

ABYSS 27

V5, N6

NOV 1983



INSIDE

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ABYSS is published bi-monthly by Ragnarok Enterprises. Subscriptions are \$7 for 6 issues, \$13 for 12 issues, or \$18 for 18 issues. Back copies of most issues are available, send for a listing. A sample copy is \$1.50. Add \$1 overseas per copy for postage. All payments are to be in check or money order for US currency.

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CONJURINGS

Hiya folks! There comes a point at which being a month late on a regular basis does a wonderful thing. All of a sudden you're not a month late anymore, you're on a 'revised schedule'. In fact, if we got any more 'revised' we could push publication back two months at the start of the next year, and then, by gum, we'd be a month early instead. This issue is just making it under the Christmas wire, so I hope you'll all be getting it in your stockings or something equivalent (leather leggings, rubber boots, nylon pantyhose...).

Please, kind sirs, direct your attentions to "Echoes from the Abyss...", which is on page 15 of this issue. This issue it features two of the most provocative issues we've published up to now, and shows why a letter column is of value. On one hand, you have an installment in what seems to be a running debate, spurred on by David Hargrave's "My Arduin..." in #23, this time with a letter from David Hargrave explaining some of his views on the controversial division between experiencing a fantasy world and not being able to distinguish the difference between fantasy and reality. On the other, there is an example of what a letter to the editor should be if it is not a specific reaction to a particular article. Lew Bryson presents us with an insightful, humorous and sometimes biting look at some of the problems of ABYSS and some of his personal and original gripes. This is the kind of feedback we want to see from any of our readers, and it is for this purpose that we created a letter column.

In subscribing to or buying a magazine, the reader takes on a responsibility shared by every intelligent person who participates in any form of informational media. While there is a clear duty to the editors and writers to provide interesting and pertinent information, there is an unspoken and oft overlooked responsibility for the reader, who should pick up that magazine and consider carefully what is within, assimilate his reaction, examine it, and if on inspection he has a valid comment or argument, it is then his duty to inform the editors of that magazine of his reactions and observations. While the printed media can easily seem passive, just words lying on a page, it is far more than that. This is also a reactive and interactive form of communication, where you can communicate to us, and although your words may not be printed, they mean as much in the forming of the magazine as anything does, because if a magazine is to succeed, the editors had better damn well be aware of what the readers want, and give it to them. Unfortunately, we are only aware of the interests of those who let us know how they feel, and this is usually a motivated and vocal minority. As in politics, it is very hard to stir the 'silent majority' into action, but it is for them that we work, and they are the main body of our readers, so we live in the hope that they will be prodded out of indolence some day and send us the informing reactions we so badly need to keep this a magazine for all of the readers and not just an elite.

I'd like to say that this is more than just a way of telling you to write us. Don't just let us know what you think. Let everyone know what you think. There are many magazines and publications in gaming, some of which have gone far from serving the interests of the average reader, preferring to take off in search of some editorial fantasy. Write these people and tell them what you want and need to see. If they're publishing something, they might as well make it something people want to read. Editors do listen, we have to, both here and in other publications, but all the hardest listening is meaningless if nobody is saying anything. What you see coming to you on the shelves and in the mail is the answer to the interests you express, and if you say nothing, there remains the chance that what is published will be worth nothing to you. Speak up! (Dave N.)

IN THE SPECULUM

MAGAZINES

DRAGONFIELDS

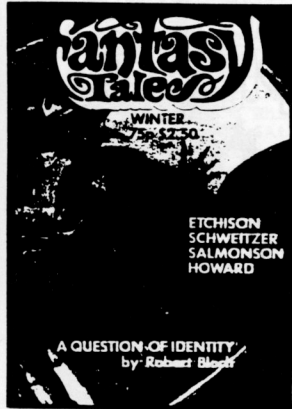
Triskell Press, POB 9480, Ottawa Ontario, CANADA K1G 3V2
Appearance:8, Content:6, Value: 4, Personal:9, Overall:7

DRAGONFIELDS is a fiction magazine from writer and poet Charles de Lint. It is now in its 4th issue, and grew out of two previous magazines, DRAGONBANE and BEYOND THE FIELDS WE KNOW. The current issue is 78 pages of text with nice art, in a 6½ by 8½ format, all in black and white using reduced IBM type(similar to ABYSS). The printing and production are quite good. A single copy is \$5 and as it is released on an irregular schedule there are no subscriptions.

The current issue is a devoted to Tanith Lee and her work, with a special selection of features included for this reason, as well as standard offerings. The Lee features include a story illustrated by her, a brief biography, an interview, a bibliography, a poem, and a story. All the material is well done and presents interesting new information and insight. It gives a broad perspective of Lee's style and interests, and fits in well with the general style of the magazine, which is oriented to mythical and style fantasy, and has published Lee stories in the past.

DRAGONFIELDS is nominally an amateur/semi-pro publication, but it continually attracts some of the best newer poets, artists and writers, including Gordon Linzner, Steve Eng, Galad Elflandsson, Darrell Schweitzer, Albert Manachino, Charles de Lint and Janet Fox. There is a clear style to the material presented, very much after the model of Lord Dunsany, James Branch Cabell, Clark Ashton Smith, and other writers on the more mystical and magical end of fantasy

I would heartily recommend DRAGONFIELDS for those who want to see some of the best new fiction in fantasy, but because of the stylistic orientation it may not be for everyone, as it tends to be rather poetic and mood-oriented. (David Nalle)



FANTASY TALES

130 Park View, Wembley, Middx. HA9 6JU ENGLAND

Appearance:9, Content:7, Value:6, Personal:7, Overall:7

FANTASY TALES is an interesting magazine which comes over occasionally from Britain. It is devoted primarily to Dark Fantasy fiction, ranging from pure horror to the grimmer aspects of Swords and Sorcery. Its publishing schedule is listed as occasional, but it seems to be a pretty regular and frequent schedule which is at least quarterly and has been going on for some time under the direction of Stephen Jones and David A. Sutton. It is one of very few British magazines in the 8½x5½ format more common here in the US, and is in reduced, double-column IBM type(similar to ABYSS). Subscriptions are \$9.50 for three issues and a copy is \$3.50 including postage. The current issue is Winter '83.

FANTASY TALES is one of the best magazines to come out of England and has better exposure than its competitors. It is run on a non-profit basis, but clearly the editors are the only people not paid, as it attracts newer, but on a regular basis. In the current issue are Robert Bloch, Dennis Etchison, Darrell Schweitzer, Robert E. Howard, J. A. Salmonsson and several others. It is also one of the places where you can find work by Adrian Cole and Peter Tremayne, a pair of surprisingly little-known but unusually interesting new British writers. FANTASY TALES also features some striking art, including Stephen Fabian, Allen Koszowski and David Lloyd, plus John Stewart and Jim Pitts, two of the most striking and interesting artists I've seen recently, both of whom are getting more exposure in the US and abroad. Material in FANTASY TALES covers a good range of subjects, but maintains a dark mood where everything touches on some form of horror, even in the most fantastical pieces. There is a clear intention here to establish and maintain a particular mood and atmosphere. Perhaps the covers are an attempt to support this, but on most recent issues they have been rather depressing, in dark greys and blacks, with the title in color. This may fit the mood, but it doesn't make the magazine look particularly appealing or grab the eye.

FANTASY TALES is an interesting and enjoyable magazine. However, there is a bit of a tendency to rely on an occasional reprint or second-rate piece by a first-rate writer, but the editing is pretty good and there is always enough excellent material to make an issue worthwhile. (David Nalle)

VARIANT

Reilly Ass., POB 17144, Rochester, NY 14617

Appearance:5, Content:3, Value:1, Personal:6, Overall:4

VARIANT is a small new gaming magazine which has been fairly widely advertised, and presumably has developed some following, so now that it is in its 7th issue it is about time we looked it over. It comes in a 8x11 format in a newsletter double-column style using reduced, justified dot-matrix type which is fairly easy to read. It is published quarterly at \$4 for 4 issues and at \$1.50 a copy. A standard issue is 8 pages long.

Articles and features in variant are suited to the most popular games on the market, particularly D&D and Traveller, although other games also get a fairly good bit of coverage. There is a clear effort to stay away from certain types of material, particularly reviews and news articles and stick to variants, rule ideas and scenarios. Unfortunately there just isn't much in the way of meat in such a short issue. #7 is taken up almost entirely by a new Traveller character class and a D&D module. While both of these seem well done, even taken together and with the other short features they are not nearly worth the surprisingly steep price. Both of the long pieces in #7 are by Gary E. Reilly, the editor.

VARIANT is literate and produced with some clear care and effort. The reproduction is nice, though there could be more and better art and some imaginative use of space, titles and graphics. The main problem here is that while the content is competent, it is pedestrian, and there just isn't much room in an 8 page magazine for the amount of material which one would hope to find in a magazine which costs \$1.50. At the same price ORACLE, DRAGONLORDS and many others (even ABYSS) provide a great deal more, usable with more systems and generally more innovative.

I can only recommend VARIANT for those desperate for ways to expand or change a campaign, and it may not be cost-effective for many gamers. There are some good editorial ideas here, but they need a more viable publication to work with. I'll try to keep up with how VARIANT develops, but right now it doesn't look like your best magazine bet. (David Nalle)

GAMES/AIDS

MERCENARIES SPIES & PRIVATE EYES

MICHAEL STACKPOLE

Blade(FBI), POB 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252

Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes is a new role-playing system for role-playing in the modern world from the people of Blade (Flying Buffalo). MS&PE is a skill-based system, but the characteristics are rolled in the conventional 3D6 manner with a small twist: if any roll comes up triples, the player may roll two additional dice and add it to the total for that characteristic. The system thus allows for the occasional characteristic which is exceptional. MS&PE has a very extensive skill and weapon list that could be useful with any modern system. MS&PE is also one of the most clearly explained role-playing systems I have ever seen. The type is large and clearly broken into easy to grasp sections. One reading is enough to familiarize yourself with the rules. There is also enough information to role-play any part of the 20th century, although the game is intended for the modern setting.

While there are many positive factors about MS&PE, when compared to other role-playing systems which cover the same material, it pales. Basically, MS&PE is based on FBI's Tunnels & Trolls. MS&PE's combat system is totally unrealistic. Most combats are entirely one-sided, with one side taking little or (in many cases) no damage. Considering that your opponenets are using automatic weapons, this is ridiculous. MS&PE is a loose system. There are too many 'gray areas' and gaps that make play run less smoothly, adding much more responsibility for the GM. Too many of the encounters and actions are random, with dice rolls ruling the game. In a game such as this that hurts role-playing. Random rolling of characteristics is symptomatic of this. When compared to Espionage (see below) it comes in a distant second. If you choose to use it in an earlier time-setting,

variant

A Gaming Aid Quarterly

#7

vol 2 No 3

Sept 1983

\$150

Xenologist

Character Class

By Gary E. Reilly

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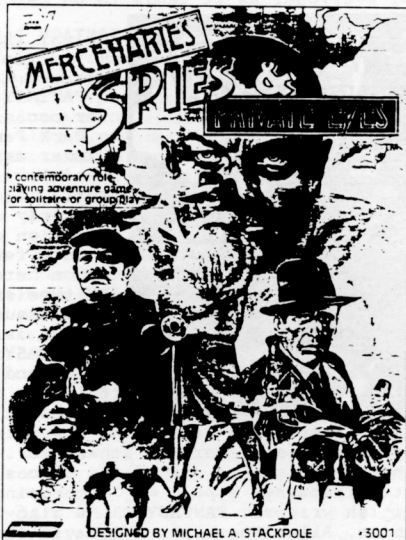
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it can't match Daredevils (see below).

MS&PE has many good points, but by tying it into a T&T type system it was doomed to failure. MS&PE is trying to do too much with a very limited set of mechanics. MS&PE has some good ideas and information and is the only system really stressing a role for Private Eyes. It might be a good basis for creating your own or a mixed role-playing system. If you like solo role-playing, Blade has just put out a solo-adventure for MS&PE, The Adventure of the Jade Jaguar. MS&PE solos and adventures are compatible with Espionage and vica versa, so if you buy either system there is likely to be plenty of supplementary material available. (Eric Olson)

ESPIONAGE

GEORGE MACDONALD—STEVE PETERSON
Hero Games, 92A-SG 21st Ave., San Mateo, CA 94402

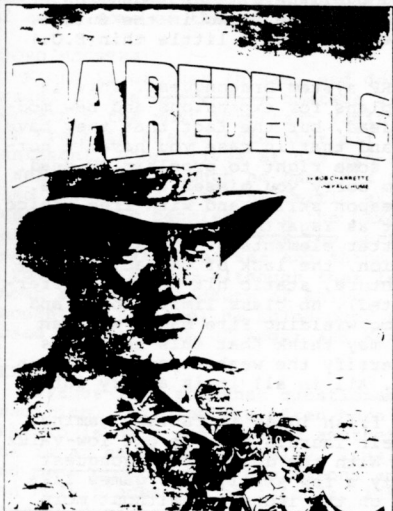
Espionage is the latest in a series of modern, spy-oriented role-playing games. There is one difference, however, Espionage seems to be better than any other ones available. Espionage uses a skill-based system and point allocation. You make the character you want. There is no dice rolling. Every character starts with a set number of development points with which to build his abilities. It is unlike its predecessor, Top Secret, as the character is based around his skills, not his weapon. Added to the character and the starting development points are disadvantages, where a character may get extra points by taking on social, situational or personal problems. The combination of these aspects makes a great deal of role-playing possible. In Espionage the character becomes more than just a roll to hit. You form the character you want and can get a real personality without random restrictions.

In the basic game characters start out as CIA trainees and can pick an area of specialization; technical services, espionage, counter-espionage, and covert action. Each field offers a special skill package as a basis for the character. These fields are not limiting, just a starting point. Espionage does not have levels or hit point gains. Experience is in points which you award directly to appropriate skills or characteristics. The character is always under the players control and no rules force the way you shape him. No one is unkillable. Combat runs quickly and is fairly realistic, including stunning effects, covering stopping power, shock and other factors. In many cases you will stun someone rather than kill him. This also prevents characters in some games where high body points are common from just shrugging off major hits as if they were nothing. Espionage can be used to supplement Champions, from which is derived. What minor flaws it has are similar to those of the parent system. At this point it is probably the best spy-oriented role-playing game on the market. It is well worth the \$12.95 asking price. (Eric Olson)

ESPIONAGE!

The Secret Agent Role Playing Game

BY GEORGE MACDONALD AND STEVE PETERSON



DAREDEVILS

BOB CHARETTE—PAUL HUME
FGU, POB 182, Roslyn, NY 11576

Daredevils is a game of pulp action from the 30s. It is based on the fiction of the 'pulp' magazines of that period. This is the realm of such heroes as the Shadow, Dominic Fortune, the Spider, Dick Tracy, and Batman. In Daredevils you design your own pulp figure. The rules cover both sides of the law and the thin line between. You can be big game hunters, detectives, mobsters, or part of Eliot Ness' untouchables. Here also the character is designed through point allocation, modified by a career choice. Daredevils is also skill based with experience applied to skills. It is one of the best systems I've seen for character generation. By this I mean that it will give you memorable and unique personalities.

As for the game mechanics, Daredevils has every possibility covered in minute detail (in a typical FGU fashion). While the rules look complicated (and are to some degree) a few readings and a sample run clears up most problems. Daredevils is painstakingly realistic, even pedantic, but the ordering of the rules is a little confusing with a mixture of basic, advanced and optional rules all together. Character generation is also not a quick process. In any skill system making characters can take some time. Daredevils is a bit lengthier than some systems in this area, but the results tend to be worth the time.

Daredevils is unusual for a role-playing game in that it is completely new to the genre. Everything you need is provided, including four scenarios at different levels of play and on different topics. PGU already has another adventure pack out and I hear that another is in the works. Daredevils is probably the best 20s and 30s game on the market. If you ever wanted to play Sam Spade or Indiana Jones, this is the game for you. (Eric Olson)

THE PALLADIUM ROLE PLAYING GAME

KEVIN SIEMBIEDA

Palladium Books, 5669 Casper Ave., Detroit, MI 48210

The Palladium system is written and illustrated by Kevin Siembieda. You might remember him for his writing and art in various Judges Guild products. This new fantasy system reminds me very much of the old Judges Guild. Although this system and many Judges Guild products may have been good enough for the market of 4 or 5 years ago, it is definitely behind the needs of today and of little value. Palladium has presented a system which is a mass of dragons and magic, the hearts desire of many younger players of days gone by; but that is not what's needed today. Today gamers are looking for a more serious and challenging approach to gaming with something new offered. The Palladium system tries to be skill based, but there is no specialization at all, with skills automatically improving when you gain a level. Once you choose skills they are set and you only get new ones after two levels and then at five levels after that. This is a mockery of a skill system and they might as well not have a skill system in the first place. Although the system sets out with good intentions and tries to provide a complete role-playing world and philosophy, it falls sadly short of a realistic world worth role-playing in. I found many of their concepts to be amusing. Unfortunately they weren't meant to be. While they system has its good points and is fairly playable, it has few new ideas and is mostly a rehash of what has gone before it. In fact, one person at ORIGINS who had read the system when I was just picking it up said that he would be surprised if they weren't sued by TSR as it was suspiciously close to Old D&D. That was his opinion, not mine. If you are desperate to buy new role-playing games, then get the Palladium Role-Playing Game. If you have enough of the same old things we have been seeing over and over for the past few years, save your money.

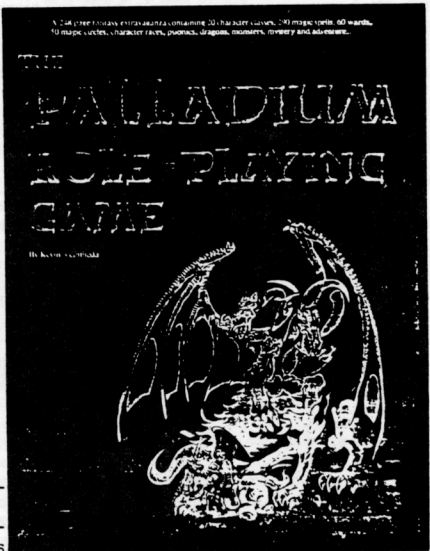
While on the subject of Palladium, let's look at a more pleasant topic. The Weapons and ... books which they put out are a different matter. While I did not particularly care for their fantasy system, their source books are excellent. So far they include: Weapons & Armor, Weapons & Castles, and Weapons & Assassins. The best of the lot is Weapons & Assassins which is extremely well done. It is followed closely by Weapons & Castles, which is also quite good. The source material shows considerable thought on the part of the authors and publishers. I've found the entire series to be highly useful and I would like to see more books in the future. At \$5 each they are a pretty good buy, although they may look a little thin (E.O.)

A REQUIEM FOR DRAGONQUEST

When SPI folded last year, with it went their FRP system Dragonquest. This is too bad, as it was just coming into its own, with plans for expansions and new modules. TSR, the new owner, has said that DQ is not dead, but the fact that they have unloaded all of their copies to bulk book dealers and that (in case you haven't noticed) they have their own fantasy system, gives me some right to proclaim DQ dead.

For those of you who don't know Dragonquest, I'm sorry you missed a good game. Dragonquest is a skill based system with various weapon skills and with free choice to specialize. I have always thought of Dragonquest as Ysgarth's younger cousin as they have a number of similarities. Some of the better elements of the system are point allocation of statistics for character creation, the lack of character 'levels', with points given out directly after an adventure, static hit points, different colleges of magic (with spell availability limited), no class limitations, and general flexibility. One of my friends runs an Estoc wielding Fire Mage, who can more than hold his own in hand to hand combat. You may think that this threatens play balance, but it doesn't, for the more you diversify the weaker you will be in specific areas. This works out quite realistically. All in all it is a very interesting system that is worth looking at.

This squelching of DQ limits the competition of fresh ideas in fantasy gaming. Some of the larger companies continue to sit on their laurels and put out low-value products which in the long run lead to stagnation. With the death of Dragonquest and the long delay of the new Arduin, there are only a few small, good games like Ysgarth around to challenge the big companies hold on the industry. Without more competition, there is no incentive for big companies to make innovative products. All we can do is look around harder and find the best from small companies, avoiding higher-class crud. Do look up Dragonquest. Support it and maybe TSR will bring it back, but don't hold your breath. (Eric Olson)



THE VANIR

DAVID HALLÉ

With this article we are resuming our tradition of presenting some comprehensive examinations of mythology for use in role-playing. This article is the first of a set of three which are intended to explore the major aspects of Scandinavian myth. The other two will be titled "The Aesir" and "The Jottun", and should be coming up in subsequent issues.



Norse myths offer a wealth of gods and goddesses of every major type. There are two major branches of gods, more or less two family pantheons. These are the Aesir who are gods of battle and conflict and the Vanir who are gods of nature and the home. Both groups are opposed by the Jottun, who represent the anti-human forces of the universe. Neither major group of gods is homogenous, and in addition to gods of good there are also more evil members of each group.

The Vanir are of the family of Njord, the leader of this group, and while not all are his children, he is generally the leader, although this honor is sometimes also given to his son Freyr. Most of these deities are fertility deities, and are associated with the elements of Earth and Water, just as the Aesir are associated with Air and Fire. Given here are a sampling of major Vanir deities with whatever attributes seem to be attributed to them most frequently. It is likely that this group of gods, though less popular in most areas than the Aesir, are older and more deeply ingrained in Scandinavian culture, thus, many of their practices of worship which are described here are rather harsh and barbaric, but in areas like Uppsala where Freyr and other Vanir held sway, human sacrifice and attendant rituals continued into the 10th century, although such practices were rarely associated with the Aesir.

VAN
Van is a sort of theoretical earth deity. He is the elder brother of Njord and the original Vanir, but he has no major attributes, and fades out of the picture almost immediately upon his involvement in starting the line, parallel to the role of As in some of the Aesir myths. He is associated with crops and commerce.

NJORD (NJORTHUR)
Njord is brother to Van, and definitely the leader of the Vanir. However, he was traded to the Aesir as a hostage after a war between the two groups, and thus, while certainly the most important Vanir, he was usually absent from Vanaheim, leaving his son Freyr in charge (note that all hostages will be described with their original pantheon). Njord lives at his sea-side fortress of Noatun, and is generally taken as a sea deity, although he partakes of aspects of the cross-over deity Nodens who is also associated with the Celtic sky god Nuad (these cross-overs are most common among West Germanic peoples like the Saxons). Njord is described as being a young man, as handsome as Baldr, who was the personification of beauty. Njords powers seem to deal mostly with the sea and ships, and he rules over commerce by sea. He also has a role in fishing, although that is often usurped by Aegir. His home, Noatun, is known as the 'Enclosure of Ships', and is where those buried in ship burials are thought to sail to. He rules over the desirable dwelling for dead seamen, to be opposed to the realm of Aegir and Rana. He is a decent fellow and slow to anger.

NERTHUS
Nerthus is a somewhat questionable deity, the twin sister of Njord. As is Vanir tradition, children are often born in pairs, male and female, and the first thing they do is mate and produce another pair of twins, in this case, Freyr and Freyja. She is an earth-mother deity, usually associated with the Nodens aspect of Njord and most common among the Saxons and related tribes. In general here sanctuaries and holy places are on islands, affirming her relationship with Njord, and she is usually depicted as riding in a wagon, indicating a possible connection to Cybele. She assures harvests, protects men in battle, and takes blood sacrifices of all types, similar in many ways to those of Freyja, though she is a mother, rather than a wife figure. She is also a lunar deity, sometimes shown with horns or a halo.

SKADI

Skadi is Njord's actual wife. She is the daughter of Thjadi, a Jottun, and is a goddess of the mountains. She often lives apart from Njord, as she finds the coast a bit inhospitable. She is of limited popularity and importance, existing mainly through her relationship with Njord.

FREYR, GOD OF THE WORLD (LYTIR)

Freyr is certainly the single most important and most popular deity of the Vanir. He is the son of Njord and Nerthus (sometimes Skadi instead), and is the twin brother of Freyja. He is handsome, wise and accomplished, but has a tendency to be ruled by his heart rather than his head and to make rash decisions in tense moments. For example, he was so desperate to wed Gerda that he gave up his powerful sword to the giants to buy her (unfortunately the weapon is one of the essential Jottun-slayers for use at Ragnarok). This sword is the original 'dancing' sword, and can fight on its own under Freyr's direction. Freyr is one of the best equipped deities of the group having not only a flying horse, but also a magical golden boar called Gullinbursti who can fly and draw his chariot (it was made by the dwarves Brokk and Sindri). He also has one of several magical ships in this pantheon, Skithblathnir. This ship can travel at the speed of wind, always has a favorable wind, navigates itself to any destination, and can hold all of the gods. In addition, it can be folded up and fit in Freyr's pocket. Freyr has a variety of attributes. He is seen as the liberator of slaves and those imprisoned, and is closely linked with elves, probably as their deity. He was once king of Sweden, and is linked with kingship, with many kings identified with him. He is a god of crops, and through him the king is identified with the crops, and if a harvest was bad it was common practice to sacrifice the king, because Freyr is also the deity of interment in the earth and rebirth. He is the god of the grave-mound (another elf connection as they tend graves), and of earthly rebirth. In general, he can be seen as a fertility god. His holy symbols are horses and boars, and the center of his worship is Uppsala. A standard practice in Freyr worship is Frobald, human sacrifice in order to encourage the fertility of the earth, a practice associated with most of the Vanir. This was usually done only once per year, usually in the spring, or if the harvest was bad, in the fall, with the king who was the symbol of fertility and Freyr. Freyr is also associated with wealth, peace and warmth, and although Gerda is his wife (the daughter of giant Gymir) he is thought to mate with his sister Freyja to insure fertility in the earth.

FREYJA (HORN, MARDOLL, SKRALF)

Freyja is the twin sister of Freyr, the daughter of Njord, and should not be confused with Frigga, Odin's wife. She is in many ways a sky-oriented deity, and lives in a castle in the air called Folkvang, where she hosts warriors and the spirits of unmarried girls. She is at once a virgin goddess and a goddess of lust, worshipped separately in both aspects. She is the most popular of the Vanir, but was the subject of much rumour among the other gods, as she was said to be willing to put out for just about anyone or anything (a rumor promulgated by Loki, but substantiated by several incidents, including an orgy with a group of Dwarves). One of her most popular aspects is as goddess of the bridal night, the passage from virginity to womanhood. She is usually depicted as a beautiful woman of gold with burning eyes, wearing a golden feathered cloak, sometimes weeping (perhaps for Freyr in his incarnation as a death god). She is said to use her cloak to take the form of a falcon, and has a strong association with birds. She is the patron of Seithr, a form of witchcraft and enchantment practiced as a semi-religion, mostly by women. This cult involved ecstatic trances, orgies, prophecy and various forms of magic, and was followed by many women as a route to supernatural (sexually oriented) power. The priestesses were called Volva, and acted mostly as seeresses, and were thought to be able to take the form of birds. One important part of this cult was the brewing of potions and poisons for many purposes, especially for fidelity and the attraction of love. In some of her aspects she is a goddess of fertility, and she is certainly a goddess of magic and the ability to alter the environment. In some areas the kings were thought to be wedded to her, and mock wedding ceremonies were often held to signify this. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, the most effective form of sacrifice to get the goddess moving and restore fertility in the land was to kill off the king who was wedded to her. Human sacrifice was, however, a secondary form of worship, far exceeded by orgiastic practices.

GULLVEIG

This is another interesting goddess. She is particularly vicious. She represents the black aspects of magic and sorcery, as well as wealth, temptation, blackmail and treachery. She is a Sybil, and hated by the Aesir, who burned her to death, and then had to do it twice more because she rose reborn from the ashes by her power. Eventually they gave up, and she remains a mysterious sower of trouble and dissent.

GEFJON THE GIVER

Gefjon is one of the nicer goddesses of the Vanir. She represents fertility of the waters, islands, magic, and is symbolized by a bull. She is renowned for being the only god or goddess able to see the future as accurately as Odin. She is generally fairly passive and amiable.

AEGIR

Aegir is a kindly and rather amusing deity, unfortunately wedded to a rather nasty shrew, Ran. He is a deity of beer and spirits, and rules the lands beneath the seas.

He is the greatest brewer of the world, and welcomes drunken sailors to stay in his realm (after drowning). He is a sea god, and has connections to deep-sea fishing, but Ran handles most of the active acquisition and activities for their realm.

RAN THE RAVISHER

Ran is another grim goddess in this group. She is the rather overbearing wife of Aegir. She is a rather destructive deity, who stirs up the waves and makes ships founder. She is said to inspire terror, and her daughters are the personifications of different types of waves. She has a net with which she draws in drowned men, who go beneath the waves to live in the halls she shares with Aegir. Though nasty, her nature seems to be exclusively associated with death at sea and the dangerous aspects of navigation.

ULLR, GOD OF THE SHIELD

Ullr, while not one of the main Vanir, was one of the more popular and certainly among the most powerful and respected, holding status with the Aesir as well, actually usurping Odin's throne for a while. He is a particularly strange deity, a god of the snows and northern wastes, who travels over the snow on his shield, which he uses like a sleigh. His main dominion is over lakes and mountains and the entire winter season. Another area of dominion is over hunting and hunters. He is also powerful in the area of enchantment and deception, especially self-deception. He is powerful and ruthless, described as majestic and glorious of demeanor, a true leader, but a bit harsh and uncaring, motivated mostly by self interest. Another item which he possesses is the ship Naglfar, made from the bones and nails of the dead, which he sails in arctic seas. It is interesting to note that prophecies of Ragnarok say that he will give the ship to Loki to help him transport his monstrous children, perhaps showing that in the end he will turn against the Aesir. He may be wedded or mated to a twin sister named Ullin, but information is scanty. He is alien in many ways to other deities, solitary and brooding, but his power, especially in his icy realm, is unchallenged. He has attributes of a death god, as far as those who die of cold in mountains or winter.



HELLA

Hella is the female ruler of Niflhel, or Hel, the most common, general afterworld for those who don't earn entry into one of the nicer realms run by other deities. It is a rather nasty, cold and unfriendly place, jammed full of dead spirits along with all sorts of evil things, especially snakes and wolves. The main body of people who go to Niflhel are murderers, oathbreakers and homosexuals. It is situated below the earth, and guarded by wolves and serpents, like Garm, the hound of Hel. There are several gates to admit the dead and the whole realm is walled. Those within are put through typical torments, such as eating carrion and drinking the urine of goats, with the torment usually appropriate in some way to their crime. Hella herself is an ancient crone, seeress, disdainful of men and gods, and supreme in her confidence of death and the gradual degeneration of the world.

THE SERVANTS OF FREYR

Freyr, like any good ruler, has a whole household of interesting servants. Two of his main ones are Byggvri and Beyla, a husband and wife team. Byggvri is a brash but cowardly manservant who tends to boast and drink too much. Beyla, his wife is Freyr's cook, and a brewer of all manner of potions. Skirnir is Freyr's messenger and herald, and tends to follow him anywhere.

OTHER DEITIES

There are a number of other minor Vanir-associated deities. Some of these should at least be mentioned here briefly. Fjorgyn and Fjorgynn are a pair of twin, mated male and female fertility deities. Oddr is sometimes given as Freyja's husband or as some sort of a manservant. Skjold is a son of Odin, and Gefjon's husband. He is

a deity of corn and grain. Ing is a minor deity associated with Freyr as the founder of kingly houses.

GENERAL NOTES

This is a brief rundown of the attributes of the major deities in this group, and many archetypes are clearly demonstrated here. As you should have seen, the Vanir are far more than just nature deities, and far more complex than many mythologies make out. It should be remembered that they have a clear sense of their identity as Vanir and not Aesir, and that they even fought a war over their independence against the Aesir at one point early in the development of the gods. While they were not as popular as a group as the Aesir, certain members in certain areas were in the top running, or even ahead of their competitors, notably Freyr in Sweden and Njord in some of the outlying areas. One of the most important things to remember about the Vanir is that they have very grim aspects existing side-by-side with their nature/fertility aspects. Almost all of them are either gods of death or magic in one form or another, in a way which is not really found with any of the Aesir except Odin. This might lead to the supposition that they are an older group of deities than most of the Aesir, and this might be correct. In any case, they are interesting and well worth playing with as background elements in a campaign, and some peripheral aspects, like Frobald and Seithr can add new depth to an adventure.

SUGGESTED SOURCES

The Road to Hel, H. R. Ellis Davidson
Myth and Religion of the North, E. O. G. Turville-Petre
Gods & Myths of the Viking Age, H. R. Ellis-Davidson
Poems of the Vikings, Patricia Terry, trans.
Norse Poems, W. H. Auden, trans.
The Elder Edda, Bertha S. Philpotts, trans.
The Prose Edda, Jean I. Young, trans.

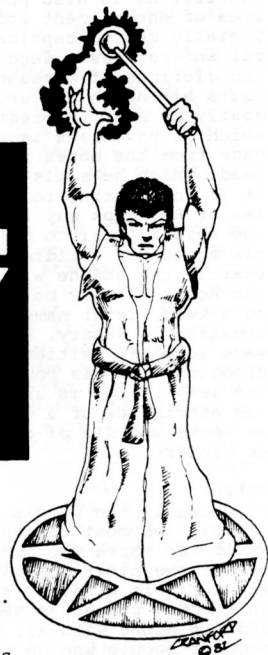
INFERNAL MAJESTY CARL JONES

There are many role-playing campaigns which feature some form of Hell and the demons which dwell there. However, in most cases knowledge about the inhabitants of that realm and their powers is strictly limited to material available in FRP aids, which is far from complete. If you have a sorcerer or who wishes to call up a demon, his task is much easier if you have some idea of the demons available for him to summon.

Traditional estimates of the population of Hell say that there are anywhere from 7 million to 2 billion demons in Hell, and certainly we could not give detailed census results here. However, Hell is arranged on an aristocratic model, and we can take a look at the highest levels of this aristocracy. There are several hundred members of the demon nobility, and while I'd like to look at all of them here, there just is not room. However, there is a Council of Princes which rules over Hell, and they number only 72, 6 in the Grand Council and 66 in the Lesser Council. All of these demons hold titles of Prince or the equivalent, and are the greatest and most powerful inhabitants of the infernal realm. In this article I have selected what seems to me to be the most likely composition of the Council of Princes, drawn from a number of sources. Note that this list may not conform exactly to those found in any single source, and is an improved hybrid.

Satan or Lucifer is often said to rule Hell, but in actuality he is just among the leaders of the Grand Council, although he is senior to the others, and treated as the king. By either name, his power is not absolute, even in his own realm, thus members of the Grand Council have been known to challenge and usurp his rank. The members of the Grand Council are marked with an asterisk on the list below.

Demons are given in the briefest form possible with as much information as we can fit in. To the left is the name, in the center their main attributes, and to the right their Will Rating (for use in YRS or to gauge their relative power). The attributes given generally determine the area of their power and what they can do to help or harm a summoner. In some cases an indication of the form taken is given,



but they will usually take a human form when coming to Earth. What they will do for or to you depends very much on how you treat them and what you do for them, and in most cases they cannot be compelled or forced to act against their will. Titles vary, and have been omitted in the interest of space conservation.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION/ATTRIBUTES</u>	<u>WR</u>
Lucifer/Satan*	Light-bringer, All-powerful, Knowledge, Envy, Arrogance	1500
Beelzebuth*	Lord of Flies, Disease, Plague, Pestilence	1000
Astaroth*	Prophecy, History, Sloth, Wealth, Reading, Writing, Language, Mobs	1000
Asmodeus*	Impurity, Incest, Invisibility, Deception, Arithmetic, Geomancy, Crafts	1100
Satanachia*	Warleader, Adversary, Subjection of Wives and Maidens	1300
Belial*	Evil, Advancement, Friendship, Success, Politics	1200
Baal	Silence, Wisdom, Invisibility	600
Clauneck	Riches, Hidden Treasure	500
Agaliarept	Espionage, Mystery, Secret Knowledge	700
Fleurety	Labor by Night, Hail, Storm	500
Lucifuge Refacale	All Wealth, Riches, Hidden Treasure	850
Sargatanas	Invisibility, Transportation, Open Locks, Clairaudience, Shepherds	750
Nebiros	Affliction, Analysis of Metals, Minerals, Plants & Animals, Necromancy, Speech	1000
Frimost	Potency, Power over Wives and Maidens	650
Sirchade	Knowledge of Animals	400
Agares	Immobility, Returning Runaways, Language, Earthquakes	900
Vassago	Past, Present, Future, Finding the Lost, Good Nature	650
Gamgyn	Liberal Arts, Teaching, Necromancy, Drowning	600
Valefor	Theft	625
Amon	Procure Love, Peace and Reconciliation, Hunting	600
Barbathas	Science, Enchantment, Treasure, Prediction, Reconciliation	750
Paimon	Music, Art, Science, Secrets, Enslavement, Loss of Will	900
Buer	Philosophy, Logic, Herblore, Healing of Diseases	550
Gusion	Divination, Advancement	600
Beleth	Procurement of Love	850
Lerajie	Archery, Infection of Wounds	500
Eligor	Reveals Hidden, Causes War, Arouses Lust	675
Zepar	Arouses Lust in Women, Transforms Women into other Forms	650
Surgat	Opens Locks	450
Botis	Prophecy and Reconciliation	500
Buethin	Herbs, Gems, Transportation	600
Zaleos	Love and Sex	650
Purson	Concealment, Divination	825
Morax	Herbs, Gems, Astronomy, Arts	575
Ipos	Wit, Courage, Prophecy	525
Berith	Alchemy, Transmutation, Prophecy, Deception	800
Gaap	Philosophy, Love, Hatred, Insensibility, Rescue, Transportation	750
Stolas	Astronomy, Herbs, Minerology	675
Sabanak	Building, Fortification, Torment, Infection, Sores, Worms	550
Vepar	Seafaring, Storms, Oceanic Illusions, Infection of Wounds	600
Focalor	Drowning, Ship Sinking, Winds, Sea	650
Shax	Blindness, Deafness, Confusion, Embezzlement, Theft, Transportation, Location	600
Bifrons	Building, Demolishing, Storms	500
Vuall	Friendship of Foes, Prophecy, Love	600
Hagenti	Transmutation of Metals and Liquids, Wisdom	575
Procel	Discover Hidden, Geometry, Science, Warmths	475
Furcas	Philosophy, Rhetoric, Astronomy, Logic, Chiromancy, Pyromancy	700
Balam	Invisibility, Wit, Prophecy	525
Allocen	Astronomy, Science	450
Chaim	Knowledge of Animal Speech, Prophecy	450
Orobas	Advancement, Protection, Strength of Will	700
Gomory	Love of Young Girls, Prophecy, Divination	500
Ose	Science, Divination, Shape Changing	550
Oriens	Wind, Evil, Flame, Transformation	675
Vapula	Manual Skills, Philosophy	550
Zagan	Wit, Transmute Liquid, Mint Coinage, Wisdom	525
Valak	Locate and Attract Serpents, Locate Treasure	425
Andras	Discord, Assassination	575
Flauros	Burning Death of Foes, Protection from Spirits, History	550
Cimeries	Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Find the Lost, Disguise	500
Decarabia	Herbs, Stones, Illusory Birds	425
Amaymon	Fire, Poison, Violence, Vengeance	850
Azazel	Sorcery, Divination, Necromancy, Sexual Prowess	650
Belphegor	Location, Invention, Wealth, Discovery	575
Moloch	Death to Children, Barrenness, Famine, Sexual Prowess	1100
Seere	Speed of Action, Transportation	525
Amuscias	Silence, Felling of Trees	600
Murmur	Philosophy, Necromancy	600
Magoth	Revenge, Spite, Hidden Treasure	650
Sammael	Draught, Famine, Wind, Dry Wells, Death, Destruction	900
Lilith	Lust, Destruction, Evil, Magic	1000
Bune	Moves Dead, Wisdom, Eloquence, Information	500

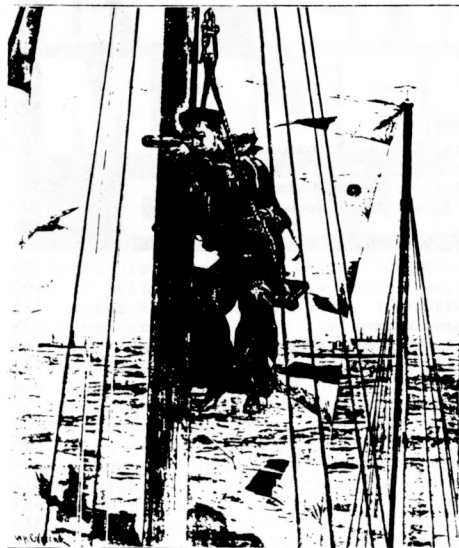
This is by no means a complete or comprehensive list, or even definitive. It is just a selection which may prove of use. What you make of demons and sorcery in your campaign is up to your interest, imagination and convictions. They can form interesting adversaries, agents, or allies, whatever is appropriate. YRS players may notice that some Will Ratings are higher than standard. This reflects an adjustment to the system to create a broader range of power. Non YRS players can use the WR as a guideline to the level of power of the given demon. Note that most of the attributes given can be used for or against the summoner, depending on how he is placated. Remember that with the possible exception of Vassago, demons are universally hostile, except as far as it serves them. Blood, souls and foul acts will please them, but only for a while. They usually aren't good to keep around the house. Use these examples well and they may add a bit of depth to your campaign.



SOURCES FOR REFERENCE

The Book of Black Magic (A. E. Waite), *The Book of the Sacred Magic of Abramelin the Mage* (S. L. MacGregor Mathers, trans.), *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Reginald Scott), *De Praestigis Daemonium* (Johan Weyer), *Liber Pentaculorum, Clavicula Solomonis* (Key of Solomon), *Honorii Papae Adversus Tenebrarum Principium et ejus Angelos Conjuraciones, Extractae ex Originali Romae Servato* (Honorius III), *Malleus Malleficarum* (Sprenger & Kramer).

FOR QUEEN AND COUNTRY JON SCHULLER



As role-playing matures games are being designed to fit in a variety of settings and time-periods, and some of the more advanced games are being set-up to be used with topical period or background packs which give detailed information on periods and situations within their general scheme or subject matter. Examples of flexible background-pack oriented games are few as yet: To Challenge Tomorrow for history or SF, Lands of Adventure for fantasy. A clumsier form of this adaptive system has been simulated by the various RuneQuest-based games produced by Chaosium (Call of Cthulhu, Stormbringer, etc). However, almost any experienced GM can do enough rule-design and adaptation to fit his favorite system to a period or background which attracts him.

Call of Cthulhu has really opened the door to historical/literary based gaming in relatively recent but still romanticized periods, and while subsequent games, such as Daredevils and Mercenaries, Spics & Private Eyes have covered the 20th century and its worlds of adventure romance, no one has yet made a try at what may be the most promising and exciting period for historical/literary adventure. This is, of course, the 19th century and the world of the British Empire in this period will get attention soon and be one of the prime topics of 1984 (Rumor has it that this wave of interest will start soon with a To Challenge Tomorrow expansion set on this period which I am told is in the works). However, for those of you who cannot wait for the whims of game publishers to have a game of the excitement of the 19th century, here are some suggestions and guidelines for running a campaign in this period.

For role-playing the 19th century I would recommend a skill-based system of soem sort. Call of Cthulhu, DragonQuest, To Challenge Tomorrow or The Fantasy Trip are viable games for this purpose, though anything, even Dungeons & Dragons could be used. Generally CoC or TCT would work the best, as they fit similar periods, and TFT is a little less magic oriented than DQ, so might work better. However, the key to working this adaptation is the ingenuity and flexibility of the GM. The main guide in this adaptation is to develop firearm rules and limit magic appropriately, although just how you do this will depend on the type of campaign you want and what type of literature or events you wish to simulate.

the reign of Queen Victoria. I suspect soon with a To Challenge Tomorrow expansion set on this period which I am told is in the works). However, for those of you who cannot wait for the whims of game publishers to have a game of the excitement of the 19th century, here are some suggestions and guidelines for running a campaign in this period.

The Victorian era is full of possibilities for adventure, distinguished as the first age in which you could travel around the world in relative safety, while there still existed wild areas and wild spirits, areas made more accessible by new forms of transport. It is also an era which is particularly well supported by literary sources. Many countries had distinctive cultures in this period, all with their possibilities. Germany, France, America, and Italy offer wonderful prospects, but none reached as far or offers so much as the British Empire, with its range from the dangers of cosmopolitan London to the challenges of the wilds of India or the other colonies. The Empire reached so far and included so much that it gathered all of the elements of great adventure into one political hegemony, accessible to many members of the ruling culture. There isn't enough space to totally explore the Empire, so we'll just look at some of the important elements as a key for further investigation.

The Victorian character can be of any station, but generally the best adventurers are Englishmen of the middle and upper classes who have the freedom and motivation to engage in challenging professions and hobbies. For the man of leisure a good hobby, say archaeology can be as important and time-consuming as a full-time job. Such characters will usually have independent income from varied sources, and belong to social organizations. Laborers and members of the underclass, especially the urban criminal class are also a possibility, and will be looked at later. Some of the most popular professions were Law, Medicine, Academics, Military, Civil Service, and the Clergy, although the better off characters may elect to be dilettantes. Most professionals were of the lower upper or upper middle class, the younger sons of noblemen, or sons of the merchant gentry. Roles for women are severely limited, with perhaps positions as writers or poets (Mary Wollstonecraft, Elizabeth Browning, George Eliot). Some of the best and most exciting positions come in working in the Foreign Office or Military in the colonies, or in Academics in obscure areas. There are always possibilities for

the wealthy and energetic dabbler. Skills can open the route to exploration, investigation, discovery, and even experimentation in bizarre fields. Work overseas can have many aspects, from Archaeological digs in Egypt, to exploration in the Himalayas or Africa, to espionage against the Kaiser, to limited actions against insurrections, to any of a number of other possibilities.

In England itself there is a social division among the lower class between the rural and urban areas. Generally, the mobility of the rural lower class is limited and they don't make the most exciting characters, but there is fair potential in the cities. The ideal example of this is the East End of London, a maze of little streets and old buildings, docks and warehouses, where all manner of thugs, beggars and cutthroats operate, not to mention disreputable drinking houses and disreputable women. This is the land of Jack the Ripper, Mr. Hyde, and Dorian Grey, the degenerate rich amusing themselves among the poor, rough and loose, and of Fagen, the Artful Dodger, and Annie Chapman, all of the scum and refuse ready to slit a throat or cut a purse to buy their way out of the filth and degradation of their lives.

Life and character possibilities for colonials is another matter worth considering. In Egypt, India, Africa, Australia and other Imperial interests there are good possibilities for characters, the revengeful Australian transportee, the Sepoy or Thug, the traditional demented Egyptian magician. These areas offer potential for characters as well as for adventures.

This is also an age of science and discovery, research and exploration. This work was done under the auspices of Royal Societies and individual patrons. This is the background for the work of Livingstone, Carter, Faraday, Burton, Smithson, Budge, Marx, Godwin, and Crowley, men who explored every frontier, from the horizon, to the past, to science, to the mind, to society, to the supernatural. This is a time when the quest for understanding is often on a physical as well as mental level.



variant

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Found among the greatest of these societies are the Society of Antiquaries, the Chemical Society, the British Association for the Advancement of Science, the Royal Archaeological Institute, the Royal Geographical Society, and the Royal College of Science. In addition, social clubs play an interesting role, especially in literary sources, as gathering points for men of leisure, ambition and ideas. Some of the most famous in London are The Royal Colonial Institute, the Athenaeum Club, the Garrick Club, the Carlton, East India United Service, Oxford & Cambridge, and the Rannelegh Club, to name but a few.

Forces move beneath the surface of the Victorian world, as they do in any highly stratified and factionalized society. Some of the most notable are the Molly Maguire and other Irish revolutionary groups, Socialists (semi-respectable), Communists (mostly mystifying), and Anarchists (the true political bogeymen of the period). There are also a number of regional and national factions which can cause trouble and sow discontent, both from colonies and Great Britain itself. In addition, other nations are interested in what goes on in England, and are willing to buy, sell, steal and con information, with possible violent implications. Particularly active are representatives of Germany and Spain, which had spies wherever they could put them.

There are many wonderful characters in this period, both from literature and history, running the range from Lord Byron, to Richard Burton, to Chinese Gordon. The colonies offered infinite possibilities for the growth of unique adventurers and roques. This was a time for men of imagination and character, when there were few limits on ambition, but many areas where life was safe and stable, a safe base for operations. We can't list all of the interesting background characters available, but a look at the literature of the period can offer many examples.

The 19th century can be divided into two periods for general purposes. These are the pre-Victorian or Romantic period (before 1837), and the true Victorian period, after the start of her reign in 1837. The first period is the one of the Romantic poets (Byron, Shelley, Keats, etc.), as well as the post-Napoleonic turmoil in France. The second period is the great time of the Empire, which most of this description has concerned. Both times are viable for play, and we should stress the almost supernatural role of the queen and monarchy. She was surrounded by an air of reverence which almost approached the imperial cults of Rome, and in many ways, her moral and social perspective colored the era, both in outward conformity and private reaction against it, creating the social and moral conflict of the age, as the free-will of the Romantic period remained beneath the moralistic veneer of the later phase.

Opportunities for adventure abound in this time, particularly as found in the writings of Conan Doyle, Bram Stoker, or Jules Verne. This is a good time for spy and detective adventure, as well as supernatural adventure among secret societies like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, or with some of the legendary mythological figures who linger at this time. Archaeology and forgotten powers offer more supernatural options. Urban areas offer a full range of possibilities for danger and for theft. More specific material can be found in some of the books listed below. From this guideline you may be able to go farther and develop a background and complete adventures for a campaign.

SOME SOURCES

Baedeker's Guide to London & Baedeker's Guide to Great Britain (Karl Baedeker: Ideal for factual and regional detail), Sherlock Holmes Stories (Arthur Conan Doyle), Dracula & Jewel of the Seven Stars (Bram Stoker), The Picture of Dorian Gray (Oscar Wilde), Oliver Twist & The Mystery of Edwin Drood (Charles Dickens), Lord Jim & Heart of Darkness (Joseph Conrad), Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde (Robert Louis Stevenson), The Prisoner of Zenda (Anthony Hope Hawkins), Plain Tales from the Hills & Soldiers Three (Rudyard Kipling), Mysterious Island & Voyage to the Center of the Earth (Jules Verne), She & King Solomon's Mines (H. Rider Haggard). Others by these authors are also recommended, and there are many more around in the same vein.

UTTGART 4



THE PRIDE OF OGYANE

ADVENTURES

Two new adventure scenarios are on the way. These are the latest in the Uttgart and Ysgarth adventure sets.

Uttgart #4: The Pride of Ogyane: is already out. It was used as a tournament scenario at UETHERCON. It is an open-ended adventure for mid-level characters with an emphasis on role-playing.

Ysgarth #5: Street Shadows is the first in the second series of Ysgarth adventures, and will be out soon. It is set in the city of Ptolemeias, and is for new characters, an introduction to the city and the world.

Each adventure is \$1.50, and they are usable with YRS or D&D. Use order form.

PTOLEMEIAS



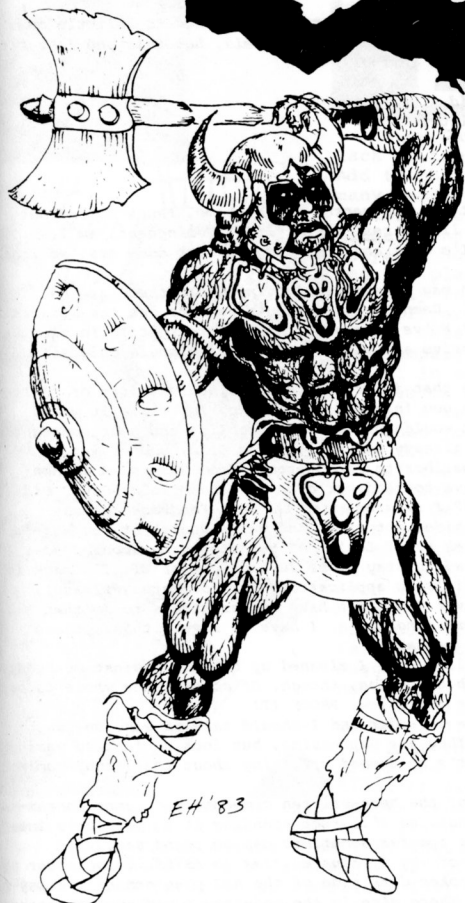
STREET SHADOWS



YSGARTH 5

ECHOES

FROM THE ABYSS



Dear 'Echoes',

Well, here I go again attempting to defend myself from another 'personalized' shot from out in left field from someone who patently should know better.

Mr. Stackpole has attempted to characterise me as living in an unrealistic dream world, and to down play the sales and importance of the original Arduin system.

Neither of these characterizations/assertions are, in fact, the reality of what I and Arduin have (and still are) all about.

To begin with, the 17000 sales volume mentioned was for the very first volume of the Arduin Grimoire, and not for the entire three volumes as he would like the world to believe.

Second, I do not now, nor have I ever failed to "live in the real world", I simply believe in my work and in its own brand of "reality". This reality is totally separate and different from the world I live in. A world which, I might add, is in many ways mirrored in the one I have created/chronicled.

The DRAGON ads mentioned were several years ago and only two in number I believe, and took nearly a year to negotiate with TSR just to get into said magazine!

Mr. Stackpole notes, quite rightly, that "in the beginning" my games were nothing more than superior supplements to a whole series of FRP games then coming out, D&D being just one of them.

What he fails to do is carry this further with the full truth of the matter. With the publication of the Arduin Adventure as the 'beginners' core on which the original three volumes of the Arduin Trilogy could be 'hung' as each individual player desired, the system was (and is) as complete an FRP system as any other on the market, and a damn sight better than most!

My article in ABYSS #23 simply attempted to show the "sense of wonder" that I and my players felt, and in no way was it trying to seem anything other than that.

The assertion that he could not find any Arduin material in the Phoenix area is irrelevant, all stores run out of every title from time to time (Tunnels & Trolls being absolutely unheard of in the stores in Petaluma, Santa Rosa and other parts of northern California, for example).

Even if it isn't carried any longer in the Phoenix area, this is only the fault of the fact that Grimoire Games was sold to Grimcon Inc about a month and a half ago. Knowing the sale was imminent, and knowing that all available funds in the new company were going into production of the new, revised Arduin (all 600+ pages of it), Jim Mathis (Grimoire Games owner/publisher) let just about everything in the large and diverse Arduin line go out of print so as not to have a large stock on hand that Grimcon Inc would have to buy. While this may not be a particularly bright business move, it was done with the intention of letting the buyer acquire the company with as little financial outlay as possible so they would have as much money available for production and advertising of new items.

I, personally, have had no business interest in Arduin for many years beyond that of authorship. So I cannot say just why the company did not advertise as it should have. But advertising in the 'trade' magazines (which only go to retailers and wholesalers, not customers) was not the way to go in my opinion. Sales have suffered because of this decision.

Finally, I really resent the implication that Mr. Stackpole spends all (or much) of his time figuring out how to produce "dynamite products" whilst I sit around in lotus land. I worked for over two years on the revised Arduin and have been fighting to get it published for months. I worked for nearly a year on a 'Superhero' game even now in the hands of Avalon Hill. I have turned out two very good Call of Cthulhu 'modules' (as well as several articles) for Chaosium over the last twelve months. The first of these was part of their successful Asylum book, the next has been scheduled for 'spring of 84' release. Most of the articles are just starting to come out in DIFFERENT WORLDS. This doesn't take into account the countless articles I write for fanzines from Scotland to Australia. I keep damn busy!

I am a professional who does professional work for myself and for several other companies. To say otherwise is to speak a deliberate and deceptive mistruth. But I also believe in my work, in what it has given me, and in what it has given thousands of others. I am proud to 'live', just a bit in that 'other world' from time to time, and am not afraid to say so. If that is living in a fantasy world, then I'm all for it, but I certainly feel sorry for those other people who have nothing better do than take venomous pot shots at people(usually their commercial competitors).

I have the honesty to speak up about my convictions and to tell the world that the sense of wonder and awe that I have concerning what I do. This, I hope, seeps over into my writing of rules and creating of games so that those who read them can feel a little of this as well. I think that this is why Arduin has done as well as it has. People can sense the 'magik' whereof I speak because I speak from belief and conviction.

I really don't have time to try to answer every small minded person who wishes to belittle me or anyone else that has done something beautiful and worthwhile in the FRP field, but this one last time I felt I had to. Thanks for bearing with me, and keep on gaming!

David A. Hargrave
Willits, CA

Dear Mr. Ragnarok,

You wanted to rile me, Olson, Nalle, Schuller, et al? You wanted to abuse me, taunt me for not writing because I happen to have other things to do, like a real social life? Delinquent, am I, DELINQUENT!! Well, as the rock 'n' roll flacks say, I'm back and I'm ready to kick some ass, so line up, boys!

First off, you there, Editor/Publisher Nalle. You may have noticed by now that there are no typos in this letter. More likely, you didn't notice. Damn it, Dave, you've got to get the details! The typos in an average copy of ABYSS are incredible! We've discussed this before, get it in gear. It makes us look cheap! We're not, we're just inexpensive and value-laden. If one could only sift that value from the bitched type.

Lewd Bison? Monocular Celt? The Lewser? I realize that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, but, guys, it won't get you anywhere. Do I abuse you in print, Olson? No, for while it would definitely sear your brain to its component atoms, it would only bore the public, and your constant parade of charts is doing that now. Why add to their already heavy load? And Eric, you've met my dear mother. What will she think when she opens her mailbox to find Letters from Gamers? And when she gets out her rusty castration knives I'll just have to send her over to Haddonfield. Dave? Old buddy, old pal? Old fart? Why are you fashing me, lad? I figured after the last Feedback ratings you'd be glad to have me behind schedule. Get on TCs hide, not mine. And while you're at it, what ever happened to the old Ysgarth Strategic Campaign, eh Dave? Let's not get too pushy about deadlines, shall we? TC's in law school and is being forced to stay sober 20 days out of 21, I'm back in grad school and reduced to living with 800 Catholic girls(no applications for roommates, please), you're finally feeling a little pressure, come on, Dave! I may not have better things to do than write stories and articles, but I do have some more pressing tasks. I have to live with all these slimy law students, Set help them! To an early grave, perhaps.

And another thing! The odds on Ormsson were more like 7:6, I cleaned up betting against my buddy What the hel, he never had a chance anyway... Nice job on Demian, though. Of course, the whole piece would have been better if the dialogue had been easier to follow. PROOF IT!

One last shot. You there, Cadenhead! I know you're a reader and I should take it easy on you, but look, pal, I like those out-of-copyright-prints! They are depressing, but look at fantasy gaming it's a bunch of guys going around killing things. What's so damned uplifting about that, huh? Gaming is hel, and don't you forget it.

Bright side. 'Berserkergang' continues to be one of the best-written commentary columns in gaming, at least for my money, and there's not much of that, so I'll keep spending it to get Jon's intelligent insights. And those of you who think he goes too far sometimes can go pound sand.

M. A. Stackpole's letter in #26 is a fine example of why I value my ties to ABYSS. This letter is not pretty. It strikes at the very heart of an unspoken dark side of the RPG phenomenon: the psychological effects of the player/character interface. Where else in the industry could such a letter be written with any realistic hopes of its being printed? Actually, after the beatification of EGG, THE DRAGON would probably headline the letter, but I'm really speaking in generalities. Get it, folks; ABYSS has never included in its philosophy the idea of reaching the entire spectrum of role-players. We're interested in the mature individual gamer with enough intelligence and imagination to handle the realities of adult situations in both their gaming experiences and in their own lives. We see logic and cause-effect relationships in life, spiced with a bit of simple random chance and shaped by human nature, and we expect a similar situation to hold in our gaming. I find much more epic grandeur in playing in a campaign of consistent detail and realistic interdependence than in one of disconnected vignettes.

ABYSS has a unique position among house organs in the gaming field, at least from my perspective We have nothing to defend. YRS only came about through constant abuse of the systems we were using, and the criticism continues daily. We invite such criticism. We only feel that we are bound to defend our right to present imaginative and first-rate material from the cutting edge of gaming. Sometimes we fall short of that. Most times we do a decent job. Hey, my subscription runs to 2005, I guess I believe in this rag! Keep up the good work, Dave, but(uh-huh) PROOF!!

Y'rs for making an omlette
and breaking some EGGs,
'Lude Bryson
(Lew Bryson)



FICTION IN GAMING

ERIC OLSON



Many GameMasters suffer from a common problem—lack of time to create/flesh out a campaign world. Add to this the problem of the two-dimensionality of many campaign worlds. It is difficult to give the various areas of a campaign world a feeling of life. Large areas may be ignored as uninteresting by the players. Some GMs try to compensate for this by having the players travel to every corner of the world. Not only is this a tremendous burden on the GM, but many players resent this attempt to control their actions. This also tends to detract from the flow of the campaign and make it hard to develop a lot of detail in any one area.

A quick and easy means of solving this problem is to use a ready made campaign world. I'm not suggesting that you run out and purchase a pre-made campaign from TSR, Judges Guild or ICE. This might give you all of the needed maps, facts and figures, but it would lack depth, personality and an intimate feeling for the GM. TSR has attempted to compensate for this with Greyhawk's World which is published now and then in the DRAGON. These tell you of developments in the world of Greyhawk. Lively and interesting though such articles may be for those who've played in Greyhawk for 9 or 10 years, they are just words on paper for most of the players. This is a nice idea, but it falls short of really helping most campaigns. What I suggest is using literary sources in SF or fantasy novels for campaign ideas.

Obviously, the most popular and well-known fantasy world is J.R.R. Tolkein's Middle Earth. This would be familiar to many through the *Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and the *Silmarillion*. These books give descriptions of all aspects of life in Middle Earth. These also tend to be among the first books read by typical gamers. In addition to the extensive material to be found in Tolkein's work, there are some helpful new aids in the Middle Earth series from ICE. These are superior to most pre-made campaign aids as they have more of a feeling of life and excitement than most, and much of the background material is familiar. There are two major drawbacks: 1) the players are likely to know too much about the world, which will lower challenge and novelty and 2) low level characters are rather hard to play in a world like this which is ruled by great forces. I haven't yet looked at ICE's two campaign modules, but I have heard only good things which lead me to expect they have tried to solve these problems. Middle Earth may still be a possibility, especially with newer players, although it could be restrictive to GM improvisation.

A close second to Middle Earth are the worlds of Robert E. Howard. Most notable of which is Hyboria. Not only is there already a detailed map of the world, there are more than 2000 pages in print dealing with the world and its two major characters, Conan and Red Sonya. Conan's world is easy to bring alive for players working from the sources. Each area of the map has its own personality with something for just about every gamer; from the savage Picts to the warlike and expanding Turan, to the crypts and necromancy of Stygia. An added plus is that gamers have usually read at least one of the books and have a basic knowledge of the world. The Hyboria books also leave enough gaps so that you can easily individualize your own campaign and therefore keep things fresh. Howard also has another interesting world in King Kull's Valusia, although there is less material for it.

Probably the next most well-known world and just as well documented, is the world of Elric of Melniboné by Michael Moorcock. Elric's world is very vivid and colorful with a good mix of wild areas and all kinds of cultures to make adventures varied. Even more than Howard's books, the Elric novels give readers a good knowledge of the flair and personality of the states and places in the world, while leaving room for the GM to advance his own ideas within the basic framework. Elric material has also been published in a number of forms for use specifically in gaming, including a

RuneQuest based system called Stormbringer. There will probably be additional expansions to go with this new and popular game. Moorcock also offers other interesting worlds, such as his future Europe in the Hawkmoon series. This is also enjoyable, with a nice mix of technology and primitive culture, although it doesn't have the epic scope of Elric. The Corum series is also good, if a bit sketchier. All three of these worlds can provide a viable campaign with a little work, and they all have distinctive character and personality.

There are many other sources which offer excellent possibilities. Some of the best of these are: Clark Ashton Smith (Hyperboria, Zothique, and Xiccarph), Adrian Cole (Dreamlords series), Paul Edwin Zimmer (Dark Border series), Richard Kirk (Raven series), Katherine Kurtz (Deryni series), Robert Asprin (Thieves World series and Mythconceptions series), Fritz Leiber (Swords series). Any of these can be worked in to an excellent background if it catches your interest, and all are worth reading. For other ideas see the 'Worlds of...' series which appears here in ABYSS.

The biggest problem with using a world background is that it may become too familiar, and unless you have your players properly conditioned, there may be difficulties with them knowing how an NPC will react, or having information which would not realistically be available to the characters. You can't very well forbid them to read the books on which you are basing your world, so there are some easy pitfalls to avoid. First, do not base adventures directly on events undertaken by major characters which will be easily remembered by someone who reads one of the books. Second, don't let yourself be tied down by the background material, feel free to improvise and expand, the best way to do this is to use the general world background, but work mostly with your own added material for specific events and situations. Finally, make it very clear to the players that what you run and what they read may not necessarily match, and that for the world they play in, you, not the books are the final arbiter. In general, an even better way to deal with this is to just draw ideas from these many worlds to use in your world, a culture here, an NPC there, and perhaps some adventures, after suitable mutation. Running your own unique world and borrowing ideas is quite effective, as such ideas are much harder to recognize and anticipate when they are in a different general background. In that way a world can be your own unique creation, yet contain all the best of a number of different fictional worlds.

Some general ideas for reducing staleness or predictability in your campaign world and to revitalize player interest might be:

1/Write up a complete history of your campaign/world. This should involve major events in all major areas of the world and involve major houses and organizations. A good dose of war and intrigue never hurts, and it is nice for families and states to have reputations already fully established.

2/Limit the players' access to information (maps, facts, etc.) as much as possible to what would be within the immediate reach of their characters. Having to work for this data makes new areas more interesting and challenging. Anything worked for becomes more dear.

3/Mix up the culture and historical base of your different regions. Differences in human languages should be made clear, as should dialects. The idea of a common tongue is a bit contrived, except, perhaps as a trade language used by merchants. Differences in language form a barrier to travel and another area to conquer. Every human is not a blond-haired, blue-eyed Anglo-Saxon. Different cultures and areas should have different smells, morals, arts, cuisine, etc.

4/Related to the previous one, don't have everyone use the same currency. Differences in currency and rate of exchange make areas distinct, and in addition, most people in medieval periods used trade and barter far more than coinage, which was actually a rarity reserved for the highest levels of trade.

5/The most common and important aspect for a campaign is to differentiate political system throughout the world. States as well as people should come alive. For example, Country X is run by business concerns, while Country Y is an empire ever looking to expand, therefore threatening Country X's trade routes. In addition, remember that those who seem to rule are not always those who really hold the power, and factions and intrigue are an important element. Most historical European principalities had geopolitical goals, if only survival. Many had their basis in a desire to unify a race, pan-slavicism or pan-germanism as the best examples. Also, the structure of cities within a state should be variable. Cities make interesting play and gain flavor from the minorities found within them. Certain ones may also become



strongholds of particular religious or political ideas. They could house the only survivors of a large scale persecution, etc.

These are only a few suggestions and there are many more possibilities. Without character, a campaign becomes flat, just an endless series of 'dungeons' going nowhere. Make the players feel that they are part of a living, vibrant and exciting world, and that they have a role in its growth and development.

MISSION OF INTEMPERANCE

LEW BRYSON



"Damn it all, man, who's the priest here and who the deity? Answer me that!" Pwyll ap Glun spun to face the quiet man a commanding glare beneath bushy brows. "We haven't lost sight of that basic element of our relationship, have we?"

"No, my lord, you are the deity, a most powerful and puissant one, and..."

"Pendryn! Don't ever use that word again! I can't abide it! I am awesome, poetry in savage motion, I'm hell on wheels, but I am never puissant! Understood?"

"Yes, m'lord. May I refer to you as bold, swift as death, the wandering lord of doom?" The priest gave a timid smile.

"I'll have an approved list of honorifics for you by the end of the month." He paused and eyed the priest. "But that doesn't change things. I'm informing Arawn of my decision this afternoon and leaving to see my son directly. I plan to be back in three weeks, and I want to see this place looking like a proper tavern. You've got the wine, you can get money from my wife, I'll be bringing the beer. Right?"

"Yes, lord, but—"

"Right, right, quite right, Gir and I will do that until I can hire Rolf off of Walt—"

"My lord! You? A tapman?" Pendryn was stunned. "My lord, you cannot! Not in your own temple. What would the Egyptian theocracy say?"

"Ach. They'd probably say the suspected the tendencies all along. And don't you get all ruffled, Pendryn lad, if you see the Grey Rider or a certain Wild Huntsman in here." Pwyll swept up his peaked hat and black gloves. "Gwyn said he'd stop in the next time his travels bring him by, and I expect this place to be up to his standards. Don't disappoint me, and all will be well." He walked to the door.

"M'lord, your wife—"

"—will be the barmaid, yes, don't worry. See you in three weeks!"

"My lord, you can't—Oh, hel." Pendryn sighed as Pwyll left. The great burnished broadsword over the altar reflected a broken picture of Pendryn's fallen face. He looked about the temple, at the consecrated weapons on the walls, at the murals of Pwyll's great combats, and sighed again. Just what the hell was a bung-starter, anyway?

"Ah, there he is, master. I see him."

"Good. Now we will find out what the mad Welshman is up to. Shigure, hand me the flask of mind-reading potion."

Voices muttered in the darkness of a doorway along Fool's Alley. Within the dim shadows hunched two figures, a slight, sallow skinned man wearing thick spectacles and a vest seemingly woven of strings of clinking shiruken; and a non-descript man of average height, build, features, dress, age, and voice. He took a small leather flask from his bespectacled partner, pulled the stopper, and drank deeply. His eyes quickly glazed over, his lips began to quiver gently, and a small stream of drool wound down his chin as he slid to the ground. "Bleeble beeble bububuh blugg—but blabb..." The nonsensical syllables wandered out as he began to scratch his robe in an aimless manner.

"Oh my goodness, master, I have given you the naughty feeble-think potion by mistake! Oh, are you going to be kicking upon my unworthy butt when you finally regain your exiled senses!" Shigure dithered about for a few seconds, wiping the drool from his master's chin and pushing the newly-minted idiot's tongue back into his mouth. "Master, I have to take the potion myself, please forgive my incalculable unworthiness." With that, Shigure drank the contents of another flask. His eyes glowed and he began mouthing words. "Got-to-go-to-Lancaster-see-Implotius-beer-no-bar-without-beer-look-at-the-set-on-that-one-like-to-get-her-heh-heh-where's-Girithaur-hel-late-again-guess-I'll-have-to-entertain-myself-somehow-heh-heh..." Shigure shook himself as the very temporary effects of the powerful potion wore off. He prodded the still befuddled Nam. "Master, they're opening a tavern! He's getting beer! They'll be making a fortune! Master!"

"Yaple? Okle-vinga bababawoose! Wow, wow, wow!"

"Master! Come home from la-la land! We have to be shaking many legs so as to be beating the Welshman and his Egyptian friend to the Planter's Punch! Wake up, oh doped up brain of my master!" Shigure shook the other plotter, but to no use. Finally he gave up and grabbed the helpless Nam and slung him over his shoulder. "Come along master, we'll go and get the wonderful antidote which I am greatly hoping you had the masterful foresight to prepare..."

Girithaur hustled along the Street of the Gods towards Fool's Alley, being careful to bump everyone within three feet of him, bowling over old ladies and pitching beggars into the open sewars. He was late for his meeting with Pwyll, and it was all the fault of the damned priests! They'd been rather balky when he'd broached the concept of his theocratical free-lancing, and the ensuing sharp words had become a free for all right in the temple chambers. Gir laughed as he jogged along, remembering their faces when he took the Throne of Ra hostage with his Hell Lance. "One step closer and you'll have Ra's Sandbox! Come on, you shits, I dare you!" His threats had cowed them, which showed how well they were thinking. If he's blown up Ra's rose quartz throne, whoo baby, a fire whipping would have been the nicest thing that would have happened! Ra was a good guy and probably wouldn't get too upset about Gir taking a vacation, but he did like that chair. It was tough to find one that would not melt...Girithaur rounded the last corner and saw Pwyll standing casually on the corner of Fool's Alley, surrounded by laughing, happy people. Pwyll spotted him and waved, grinning. "Hey, buddy! Come on and join the party!"

"What's this action? You been telling that one about Aethylia and the one-legged beggar again?"

"No, just a little euphoria powder in the air, never hurt anyone. I thought I'd make their day for them. You ready to go over to Ned's? C'mon, let's hit it." The two demi-gods walked away, leaving the laughing people in their wake. "Don't worry about it, Gir, it only lasts about three days..."

An hour later the two reached a certain townhouse in the Mage's Quarter. Pwyll had notified Arawn of his intention to take a sabbatical along the way, and the god had taken it well. He had liked the promise of free drinkings even better, and had agreed to come around with his wife sometime. Girithaur was dumfounded.

"What a loose bunch! How in the name of Thoth do you ever get any work done? The Egyptians wanted my ass! We'll never see any of my bunch in for a few." He paused, and turned to Pwyll with a questioning look. "What are we going to do if opposing gods show up? Besides pick up the pieces and start rebuilding the next day, I mean."

"Trust to Gwyn, old buddy. He has granted me a boon. We've got a planar extension. When you walk through the door of the bar, you'll actually be walking into an enclave of the Grey Lands. There are only three entities who will have power there. One is Gwyn, the other is my lord Arawn, and the third is walking down a street in Ptolemeias with a second rate Egyptian demi-god. If anybody starts any trouble, I'll just boot their ass out the door. Maybe I can talk Gwyn into granting you a temporary permit as well."

"Slick, pal. Is this Ned's here? The one with the eyes beside the door?"

"Yeah, this is the place. Nice location here. The Archmage's College is right over there, so he can walk to his Combat Conjuring class. Right back there are the Brewer's and Vintner's Guilds, and guess who just happens to be an honorary member of both? Not much gets by my boy Ned." Pwyll stepped up to the door and knocked two times. A mouth seemed to grow out of the wood, and the eyes beside the jamb swivelled to focus on Pwyll. The mouth spoke.

"Yah, who is it now! I'm busy, screw off."

"It's Pwyll, you little shit! Open up, or I'll tell the world the story of your exploits in Dwarfheim!"

The mouth let out a laugh. "Bullshit! You don't know the half of it, and besides I already sold the rights to Savak, he's publishing the whole thing as Sex Confessions of a Dwarvish Impersonator later this month. Come on in and I'll let you look at the galleys. I didn't know I was this amazing!" The door swung open, and revealed a somewhat over-decorated vestibule and a floating disembodied hand which crooked a forefinger beckoningly. The two visitors walked in and the hand led them to Ned's workshop on the second floor. The diminutive mage sat on a high stool, eating from a plate of food before him. The table at which he sat was cluttered with bubbling retorts, a small iron cauldron over a glowing brazier, and assorted specimens held in massive bell jars.

"What's up, pal? Heard from your toad of a first-born lately?" Ned belched and wiped his face with a silk napkin which appeared in his hand. "You know, that fat little fart is getting pushy lately, he needs taking down a peg. Is that why you're headed for Lancaster?"

"No, you gossip monger. I'm going to Lancaster on business, and that's why I'm here. How would you like to—Ned, what the hel are you eating? It smells intriguing, but it looks like Otyeugh slops." Pwyll took the fork out of Ned's hand and held it up to appraise the dangling foodstuffs draped over it.

"It's all healthy stuff, bean sprouts, bamboo shoots, water chestnuts, li-chee nuts. It's all conjured, though. I've been putting on some weight, up to almost 70 pounds? So I eat this stuff for the pleasure of eating. Of course, after two or three hours the spell wears off and I'm hungry again...What's the business? Gonna start making Gilrod dolls?" Ned giggled and waved the fork, and the table was covered with thousands of tiny figurines, all with blond hair and prominent rings, effigies of the patron god of Lancaster, Gilrod. "Manny would shit if he saw this!"

"Laugh then, fool, laugh yourself right out of it! Come on, Pwyll, let's go." Girithaur turned towards the door. "I didn't come here to hear the flame defamed."

"Hold on there, Wraithmaster." Ned's voice had taken on a more serious tone. "I meant no disrespect. Gilrod and I go way back, and sometimes it's hard to remember that to some people, most people, he's more than just somebody I knew in Uttgart. Come back and I'll behave." He grinned. "For a while anyway."

Girithaur returned and made a stiff bow. Pwyll quickly filled the awkward silence. "Look, Ned, the business is that Gir and I are opening a bar and we need your help." He paused to stifle Ned's excitement. "Yes, a bar. Listen. What I need is that spell you researched about ten or fifteen years back, the portal."

"You mean whoa-ho-ho round-and-round and it comes out here? I've got it lying around somewhere..." Ned waved again, and a hand began shuffling through a pile of scrolls on another table. "What's the scam? You going to hijack a beer wagon into your back room?"

"Ned, old boy, that's been your problem ever since the accident." Pwyll bent and grasped Ned's stool, lifting it and twisting so that he looked the startled conjuror in the eyes. "You have a tendency to thing small. I'm not going to hijack a beer wagon, I'm going to hijack a brewery!"

Ned was so astonished that he forgot to be enraged about the liberties they'd been taking. "WHAT? Put me down. Girithaur, we have a serious problem here. Pwyll's gone quite mad. You ass, Pwyll, how much do you think my portal spell can be stretched? I've never had the aperture more than 20 feet wide! Are you going to take it in pieces? What are you up to? I have to know, have to make sure I gouge you for enough."

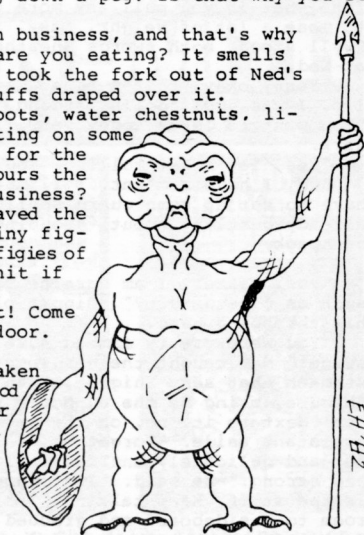
"No, no, I still have my wits. The only problem is this: can you bring the actual aperture size don't to about an inch? I need a 70 league range, but I know that is no problem." Pwyll's small flattery was lost as Ned became absorbed with the mathematics of the proposal. His eyes focussed on the ceiling, he waved his arm and the clutter on the table disappeared, to be replaced by an abacus, writing tools, and a chart ominously labelled 'Usuroius Rates and Charges.' After several questions, Ned asked the proposed duration of the spell.

"Well, we'd kind of like it to be permanent, I guess," Pwyll said, and winced, as Ned grabbed the chart and started to laugh, rubbing his hands together. After some rapid abacus work, the miniature mage banished his tools and passed Pwyll a sheet of papyrus with the final price. The swordsman's jaw dropped.

"450,000 silver makrs!! What kind of a—you say I've gone mad! What the hel is this, here, 200,000 for the research? You already know the damn spell, you little bastard! Why are you charging for research?!" Pwyll was raging in Ned's face and Girithaur had drawn his sword, Grom, swinging it in small arcs, a gleam in his eyes.

"Cool down, both of you!" Ned cried, and waved both arms this time. The two demi gods found themselves inside what appeared to be a clear aspic. "Much better. Now, that 200,000 is for the research I've already done on the spell, and the research somebody else would have to do. Remember, lads, I'm the only one with the spell! There is another way to do business, though. Interested? Well, I'll assume that you are...If you just pay me 180,000, a much more reasonable price, I'm sure you'll agree, the spell is yours, with only one provision: I get to drink at the bar for free. Deal? Well? Oh, sorry." Ned waved again, and Pwyll and Girithaur were free to charge at him, only to find themselves slashing open air, as Ned flew up to the ceiling. "Now, boys, do try to be more understanding! How about that deal?" He frowned. "Pwyll, that's not bery mannerly. How about this: I'll go along with you two and help out, and we'll see how I feel after that, eh? The price can only come down, and I'll bill you for the services for the trip separately. Well?"

"Come down off the Geb-defiled ceiling and ask that, you cheap little conjuring creep!" Girithaur leapt on the table to take a swing at Ned, who merely giggled and



gestured. The table disappeared and Gir was undone. "PWYLL! Get him!"

"No, Gir, he's okay. Come on down, Ned, I'll handle my buddy. The deal sounds fine, but if you pull any more of that binding crapola on me or Gir, you're gonna to lose a lot of weight, fast. You know I can do it, too. Do we have an agreement?" Pwyll stood, both swords sheathed but his hands firmly on their hilts, and looked at Ned.

"Yeah, okay, that's fine. Havgan's hair, you don't have to give me the tough guy lip. I was just fooling around." Ned floated down from the ceiling as he spoke. "You want to leave today yet? If we push it we can be five miles out of the city by dark."

"Yes, let's get rolling. You have a horse here, or do we have to get one for you?"

"No, I have a mount. I'll meet you around front in five minutes, all right? Just have to set up some guard spells and pack a small bag, and I'll be ready." Ned was already bustling about, grabbing things out of middair and stuffing them in a small backpack.

"Yes, master, I am sure he said Lancaster. I was in his mind. How could even one such as I be unsure?" Shigure pleaded with Nam as the latter sat with an icebag on his throbbing head.

"You were pretty damned sure about that mind-reading potion, too, you imbecile swine!" Nam caught the unsuspecting assassin with a terrific backhand blow to the stomach that sent Shigure crashing onto a chest of drawers. "OH! Owwww, my head! Shigure, bring me the euphoria powder. No, no, not that one, fool, that's flash powder! Next to it, no, on the left! Right! No, correct!" Nam got up and swept his assistant aside. "Forget it, I'll get the stuff." Nam took a small pinch of the powder and delicately snuffed it into his nose. "Just be thankful your heart is young and strong," he said. "If I were you I'd never...ah...holy shit!...what? Yes, this is the stuff. Keep talking, lad, I feel it coming on." Nam staggered across the room to a sideboard and grabbed a bottle of brandy. "Talk, swine, I...whooh, Death!" He tilted the bottle up and drank.

"Yes, master." Shigure edged away from Nam, loosening his katana in its sheath. "I was saying that if we leave immediately for the Vaen Mark gate, we can bribe the guards to delay Girithaur and the Welshman there. But we must hurry, master. Master!" Shigure watched as Nam put down the bottle, having drunk a good third of it.

"Yes! The Vaen Mark, right away. Saddle my lizard, Shigure, we ride for money!" As Shigure scurried out of the room Nam hauled out a strongbox and removed a purse of 1000 silver marks. He looked quickly around the room, grabbed a set of saddlebags, and, after a moment's hesitation, the box of euphoria powder. "Never know, might act up again..." he murmured to himself as he ran out the door. Shigure had their large riding lizard ready outside, and they set off at a rapid waddle for the Vaen Mark.

"Ned, you look like an ass. Worse, you make use look like some Dionysian circus. Why couldn't you just ride a horse?" Pwyll's voice rose with his exasperation.

"Quiet, Pwyll, you're making him nervous." Ned admonished his friend. He stroked the neck of the huge bear he rode. "There, there, Artros, it's all right, he didn't mean to be nasty, it's just his nature. You just be a good dumb beast, yes, that's a good moron...behave yourself and maybe I'll let you have a day or two back in human form with your wife and family."

"There's the Vaen Gate," called out Girithaur, who had ridden ahead to get away from the stench of Ned's mount. "Let's get going, you two."

But much to the sniggering delight of Nam and Shigure, hidden behind a small building outside the gate, the guards were true to their bribe. "Sorry, sir, gates are closed for the evening. Special orders from Commander Delren. No exceptions."

"This is ridiculous!" Girithaur stormed. "I'll have your heads and that simpering bastard of a commander's! Let us through!" He made to draw Grom, but Ned touched his elbow and whispered in his ear. "What? Well, lay it on, short stuff! Anything to get out of this damn city!"

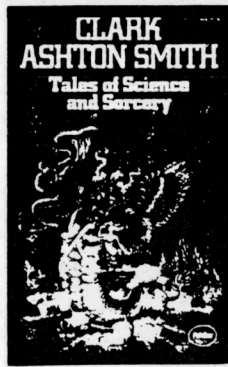
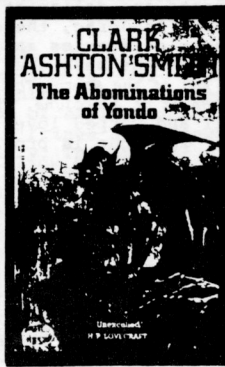
Ned waved his arms, and his mount disappeared in a cloud of smoke and a loud clap of thunder. When the smoke cleared he was seated on the back of a medium sized dragon. "Come on, get aboard! This flight leaves in ten seconds!" Pwyll and Girithaur jumped off their horses and ran for Ned's transformed mount, climbing aboard just as he kicked it into flight. "Mordiggan's mercy on you swine!" Ned called as the dragon flew over the cringing guards. "What the hel, Gir, we'll be in Lancaster by midnight at this rate! Might as well go in style!" Ned slapped the former Soldier of the Sun on the back as all three men laughed while the dragon flew over the tent city outside the walls of Ptolemeias.

They were moving quickly, and so didn't hear the sounds in the square as they left. The sounds were mostly of flesh hitting flesh and shiruken... "Imbecile! Cretin! SWINE!... (sniff!) You slime-ridden pustule, you...ahhh, Thanatos, take me now! FOOL!"

"But master, how was I to know they had a dragon? Ow! Master, you're hurting my unworthy self..."

THE WORLDS OF CLARK ASHTON SMITH

JOHN R. DAVIES



When most gamers and fantasy fans think of writers in the WEIRD TALES tradition, masters of dark fantasy, they think of H. P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard or perhaps Robert Bloch. The time in which they wrote could be considered the classic age of this style which merged fantasy and horror, and has spawned a realm of followers, like Karl Edward Wagner and Fritz Leiber. However, one writer who is often forgotten and left off this list, is Clark Ashton Smith, mostly because until recently his works were out of print in the United States, although they are now returning to print, and British editions have been available for the last decade or so. It is a pity that Smith is only just returning to light, because it is easy to argue that he is by far the most skilled and imaginative of this cadre, a master storyteller, adept and fusing horror, fantasy and humor in unequalled tales of mystery and magic.

Clark Ashton Smith wrote mostly short stories, and these have been rearranged and collected in different combinations in different editions, so it is hard to deal with individual books (especially as I have British editions of everything and you will probably only be able to find the new US editions which are quite different). Thus, we will deal with individual stories and series of stories.

Smith's heroic fantasy or swords and sorcery can be placed in groups by the setting which he uses. Although Smith's ability to invent worlds and backgrounds was phenomenal, he wrote a number of stories which shared backgrounds, and these form a good guideline. His main worlds are Hyperborea, Atlantis, Averoigne, Xiccarph, and Zothique. These worlds are placed in the past, the future, and in remote space, but all partake of his mastery of mood, suspense and style. By looking at these specific worlds and some of the stories in them we can get an idea of Smith's vision.

Hyperborea is featured in a number of Smith's most famous stories. It is the primal continent of the earth, before Atlantis' rise and fall. It is a huge island of jungles and giant cities, populated by many strange races and tribes, both human and non-human. Smith fits it roughly into the pleistocene period, replete with the extinct beasts of the time, such as Archaeopteryx and Megatherium. He places a highly developed, magic using civilization in this time, from the great empire in the south, to the mighty free cities (Cerngoth, Leqqan, Oggon-Zhai, Iqqua) of Mhu Thulan in the north, to the island of Thulask, and the barbarian wastelands of Polarion in the far north. This setting produces two of Smith's most memorable and oft-used characters, the master (but unlucky) thief Satampra Zeiros, and the great mage Eibon author of the Book of Eibon, and famed inter-planal/inter-planetary traveller. The world of Smith's imagination abounds with mighty but slightly goofy mages, unwary hero/victims, and unknown, unimaginable horrors. One thing to note about Smith's work is his tendency to kill off his heroes just as you've gotten to like them, so never expect a central character to last. Some of the most notable stories of this group are: *The Seven Geases* (see a greedy noble abused again and again and again), *The Testament of Athammaus* (a tale of the Voormi, the dreaded cannibalistic, mountain beast-men), *The Door Into Saturn* (See Eibon demonstrate the values of magic while putting down an obnoxious priest. A rather wry look at faith), *The Tale of Satampra Zeiros* & *The Theft of the Thirty-Nine Girdles* (these are the archetypal tales of heroic thievery, inspiration for *Fafhrd & the Grey Mouser* and others). It is noteworthy that this world was the inspiration for Howard's Hyborian world. There are also clear moral themes here, particularly those of greed, bigotry, pride, and false faith. Themes appropriate to each world can be identified in others as well.

Atlantis is a little less well developed than Hyperborea, but it has some really fine stories. Smith chose to depict this mythic realm in its last days, before its sinking, showing a degenerating society, controlled by desperate mages seeking an



escape from their doom. This is a grim period, with fairly few stories, of which the two most outstanding concern Malygris, the greatest mage of the time. These are: *The Last Incantation* (in which the old, embittered mage is disappointed in an attempt to recapture a lost love) & *The Death of Malygris* (in which he takes revenge on his killers after his death). This is a good, if short set of stories, with themes of bitterness and despair predominant.

Averoigne is perhaps Smith's most interesting world, set in a pseudo-historical variant of medieval France, a mythical county called Averoigne which seems to fit somewhere around Auvergne, Provence, and the Pays d'Oc in general. It is a realm of dark forests and malignant magics, demons, and of an interesting character, Azederac, the demon-worshipping bishop. There are a fair number of stories in this group, covering a range of topics. Some of the best are: *A Rendezvous in Averoigne*, *A Night in Malneant*, *The End of the Story*, *The Maker of Garqoyles*, *The Holiness of Azederac*, and *The Beast of Averoigne*. Themes of this period seem to be demoniac evil and warped love.



Zothique is probably the world about which Smith wrote the most. It is the world of the end of time, when the sun is dying and man has returned to barbarism and magic, and the old gods have returned. He has no greater period for mood or mystery, and the setting really stands out for its dark imagery and grim vision of fantasy and adventure. This is a world of necromancy. It seems everything is tombs and death. Love is the love of the dead, power is power beyond death, and curses and magic are transcendent. Of all of the worlds, this is the most unusual and interesting. Some examples of the finest stories are: *Necromancy in Naat*, *The Empire of the Necromancers*, *The Charnel God*, *The Dark Eidolon*, *The Isle of the Torturers*, *The Black Abbot of Puthuum*, and *The Vowage of King Euvoran*. The themes here are very clear. Death and entropy rule over all, and in the end of most stories there are no winners. Everyone gets their just rewards.

Xiccaph really isn't as well developed as the other settings, but it is worth noting, as it is not a place on earth, but one of several far planets which Smith uses, and by far the most successful of these. Xiccaph shows how well Smith can portray inhuman and alien ideas on this world of four moons, no matter how human the characters may seem on the surface. Two related stories of note are: *The Maze of Maal-Dweb* and *The Flower Women*.



By no means is Smith's art restricted to these worlds and styles, but certain backgrounds do stand out. He also did some very nice arabian nights pastiches, some traditional, Lovecraftian fantasy, and some less inspiring space-opera, though even that has his grim style. There are several things which characterize Smith's work and make him unusual. The first is his use of sorcerer characters with great frequency. He likes to write of men of magic and ideas, and to present the range and challenge of their powers. The second is his strong sense of doom or Wyrd. Everyone tends to get what's coming to them in the end. Evil and foolishness are usually punished, and there is a dismaying tendency for no one to be left alive at the end of a story. Many of his characters are charming, interesting, or unusual, but there are very few you'd want to invite home. One interesting thing to note is that, just as his mages are usually powerful and dominant, his warriors and leaders are usually clumsy fools, though they do sometimes win out through sheer luck or idiotic determination. Characterization and mood are his strongest skills.

Clark Ashton Smith may have been one of the first writers of dark fantasy, but no one since then has been able to reach the heights of terror or adventure with anything resembling his consistency. He is a joy to read: funny, sad, frightening, and provocative. He writes fantasy with the imagination and the intellect, with a style and artistry which is unequalled. He seems the ideal merger of imagination and expression, and for my money he is the greatest writer of heroic fantasy ever, and one of the best writers of horror as well. As for his Science Fiction, I cannot be so kind, but nothing should stop you from seeking out his works and devouring them.



SOME OF THE EDITIONS AVAILABLE AT ONE TIME OR ANOTHER
Out of Space & Time (2 vols), *Lost Worlds* (2 vols), *Zothique*, *Hyperborea*, *Poseidonis*, *Other Dimensions* (2 vols), *Genius Loci*, *The Abominations of Yondo*, *Xiccaph*, *Tales of Science & Sorcery*, *The Black Book of Clark Ashton Smith* (poetry & Fragments). There are certainly others about, especially from small presses, and I have also seen a pictorial essay and catalog of his sculpture, for which he was quite well regarded, including sculptures of the deities of Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos and a few characters of his own.

GAMING BY MAIL

D.R. MACNAMARA

This is a feature we've been trying to get hold of for a while to present something a little different and expose *ABYSS* readers to another aspect of the varied world of gaming. The author is broadly experienced in all aspects of Play By Mail Gaming, and we hope that he will follow this examination of some of the popular games with further explorations.



BEYOND THE STELLAR EMPIRE

Adventures by Mail, POB 424, Cohoes, NY 12047

This is an intermediate future(2300AD) game of exploration, colonization and trade in a fringe area known as the Capellan Periphery. The area of play consists of about 50 star systems chock full of planets, moons and space hazards(asteroids, dust clouds, other players...). Players operate a single starship. These ships come in assorted types from dinky little yachts to good sized freighters and heavy cruisers. Your ship is originally owned by one of the industrial/trade cartels known in the game parlance as affiliations. Each of these groups has specific goals, control of the drug market, mining, agriculture, etc. The Imperial presence makes itself felt in the form of the space pigs, otherwise known as the Imperial Stellar Patrol. Within the framework established by the GameMasters it is possible for players to do almost anything, provided the cops don't catch you doing it. A turn is played with a single turn sheet, and the limiting factor to what you can do is time. Each turn consists of 70 Time Units and everything you do takes up a number of these. Jumping from one

system to another takes 20TUs, launching a probe takes 5TUs, and conducting transactions at your friendly neighborhood starport takes 10 more Time Units.

The big selling point for this game is detail. System maps show the relative positions of the stars and planets on a 30x30 hex map, hazards aren't shown until you fill them in yourself. Each planet/moon is drawn on a grid varying in size from 1x2 to 36x52 sectors. Each of these sectors is 40000 square miles, a 10x10 sector map breaks down further to show finer terrain detail. The starships are divided into Command, Main and Engine sections and a player places appropriate items in each. A player can content himself with conning a starship or can explore planetary surfaces with a ground party and even found his own colony.

My only real gripe is cost. The regular turn fee is \$4.50. Each permanent ground party and colony is also \$4.50 per turn. Considering what you get for a normal turn that is pretty steep. Turn around time is phenomenal(8 days), that's from you back to you. Since I've run more than 20 turns between my starships either I'm weird and rich, or the game is pretty good.

WARBOID WORLD

Adventures by Mail, POB 436, Cohoes, NY 12047

This is a game of surface conflict between players controlling STICs(SubTerranean Industrial Complex) and a plethora of robot types known as 'boids. One of the more interesting aspects of this game is the diplomacy, there isn't any. Everybody's 'boids look just like the other guy's, each player has his STIC buried under what he considers to be hex 5050, the game number is coded so it only means something to the computer running it and they start a number of games at the same time. Furthermore, the game mechanics don't favor the good guys.

Players start out with a STIC containing 2 working factories, 30 damaged factories, 2 internal powerplants and 5 external powerplants. On the surface are three Controllroids(a type of 'boid) and his sensor network. Factories are used to build 'boids and powerplants, internal power is for repairing damaged factories and powering the STICs tunneling equipment as well as enabling the factories to operate. External power has a myriad of uses: seizing enemy and 'wandering' 'boids, powering the sensors, sending orders to your 'boids, and giving power to the 'boids your factories create. The sensor network is of great importance, without it a player may not even know he is being attacked until it's all over but the shouting. A player maneuvers his 'boids on the surface and through tunnels in an attempt to give better than he takes. Points are gained by destroying 'boids and by shutting down other players STICs.

Boardgamers will love this game; assault, defense, hidden movement, intelligence reports, and infiltration. PBMers will like the turn around time(2 weeks), and the

lack of diplomatic drain on the wallet. I think it could use a few improvements, especially in the area of cost(\$3.50/turn). This is a pretty good way to spend your gaming dollars. Try it, you'll like it.

PELLIC QUEST

CIA, Ltd., POB 383, Skokie, IL 60077

This is one of the older PBMs. Only one I know of has been around longer. PQ is a game of exploration, conflict and diplomacy(usually in that order) between 15 players. It has six types of races that touch most of the bases found in later game backgrounds. The Zente are extra-galactic insect invaders, Droyds are the remnants of a mechanical society, Brigands are pirate types, Crusaders are fanatics out to convert the galaxy, Emperors are firm believers in 'what's yours is mine so give it to me', and Traders move things around for other players and skim off whatever they think they can get out of it.

Players start out with one system, five fleets(frameworks on which to build ships), and a few other items. He then builds ships and troops and sets out to conquer the galaxy. Players are identified by a code name and everything he owns has it plastered on it for everyone to see. Players can trade 3x5 cards within the game with any information, but after the initial contact by 3x5 most diplomacy is done by phone or through the mail. Player alliances dominate the game and you can't usually survive without at least one ally. You get points for doing various things like capturing and holding systems, destroying other player's possessions and holding artifacts that you find or capture. The game ends when one or more players pass a pre-determined score, usually around the 20th turn.

The most unfortunate aspect of this game is the length of time between turns. Players can and do lose interest when turnaround time is a month. Games can last for years! Turn fee is reasonable at \$2.25. It is a good way to meet other serious PBM gamers.

STARMASTER

Schubel & Son, POB 214848, Sacramento, CA 95821

This pointless, unbalanced, overpriced hodgepodge has been on the market far too long. It purports to be a game of interstellar empire building. It is actually a simulation of the real world. The rich get richer and the poor get stomped on. With competent management and a little less greed this could have been a good game, as it is I'd only recommend it to my worst enemy unless he were filthy rich.

If you still think you want to try it after reading the above paragraph, I'll be more specific. Players start out by designing their race and homeworld, so far, so good. The GameMasters then create a star system with said race and world and put it in their galaxy. Players can build ships, troops and defenses. They explore near space for worlds to colonize or conquer. Sounds good so far, right? Well it's all downhill from here. Rich players then set up other races at \$5 a shot and demand that the GameMasters set them up near their other planets or not bother to set them up at all. The GMs comply(they wouldn't dream of turning away a buck) and the player has his original race subjugate his new races and loot their worlds with no resistance. Players who don't or can't afford to follow this practice are soon so weak in comparison that they are easy prey for wealthier players. They are usually overwhelmed quickly and their time, effort and money goes for naught.

If, in spite of all reason, you are still interested, turn around time varies from 3 weeks to 2 months, and the resular turn fee is \$3.50. Don't say I didn't warn you.

CATACOMBS OF CHAOS

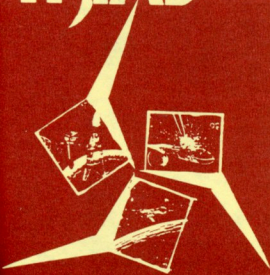
Schubel & Son, POB 214848, Sacramento, CA 95821

Another loser from Schubel and Son. CoC is a completely computer moderated game wherein an intrepid party of adventurers stumble around in the dark and attempt to destroy monsters and capture treasure without being killed themselves. This is not a put down of FRP games or gamers(I am one), but it is an accurate description of this game. Anyone who has ever played 'Zork' or any other adventure type game on a computer will recognize the style immediatly. Now, imagine if you can, playing one of those games by mail one move at a time.

This game had promise, but not much. As usual, greed and banality with contempt for the intelligence of gamers as a class, are the foundations for this offering. Each player is given a pool of 100 points from which to create his party of adventurers. These are used to give attributes to from one to ten characters. You can make one superhero with 100 points or 10 average guys with 10 points each, as long as you don't use more than 100 total. So far, it's not too bad, but the rub is that each character can perform only one action per turn. That's not too bad until you discover that entering a room counts as an action.

All characters and actions have to be coded onto computer cards so that they can be read by an optical mark reader. This can be a real pain and strictly limits your options. My complaint here is that it is expensive and time consuming. The GM just places your stack of cards in the reader, hits a button, tears off your printout, folds it, sticks it in an envelope and mails it off to you. For all this he expects you to pay \$2.25 plus 25¢ per character in your party. Go ahead and play it, it's only money.

TRIAD

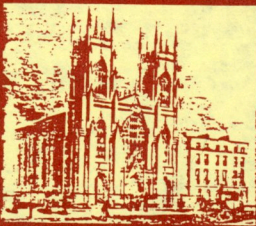


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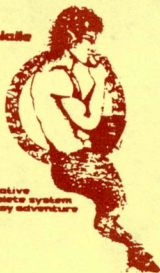
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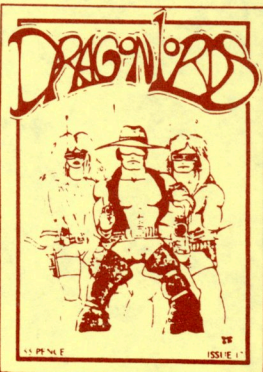
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ISSUE 61

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Echoes...	78	+4
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