in seeing

some of our upcoming releases.

If, on the other hand, you still feel ripped-off, I would be happy to refund your full purchase price in person.

Omar Pancoast III
DWR Publishing Co.
Gaithersburg, MD

Dear Mr. Pancoast,

As to your letter on my review in ABYSS #23, thank you for explaining your views on the use of the Castle of Ramoth. I also thank you for sending me the revised Castle of Ramoth—Island of Ras Anttis combination. After seriously examining this new product, I must say that it is much improved. However, several of my basic criticisms still hold. First, the cover blurb on the original Castle of Ramoth shows the maps of the castle, the island of Ras Anttis and some as yet unknown city, and bears the label, 'Map Set: RA-II(CR) The Castle of Ramoth'. Only one of the map shown on the cover was actually in the product package. Even if this was not intentional, it is quite misleading to the average purchaser. The new product bears the label, "This unit is not a ready-to-play scenario. It is a playing aid and/or design aid only." This statement is not on the original product, and this distinction is part of the reason for the tone of my review. The new product also contains two pages that appear to be related to the castle which were not in the first issue. This includes a sample dungeon illustration and a terrain map of the area around the castle. Both are useful to a degree, especially the terrain, and I don't see why they should have been left out of the original product.

The Island of Ras Anttis is a considerable improvement over the Castle of Ramoth. While I felt the island map was an improvement, I found it lacking in many areas. After meticulously naming the areas on the map, not even the briefest hint as to their nature or why they were named as such is given. While I agree that a 'game aid' should not dictate to players, I think that anyone who needs to buy this sort of aid is lacking in enough basic skills that he needs some explanation and help in applying the materials. Also, while some of the additional listings and information added to the product are helpful, they are nothing that I haven't seen before and are certainly available in most rule-systems currently available.

To review any product, including the Dream World of Ramoth, I have to look at the information given and the price of the item. The information must be useful, must be original and functional within the goals of the product. The content should be complete without difficult gaps for the user. I also see how the product fits in with the progressive trends in gaming. By this I mean that a product should be an advancement in techniques and an addition in concept and quality to role-playing as a hobby. A product should be current, not clinging to old standards that are becoming obsolete. Today's gaming hobby is quite dynamic, and a company either advances with the new design trends or it perishes. An example of this is Judges Guild, which (while it has serious internal problems) has continued to put out products which are designed for the market of 3 or more years ago. This kind of designing does not advance or enhance our hobby and should not be encouraged.

Considering these factors, I still have to give Dream World of Ramoth as I've seen it so far and as you have described it a bad review. This product is not appropriate to today's market. It might have been viable several years ago, but it has little use today. Also, without knowing the

current asking price of the new version, I cannot give it a comprehensive evaluation. However, if the expanded version is priced any higher than the old Castle of Ramoth, it is overpriced for the amount of material provided. There already many complete, ready to play products that have all that this has plus more useful material for using the product and to aid the novice GM. In its current form, this product is of little value to most gamers, and in its original form it is even less useful. I have to stand by my review. If you upgrade your products to fit the needs of a more advanced and imaginative playing market, I would be glad to examine and review anything you published without bias and on its own merits.

Eric W. Olson
Assistant Editor of ABYSS
Haddonfield, NJ

Dear Scribes of the ABYSS,

I, Alexis Seventhrow, have made my miserly alter ego give the paltry sum of gold for another year of your tomes of legend and lore.

My adventures (pre-abysmal) consisted of hacking and slashing, looting and contemplating the reflections in beer mugs. Thanks to your wise insight and my alter ego's wisdom to use it, I now do more; gambling, wenching, perfecting my con-artistry and occasionally looting the chapel of some minor deity.

I saw trouble in paradise. My consistently contemptuous and clumsy clod of an alter ego was actually contemplating not renewing his subscription.

I, of course, saw the error in his ways. So, I pointed out (at dagger's point) to the misaligned mindless and orally diarrhetic miscreant his misconception and the unfortunate mishaps which might follow.

He immediately filled out the handy form. I knew my wonderfully well-thought words, my subtle logic and my dagger at his throat made him see his folly.
We will take your magazine another year.

Alexis Sevethrow
(Mike Smith)
Athens, TN

We'll take subscriptions anyway we can get them, even if we have to get characters to force their players to subscribe. We hope that ABYSS has been as valuable to others as it clearly has in expanding the role-playing horizons of Mike Smith and others like him.

Dear Dave,

I felt a need to write regarding your article on Zoroastrianism. I have just finished a course on it and I feel that there are some problems with your article.

Although you have obviously done some research on the subject, two of your sources are misleading and I am unfamiliar with the third. Cumont is a turn of the century anthropologist who is no longer considered a valid source for religious history or analysis. Campbell adopts a Frazerian viewpoint concerning comparative religion which adds an element of ethnocentricity to his conclusions.

The major tenets of Zoroastrianism are Right Thought, Right Speech, and Right Action. That was not adequately explained in your article and would certainly be important to anyone playing a Zoroastrian character.

It is very useful and interesting to present articles for use by players, but it seems important to me that the players get an overall feeling for the basic tenets of the religion rather than a quickie summary of the most obvious attributes of various deities. A real religion in gaming should be presented as accurately as possible so that gamers don't get false ideas about what the religion represents. If you come across some ideas in a religion that are ideal for gaming but some other concepts in that religion are not as well suited, make up a religion that use those ideas you like. It allows the Game Master freedom to play with the ideas and doesn't mis-inform the players.

Don't get me wrong, I really like your publication and find the religious articles useful. I look forward to many further issues of ABYSS.

Kate Pfeifer
Hortonville, WI

To clarify the nature of the 'Mysteries of the Ancient Magi' article, it was not written as a guide to modern or even ancient Zoroastrianism, but rather as a look at some of the myth-concepts behind the pre-Zoroastrian religious and philosophical beliefs, especially the myths and beings, which developed into the modern form of Zoroastrianism. It was intended to present the playable aspects of the primitive forms of this religion with a primary orientation towards gaming use. As such, it may not have been the best article in the series, but it gave an accurate and playable description of the major entities and beliefs involved, without entering too deeply into complex philosophies and modern beliefs, which although interesting, are not really necessary to play in a role-playing campaign. As was made quite clear in the introduction and conclusion to the article it was not intended to be directly related to Zoroastrian theology or practice, merely to its ancient myth antecedents. Criticisms of theological and anthropological aspects of the article or the sources are not relevant as it was a factual and mythological article.



Middle Passage



THE GAME OF TRADE
IN THE ATLANTIC
1680-1830

Middle Passage

Middle Passage is the outstanding boardgame of strategy and trade on the great Atlantic trade-routes of the great age of merchant sail between 1680 and 1830. The game includes a 2-part map, a set of record sheets, a 12 page rule-book with charts and examples, and six sets of ship counters.

Middle Passage can be played by up to 6 players, and allows a great deal of interaction, diplomacy and strategy. Each player runs a new shipping line and starts out with some basic capital and begins to build ships to transport goods from port to port, buying and selling any of 8 basic commodities to gain wealth and improve his line. They can also opt to become pirates and prey on the other players for quick profits at high risk. There are encounters and rules for wars and national conflicts, and there are special scenarios for military and political situations. Middle Passage is unusually flexible and playable. You can order a copy now at only \$4.95 plus 50¢ for postage.

BERSERKERGANG THE DEATH OF GAMING

JON SCHULLER



The doctor's report is in. The patient is suffering from an insidious cancer which is eating away its vital organs, complicated by economic and attitudinal problems. Taken together these factors may be fatal, and will at least leave the patient no more than an empty husk, a shadow of its former self. Symptoms observed at stores, conventions and gaming clubs all lead to a grim diagnosis. It may not be too late to apply a radical remedy. We have to find a solution. I don't want to perform an autopsy.

Sales of certain types of games and games in general have been falling off in many stores, and although analysts predicted a recovery in sequence with the general economic revival, this has yet to be demonstrated and is getting to be painfully overdue. Attendance at conventions is down dramatically. EASTCON this year was half what it was last year and a quarter what it was in 1981. ORIGINS is down as well, to about a third of last year's attendance. This can, of course, be attributed to such factors as poor locations, mis-management, lack of publicity, and even sabotage, but all of these factors have plagued past conventions which were far better attended. This fall off is affecting companies of all sorts, but especially those specializing in marginal products, such as Judges Guild. It is also particularly bad for role-playing oriented publishers as growth in role-playing has been faster and more sudden, and there is no old and established body of customers to fall back on as there is for wargaming.

Whether we like it or not, TSR is the undisputed leader and trend-setter in the role-playing industry. For most new gamers Dungeons and Dragons is the game with which they will start playing and for too many it is the one which will stay with them for their entire role-playing career. Next, most role-players start at a young age, ever more so it seems (a demographic report published by TSR shows a decrease of 2 years of player age per sales year, with a projected target age of 8-10 for new players in 1984). Young people, especially adolescents and pre-adolescents go through many changes and their attention spans are not long. If something catches their attention, it must be particularly flexible and fascinating to keep their attention as their interests change with maturity. There are few people who, once they abandon a hobby or pastime for any length of time will go back and revive that interest. Thus, for a hobby/pastime to maintain the interest of a young person it has to be able to hold both his pre-adolescent, adolescent, teenage, and mature interests if it is to be a lifetime involvement. These are basic principles which apply in this sort of situation.

Dungeons & Dragons, particularly AD&D and related products, is aimed at an increasingly immature audience. It is a mechanically limited system, not really flexible enough to encourage mature and socially complex situations and gaming styles. As people grow up they look for challenges on a more cerebral and more social level. Without modification, D&D does not provide these qualities. Some players will discover other games and ideas, some will find ways to alter D&D to their new interests, but the vast majority will become dissatisfied, and walled in by the mass of TSR products they won't be aware of alternatives, and they will slowly lose interest. As a result, what is happening in role-playing today is that lots of new players are being attracted by a product aimed at an easily attracted audience, but the product, while suited to 8-14 year-olds cannot hold the interests of these players as they mature, so the potential for continuing sales and sales of advanced supplemental material is limited. By aiming for a young audience, TSR has created a situation in which its customers are outgrowing its products, and turning away from gaming in general because no advanced alternatives are readily available. Unfortunately, some of these same limitations can be found in products from other gaming companies who try to fit their material into the mold familiar to the large D&D audience. Also, the communities which gather around any role-playing game tend to be just as insular as D&D groups, and once they find a new alternative game they may stick to it, not searching for more varied fare, and eventually lose interest in that game as well, and at that point they usually aren't involved enough to move on to a new game.

The answer to all of this is to get gamers involved in a much more active and self-aware gaming community where exchange of ideas is much freer and the old idea of 'system-snobbery' is eliminated. Players new to gaming should be made aware of the great variety of games available and encouraged to sample a variety. Involvement in more than one game system and campaign type is what can keep players interested, especially if they are constantly trying new ideas out.

To save gaming we must broaden the horizons of new gamers, eliminate system-snobbery and create a sense of community and involvement. TSR is poisoning its own market and passing the curse on to the whole gaming world. If they don't start to aim products at older players or to meet the needs of gamers as they mature, D&D will stagnate and die, and if the broader gaming world doesn't increase awareness of the lasting role-playing possibilities for new players, we'll all go down together. Think about it. Do something about it.

BRAVING THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

Eric Olson

Middle Passage is a game of trade in the Atlantic ('the middle passage') between 1680 and 1830; the great age of mercantile sailing vessels. Middle Passage lets players run the great shipping companies or the pirate bands which prey on them. It revolves around the design and maintenance of ships while trading 8 basic commodities to gain a profit. The game board details the major trading centers of the Atlantic; from Rio de Janeiro and Luanda in the south to Newfoundland and Edinburgh in the north.

The player or trading company in Middle Passage starts with a set capital in which he builds a ship within his means and to his own specifications. You can build the fastest ship afloat, the most heavily armed, one with the largest cargo capacity, or a personal mixture of the above. Each player also chooses a nationality for the registry of the boat and a home port for it of that nationality (say Great Britain and Bermuda). The registry of the ship need not be the same as nationality of the shipping line, and is important, as wars are possible between the various Atlantic nations. If there were a war between England and France a British ship could not enter a French port. Also, every turn, before movement, a roll is made on a random event table. More than half of the results are ship encounters. While most of these are peaceful, you do roll for nationality of the ships. If they are of a hostile nation, they will attack. Also, if another player is of a hostile nation, you have the option of attacking him legally. If you are not at war and attack a ship, you are branded a pirate and ports will deny you entry.

The goal of all of this is, of course, to make a profit from trade and expand your mercantile empire. Or, if you are a pirate, to expand your fleet and build up a safe base; say taking over an isolated colonial holding and defending it against all comers. Other options for merchants are to establish exclusive trading rights in certain ports and dominate trade in one of the 8 commodities. Anyway you do it, it's a lot of fun and there are so many possibilities and avenues for expansion that it is well worth its \$4.95 cover price. Now, I know that you are thinking that that is pretty easy for someone who works for Ragnarok to say, but the interest sparked in the game at EASTCON just confirms my views. I saw the game for the first time there, and I have played quite a few games since then (in one of which I beat the designer of the game, Dave Nalle (actually I blew him out)). Middle Passage is more complicated but just as enjoyable as my all time favorite—Field of Honor.

Since I've been playing, I've discovered a few minor flaws and have made some expansion rules. For those who ordered advance copies there are some errata and addenda to be noted. 1)When commodities are bought and sold, the base value given is multiplied by a factor of \$500 rather than \$100. 2)Hostile nations and wars are rolled for every 5th round rather than every round, which allows a bit more long range strategy for the players. 3)A clarification. If a player is running more than one ship, while they are all moved on his turn, the moves are separate, and each must roll separately for events, and even if they are in the same area, they are both fully effected by damage from rough weather, each taking the full effects. 4)Another clarification. If a ship is leaving port and rolls a nasty encounter, it need not leave the port. It may opt not to move that turn and hope for a better roll on the next turn. Staying in port protects completely from ship encounters, and causes the ship to take one storm type less if a storm of some sort is rolled. A hurricane becomes a gale, a gale a storm, and a storm does no damage.

I also have some suggested optional rule additions as listed below.

- 1)Each player should be of a different nationality. There are 7 possible, and each player should pick one, choosing in a randomly rolled order. This applies to the nationality of the player's company, not the registry of his ships, which he may choose.
- 2)Repairs to a ship should take a full turn in a port, with no movement taken.
- 3)Non-player ships might be able to have captains. Roll on the following chart to find the value of the captain. Roll 1D10. Add 1 for Men at War, add 2 for Priv-

Middle Passage



THE GAME OF TRADE
IN THE ATLANTIC
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steers and add 3 for Pirates. Make no addition for Merchant ships. The table for rolling Captain Level is given to the right.

4) Multiple ship encounters are another possibility. The percentages should be as follows. Merchants-20% of 2, 5% of 3. Pirates-30% of 2, 15% of 3, 5% of 4. Men of War-15% of 2.

5) Exclusive trading rights. For a fee of \$3000 per turn a player can buy rights to their home port, keeping all others from buying there as long as the fee is paid. Similar privileges can be established at additional ports at a fee of the number of guns at the port times \$500 to set up the rights, plus \$5000 to maintain the right per turn.

6) Pirate's safe haven. Pirates can pay for safety rights in non-neutral colony ports excluding the US. There are two methods to do this, paying \$2000 per turn, or a one-time fee of \$15000. This is a bribe to port officials, and makes the port the equivalent of the pirate's home port as far as rights and protection, regardless of nationality or pirate status.

7) Warehousing. If you have purchased or acquired more cargo than you can handle, you can rent a warehouse for \$200 per turn per cargo unit held. They must be in a specified port, and if its nation goes to war with yours the cargo will be seized. It may also be seized if the port is sacked.

8) There can also be ships in a port, guarding it or just hanging in, and they might take part in a defense if the port is attacked. For the Caribbean roll 1D6 for the number in port, for South America roll 1D4. For Africa roll 1D6-2. This is only on those ports which do not have a set shore defense of more than 10 guns. Use the events table to determine type. If a port is taken they should have a 30% chance to escape and if they fail, you can plunder them. On the events table roll 1D20 and add 36 for the type.

9) If you are in a port that becomes hostile while you are there, you can either fight the coastal defense, surrender your ship, or ransom your ship for $\frac{1}{2}$ its original value, captain and cargo included. The ship will be returned immediately if ransomed, or after the war if not.

10) Hull Damage. For every two points of hull damage, reduce hull capacity by one. For example, if you have a 30 hull and take 10 points of damage, your capacity is reduced to 25 until you reach land. Then, if it is not repaired, it becomes 20. This covers emergency repairs and salvage at sea. If Hull-Hull Damage (real) becomes 0, the ship still sinks.

11) Ability of port facilities. Given below are a number of ports and their capacities. These are only minor ports. Ports in Europe or the United States can repair up to any level and those in Africa not listed below cannot repair at all. The

Port	Captain	Hull	Guns	Speed
Bermuda	2	15	4	8
Bahamas	1	10	2	5
Cuba	4	30	10	15
Jamaica	4	30	10	15
Haiti	3	20	8	12
Puerto Rico	2	15	5	8
Georgetown	1	10	2	5
Santa Cruz	2	15	5	8
Rio de Janero	3	25	10	15
Tripoli	2	15	5	8
Tunis	3	20	8	12
Algeirs	2	15	5	8
Tangier	2	15	5	8
Arguin	1	10	2	5
Sene-Gambia	1	10	2	5
Cape Coast	1	10	2	5

values given on the four columns of the chart are the maximum levels of those quantities the port can repair to a ship in a turn. These are also maximum values in these areas which can be built in that port, thus, Cuba can only offer captains of 4 or less value, build hulls of up to 30, sell 10 guns to a single ship, and build or repair 15 Speed. Note that any ship at any port or coastal area can do limited repairs to Hull, Speed and Crew. They can repair up to 8 points of Hull, 4 of Speed, or 20 Crew. There is no top limit on Crew at a port.

12) Shore defenses. A player may increase shore defenses at a port by paying \$8000 for each additional gun and \$500 per additional man in the garrison troop.

Some of these modifications may seem a bit far-fetched, but the game is very open ended and one of the scenarios allows each player to

play an entire nation. Middle Passage has almost infinite possibilities, and can be played over and over again with different scenarios and variants, including many which you will probably think up on your own. Give Middle Passage a chance, you won't regret it.

ADVENTURES FROM THE ABYSS

ISSUES 1-22

EIGHT ADVENTURES

Adventures from the Abyss is a special offering for a limited time only. It is a single book with 8 mini-adventures published in *Abyss* over the last five years. It includes such excellent adventures as 'Jortaksholt', 'Lovers of the Grave' and 'The Trial of Ptah', plus 'Dome of Dwargel' from *Abyss* #1, which is generally not available.

The adventures mostly run for 2 to 6 hours, and are described in terms of D&D and other systems as well in some cases. *Adventures from the Abyss* is now only \$3.95 plus 50¢ postage and handling.

CONVENTION REPORT

EASTCON

E. Olson

EASTCON wasn't what I would call an ideal convention. In fact, it was pretty lame. On the negative side were the following: it was in the middle of nowhere, the facilities were too spread out and inconvenient, there was too little parking, there was nowhere nearby to eat, the pre-registration was fouled up—so Ragnarok and Gamelords events weren't listed, they only printed registration books for about ¼ of the attendees, there were fewer gamers than expected, the dealers were scattered all about (some carefully hidden, and there was a total breakdown of order. On the positive side, we were there, I was given an 'SPI died for our sins button' (thanks Bruce), and there were a few real people wandering around.

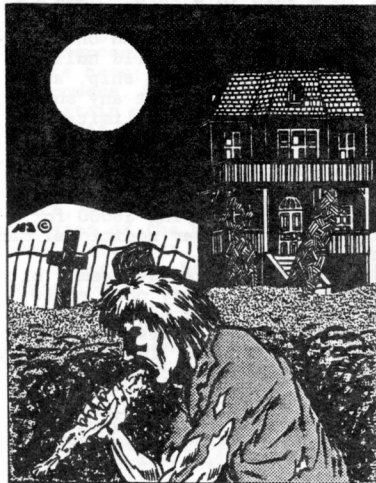
I had really looked forward to EASTCON and I was sorely disappointed by its lack of cohesion. Allen Barwick and his youthful staff tried their best, but the convention was a bit too much for them. However, as with any convention, you get as much out of it as you put in, and it can be enjoyable if you make a try at it. I had a good time even though Ragnarok was given the shaft and my prized Field of Honor tournament was smaller than I had hoped. I met a lot of friends who I only see at conventions, and anytime we get the Rag-men together, strange and humorous events (at least in our eyes) occur. Basically, EASTCON was a warm-up for the big convention—ORIGINS in Detroit. Also, Middle Passage and partial copies of To Challenge Tomorrow were unveiled.

As you can see from my article, Middle Passage is pretty good. TCT is also good, though some of the hype I've seen is pretty nauseating. It is a flexible system. We played over the weekend using TCT in a Call of Cthulhu type background and it ran very well. Well, that's about it. Thanks to those of you who stopped by our carefully hidden booth. (Sorry there are no photos, but Mort Munchkin only put in a limited appearance and was so mobbed by fans that we couldn't even get close)



ORIGINS

D. Nalle



EASTCON was a particularly good warm-up for ORIGINS, as it inured us to disaster. Without a question this was the worst of the half-dozen ORIGINS I have been to, and there are some clear and obvious reasons for this which could have been anticipated. Nobody want to go to Detroit. The area around Cobo Hall, where the convention was held, is an uninhabited wasteland of liquor stores and car-dealerships, the city is ugly, and there was a bloodstain on the lampshade in our hotel room. The city is unattractive, unsafe, and there is nowhere to get decent food at a decent price. We didn't have to hold it there, certainly not downtown, and in the future this is a site to be avoided, no matter how influential MDG is.

For the most part the convention was adequately managed (not good, adequate). The staff was competent and effective, but there were some annoying policies (they'd only let us into the dealer room 15 minutes before it opened to set up our booth), the program book was sloppy, ugly and disorganized, there was no ticketing for free events, and our best event was incorrectly listed as free so we lost attendance. We tend to run scholarly seminars and expert panels for which we charge a fair price,

but no one else was running serious seminars so they looked out of place. Seminars which had 100 people last year barely had 12 in Detroit, a reflection of the serious attendance problem (a third of last year). Another problem was that demonstrations were all held at the same time in one big room, leading to a lot of confusion. Ragnarok had a nice booth, but we barely broke even. Middle Passage sold well, as did To Challenge Tomorrow which was released for the convention. We also picked up some new games to review in ITS (certain people shamelessly leached millions of review copies—expect to see a lot of Eric in ITS)

ORIGINS next year will be in Dallas, and they seem to be well organized at this point, but DALLCON (their yearly event) was a bust and badly under-attended (though well run). Dallas is a much nicer place than Detroit, so we still have hopes.

THE WICKED-WEEDS

ARDATH MAYHAR

Ardath Mayhar is a popular fantasy novelist who has published a number of stories and novels, including How the Gods Wove in Kyrannon, The Seekers of Shar-Muhn, Khi to Freedom, Golden Dream, and Soul Singer of Tygnos. This is her first story for ABYSS, but we hope to present more in the future as we expand the fiction content of ABYSS.

The wicked-weeds are growing again. It's been a long time since any of us have heard of such a thing, but our Granny remembers the tales from her young days in the Old Place. We had all hoped they'd been cleared out for good there, and in the new lands here we knew there hadn't been any since first our Family came.

The first ones showed up along the cow-lot fence. Little Rob came a-scrampering to the house one morning, his face all screwed up with crying.

"A big red weed stuck me all over with stickers!" was all we could get out of him.

Now, there's many a weed in these parts that is well-supplied with stickers, so we didn't think much about it. We doctored him with aloe and comfrey poultice, and pretty soon he stopped crying and went off into the parlor, where his Aunt May was holding school for all the Family's children. We can't hold with the nonsense they teach in the regular schools, so May went off and got her degrees, just so she could educate our own young ones.

But next morning little Rob wasn't up to doing the milking. He was flushed and feverish. His eyes looked odd. So his older brother, Simeon, took the bucket and set off for the cow-lot. He was back in two shakes, his eyes big and round in his tanned face.

"There's something really strange growing by the gate," he told Grandpa. "It's tall, like an extra-big weed, with a blood-red stalk and branchy leaves all up and down it. When you get near it, it whips out and stickers you. I never saw the like."

Now Rob was only a little fellow, but Sim is twelve. He has been educated, not in the ridiculous ways they offer in the dinky little schools the locals run, but in the Family's demanding ways. Besides seeing and doing and reading and learning to tell the difference between his head and a big turnip, he has taken the college tests and doesn't even have to go to his Aunt May's school. We sent him to the Old Country across the water(not, of course, to the Old Place, which is much too far away), so he could see some of the world. When he said he'd never seen the like, we took stock in his words.

Grandpa looked across the table at Granny. She squinched up her narrow gray eyes and shrugged her tiny shoulders. "Could be," she said. "Though mighty unexpected."

We all looked around the table, children and grandchildren, uncles and aunts, sons and daughters. It took us a while to catch up with what they were signalling back and forth. Then Cousin Marthajo said, "Wicked-weeds?" in a scared voice.

Nobody answered her. We just got up from the table, leaving the cornmeal mush steaming in our plates, along with the frizzled ham and drippings. Each of us took his own hoe from its place in the rack and started off toward the barnlot.

The gate was, I will admit, in pretty sorry state. The post was old and had settled comfortably back on its haunches. There was a pretty fair gap between it and the gate. We'd put in a length of chain, so the gate could be snugged tight to the post, to keep the calf from squiggling through. But the whole thing was this-way and that-way, not a square corner nor a straight line in the lot. Beside the post was the weed.

It was a scary-looking thing, make no mistake. That stalk(it must've come up from near nothing to shoulder-high in a matter of hours) was the color you'd think it might be if it has been glass tubing, pulsing full of blood. The leaves were narrow and stingy and red-veined. Under each was a cluster of colorless spines.

Granny bent to look at the thing. But she kept her distance and didn't touch it. Then she looked at Grandpa and nodded. "Just as I heard it told, long ago. Chop her down, Elzo. Though it won't do us one bit of good."

Grandpa grunted. His bushy white eyebrows drew together in the way that makes me think of Jehovah on an off-day. He raised his hoe for a good chop...and the weed shook. Just as if it knew what he was doing. It trembled the way my knees were beginning to do, though I was a man near thirty. But Grandpa took a swipe and cut it off just above the roots.

"Dig her up, every root," Granny commanded. We all pitched in and hoed up those red rootlets. They made a big pile. For such a young plant, it was unlikely large.

When we'd done, Granny had a pile of pine-chips and bark and needles gathered right beside the roots. She got down on her knees. We could hear her joints crackling and complaining, but she pushed the two piles together. From her pocket she took a small box—her flint-and-steel that she only used for the most serious things.

It took several passes to get a spark caught in the timber. The tiny blaze took its own time, too, but she waited, steady as a rock, her wrinkly face set like lava. When the fire had caught, she looked around at all of us. We knew what to do. We joined hands and set our gazes on her face.

She closed her eyes and chanted. "EERHO! ARREHO! ORROHO!" I never had the gift of tongues, but I could recognize the language of the Old Place, as she went on with it. The fire blazed, clean and bright, until it hit those roots. Then it turned purplish-black, flame and smoke alike, and a stink to choke a goat began to rise. Granny frowned. Sweat stood out on her forehead.

She chocked into a jaw-craching chant. I closed my eyes and held on. I had always hated the way the world spun, when she did the old magics, and things hadn't changed a particle. But the air cleared, finally and clean smoke boiled from the fire.

When everything was down to ash, and the ash had been drowned in clean water, new-drawn from the barnlot well, Grandpa buried what was left and marked the dirt on top with the old signs.

Now every man and woman and child of us knew that wasn't the end. We'd known about wicked-weeds all our lives. We understood how sneaky and persistent they are and how hard to get rid of. And dangerous. Most of all, dangerous. But we all felt reassured, nevertheless, as we went to breakfast and then to the fields. Something about Granny could make you easy in the middle of a tornado.

The next morning Sim came running back. "The cow is gone!" he yelled.

Granny groaned. Grandpa frowned fit to make the mice crawl back into their holes. We all looked around, and you never saw twelve faces more full of apprehension.

"Just riled them up!" Granny spat, screeching her chair back and drawing herself to her full height. That brought her almost to Grandpa's second shirt-button. Still, it seemed as if she were looking down on us from a towering elevation.

"There's roots in the lat. I'd bet on it. If I'd used my wits, we'd have hoed there, instead of in the fields. Now we've got to dig up the place, root them out, one by one. Understand...if there's one stand of them, there's bound to be more. But we've got to do what we can. In the old country, with neighbors who knew what to do, you could clear out an entire area. It's different now. We're alone."

Everyone nodded solemnly. We'd been alone ever since the Family came to this new country. Not one of the families that neighbored us knew the old skills or even the old problems. They acted as if they'd been new-minted that morning.

"The cow, now, will not be seen again," rumbled Grandpa. He spoke so seldom that when he did, his thunder-on-the-mountain voice always startled me a little. "Sim, take four of the tads and go to the far pasture. Bring in old Suebell. She must furnish our milk now, whatever her calf thinks of it."

That was Grandpa. While everyone was worrying over big abstracts, he was down there figuring the necessities. And with eight young in the Family and two more coming, milk is a necessity.

We spent that day and two more digging out tiny little wicked-weed seedlings that we couldn't've seen at all without Granny to show us. We turned the barnlot literally upside down. The size of that root-pile was considerably bigger when we were done. Then we sent out the young ones (in company with bigger ones, of course) to search out any in the woods and fields. Their eyes were sharper, and they were right down there near the ground. Like a bunch of hens, they spotted things a grownup would never see.

After a week, we felt pretty certain that we'd cleared our own ground. No more livestock disappeared, and we kept close watch on them. But the woods that wrapped around our acreage seemed to be losing their inhabitants. Beast and bird and crawling serpent grew scarce, and we looked at one another, knowing the reason.

One morning Granny got up and put on her polka-dot dress and town shoes.

"Harp, she said, "Drive me to town."

I knew what she intended, and it made my inwards cringe. It would do no good at all, but I knew it was right and she must do it. I shivered, down in my gut, all the way to the sheriff's office.

She didn't let me go in. Those of us under forty she treats as if we were babies. She clicked into the office all alone, leaving me to fiddle with my imagination. She came back out in a bit. She looked glum, and I knew she'd been brushed off. But we had to warn others, even if they didn't heed us.

Of course they didn't. We keep our ground rooted out and have little trouble nearby. But now it's too dangerous to get the truck or the car out onto the road. After the wicked-weeds took the postman we gave up going to town. Word on the radi told us about what's happening to the rest of this unfortunate country. People disappear by day and by night. Cats and dogs are all but gone...not even many rats left. It's all so familiar. We've known that kind of plague before.

If only they'd listened! We could have taught them the old magics, but they don't believe in any magic except steel and electricity, so they're losing their world. Just the way our very oldest kin lost theirs.

We fled the wicked-weeds across the spaces between the worlds. More than once, according to the Family tales. Always the wicked-weeds came along, after a while. They must cast their spores from hither to yon.

Looks as if the time has come to get out the old manuals and polish up the old magics. We'll soon be looking for still another world to flee to.

PRODUCTS:

Throughout this issue you may have spotted strategically placed plugs for various inestimably charming Ragnarok products, including To Challenge Tomorrow and the soon to be released Triad. In addition, many of our traditional products are still available.

The Ysgarth Rule System is still available in its second edition at only \$11.95. It is the most innovative FRP system around, a skill-based system designed for maximum flexibility and role-playing enhancement. Ysgarth Supplement #3: Expanding Worlds will also be out soon, and should be quite interesting. It was delayed for a complete rewrite.

DRAGONLORDS #16 has just come to us, and is in the DL tradition of light-hearted excellence.

Adventures from the Abyss is particularly interesting. It contains 8 adventures from old issues of the ABYSS, on a full range of topics and levels of entropy.

We need your continued support, so I hope that you will order these or other items from Ragnarok, so that we can continue to bring you the most innovative role-playing games and aids at unusually reasonable prices. Write if you want a full catalog. The first step might be to renew your ABYSS subscription now and to get your friends to join our growing readership.

Note that you will find Feedback forms below, plus a lengthy questionnaire that I hope you will take the time to fill out so that we can better determine what games to cover in reviews and articles in ABYSS. Do fill it out with care and return it to us. The results will be published next issue with any luck. Let us know what you want to see in ABYSS and we'll try to fit your needs and interests.

RAGNAROK

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WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

FEEDBACK

RESULTS #24	RATING	CHANGE
Conjurings	89	+14
Witch Hunt	95	-3
Advanced Look at TCT	81	--
In The Speculum	75	-6
Summer at Soundsend	84	+2
Echoes from the Abyss	96	--
D&D Magic	63	-10
Studies in Sorcery	82	+7
Mysteries of Magi	95	+1
Alf Klosterman	86	--
Negui Dharsee	62	-24
Mike Cranford	95	==
Other Artists	92	--
Cover	97	+7
Titles/Graphics	97	-1
Overall	86	+2

QUESTIONNAIRE

Rate the games and magazines below on a 1-100 scale, with 100 the best and 1 the worst. Do not rate those you don't know well.

Dragon	_____	Original Dungeons & Dragons	_____
Spacegamer	_____	Adventures in Fantasy	_____
Gameplay	_____	Advanced Dungeons & Dragons	_____
Sorcerers Apprentice	_____	High Fantasy	_____
Abyss	_____	Rolemaster Series (ICE)	_____
Alarums & Excursions	_____	RuneQuest	_____
Nexus	_____	Worlds of Wonder	_____
Pegasus	_____	Ardun Grimoire	_____
Dragonlords	_____	Call of Cthulhu	_____
Phantasy	_____	Ysgarth Rule System	_____
Netherworld Continuum	_____	Swordbearer	_____
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