

ABYSS



ABYSS

CONJURINGS

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Editorial Offices

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ARTISTS IN THIS ISSUE

Rick Pressley(3,4,5,20,21,24), Wayne Mitten(8)

Welcome to the first annual Eric Olson memorial issue. See your favorite assistant editor abused. See him upbraided. See him quiver in abject terror. See his favorite column dropped from the issue altogether. Witness an issue without one word of his deathless prose. See his greatest rival in assistantdom write on in splendrous solitude. See his name taken in vain in his silent absence. Oh grim day. Oh slaughter of innocent babes!

Although the pitiable editorial remnant twitched and gibbered, begging to defend himself, in my official capacity as the heartless master of tortures, I felt obligated to leave him exposed to the fiery blasts of outraged critics. What injustice. What cruelty. What a bummer!

Take a look at "Echoes from the ABYSS" this issue. All should become clear. It seems that Eric's manly efforts at balanced criticism hit a biorhythmic low point last issue, at least in the view of his subjects(victims). While I appreciate the feedback from Messers Stackpole and Siembieda, and while Eric is conspicuously absent from this issue(Having slithered off and taken "In the Speculum" with him in protest), be not afearred. ABYSS still stands behind Eric and his reviews. I've read Mercenaries Spies & Private Eyes and The Palladium Role Playing Game, and on consideration, I agree completely with Eric's analysis of the general merits of the works. His criticisms were valid, as they traditionally have been. In fact, in the case of The Palladium Role Playing Game, he was downright charitable. Sometimes his tolerance and understanding amaze me. We will continue to publish reviews and articles which are exacting and demanding, and do not shrink from issues, or couch commentary in overly kind jargon. Less rigorous standards for reviews would be a disservice to the reader who presumably wishes to know what makes a given game or aid worth buying or worth avoiding. This is the purpose of reviews, and Eric's work tends to achieve these ends in a concise format.

Eric wanted to defend himself. He didn't want to take this attack lying down, but space and planning considerations gave us a marvelous opportunity to demean and humiliate the upstart editor(he of the threats of coups). Unfortunately, he seems to have taken "In the Speculum" with him. Eric will be back in force next issue. Weakened by reviw withdrawal, we had to give in to his demands that we let him have his day in print(it was give in or never see "In the Speculum" again). Next issue will feature reviews, a new TCT mini-adventure "Quest for the Bogan", and Eric's reply to this issue's "Echoes..."

I think this is a good issue, so read on. Remember, your feedback and comments are our greatest reward, and the guiding light in our ongoing quest for ABYSSmal excellence. That's all the more I can ramble...Later!

ORIGINS AWARDS

Whether you like to admit it or not, you are a Ragnarok Enterprises customer. Now, ORIGINS is the national gaming convention coming up in Dallas this summer. At ORIGINS they give out 'Origins Awards' which mean a lot to some of us. If you've liked ABYSS or other Ragnarok products in the past year, you can help keep us happy and productive by giving an encouraging push. Yes, you can vote for these awards. Just find a nominating balalot and fill it out(they are in most of the large magazines). Put down your favorite items in the appropriate spaces, and send it in. We hope you'll put ABYSS down in the 'best amateur magazine' category, and perhaps TCT in the 'best role-playing game of 1983' category. If you want to put other eligible Ragnarok releases down as well, don't expect us to stop you. This kind of recognition and encouragement keeps us going.

THE AESIR

DAVID NALLE



Rsp

In this second look at the deities of the Germanic and Scandinavian background, we turn to the single most prominent group. Last issue the Vanir, gods of peace and the earth, were examined. This time we move on to the Aesir, the pantheon of gods representing the forces of the sky and of battle. It is interesting to note here, that in an early myth cycle the Aesir and the Vanir fought a dread battle, with the curious result of a Vanir victory. This reinforces the important observation that the general nature of a pantheon does not exclude diverse natures within the group, or impressive secondary qualities. Next installment, we will move on to the most obscure group, the Jottun.

The Aesir are the family and associates of Odin, who clearly dominates the group, at least hierarchically. The Aesir were the most popular deities of the pagan north, deities suited to the upper classes, and thus subject to better and more complete written chronicling. Just as the Vanir are associated with Earth and Water, the Aesir have connections to Air and Fire. Curiously, in spite of the martial nature of most of the Aesir, in many cases the Vanir come off seeming more powerful, if only because of their greater reliability and ability to cooperate.

Aesir worship was somewhat more durable in a public context than Vanirism, lasting into the 13th century, ending with the fall of the Jomsvikings in Norway, though some traditions have carried on since then, both from Aesir and Vanir backgrounds, preserved in folk traditions and superstitions.

YMR

Ymr is not properly an Aesir, as he is really a Jottun, but he is the first of the Jottun, and father of the Aesir, who used his dead body to form the earth. He was born out of ice in the void which existed before time. Leading the giants in a battle with the young Aesir, he was killed by the brothers Odin, Vili and Ve, who were either his three sons, his grandsons through an intermediate son called As, or his great-grandsons through his son Buri and grandson Bor (mated with his granddaughter Bestla). Ymr's blood flooded the earth and created the world sea. The only survivors other than the three Aesir was the giant Bergelmir, father of the Jottun. Odin, Vili and Ve were the first Aesir, though they did not rise to equal prominence.

ODIN GAGNRAD

Odin is the leader and father of the Aesir. He is called "All-Father", "War-Father", "God of the Hanged", "God of Cargoes", "Lord of Hosts", and "The Wanderer" (Gagnrad). He is the creator of the earth and life, building all of the parts of the world from the body of Ymr, his father. Popular depictions show Odin as a kindly, patriarchal deity. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Though he is a paternal and tribal deity, and is a deity of wisdom (marked by the lack of one eye, offered up to the pool of Mimir in exchange for wisdom and foresight), he is actually one of the grimest and cruelest deities of Norse mythology, generally not a nice guy. While Odin was known for taking on and guiding human protegee heroes, a quick examination of their careers show that they were beset by Wyrð, that hard to explain quality characterized by a heroic life ending with an inescapable and pitiful doom, usually the result of betrayal or foolishness. On one hand, Odin is a god of war, manly virtues, fury, rage, madness, tactics, and hunting, with associations to the sky and weather. He is known as a sword-giver and lord of berserkers and weres, and often walks the earth giving military advice in human form. On the other hand, he is a god of wisdom, knowledge, inspiration, poetry and the unknown. He practices possession, shapechanging, and a variety of necromancy and divination. He is a deity of all forms of magic, especially spirit and divinity types. Other magical specialties include battle magic and weather magic. One of his better known aspects is as a god of runes and secret, magical language. In this aspect he is a super-shaman and god of shamans and mages. He has a number of interesting attributes and abilities. He is generally depicted as a grim-looking one-eyed man, but when he walks the earth he can take any form. He sends out his spirit in animal form and possesses people, as well as being able to look through the eyes of others and see the future at times. One of his practices was to sleep on grave mounds or use false death as means of communicating with the dead. An important and mysterious power is one of rejuvenation. By wounding himself with his spear and hanging from the branches of Yggdrasil for nine nights he can regain his youth. He rules the hall of Valhalla in Asgard, where dead warriors feast. From his throne there he can see the entire world. He is great at Riddles, a master of disguise and deceit, he can fire ten arrows at a time, and has Gungnir, a magical spear of obscure properties, possibly related to resurrection or rebirth, which is said to never miss. He has two ravens who scout for him called Huginn (thought) and Muninn (memory) who circle the earth each day, making him effectively omniscient. He is also served by a wolf, which

is often used as his totem/symbolic animal. In many ways the wolf represents his nature and personality, which are certainly feral. He has an 8 legged horse called Sleipnir, though to represent a bear born by four men going to a funeral. It is the horse of dreams and prophecy, particularly associated with visions of death and doom. He has an arm ring called Draupnir, which produces 8 identical rings per night, which Odin gives as rewards. He is thought to ride the skies at night, creating storms, wearing a concealing cloak and the traditional wide-brimmed hat. One of his interesting powers is that anyone who hears him speak will believe whatever he says. It is important to note that more than anything else, Odin is a meddling, manipulating deity, he likes to breed and use humans, raising generations of entire families to serve his obscure purposes. What's more, he is treacherous by human definitions, using men and casting them aside, changing sides at will, and generally being fickle. He is also a deity of thieves and assassins, especially suicidal assassins, and various forms of traitors. This fits well with his death association. As far as family life, Odin was wedded to Frigga, and had a huge number of sons. The worship of Odin almost always involved human sacrifice, usually by hanging. Odinites who died in battle were burned and their widows were expected to burn themselves alive on the pyre. Sacrifices were generally hanged. Odin is often depicted as hanged from a tree like a criminal, often with a spear wound. The cult practiced mass sacrifice, and was forbidden in various places and periods as too grim and dangerous to have around, especially as many of the priests practiced politically motivated assassination. Worship was universal from the Black Sea to Ireland, with the center in Sweden. The Jomsvikings who are often seen as the last pagans in Europe were Odinites, and succeeded in assassinating Christian kings and leaders in the north before Jomsburg was finally taken. Suicidal assassination was a reasonable part of the faith as it was thought that all those who died in battle or as a sacrifice (including in an assassination) would live on in Valhalla with the god. Odin's symbols are the Valknut (a rune similar to a civil defense symbol), and the Triskelion (a rune similar to a twisted Mercedes symbol). Odin is certainly a strange character to have as the leader of a pantheon. It is a reflection of his power that he could maintain control most of the time given his attitudes and the unruliness of his various children.

VILI & VE

These are Odin's two brothers, presumably twins, though they seem to be younger than Odin himself. They are fairly obscure sky and wind gods. Vili is associated with the quality of will, and Ve with godliness or faith. They seem to be merely aspects of Odin's nature, as they represent two of the qualities which he prizes highly. Their characterization in myth is too abstract to let us go any further.



THOR THE THUNDERER

Odin had a number of sons, and the exact order of precedence is not clear, although Thor is definitely the eldest. He is a god of the sky, of thunder, storm and lightning, representing might, strength and fury. He also has an association with fire. He is seen as a destroyer of evil. Thor was a rather popular deity among the Germans, but less so with Scandinavian peoples. He also went by the name Donar, and has had a bit of a revival in the 19th and 20th centuries, first with Nazism and now among neo-pagans. He is a fairly straightforward deity, his main faults being shortsightedness, pride, and obstinance. He is depicted as a huge man, heavily muscled, with a red beard. He rides through the skies in a cart/chariot drawn by goats which he can kill, eat, and resurrect from their bones. The wheels of the cart rumble to create the thunder. He wears a belt which doubles his strength, and has iron gloves which protect his hands so that he can bear his most powerful item, his hammer Mjolnir. Mjolnir is a war hammer which was made with too short a haft, so it doesn't work quite right in hand to hand combat. To compensate he practiced extra hard, and developed the unique skill of throwing it. He can even make it return to his hand after striking. Mjolnir strikes with phenomenal force, shattering rock, and killing multiple foes in a single blow. The hammer is his holy symbol, the origin of the T-cross which was worn by worshippers. It is not his only missile weapon, as he can also throw lightning bolts, represented by his other symbol, the Swastika, which is a storm/lightning rune. One note on the hammer is that in earlier forms it may have been a double axe, parallel to that of other sky gods, particularly Zeus. As Odin is a deity of the nobility, Thor could be considered to have a peasant connection, with the cart and goats as symbols of the farm. His shieldbearer is Thjalfi, who is associated with the peasantry. He is a notable trencherman, and an amazing drinker. He is married to Sif. He also wears an oath-ring on his arm, by which oaths are sworn in his name. In worship, statues are an important element, one practice was to parade a statue in a cart, and temples generally had pillars all around them carved in his image. Temples were usually in oak groves, and often had an eternal flame. The most common sacrifices to Thor were bowls of blood, usually poured on the altar, or onto sacred ground.

BALDR THE BEAUTIFUL

Baldr is another senior son of Odin. He is distinguished by the fact that he was killed through the machinations of Loki, but will rise again after Ragnarok. He is a deity of beauty and light, also of war and honor, with associations to the sky and sun, appropriate to a god who was described as 'shining'. He is invulnerable to weapons, because all substances on earth loved him enough to agree not to harm him, save for mistletoe, which was overlooked, and it is with this magical plant that he was speared by his blind brother Hodr, guided by Loki, and perhaps an implication of intentions towards his wife. He is said to be the most beautiful being alive, but Freyr is said to be more fair in some sources, though it may just be Vanir propaganda. He appears as a fair haired, pale-skinned man. He is wise and merciful, and associated with healing as well. He is one of the nicest of the Aesir, however, between the period of his death and potential resurrection he will be fairly passive. Forseti is his son. He owns a ship called Hringhorni.

This is a popular, but not very well developed son of Odin, who may actually be the same deity as Tew. Tyr represents the principle of victory in battle, and lost his hand in chaining the Fenris wolf. He is also a deity of bravery, despite his handicap. He is seen as honest and good hearted, and easily spotted in depictions by his single hand.



TEW

The confusion with Tyr springs from the fact that Tew is often also presented as one handed and the fact that he will be killed by Garm, the wolf/hound of Hel at Ragnarok. However, the difference in their attributes beyond these superficial similarities is notable. Tew is similar in his aspects to Odin. He is a deity of war and victory like most of his brothers, but he is also a sky and paternal deity. He has one major, important facet which sets him apart from other deities. He is a god of law, order, duelling, feuding, and trial by combat, as well as any form of oath or agreement. He also presides over the punishment of criminals. In addition he has associations with the woodlands and wild animals. His judicial aspect is most notable in the fact that he is the patron god of the 'Thing', the regular tribal or national congresses of most Germanic peoples. His worship is characterized by sacrifices involving mass slaughter.

VIDAR

Vidar is the most important of what might be called Odin's younger sons. He is a deity of strength and justice, often associated with smith skills and some aspects of secret knowledge. He acts as if he is slow witted, but this masks a secret intelligence and subtle caution. He is the senior of Odin's sons who will survive Ragnarok (not counting Baldr who is reborn), and seems to have been Odin's heir as leader of the Aesir who survive the battle. He will slay the Fenris wolf at Ragnarok, and is probably stronger and better in battle than Thor. One interesting note is that Vidar is a crossover deity, also worshipped among various Celtic and Germanic peoples all over Europe, and is usually considered to be the father of Whelan, the great pan-European smith deity. Vidar is usually presented as being a giant, part giant, or at least of giant stature.

HODR

Hodr is an enigmatic deity, probably the fourth oldest son of Odin, somewhere between Baldr and Vidar. He is blind, and presented as a fool. He is a deity of those deceived, and self deceived. He is the classical epitome of carelessness, foolishness, and bad luck. He is a patron to those who fall on hard times and have self-destructive tendencies. He is sometimes also seen as a story teller and entertainer. He threw the bolt which killed his brother Baldr, tricked into it by Loki. He may also be a deity of adultery and envy, as there are hints that he was after Baldr's wife.

VALI, MODI, VEOR, MEILI, MAGNI & HERMOD

These are the remaining younger sons of Odin, with Hermod the youngest and the rest of unknown ranking. Most of them are fairly vague, and so are grouped together here. Vali is a deity of vengeance and mad rage, and the avenger of Baldr, killing Hodr, an act which should make him accursed by the tradition of the myth cycle. Veor is Tyr's shield bearer. Hermod is particularly interesting as he is the one sent to Hel to bring back Baldr. The rest are obscure, presumably war and battle deities like their brothers. It should be noted that Modi and Vali will both survive Ragnarok, as will Magni, who ought to be mentioned here as well, as he is usually grouped with the younger sons of Odin, although he is actually a son of Thor. He is primarily associated with strength, and has a horse called Goldfaxi.

MIMIR

Mimir is counted among the Aesir, although he was actually a Jottun, but, just as there are evil Aesir, there was one good Jottun, and he became an advisor to Odin, when the All-father came to his pool at the foot of Yggdrasil to offer up his eye in exchange for a wisdom-bringing draught. He is the guardian of Yggdrasil, the wisest of the Aesir, and the forger of the sword Miming. He was given as a peace-exchange to the Vanir, who killed him and sent back his head, which lived on, kept by Odin's throne to advise him. In addition to his wisdom and smith skills, he is seen as a guardian and water spirit, particularly connected to fresh water.

BRAGI

Bragi is a deity of questionable origin. He may be a son of Odin, but there is no reason to believe it. Most likely he is the deification of a 9th century skald of the same name, who took on Odin's skaldic aspects. He is a very late addition to the Aesir. He is a deity of poetry and word use. He is a symbol of peace and prosperity, though he is often presented as a bit boastful, with a tendency to back down after talking bigger than he is able to enforce with actions. He is also seen as a deity of politics of a sort, or at least a rouser of men's spirits to action through inspiration.

Hoendir is another enigmatic deity of unclear origin. Like Mimir he is mentioned in the creation of the world, so he must have been around then, meaning that he is either of the earliest generation of the gods, or a Jotun of some sort. He is Mimir's partner and companion. He is silent and keeps his own council, but when he acts he is foolhardy. He tends to be a bit timid, but is handsome and an unusually fast runner. His prime aspects involve prophecy and introspection. Prophecy is part of his worship, performed with blood soaked twigs. He is also a deity of manly sensitivity and tender feelings, particularly in familial contexts. He was sent with Mimir as a hostage, but because of his pleasant demeanor and passive nature he was not killed when Mimir was.

HEIMDALLR THE WHITE

Heimdallr is another mystery in the pantheon, but one about whom much is known, as he is one of the most powerful and prominent Aesir. He is said to be the son of nine maidens, who may have been sea giantesses. He has a number of unique powers and attributes. He never sleeps, can see and hear everything (grass growing, etc), shines, and can see through time (past and future). He is the guardian of the Bifrost bridge, which is the main access to Asgard, and he lives close by it. He is described as having a shining countenance, and is quite handsome. He guards the Aesir, and it is his job to send out an alarm with the Gjallarhorn, a huge horn which can be heard throughout the world, and which only he can sound. He may have connections to the Vanir, and he is called the Father of Men, probably because he has a closer physical proximity. He bears a sword called Heimdallirram or Hofud. His general area of provenance is the sun, sky, rainbow and moon. Fitting the shining aspect and the fact that he always watches over everything. He is generally strict in his guard duties, and benevolent in watching over mankind.

LOKI

Loki is probably the most intriguing of the Aesir. While he is usually portrayed in an adversarial and oppositional role, there are many cases in which he helped the other Aesir and worked with them, although there is no question that he was the father of monsters and was generally abusive to the other Aesir. However, after his betrayal of Baldr he was imprisoned until Ragnarok, when he gets his final revenge on the Aesir, leading an army of giants into Asgard. The source of Loki's grudge against the other Aesir is unclear, but it seems to be an attitude which develops through his career, perhaps because he was snubbed and pushed around by the other more physical deities. Loki was the son of a giant, but was raised among the Aesir. In the course of his life he fathered a number of horrible little children, including the Fenris wolf, the Midgard serpent (circling the world), and Hella, goddess of the underworld, all of whom shared his opposition to the Aesir. These children were born by a unique method, as he was able to change sexes and impregnate himself to bear children, naturally producing odd results. His sexual exploits were not limited to this type, as he also caused a bit of a stir when he had an affair with Tyr's wife. One interesting fact about him is that he was Odin's brother by blood oath, a curious circumstance which leads into the logical supposition of a fundamental relationship between the two deities. It is possible that Loki was developed as an alter ego for Odin, or even a parody. In many ways he is an anti-shaman, a purveyor of false and deceptive magics and prophecy. He is a trickster, beguiler, and rather sinister and mischievous. He is one of the most active gods, always scheming to humiliate others, and he carries many of his plots out by using his consummate ability to change forms. Perhaps his most interesting skill is the ability to insult anyone brilliantly. There is an entire poem in which he abuses all the other Aesir and Vanir. He seems to have unlimited access to scurrilous gossip and knowledge of every foul and degrading act which anyone has committed. He is not primarily a violent deity, but one who uses others, and works with psychology to create chaos and dissention. In his early career he is not really evil, and he may never have been wholly so. He just becomes bitter and a bit more aggressive as he goes on. His desire for vengeance at Ragnarok can easily be attributed to the fact that the Aesir imprisoned him and set a serpent to drip acidic venom on his face, except when his wife was able to catch it in a bowl. He is sometimes seen as a deity of death or fire, and his nature is certainly mercurial enough to fit the first classification. He is usually depicted as a small, bearded, red-haired man with wild eyes. He has a sword which he rarely uses, called Laevateinn, which is associated with death and treachery. General worship does not seem to have been widespread, but worship and invocation in specific circumstances where he was appropriate was common. He is the protector of liars, thieves and traitors.

FORSETI

Forseti is of the younger generation of Aesir. He is the son of Baldr. He is one of the later developments in the Pantheon, a deity of precious metals, gems and springs, essentially anything bright which comes out of the earth. He is seen as a peace-bringer, and bears a golden axe. He lives in a hall called Glitnir, made all of gold and silver. He is sometimes also seen as a law-giver. He is a pleasant if not particularly important deity, developed as part of the beginning of the romantic tradition, not as clearly part of the epic mode as Odin or other early gods.

KVASIR

This is one of the stranger deities of the group. His origin is unclear, but it is very early. He isn't really alive, but yet lives on. He was slain by dwarves, who made a magic drink from his blood in the cauldron Odrerir, more or less with Odin's approval. This drink became the magical mead of inspiration and poetry called Odrerir. It is a fairly important part of life in Asgard.

LODR

Lodr is the shield bearer and companion of Odin, and one of the most practical deities. He is the patron of the arts and crafts, and also the god of the awareness and use of the senses. He is in many ways a reflection of Odin in the more physical realm.

Frigga is the wife of Odin, and should not be confused with Freyja, the sister of Freyr. She is the daughter of Fjorgyn, and lives either at Fensalir or Folkvang, where she holds a sort of continual cocktail party for the dead, particularly the Valkyries, of whom she seems to be the leader. She is the patron of warrior women, particularly those who support their men in battle. Like all of the Aesir goddesses she is rather secondary in nature, far less well developed than most of the forceful Vanir goddesses. She has two personal servants, Gna and Fulla.

OTHER GODDESSES

Signy is the wife of Loki. She is as nice and kind as he is fickle. She seems to be sort of a symbol of faithful, long-suffering womanhood, but is really not very well detailed. Sif is the wife of Thor. She has hair which is actually spun gold, and she seems to be a corn goddess. Nanna is the wife of Baldr, and has no real personality save as the object of Hodr's theoretical affections. Idunn is a bit more interesting, though a late development. She is the wife of Bragi, and guards the apples of immortality, an essential commodity, as unlike many other deities, the gods of Asgard are not immortal, aging slowly, but like men in general. Only a few, like Odin and Baldr can bypass this and restore themselves by one means or another. Generally the goddesses of the Aesir are not very forceful, and pale in comparison with the Vanir, particularly Freyja.

THE VALKYRIES

These are the warrior women who follow Frigga and serve Odin, travelling over the battlefield, collecting the souls of the deserving to live on at Valhalla, feasting with the gods and waiting to fight at Ragnarok. They live a fairly independent existence, somewhere between the realms of men and gods, accessible by men only after hard trials. They are generally chaste adhering to a martial code, but they can be seduced away, and a few married earthly heroes. They are probably some of the most prominent women among the Aesir.

THE EINHRARS

These should also be mentioned. They are the picked warriors of Valhalla, serving Odin, feasting, warring and drinking, waiting for Ragnarok when they will rally to the sides of the gods, just as the evil spirits in Hel will join Loki and the Jottun.

THE SKALDS

This is another group which ought to be mentioned. They are the Norse equivalent of traditional bards, poets and writers who preserved the literature and history of the people, with religious connections and considerable political power. They are the chroniclers of the acts of the gods, and specifically the servers of Odin and Bragi. They are often attributed with magical and holy powers, and certainly with the gifts of inspiration and prophecy.

Among the most notable skalds are Bragi Boddason ('The Old'), who seems to be the basis for the development of the god Bragi, and Snorri Sturluson, who recorded the Eddas and other major mythological sources. Like Celtic bards, the skalds held a privileged position in society, and are a major and noteworthy aspect of the worship of the Aesir.

GENERAL NOTES

While this is a brief look at the attributes of the major deities in this group, a number of characteristics become immediately clear, especially in comparison with the Vanir, whom we have already examined. The Aesir clearly tend to be male dominated, associated with war and the sky, and quite a bit nastier and more vicious than the Vanir, although not nearly so interesting with a few exceptions. In many ways these are the gods of the upper and urban classes, while the Vanir are more common and rural in orientation. While many of the Aesir are much newer than the Vanir, some, like Odin and Thor are clearly early deities, and as such bear some similarities to the Vanir, though their ongoing immense popularity places them in a special category. However you deal with the inconsistencies and enigmas of this pantheon, the Aesir are an interesting background element which can be fitted into any campaign, or at least provide interesting ideas.

SUGGESTED SOURCES

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 Philpotts, trans.

Anglo-Saxon Poetry, R. K. Gordon, trans.
 Heimskringla, Snorri Sturluson
 The Skalds, Lee M. Hollander, ed.
 The Prose Edda, Jean Young, trans.
 Anglo-Saxon and Norse Poems, N. Ker Shaw



ECHOES FROM THE ABYSS

Dear Mr. Olson,

I recently received a complimentary copy of **ABYSS** #27, which featured a review of **The Palladium Role Playing Game**. Of course all reviews are simply the opinion of the reviewer, producing some intriguing pros and cons about the game. What I find incredibly disturbing is sloppy and erroneous reviews such as the **Palladium Role Playing Game** review in **ABYSS**.

In the opening sentence I am noted as having been a writer and illustrator for **Judges Guild**. I have never written anything for **Judges Guild**. Even my brief and unimpressive tenure as a freelance illustrator lasted for only six months, ending in April 1980. Nor have I ever been involved with **Judges Guild** production, design or layout.

I am further puzzled at the continued comparisons of myself, **Palladium**, and **Judges Guild**. Comments include "reminds me very much of the old **Judges Guild**", but you don't tell the reader in what way; and "although this system and many **Judges Guild** products have been...". Why all the **Judges Guild** comparisons? The quality of the **Palladium Role Playing Game** in packaging, reproduction, layout, size and art far outstrips anything ever produced by **Judges Guild** as well as many contemporary games.

I cannot help but feel that you were automatically prejudiced by my association with **Judges Guild**, whose trademark became the production of shabby, exploitative, unattractive game books. This is both misleading and unfair as the **Palladium** game package does not even remotely resemble any **Judges Guild** product that I am aware of.

In addition to your personal prejudices about **Judges Guild**, it is sadly apparent that you simply skimmed through the **Palladium Role Playing Game**, giving it little more than a cursory reading. Of course, 270+ pages is a lot to read, but if you are going to review a book I have always felt that one should take the time to read it.

You write that the **Palladium Role Playing Game** is "...a system which is a mass of dragons and magic." Granted, the dragon section is impressive and notable, since each dragon is illustrated with several full pages of art. Yet, somehow I do not think that 12 specific dragons and 14 pages devoted to their stats and history amounts to a mass of dragons. Even if you include the cult of **Dragon Wright** in the religion section and occasional references to dragons, you might be able to add another three pages to the aforementioned 14.

A mass of magic? Maybe. Magic fills a third of the book if not a little more (especially if you include clergy, gods and religions in that category, I don't). Why so many pages for magic? Well, the 290 spell descriptions alone consume a great deal of space. Then there are the six magic character classes. There are Wizard, Witch and Warlock (which one might construe as a **D&D** magic user unless one actually reads the text to find the many philosophies, conditions and powers which make them very different). The **Diabolist** and **Summoner** with their own alphabet of symbols, wards and circles are totally new to fantasy games. **Diabolists** and **Summoners** cannot cast spells, their powers exist through the creation of symbols and circles. Finally, the **Mind Mage** incorporates the power of the mind to perform magic-like feats. Interestingly, you either did not read the section or you actually found nothing new, because you write that "it is definitely behind the needs of today and of little value." "Today gamers are looking for a more serious challenging approach to gaming with something new offered.", "it has few new ideas and is mostly a rehash of what has gone before it." You then quote someone who allegedly bought the book after buying it a few hours earlier at **ORIGINS** as saying that it was "suspiciously close to old **D&D**". You go on to say "that was his opinion, not mine", but apparently concur as there is no statement to the contrary.

I, and reportedly many purchasers, feel that there are new ideas and numerous twists/variants of traditional fantasy themes. **Palladium** was not based on other games, but on legends, myths, and magics throughout history. Is **Star Wars** new? No, all of its concepts, plots and visuals are as traditional to SF as ray guns and rockets, but it is presented in an exciting package with twists and extrapolations on the traditions which inspired it. The **Palladium Role Playing Game** is based on a classic fantasy theme, but with many variations, extrapolations, details, and thought to challenge and excite the player.

What is your criteria for fantasy? Are the **Palladium Role Playing Game** and its world any less realistic than Robert Asprin's **Myth** series, or Zelazny's **Amber** series, or Ann McCaffrey's fantasy series, or even Conan or Tolkein for that matter.

In closing, I would like to note that my distributors tell me that it is the older (20 and up) player who is the prime purchaser of the **Palladium Role Playing Game**. The book has been often noted for its experience system, alignments, insanity tables, magic, combat, men of arms, thoroughness, realism and for the illustrations.

Kevin Siembieda
Palladium Books



Dear Dave,

I thought I'd drop you a line about **ABYSS 27**. I realize designers of games are not supposed to answer reviews, but Eric Olson said a couple of things that deserve comment. The reason **Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes** has a randomly rolled character generation system is to reflect my preference for rolling characters up. I just happen to like looking at a character and trying to decide what sort of personality seems to be suggested by the numbers. I find it a very creative process and I also find it helps prevent every character looking the same just because there are three or four characteristics that should be jacked.

Mr. Olson's characterization of **MSPE** combat as being unrealistic, citing automatic weapons combat where one side takes all the damage and the other takes very little, causes me some concern. While it is true that **MSPE** is compatible with **T&T**, the combat system is not the same. In weapons combat each character involved gets to shoot, and get shot at, with combat being resolved simultaneously. **MSPE** does not use the **T&T** 'total your groups, winner take all combat resolution system', and therefore combat tends towards being deadly. I would hesitate to suggest that Mr. Olson did not read that section of the rules carefully, or that he just assumed that compatibility meant they were the same, but he's gotten results from combats totally unlike any we've seen.

The hand to hand combat system is resolved with the 'winner take all' set up, much like **T&T**, but the application of skills to the combat makes a great difference. Also, the fact that **MSPE** characters do not undergo the attribute inflation of **T&T** means that combats remain on a more equal level. Sure, I'll admit that any good martial artist in **MSPE** can take on three street thugs and come away without a scratch, all things being equal, but that's something I'd bet on in real life too. I think if Mr. Olson goes back and plays around with some sample combats, he'll see where he might have prejudged the game on the basis of **T&T**.

Ultimately, the combats are meant to be deadly, to keep their frequency down. As for responsibility being placed on the shoulders of the GM, that is where it belongs, in my opinion. I take role playing as meaning playing a role within a setting the GM has created. The GM must be able to respond to my demands as a player, and figure out what my actions will do to his scenario. I cannot see how that hurts role playing. In fact, the players are encouraged to demand information from a GM. That justification, to my mind, is part of role playing. In practice much role playing, because of the determination of roles when the characters are created and because points are given for role playing, is possible with **MSPE**.

I do respect Mr. Olson's opinion of **MSPE**, after all he is entitled to that opinion. Still, I do wish he would judge **MSPE** on itself, not **T&T**. I worked long and hard to solve many of **T&T**'s problems in **MSPE**, and being hung out for another designer's sins is not something I enjoy.

As for Dave Hargrave's reply to my letter, let me apologize. Certainly, none of my comments were meant as personal and venomous pot shots, I was merely reacting to what I saw as dangerous generalizations made by someone in the industry that can be used as fuel for those who would roundly condemn role playing. And Dave can rest assured that I did not hit on him because I consider him a commercial competitor. I'm not out to belittle him for having created something wonderful and beautiful, but I would like him to realize what is going on in the outside world, and to be careful.

Like it or not, the United States is going through a religious revival. This means they are hitting on anything and everything they consider a waste of time or demonic. We've all seen the bad press about FRP, the latest bit being about a family that is suing a school that let its son play **D&D** hours before he blew his brains out. Hell, the day after that appeared in the newspaper, we had a 'Christian' walk in our storefront and tell me I had blood on my hands. Well, I can live with that, but I can't handle folks in the industry writing about all the freaky things that have happened to them and their friends. I've had Dave Hargrave quoted to me from articles and such, citing him as typical of people in our industry. By his own admission, Dave is far from typical...

Sure, I sound paranoid, but who would like to have their job called demonic and be told his employer is Satan? Hell, no pun intended, Satan would pay better than this.

Dave's not alone in his love and enjoyment of the fantasy world he has helped to create. To assume that of me is casting me as less than human, for the worlds we create are our children. Whether the world, or the characters, take off and live and breathe by themselves it is a thing of beauty. The same goes for artwork, music and books, such things are only partly understood by the folks who would exorcise our games from the world for the taint of demonism.

I've done talks all over Phoenix and the US for parents so they can understand what their kids are into. They have valid concerns about a preoccupation that may pull a kids away from schoolwork. They don't know what is going on; what they do know is that their son or daughter is totally engrossed in something make believe, that he is spending lots of money on it and that some folks think it is demonic or magic. Then Dave gets quoted to them as per injuries from the game transferring over to real life and the like. It scares them and then they decide Junior can no longer play the games.

The problem is epidemic. The Scottsdale schools ordered **D&D** removed from the library because one parent protested. When it was removed over 100 parents signed a petition asking for its reinstatement. No dice, **D&D** was out forever.

Role playing is a positive experience. Positive aspects, like problem solving and stimulation of creativity need to be stressed. Most Moms and Dads don't have the depth of understanding needed to handle Dave's cases of simultaneous coincidence. I'm not faulting Dave for having the honesty to speak about his convictions, but care must be used so his convictions are not misunderstood and misused by those who would like to see this hobby ended on pseudo-religious grounds.

I'm sorry if I offended Dave, but at least he noticed. I applaud his keeping busy. I hope in the future his professionalism will include a measure of caution so he does not hurt the profession he so gladly is a member of.

Mike Stackpole
Blade

SCRIPTS OF YSGARTH CARL JONES

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Any but the most primitive role playing worlds will have at least a few societies with highly developed written languages. Role playing is usually a verbal and social activity. As a result, the written languages of the world only impinge upon the attention of a player in those rare special situations where a written message or relic is central to some mission, adventure, or situation. While it is generally good to keep play on an informal, interactive level, every element of a world important, and it never hurts to pay attention to detail. Written language is particularly important, because it is the key to the greatest arcane studies, and central to the practice of many desirable skills, including some branches of magic. How a given GM deals with written language is mostly a matter of preference and commitment, but well developed scripts and writing styles can be a great deal of help to players and GM in visualizing at least one aspect of their world.

Ysgarth is a world with a bewildering variety of nations, races and languages. There is a fairly high level of literacy among some peoples and special groups, although general literacy is fairly low. Priest and merchant classes in various regions use written language as a matter of course, but the forms which writing takes in different areas varies widely because of special societal influences. It can provide some good examples of how common written languages can develop, interact and be used.

Writing in Ysgarth had several origins, none of them with a clear claim to primacy. These separate strains have worked on each other to result in the limited hybridization of the three major alphabets/scripts of Ysgarth. The three scripts examined here are the scripts used in Ysgarth proper, not Arojika, Jahannam or any other continent, although, as will become clear, external scripts also have an influence. It is important to note the distinction between script, alphabet, and language. Language is the general structure and vocabulary of communication. Alphabet is the set of characters required to represent the sounds of that language. Script is the selection of symbols used to represent the alphabet. Any language can theoretically be simulated with any alphabet or script. The composition of an alphabet will generally conform to the needs of a language. With some adjustment any script style can write any language, and there can be variations in script style within a language. In addition, the same script is often used by a number of different languages. For example, English, French, German and Finish all use Latin Script, but their alphabets and languages are quite different, with appropriate modifications of the script.

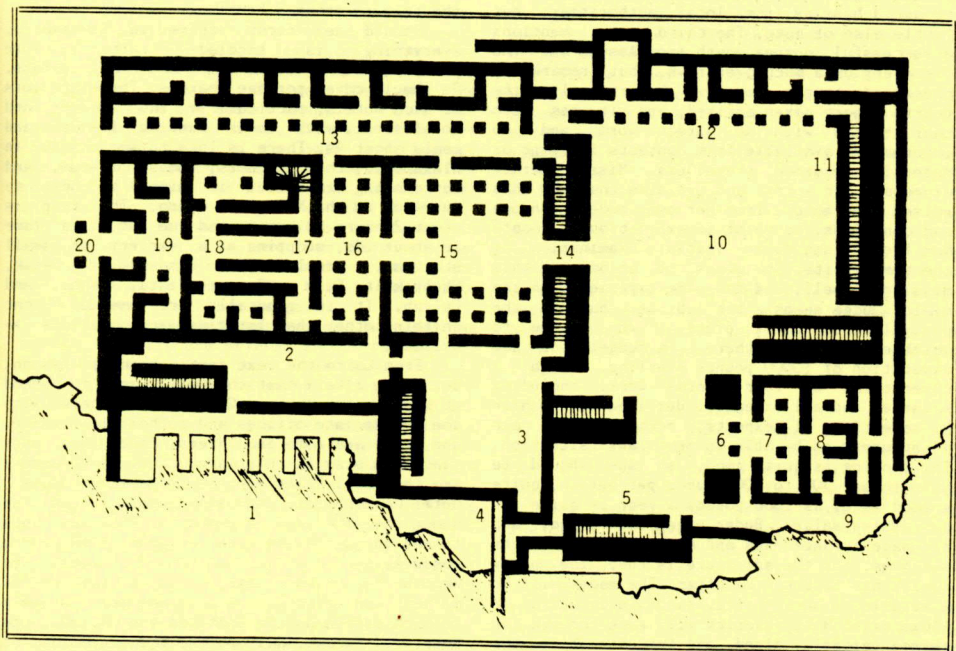
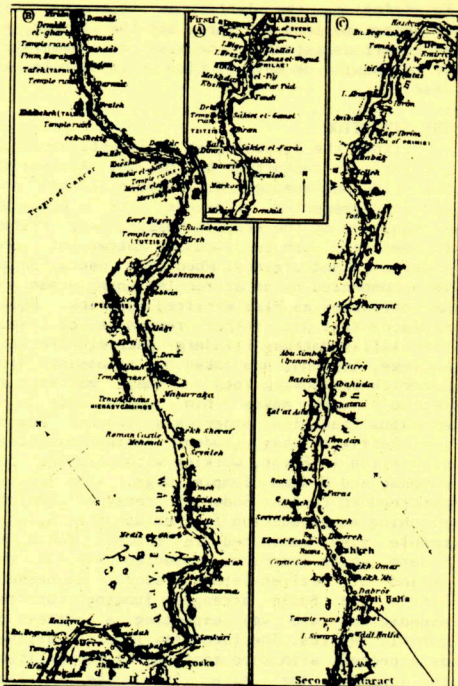
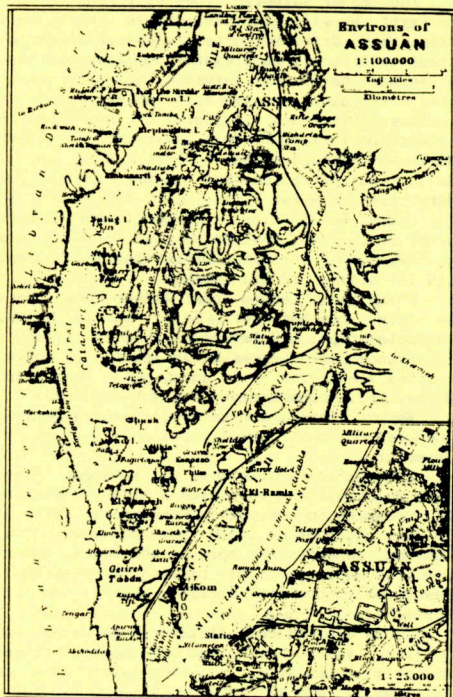
There are four general sources for the scripts of Ysgarth. The oldest of these is probably the priestly script of early Gael and Kymric Druidical orders, a primarily inscriptive form of writing only popularized when nationalistic competitiveness in business and literature forced it into a secular realm and a more versatile form. Second, and roughly contemporary with this script is the literary and scholarly script developed by the Etrua prior to the Saexe invasion, and adapted to mercantile purposes by the Osca, who also used its 20 letter symbols to represent the numbers 1 through 20. During the poorly documented period between the Cataclysm and the founding of Ptolemeias these seem to have been the dominant scripts in Ysgarth, with a Saexe runic script developing as a third major script late in this period, as shown by a scattering of inscriptions, probably as a secret priestly script.

With the re-establishment of Ptolemeias by Phari and Ilchan merchants at the beginning of the current stable historical period, the fourth element, Phari script, was introduced as the written form of the trade language Cansa, and spread quite quickly, being adapted to several local tongues. At the same time, as local societies began to change to compete with the enclave of foreign merchants, their languages became secularized and more practical, as did their scripts. In addition, this was the period of the Saexe conquest of the Etrua and Osca. The results of this turbulent but better known period was the development of three major distinct scripts: Rhesymol, Crivar and Kathasa. Examples of these in that order are given at the head of this article. Two versions of Rhesymol are given, the first is the northern variant, the second the more common southern style. In addition, examples with letter/sound correspondence for English accompany this article. Fig. #1 is Rhesymol, #2 is Crivar, and #3 is Kathasa. As you can see, the scripts are not exactly intended to fit English sounds or language.

Kathasa is based on Phari scripts used in trade. It consists of 12 consonants and 3 vowels, and is a considerably simplification of far more complex literary forms found in the east. For mercantile purposes the 12 consonants are generally also used to represent the numbers 1 through 12, while the '0' or '-' symbol is used for zero. It is widely known and used, and documents in almost any language can be found in this script, mostly business and government related. The only places where it is actually used as the main script for all writing are Ptolemeias, some northern Oscan areas, and some Magar areas, as well as among urbanized Kernwyk. It is common, widespread and easily recognized by the literate, but does not have a real literary or scholarly role. It is highly adaptable, with numerous minor variant forms in use.

Crivar developed out of old Etruan and Oscan forms during the early period of Saexe domination, taking the generally logical structure of the local languages, and adding a number of Saexe rune-symbols. There are 20 letters, 5 vowels and 15 consonants, the same distribution as is found in the early Etruan, but only the 'o', 'r', 'h' and 'm' symbols can be strongly argued as pure Etrua in style. One significant aspect here is that although there might seem to be a superficial visual similarity to Kathasa, any relationship must be to earlier, pre-cataclysmic forms, as Crivar

DISCOVERIES OF GEZIREH-TABAN



INTRODUCTION

This adventure is designed for moderately experienced TCT characters playing in a Victorian period campaign. The setting is London and Egypt, and involves matters Egyptian, so characters with appropriate skills, backgrounds and professions would be useful. At least a couple of the characters should be acquainted, one should have a reputation for sleuthing or investigation, and one should have some standing as an Egyptologist, the latter so that he can organize and lead the party and the former as an expert assistant in the mission. Membership in the Savile or Cavalry Club would also be an asset.

THE SITUATION

Either the Egyptologist or Investigator for the party is contacted by Mr. E. A. Wallis Budge (18 Marlborough Hill/Savile Club), the widely respected Curator of Egyptian Antiquities at the British Museum, who wishes to meet with them to discuss a matter of some importance and urgency. When they meet, Budge is accompanied by an attractive young woman who he introduces as Miss Winifred Soderick. Budge explains that his rather reclusive colleague Sir William Matthew Flinders Petrie (University College, London), has asked him to assist Miss Soderick in looking into a small matter, as Petrie's work makes him unavailable. He explains that Miss Soderick's brother Edmund was Petrie's star student during his last expedition in Egypt, working with him at the Daphnae and Miderm Temple digs. When Petrie returned to London, Soderick remained behind, planning an expedition farther up the Nile a temple site mentioned in records found at Miderm, which Soderick suspected was on the island of Gezireh-Taban, above El-Hesseh. Petrie and Budge arranged funding for the expedition, and was expecting a series of monthly reports. The first few reports arrived as expected, with some mention of competition in locating the site from the Italian archaeologist Andrea Bonifazzi, and an effort to avoid hassles from local authorities, but little else of note. The third report mentions a successful journey south from Assuan and the discovery of a much overgrown, but remarkably preserved temple complex. Unfortunately, the fourth report never arrived, and it has been four months with no direct word and no information available from contacts in Egypt or recently returned travellers. Miss Soderick expresses her worry, and explains that she has raised some money, from her own modest income and donations, to mount an expedition to locate her brother and do an initial examination of the temple site. She plans to accompany this mission herself, and has some experience in the field. Budge seems a bit dubious, but if the party leaders don't protest, who is he to quibble. All told, there is a budget for the expedition of 10000 pounds sterling, enough to cover three or four months work, including salaries and all expenses. Her idea is to hire a selection of experts, both scholars and adventurers to be able to meet any situation. The funding is quite good, so she should be able to pay 300 to 500 pounds per person, quite a good wage, as 1000 pounds a year is quite an impressive salary. Budge urges them to go, and has made arrangements and established contacts for them. For the adventure is run, the party really has to take the offer. The money will be available in bank drafts, cashable in Cairo or Alexandria. Miss Soderick will work through the person initially hired, and let him hire the

rest of the party (4 to 8 persons). As a final note, should they want to take an English guide with them, Budge recommends the soldier/archaeologist/adventurer Col. Sir Nevill Maskelyne Smith, who can be found at the Cavalry Club. No one knows the Upper Nile better, and his knowledge and connections would be a definite asset.

THE JOURNEY

Four major shipping lines sail from London to Egypt. We will pass over those which sail from other British ports, although some of these go directly to Alexandria. Three of those given here have their terminus in Port Sa'id. The routes and rates are detailed below.

Peninsular and Oriental Line: Leaves Tilbury Dock every Friday, Leaves Royal Albert Dock every Saturday. Reach Port Sa'id in 11 days, via Gibraltar and either Malta or Marseilles. L19 1st class, L13 2nd class.

Orient-Royal Line: Leaves Tilbury Dock every 2nd Friday, reaches Port Sa'id in 13 days via Plymouth, Gibraltar, Marseilles and Naples. L19 1st class, L12 2nd class.

Shire Line: Leaves Royal Albert Dock every 14 days, reaches Port Sa'id in 14 days, variable stops. L12 1st class, L10 2nd class.

Prince Line: Leaves London every 14 days, reaches Alexandria in 14 days, via Tunis and Malta. L12. (accommodations are sub-standard)

Return tickets are generally available at a 30% reduction if used within a year of departure.

Port Sa'id is of almost no interest, save as a major British port with a high proportion of Europeans in residence. Passengers will be unloaded by boat as there is no passenger dock. Customs inspection is held on the beach. There are four major hotels: Eastern Exchange (9s), Savoy (10s), Continental (11s), Hotel de la Poste (9s).

It is advised that Alexandria be saved for a later visit, and that the party travel directly up the Nile, so they will want to carry on to Isma'ilya and on to Cairo by rail. The fare to Cairo is about 20s 1st class, and the trip is about 5 hours.

Should they first arrive in Alexandria, everything is handled rather more professionally, with a wharf and real customs. 7s should cover portage charges. There are lots of nice hotels, particularly the Windsor and Hotel Abbat, with rooms running 15-30s, and meals about 4s. There is lots to see and do in Alexandria, the catacombs, tombs, museum, and surrounding sites, but it might be best to carry on up the Nile to Cairo. The trip is about 7 hours by train, and the 1st class fare is about 18s, stopping at a variety of small stations, including Damannhur, Desuk, Shubrahkit, Kafr ez-Zaiyat, Tanta, Benha, and Kalyub. It is generally recommended that anything other than 1st class accommodations be avoided.

From Cairo the next destination is Assuan, but it is likely that they will want to spend at least a few days in Cairo, and check with the appropriate offices and authorities there, and there are some encounters. There are many places to stay in this large city. Recommended are the Hotel D'Angleterre, Shepherd's Hotel, Hotel Continental, and Savoy Hotel. Rates run about the same as in Alexandria. There is lots to see in Cairo and the environs, including mosques, fortresses, the Egyptian Museum, the Arabian Museum, Old Cairo, and a variety of markets and festivals. Excursions are possible to such places as the Tombs of the Caliphs, the Petrified Forest, Heliopolis, the Pyramids of Gizeh, Memphis and Sakkara.

If they have Col. Smith with them, his contact in Cairo is Sir Gaston Maspero, who is with the Dept. of Antiquities. In any case, they will have to contact the Department of Antiquities for approval of their expedition and for any information which they can get. If they don't, they will be investigated. A second contact is Heinrich K. Brugsch, who is associated with the Cairo Museum, and is the director of the School of Egyptology in Cairo.

From Cairo, the program is to go up the Nile to Assuan, the launching point for the main expedition. Assuan can be reached either by steamboat or rail. By boat it is 7 to 10 days to Assuan (round trip 19 to 21 days), on any of a number of steamers owned by Messrs Thomas Cook & Son (Ramses, Amasis, Prince Abbas, Tewfik, Memnon, Cleopatra, Nefert-Ari, Amenartas, Hatasoo), Hamburg & Anglo-American Nile Co. (Puritan, Germania, Victoria), or Express Nile Steamer Co. (America, Virginia). Round trip fares are £50 to £60 1st class, with all expenses covered, including food and tours, or £35 without incidentals. One way fares are not generally available, or will be no less than £20. Travellers are allowed 220 lbs of luggage, with a fee of £1 per additional 110 lbs. Note that steamers tend to delays from running aground on the somewhat migratory banks and bars of the Nile.

Assuan will be the main base of operations for the expedition. It is about 5 miles from El-Hesseh and Gezireh-Taban. There are several good hotels in Assuan, and the party should take rooms in one of them and use it as a base to work out of. Assuan has a population of some 13,000, and is located on the east bank of the Nile. It is the last major stop on the railroad. It is across the Nile from the great Libyan Desert, in an area where there are a number of large islands in the river, including Elephantine, Sehel, Awad, and Philae. There are a large number of sites here, and this area is the proposed location of a Nile Dam.

The major hotels in Assuan are: Savoy Hotel, Cataract Hotel, Grand Hotel Assuan, St. James Hotel, Khedivial Hotel, Post Hotel, plus several others near outlying tourist spots. Rooms run 10-25s, including meals. In addition, in the town of Shellal, a few miles farther up the Nile there are two hotels, mostly serving the tourist trade at Philae. They are the Pension Neufeld and Desert Camp, but they are rather spare accommodations, although they are closer to the site. It is only 5 miles to Gezireh-Taban, so they might as well stay in comfort in Assuan. For £1-2 a boat may be hired in Assuan to take passengers up the Nile for the day. The railway may also be taken to Shellal, the last stop, and from there a boat may be hired to go to the island for about the same price as in Assuan. The trip to the site takes about 1 hour from Assuan.

It is recommended that Assuan be used as the HQ, as there are several encampments set up to be run there. Col. Smith has two contacts there, if he is with the party. They are the British Vice-Consul Major W. H. Hunter, and Dr. Leigh Canney. It might also be useful to hire a local guide (Dragoman), and there are plenty of these available all about, though they have a tendency to be more interested in taking you to see their uncle's artifact shop, or purveying all manner of misinformation. For general reference, there is a telegraph office in Assuan. In addition, all of the major hotels have restaurants and bars. Workers and bearers are available for hire in Assuan and Shellal, at about 5-10s (20-40 Egyptian Piastres) each/day, and some have experience, and might be suited to be overseers.

Note that Gezireh-Taban is one of a large number of islands in this area, almost all of which have temple sights on them. It is one of the smaller and less significant islands, and has therefore not been as thoroughly investigated, but there should be no problem locating it or getting there. Some general information can be gathered in Assuan.

EVENTS, DETOURS & ENCOUNTERS

There are a variety of things which can happen during the trip to Gezireh-Taban, in various places along the way, some more or less random in their incidence, some related to the mission of the party. They are listed here, with brief descriptions of situations and persons involved.

DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES (CAIRO)

While in Cairo it is essential that they stop in at the Department of Antiquities and meet with Sir Gaston Maspero. Maspero will be fairly friendly and accommodating, and will want to see their itinerary and a general outline of their program. If they ask him he will tell them that Edmund Soderick went to Gezireh-Taban on September 18th of the previous year, and the last report from him was received in the middle of December. It is now May of the following year, and nothing has been heard. He was supposed to send monthly reports both to Budge in London and to the DoA in Cairo, and none were received after December. His itinerary scheduled his work for completion in the beginning of March, when he was to return to England for a series of lectures. That is about all that Maspero can tell them, but he plans to keep an eye on them nonetheless, and mentions Ahmed bey Kamal as a contact to use in Assuan.

CAIRO MUSEUM (CAIRO)

There is lots to see at the Cairo Museum, a full selection of antiquities from all periods, unfortunately, most of them are second rate, not as good as those to be found in some of the finest museums abroad. A tour is a natural thing for the party, and it is a good way to spend an afternoon. One interesting thing will happen on the tour. As they are exiting by the east atrium, they will pass on their left a grouping of three large statues, Ramses II flanked by Ptah and Sekhmet. As they pass, the person with the highest PSI (if over 17) will glance at the statue of Ptah, and stand fixed to the spot. Unless they can roll within 2xPSI on %ile, they will faint. While distracted in this way, they will have a vision where they are gazing into the eyes of Ptah, and seeing on beyond them into the interstellar void, where they see a giant serpent swimming towards them, opening its jaws wider and wider. The vision ends as the huge fangs snap down on the person having the vision, at which point he awakes. No more than one person will be effected by this vision.

DERVISH FUKARA (Any City)

In any large square or open area the party may be distracted by a group of about 20 Dervish Fukara dressed in colorful rags or skins (Dilk), carrying staffs with bright rags on them. Many of these are mad, and all perform the Zikrs, or howling dance, in which they spin around shouting praise to Allah ("la ilaha", "hu"), often concluding in an epileptic fit. Crowds often gather, and many will throw coins as contributions to these holy men who are considered touched by god. It is natural that anyone would stop to watch. However, gangs of pickpockets work these crowds, and they will

always go to for rich looking Europeans. Each person has a 50% chance of being gone after. If he is, the pickpocket has a 100-2x(victim REA) chance of success. If he doesn't make the roll, then the victim catches the pickpocket(probably one of half a dozen street children), though he may have to chase him down(with some interference). If the pickpocket makes the roll, the victim can kiss off his wallet and its contents(passport, identification, money, etc).

ANTIQUITIES SELLER(Any Market)

It is likely that while in some town they will go to a market. Sometime while they are there, because they are Europeans, a shady looking fellow will approach them and pull them aside, explaining in broken English that he has a friend who has a private shop where more interesting items are available. If pressed, the man will show them a few small and genuine jade statuettes, but he will sell nothing, and seems very wary. If they go along, he will take them down some back alleys to his friend's shop, in a small house behind a Casbah. At this point there remains the alternative of a gang of 6-10 thugs catching them in the alley, armed with clubs, but you can just as easily let them go on to the hidden shop.

In the dim shop, a large, unidentified man greets them obsequiously, and offers to sell the wonders of Egypt(all periods: Dynastic, Persian, Greek, Roman, Mohammedan)(Statuettes, Papyri from Alexandria with magical secrets of the ancients, grave remnants, gold and silver jewelry, animal mummies, precious gems, etc...). Their ability to spot genuineness will be their levels of Archaeology or appropriate skill plus their RAT divided by 2%. Prices will be appropriate, ranging from L20 to L5000, depending on the item, and everything will seem to be priced below its value. There is a 5% chance that any item sold is real. If it is real it is worth 5 times the value it is bought at. If it is fake, it is worth one tenth the value it is bought at. Each character may roll only once to spot genuineness, and if they get too curious, the seller will get nervous and eject them. He has 8 guards nearby. Note that selling artifacts is illegal, and these men will do desperate things if they threaten to go to the authority. Naturally, if they spot fakes later the shop will have disappeared.

SNAKE CHARMER(RIFA'I)(Assuan)

In Assuan, there is a fair chance that they will see El-Haiyat or another Fifa'i charming snakes in the city square. Whether it is El-Haiyat or another snake charmer there will be a small boy with him selling inexpensive charms against snake-bites. There is a (PSI-RAT)x3% chance that they will work for the buyer, effectively halving the effect of snake poisons and acids against him. If the Rifa'i is El-Haiyat, there will be small children in the audience picking pockets, as described above with the Dervishes.

BONIFAZZI(Riverboat or Hotel Savoy)

Chances are that at some point in their journey they will run into Andrea Bonifazzi, their main competition in working at Gezireh-Taban. Bonifazzi has permission to do digs in the El-Hesseh area in general, and takes this to mean all of the islands around El-Hesseh. As they travel up the Nile by boat he will also be heading to Assuan from Cairo, having arranged for some new equipment and provisions, and checked in with the Department of Antiquities. He won't necessarily be on the same boat as them, but there is a fair chance

that they will run into him somewhere, if not at the boat or in Assuan(they might even end up at his hotel), after they have been in Assuan for a while he will track them down to talk, as the DoA will have told him about their plans, though they will have kept back most of the details and told him to lay off. Bonifazzi will question them, and make it fairly clear that he plans to do work at Gezireh-Taban, if not immediately, in the near future, and that he may consider them poachers. He will also make vague threats, and mention ancient powers which should not be interfered with. Note that he knows of no old powers there, but just wants to scare them off. He knows Edmund Soderick vaguely, and they have had a few run ins in the past, so there is no love lost between them, but he will protest his innocence in his disappearance. After talking to them Bonifazzi will step up his plans to get whatever he can off of Gezireh-Taban before they get there.

BONIFAZZI(Gezireh-Taban)

Bonifazzi has two 'assistants'(armed guards, use British Troop stats), and 30 armed Dragomans on his payroll, and will head for Gezireh-Taban the day after he talks to the party, unless he is delayed. He is going only to rip off as much as possible, which his men will take across the Libyan desert to Tripoli. Normally, this is a quick and quite illegal operation, but if he is being watched, and others want to work there he will stretch his time out, just to be annoying and to look legitimate. If anyone interferes he will fight back, including various forms of violence and intimidation, such as kidnapping Winifred Soderick. If someone else is already there he will try to scare them off. In addition, he may find Edmund Soderick himself, who he will gladly ransom in exchange for sole access to the island. He is a man who is willing to do violence or have others do it if there is any hope of profit in it. Note also that El-Haiyat will be keeping an eye on him as well, and may take action to stop him if he doesn't manage to get in and out really quickly. If not interfered with, he can strip the site of valuables in three days.

DISCOVERING EDMUND SODERICK

One of the goals of the party is to find Edmund Soderick. Soderick was recovered in the waters of the Nile by fishermen from Sheial, and taken to Dr. Canney in Assuan, who treated him for abrasions, exposure and snake bite and released him. Prior to that time Dr. Canney had not met him, so he did not recognize him, and Soderick had lost all memory. The doctor released him, as he had money with him, and after some cursory investigation, forgot all about him. Since then Soderick, who doesn't remember or want to remember who he is, has been steadily declining, spending his last money on drink, and living in the Khedival Hotel, which has a good bar and low rates. Dr. Canney will not immediately remember treating Soderick, as it was three months ago, but eventually he can be prompted to remember, though he doesn't know where Soderick is now. Soderick is now bearded and badly scarred, and looks more or less like a native. In addition, he no longer remembers English, and speaks only arabic. One interesting note is that he bears among the stars on his chest the Mark of Mehent, an abstract representation of the eye of a snake. More on Soderick is in the appendix. There is a fair chance that even his sister will not recognize him, but questioning might eventually lead to him. He is obsessive about the island, and may sometimes be spotted

starting over the water towards it at night. Sometimes his eyes seem serpent like, when caught in the right light. He will not recognize his sister, and may not be able to tell them anything even under hypnosis, and will require extensive therapy before he recovers. Bonifazzi has as much chance of finding him as they do. If they stay in or go to the Khedival Hotel, there is a good chance they will encounter him and have a better chance of recognizing him, as he will be around, and probably try to bum a drink off of them. The Hotel Khedival may be too low class for them to stay in for long, however. Note that El-Haiyat is keeping an eye on Soderick and anyone who deals with or looks for him. He knows who he is, as do a few other rather reticent townsfolk. The Dragomans who worked with him on the dig have vanished into the desert, and cannot or will not be found.

DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES OBSERVER(Assuan)

Ahmed bey Kamal, the DoA representative in Assuan will be keeping an eye on both the party and Bonifazzi. He will make periodic visits either to the site or to them every three or so days to check up on how they are doing. He has the authority to call out the British Garrison if there are any problems or disputes between the archaeologists, or to telegraph to Cairo for higher authority. He is willing to act quickly and decisively, especially if there is any hint that someone might be stealing antiquities. He is likely to put the site under armed guard if necessary, though he'll have to get authorization for it(not too hard, if the garrison has nothing better to do and he doesn't need too many men).

UNUSUAL EVENTS AT GEZIREH-TABAN

Edmund Soderick didn't just lose his grip on reality spontaneously. There are forces on the island who want it to remain inviolate, or at least untainted by the presence of westerners. These take two forms. One is El-Haiyat and his followers, who will try to drive people from the island with as little force as possible, but with as much as necessary. Second, there are the older guardians, spirits and powers who can summon other guardians if they are aroused. More detail is given on this in the description of the island, but the temples there are still places of power for Sebek and Mehent, and they will protect them, especially from those who try to remove some of the temple treasures. The final element is what caused Soderick to become a broken man, the Eye of Mehent, which is dealt with later, a huge gem, bearing the power of the goddess, but containing a force so alien to human life that extended contact will cause one to become disassociated from reality, withdrawn, and rather like what's left of Soderick.

AT GEZIREH-TABAN

Gezireh-Taban is a small island off the southern coast of El-Hesseh, right in the middle of the Nile. The island is overgrown with all manner of reeds and rushes, and partially submerged. It is clear that at extreme high flood, most of the island is under water. There is a temple complex on the island which Soderick was the first to explore. It is detailed below by the numbers on the map. It is fairly accessible. There is growth everywhere, even inside the temple, which is not in great shape, though most of the walls are standing. In many places inside the walls, passages and the like are clogged with silt deposits left by

some of the more ambitious flood seasons. Generally, note that under suspicious circumstances the temple was flooded in the 19th Dynasty and all there were killed.

1/This is the harbor for the island. The shallow inlet is heavily grown up with rushes, but there is a passage which was cut through it by Soderick and is only partly grown back. Once past the rush growth, there are 6 slips in good shape and a tile-floored, walled wharf, which is in quite good shape.

2/This is the first courtyard after the docks. There are four exits off of it, one to the docks, one into a pylon, one into the Great Temple, and one into another intermediate courtyard. Note that this pylon is similar to other pylons in the complex. It is a large, trapezoidal wall with friezes on the large faces and a flat top reached by stairs(shown in the map). Most of the pylons are 30 to 40 ft tall. Unless otherwise described, the faces of the pylons show general scenes on the Nile, featuring common casts of characters from all walks of life doing common things.

3/This is another intermediate courtyard with entries to the Great Temple, the Central Courtyard, and two pylons.

4/Located here is the Nilometer, a walled channel with marks on the walls for measuring the water level of the Nile.

5/This pylon is a bit different from the others. The outer and inner faces are similar, and the outer face can be seen from the river. It shows a panorama of the Nile, which on close examination seems to be crawling with various saurian life. Rising out of it is the figure of a Crocodile-headed man, and towering behind it in the background is the hooded head of a huge cobra which seems to tower into the sky.

6/This is the entry way to the Temple of Sebek or Lesser Temple. It has not yet been opened much, and is filled with silt, but it can be dug out. There are obelisks on either side of the door bearing inscriptions concerning the building of the temple under the instructions of the Pharaoh Entef(11th Dynasty). They also discuss the consecration of the temple to Sebek, the crocodile deity.

7/Digging through the silt will get the excavators to this ante-chamber, where they will make the unusual discovery of six mummified bodies buried in the silt, seemingly for a very long time. The really unusual part is that the mummies are chained down in place.

8/This is a niche in the main chamber, filled with silt. The treasures of Sebek are here, including two gold statuettes of the god, a complete mummified crocodile, and The Book of Sebek, written in hieroglyphs on crocodile skin, containing the mysteries and secrets of the faith(some of which may be quite interesting if deciphered). These are worth L25,000. Also found here are three more chained mummies. Note that if these mummies are autopsied it will be found that they drowned. If anything is removed the crocodiles who bask at point 9 will be motivated to come in through the front and back of the temple and enforce security.

9/There is a beach here, nicely exposed to the sun, where 12 crocodiles(see appendix) bask and gather warmth. They will be peaceful unless disturbed, but if the Temple of Sebek is fooled with they will get angry and take action to defend it.

10/This is the main courtyard. The ground level here is about 3 feet higher than all of the temple entrances, but parts of it have been dug out, presumably by Soderick, and all of the entrances have been cleared at least a bit.

11/This large Pylon is 60ft high, and is the only part of the temple visible from the river. It has a huge combination mural and inscription, which seems to have been efaced. Below the new ground level, if the base of the pylon is dug out it will be seen that there is a small inscription in a later hieroglyphic form indicating that the efacing of the inscription was on the order of Pharaoh Amenephtes(19th Dynasty).

12/These are cloisters. They are all buried and unexcavated, just poking out of the silty earth. In some of them are mummefied, drowned priests and some personal effects.

13/These are basically similar to those in #12.

14/These two pylons mark the entrance to the Temple of Mehent or Greater Temple. The entrance has been cleared out and the pylons bear depictions of a giant, coiled cobra surrounded by thousands of smaller serpents.

15/This is the temple proper, with a collonade and a passage cleared through the middle. Burried in the collonade, which has not been excavated are some 20 mummefied priests chained up as with those mentioned earlier. There are no temple treasures here.

16/This is a second chamber of the temple. Only a path through is dug out. The rest is filled with silt, columns, and nothing else.

17/This corridor section through 18, including the side corridors is completely dug out. The rooms on the sides have drowned priests. The steps off one side go down beneath the temple to a natural cavern which was sealed by a heavy door, and has been dug out, but re-sealed and hastily buried again recently. It will not take too long to reopen. There are no

signs of silt in the natural cavern below, which is fitted out as a temple, with columns and trappings added. It is rather richly outfitted, with a selection of statuettes and a variety of artifacts worth a total of about L50,000, the prize of which is a huge statue of a cobra above the altar at the back. There is a hidden panel in the top of the altar, beneath which is the Eye of Mehent, a large yellowish diamond clearly worth about L100,000. However, anyone who possesses it will tend to look into it. Anyone who looks into it will tend to be absorbed by the alien horror within, becoming paranoid, and losing his identity and mind. The result will be similar to the symptoms shown by Soderick. The chance of looking in it after seeing it is $100-(3 \times \text{RAT})+(\text{PSI})\%$, and the chance of resisting is $(\text{RAT}-\text{PSI})+10\%$. However, anyone who is drawn into the crystal and loses his mind will bear the Mark of Mehent, the serpent goddess on his breast, and be immune henceforth to snakebite. A good thing, as when the gem or anything else in the temple is disturbed, a horde of snakes from the area will be summoned, as well as (though more slowly) the 5 Cobras of Mehent, who are supernatural serpent spirits who dwell in the earth beneath the temple, and should emerge from their sleep just as the smaller snakes are surrounding the temple and the transgressors are leaving.

18/This is the end of the cleared out area.

19/This is the rear alcove of the temple, not yet excavated, with a dozen dead priests.

20/This is the rear entrance to the temple, with an inscription warning off thieves and transgressors of all kinds, promising them the eternal oblivion of the waters of the Nile and the eternal curse of the serpents of Mehent.

APPENDIX: CHARACTERS & CREATURES

Described here are characters and beings of all sorts referred to in the text. For those not specifically given here use the closest and most appropriate statistics given.

COLONEL SIR NEVILL MASKELYNE SMITH

AP:80	AFR:18	SKILLS:Punch(HAR35)	Dodging(MDR35)	Legal(30)	Riding(120%)
FP:50	MOV:35	Dimancea .45(MAR40)	Parry(HDR30)	Archaeology(96%)	Investigate(90%)
HP:40	HEI:6'	Sabre(HAR35)	Observe(120%)	History(80%)	Tactics(100%)

Smith is a semi-retired cavalry officer who served with Gordon in the Sudan. He is a bit of an adventurer, and widely travelled. He is also a self-trained and fairly experienced archaeologist, having excavated the temple at Wadi Halfa in 1887 before returning to England. He charted the Upper Nile for the British Army, and is very experienced with the southern parts of Egypt. He is also an agent of British Military intelligence, and worked as an intelligence officer for Gordon in the Sudan. He is an avid hunter and polo player, and a member of the Cavalry Club. He has the knowledge and connections to be an excellent guide.

WINIFRED SODERICK

AP:65	AFR:8	SKILLS:Velo Dog 5.5mm(MAR60)	Dodging(MDR45)	Writing(30)	Clerical(30)
FP:60	MOV:30	Swordcane(HAR35)(1D6)	Dance(31)	Music(25)	Teaching(28%)
HP:32	HEI:5'5"	Parry(HDR35)	Observe(130%)	First Aid(72%)	Conning(112%)

Winny Soderick is an English teacher at a private girls school north of London. She is well educated, and has a small inheritance, so she is fairly well off. All of her family except her brother died when she was young, so she is very attached to him, and becomes quite concerned, verging on hysteria when he has vanished. She is skilled with a pistol, and goes armed when in London. Her parents were Church of England missionaries in the Middle East, and she learned to go armed at an early age. She bears a cleverly-disguised walking stick/swordcane which was a gift of the son of a North African tribal leader, with whom she had a teen romance.

EDMUND SODERICK

AP:80	AFR:30	SKILLS:Punch(HAR50)	Archaeology(120%)	Empathy(40%)	Spirit(50%)
FP:80	MOV:38	Dodging(MDR35)	Observe(115%)	Necromancy(25%)	Investigate(90%)
HP:50	HEI:5'11"	Parry(HDR40)	History(90%)	Spatial(12%)	Telepathy(25%)

Soderick is in terrible shape should they find him. He lives in the Khedivial Hotel in Assuan, and can be found in the bar there, dressed in native garb, and drunk out of his mind. He cannot remember where he is, who he is, or even his name. He seems not to be able to speak or understand English, and his flesh bears horrible blister scars, which may make it hard for even his sister to recognize him. No coercion or other means will get him to tell of his past or what brought him to this end. Questioning will bring out the facts that he was fished out of the river near Shellal, and brought to Dr. Canney, who fixed him up as well as he could, treating him for snake bites, abrasions and exposure. He had some money, and is living off of that. He will be in mortal terror of returning to the Island, and is constantly being watched by El-Haiyat and his agents, who will be wary of anyone helping, removing or talking with him. Dr. Canney will probably tell them how to

find him if he is questioned. He is insane, and violently paranoid, with unusually high STR as a result. However, he may seem lucid at times. He is very depressed and anti-social, but may come out of it slowly if constantly exposed to his sister. Should he become more communicative, he will still be unable to think or talk about his experience on the island, though perhaps if they are very lucky, he will warn them to leave it alone and leave Egypt. He will want to stay behind to watch over it, in a monomaniacal way.

ANDREA BONIFAZZI

AP:75	AFR:15	SKILLS:Punch(HAR30)	Dodging(MDR35)	Forgery(90%)	Search(115%)
FP:50	MOV:33	Bodeo 10.4(MAR55)	Parry(HDR30)	Archaeology(125%)	Investigate(90%)
HP:43	HEI:5'10"	Sabre(HAR35)	Observe(150%)	History(80%)	Security(105%)

Bonifazzi is an ambitious, unscrupulous Italian archaeologist/treasure hunter. He is under suspicion by the Department of Antiquities, but nothing has been proved. He is about to mount his own expedition to Gezireh Taban, and has with him two bully-boys(use stats for Garrison Troops) and 20 native assistants. As they arrive in Assuan he is about to head out to the island. He is ruthless and well supplied for money and illicit connections, so he will take necessary measures to stop them or cause trouble. Generally, the Dept. of Antiquities would prefer that someone else do the site, but if he gets there first and had first claim, they must support him. He is working out of the Savoy Hotel.

SIR GASTON MASPERO

AP:60	AFR:10	SKILLS:Swordcane(HAR30)	Sales(18%)	Intrigue(40)	History(70%)
FP:42	MOV:28	Parry(HDR40)	Admin(40)	Archaeology(150%)	Security(90%)
HP:30	HEI:5'6"	Dodging(MDR40)	Observe(180%)	Folklore(78%)	Surveillance(84%)

Sir Gaston is one of the top officials in the Department of Antiquities, and works with the Cairo Museum as well. He is one of the contacts in Cairo, but he will be the supervisor of any official investigation of Gezireh-Taban, and has authority to call out the British Garrison in Assuan, or whatever is necessary. He is a reasonable enough fellow, an excellent archaeologist, and a good administrator. He is fairly reasonable, and expects to be kept informed of any work done in the Assuan area. His direct subordinate there is Ahmen bey Kamal, who is the DoA supervisor for the Upper Nile area, working out of Assuan. Contact is by telegraph.

MAJOR W. H. HUNTER, BRITISH VICE CONSUL IN ASSUAN

AP:70	AFR:15	SKILLS:Punch(HAR30)	Dodging(MDR30)	Legal(35)	Riding(100%)
FP:60	MOV:30	Dimancea .45(MAR35)	Parry(HDR25)	Artillery(50%)	Organization(90%)
HP:44	HEI:5'10"	Sabre(HAR30)	Observe(90%)	History(66%)	Tactics(100%)

Hunter is a British Army officer on detached duty, serving as vice-consul in Assuan. He is responsible for any British citizens who cause or get involved in trouble there, and he has a small garrison of 150 British soldiers with which to maintain order. He is not particularly bright or innovative, but a competent administrator and leader. He might be of some use to the party, and could certainly be called in for aid in the right situation. He has instructions to comply with local authorities, including the Dept. of Antiquities.

DR. LEIGH CANNEY

AP:60	AFR:20	SKILLS:Punch(HAR45)	Dodging(MDR30)	Writing(30)	Pathology(120%)
FP:66	MOV:40	Kynoch .45(MAR33)	Parry(HDR25)	Diagnosis(90%)	Pharmacology(80%)
HP:50	HEI:6'2"	Long Knife(HAR25)	Observe(120%)	First Aid(110%)	External(90%)

Dr. Canney is a specialist in disease and parasites found in desert and river-valley climates. He is the author of numerous works of research on North African diseases, and treats both natives and Europeans in Assuan. He is in close touch with British authorities and has a good selection of local contacts. He is respected and trusted by all, as he performs a useful and necessary service in the community. He treated Soderick, and released him as harmless but addled. Psychiatry is not his specialty. He will tell what little he can if asked.

SEIYID AHMED EL-HAIYAT, RIFA'I(SNAKE-CHARMER)

AP:90	AFR:20	SKILLS:Dagger(HAR60)	Concealment(90%)	Torture(120%)	Hypnosis(104%)
FP:55	MOV:35	Dodging(MDR45)	Manual(125%)	Coercion(75%)	Shapeshift(60%)
HP:33	HEI:5'3"	Parry(HDR50)	Observe(145%)	Empathy(100%)	Spirit(70%)

Seiyid is a rather questionable local character, well known and respected, but more feared than liked. He is a Rifa'i, or snake-charmer, and plys this profession in front of the post office, mosque, train station, or any of the major hotels. However, he is also well supplied with underworld connections, and supervises a whole gang of child pick pockets who work while he entertains. In addition, he is the self-appointed guardian of the Temples at Gezireh Taban, and keeps an eye on Soderick and any other potential violators, because he makes a practice of giving small offerings at the temples and gathering snakes there to use in his act. Because of his skills and background he has an affinity with the snakes and spirits of the temples. He will take what measures are needed to keep the place inviolate, and if necessary, he will go there and rouse the spirits of the place to defend against any European interlopers, if the spirits do not rouse themselves. If the players can somehow dominate and control him, he might be able to check some of the dangers of the temples. He is an older man, and in addition to the urchins who work with him, there are a number of townsmen all about who owe him a debt or fear him, as he sells charms, and threatens various curses. He can probably gather 20 or so to help at a given time.

AHMED BEY KAMAL, DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES REPRESENTATIVE IN ASSUAN

AP:78	AFR:15	SKILLS:Adams .45(MAR35)	Dodging(MDR30)	Admin(30)	Intrigue(40)
FP:45	MOV:30	Dagger(HAR40)	Gambling(35)	Business(35)	Archaeology(70%)
HP:36	HEI:5'10"	Parry(HDR45)	Observe(110%)	Sales(45)	Conning(120%)

Kamal is a local businessman, dealing in a variety of goods, through his brothers and assistants, who run many of the stalls in the Assuan bazaar. Among other enterprises he rents boats, horses and camels, sells rugs and metalware, and arranges guides. He is still fairly young, having only recently inherited the business from his uncle. Until recently he was a student of

Egyptology in Cairo, but he has discontinued his career to take over the family business. He also works for the Dept. of Antiquities, more or less as a volunteer, to keep an eye on things in the Upper Nile area. He can round up 30 or 40 armed retainers, family members or employees as needed to enforce various Antiquities regulations. He is one of the leading men of Assuan, and widely respected.

TYPICAL DRAGOMAN, WORKER, OR OTHER LOCAL

AP:70	AFR:13	SKILLS:Sabre(HAR35)	Dodging(MDR30)	Riding(105%)	Manual(90%)
FP:40	MOV:30	Dagger(HAR45)	Parry(HDR35)	Survival(60%)	Surveillance(75%)
HP:33	HEI:5'6"	Breechload (MAR40)	Silent Move(60%)	Concealment(90%)	Intimidate(60%)

These are stats for standard townsfolk, guides, hired workers, and dragomans. They are fairly typical statistics for people of this region and period. Note that they probably have access to Breechloading Rifles of the equivalent of 10mm, but they will not generally be carrying them around. They can be dangerous, and are very superstitious. They hire at the rates given previously.

BRITISH GARRISON TROOPS

AP:70	AFR:15	SKILLS:Punch(HAR40)	Dodging(MDR35)	Land Op(50%)	Intimidate(60%)
FP:45	MOV:34	Enfield .303(MAR45)	Parry(HDR30)	Organization(60%)	Tactics(70%)
HP:40	HEI:5'8"	Sabre(HAR30)	Observe(90%)	Artillery(40%)	Survival(50%)

These stats are typical for British garrison troops in Assuan. There are a total of 150 of them available, under command of Major Hunter. They mix fairly regularly with the townsfolk and are pretty well accepted. Their main weapon is the Enfield Rifle.

NILE CROCODILES

AP:40	AFR:15	SKILLS:Claw(MAR25)(1D6)	Dodging(MDR25)	Surveillance(90%)	Hypnosis(60%)
FP:40	MOV:10/50	Bite(MAR50)(4D8)	Swimming(120%)	Concealment(90%)	Empathy(25%)
HP:100	LEN:8'	Parry(HDR25)	Hunting(40)	Spatial (15%)	Cover(45%)

These are the vicious guardians of the banks and waters of the Nile. They are slow, but they are sneaky and dangerous. They are sacred to Sebek, and will take part in the defense of his temple and of the whole complex on the island. Generally they are only hostile if injured or annoyed, but if they get hungry, anyone is fair game. The split movement is land/water.

ADDERS & ASPS

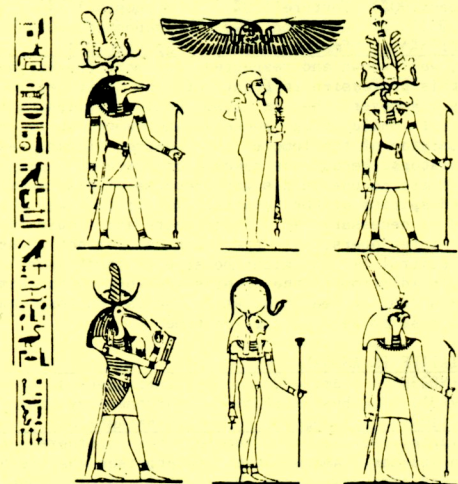
AP:60	AFR:12	SKILLS:Bite(HAR40)(1D6)			
FP:50	MOV:25	General Defense(MDR/HDR50)			
HP:12	LEN:3'				

Most small snakes found in this region are described as either Adders or Asps without much regard to actual breed of snake. It is sufficient to say that these are small, poisonous water and land-going snakes. There are lots of them available around the island. They can be called up to defend the temples. No skills to speak of are given, but they should have the logical abilities. The effect of their poison is the loss of 20 overall HP on the first bite and 2 less per bite for each subsequent bite. If a person loses three times his HP as a result, as with standard overall damage, he will die.

COBRAS OF MEHENT

AP:80	AFR:25	SKILLS:Bite(HAR60)(2D12)	Parry(HDR40)	Empathy(100%)	Spatial(20%)
FP:60	MOV:40	Spit(MAR50)(1D12+2)	Intimidate(120%)	Hypnosis(120%)	Telepathy(70%)
HP:90	HEI:10'	Dodging(MDR40)	Coercion(70%)	Precog(80%)	Spirit(85%)

These are spirit-possessed cobras who dwell beneath the temple of Mehent as guardians. They are generally asleep, but may be roused to defend the temple in appropriate situations or if disturbed or summoned. They are intelligent, and can communicate with humans through telepathy. They can also call up other creatures to help them fight. Their venom is acidic in nature, and does damage by burning/dissolving flesh, and can be spat up to 50 ft, or deposited on biting. The venom, when spat does the damage stated. On a bite, both the spat poison and the bite damage are done. They will also use their magical powers in defense of the temple.



variant

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1	V/F/FF
n	P/B
m	Th/Dd
l	Z/J/X
h	C/G
h	S/Sh/J
l	X/Ch/LI
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FIG 2	1	I/J	p	P
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FIG 3	✓	B/P	m	M
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	z	V/F	,	A/Ae
	h	L	—	O/U/W
	3	C/S/Z		

uses full vowel symbols rather than accents as is found in both Crivar and Rhesymol. Crivar is functional and widespread, used in business, government and literature among the Osca, Etrua, Saexe, Gott, Frejsa and Magar. The Vaen use an older form of the script, and have a very low rate of literacy. There are also a number of variant styles, suited to the specific application.

Rhesymol is a considerably changed growth out of an old druidical inscriptive script, with notable influences from other styles. The most striking and immediate of these is the presence of accent marks instead of symbols for vowels, clearly drawn from Kathasa, as letters for the vowels exist in older manuscripts. There is a somewhat twisted logic to Rhesymol, although there are 17 symbols, 13 of them consonants and 4 vowels. This is more or less the result of the strange requirements of the languages with which it is used. In some forms one or more letter may not be used, or functions may be combined down to as few as 12 symbols, but in ornate literary styles there is an archaic variant which has 27 consonants and variable vowels (more elements of this older style are preserved in the northern form than in the southern form). Being able to read Rhesymol is to some degree a matter of intuition and experience. There is a highly developed school of artistic calligraphy and illumination. Rhesymol is used by all of the Kymric and Gael peoples, as well as most Kernwvk. It is used most in literary and historical works, but is also common in government papers, and is quite acceptable for business purposes. It is important to note the north/south division, basically between the Gael and Kymraeg peoples, with the northern (Gael) users having a more ornate and rounded style and the southern (Kymri) users favoring a sharper style (given in fig. 1). Both are essentially the same, just presented differently.

These three basic styles are used in one variant or other by all of the major human groups in Ysgarth. Which script a people uses depends to some degree on geographical proximity and on the nature of the language which the script is being used to present.

Scripts, and of course, language to go with them, are an integral part of any world, and with a little thought and work it is easy enough to develop and apply a script to your world, fitted to the history, background and culture which uses it. Like any detail, scripts can add feeling and depth to a world, and when writing a note or an inscription, you'll know how to write it and what to write it in. In addition, strange writing is confusing, even to the brightest players, and as most people in a heroic fantasy background would be illiterate, this will certainly let players share the mystified perspective of their characters.

YRS & TCT IN BOXES

So you've been holding off on buying Ysgarth or To Challenge Tomorrow because you didn't want to get them in the tacky zip-loc bagged version. Well, now you need wait no longer. Now both games are available in special editions, neatly packaged in sturdy, durable, custom made boxes. The boxed Ysgarth contains not only the full 6 rule books, but also a set of character and record sheets and the first three rule supplements, a \$24 value for only \$18.95. The boxed To Challenge Tomorrow comes with the full rules to TCT, plus Triad (the first expansion set), and a set of character and record sheets, a \$13 value for only \$9.95. See the order form at the end of this issue for ordering information. Be the first on your block to take advantage of this special offer and get these trend-setting games in a handy new format. There's no reason to wait any longer.

MISSION OF INTEMPERANCE LEW BRYSON



The bar was typical for Lancaster; it was full of beady-eyed adherents of Gilrod, all drinking flagon after flagon of the delicious Lancaster lager. Implotius didn't mind the beer, in fact, he rather enjoyed it. He was, after all, the present Brewmeister, and the beer reflected his tastes, though he wished he could explain the importance of resin to the brewers. It was all these Flame types that made him nervous. His back twitched occasionally with apprehension that someone might recognize him as one of the foremost champions of the Pool, the Hand and Blade of Mimir. While his faith had not dimmed, his fighting fervor had. Implotius was in the unpleasant position of being frightened by himself. He'd finally witnessed the full power of his weirdsword, and he didn't really care for it. The mastery of it was beyond him. Now he preferred to misdirect, sidestep, and otherwise cheat enemies. He was engaged in something of the sort at the very moment. The bartender had quoted him a ridiculous price on a bottle of wine, and Implotius had decided not to pay, so he and Mithrandir were about to start a bar fight.

Mithrandir waited by the door. It was good to see the Greek again. Lancaster was a city of intrigue and power, but he needed greed sometimes to get the whole experience into perspective. It was the simple pleasures of rudeness and petty theft which had first kindled Mith's interest in power, and they still gave him his most basic delight. He watched as the bartender drew yet another flagon of the beer that made Gilrod famous and turned to set it before the large Vaen beside Implotius.

Mithrandir gestured minutely and a hot flame licked briefly at the seat of the bartender's leather pants. With a yelp he lurched forward and doused the Vaen with the foaming liquid. Implotius took his cue. The lanky Gael on his left caught Implotius' elbow in the back of the head as the Greek wound up and landed a solid fist on the Vaen's right ear. Mithrandir watched anxiously as the Greek quickly hit the floor and the Vaen and Gaeldochoer turned to each other.

"Horse-lover!" shouted the Gael, and swung first, his hairy fist landing square on the Vaen's salient nose. Braid decked Vaen heads all over the bar turned at this insult, and one large nomad leapt from his stool to tackle the Gael. The bartender was still fanning his sore bottom when Implotius vaulted up from the floor and over the bar, swinging his boots to catch the tapman in his aproned midriff. Down he went, and Implotius fetched him a good one in the head to make sure he stayed there.

The Greek stood on the bar and looked down on the chaos he'd created. The Vaen were singing as they happily took on the entire bar, outnumbered though they were. He saw Mithrandir at the door waving and making catching gestures. The Greek caught on, and started tossing bottles of wine to the mage, skimming over the heads of the combatants. He strolled the top of the bar, side-stepping the occasional grasping hand and booting the odd grimacing face. He stopped to snag one last bottle, and straightened to see Mith grin evilly as he closed his cape and turned to run. The bastard! He was skipping with the booty!

Implotius swung his left arm in a vicious arc and laid open the back of a swaggering Magar's head with the cestus he wore on the stump of his wrist. The man screamed and bent double, clutching his gashed scalp, which was exactly the result the Greek was hoping for. He hopped off the bar onto the man's broad back and used it as a springboard to leap for the overhead lantern. He caught the lantern and swung with it, but the weak ceiling gave loose and the hook came out in a shower of dried mud. The Greek managed to break his fall on a table, pushed off with his strong swordarm and landed heavily on the back of a low order Kymri priest. The priest staggered towards the door under the impact of the Greek's body, and Implotius decided to ride him as far as he could, urging him on with jabs of the cestus. The priest finally collapsed about five feet from the door, but the Greek was ready, and was running by the time the holy man hit the floor. He tore outside, grabbed the door jamb to make the turn, and sprinted down the broad street after the fleeing Mithrandir. Mith had his head down and his short legs pumping, racing along the street towards the papal castle and sanctuary. Thought he'd be safe there, did he? The Greek smiled to himself as his long legs ate up the mage's head start. He hadn't reckoned on the Greek bribing his hobbit shock troops with Black Elvish pipeweed. Anar Len had the right scoop; these little devils would do **anything** for Elvish!

Ned's dragon circled Lancaster at about half a mile. The lights of the guardtowers gleamed against the backdrop of the mountains of the Orszag, and the continual watchfire on the highest tower of the papal palace flickered and danced. "It's a pretty place the boy's got, I have to admit that," Pwvll mused as they gazed at the city. "It's just kind of insulting that he's the high-priest of an asshole who always treated his dad like dirt." The warrior sighed. Still, his mother's proud of how far he's gone, and I can't fault her for that. He runs a whole resort and a

religion that rules the Thearchy, and I'm a lousy demi-god who has to stoop to petty larceny to start one little bar. The young have it so easy today..." He sighed again, and idly flicked a small fireball from his ring to watch it burn across the sky.

"By the left nut of Osiris! Knock it off, you old fart, you're making me cry!" Girthaur snapped his head around in exasperation. "Your little fat shit of a son jerked me around and made me look a proper jackass when I was laying my life on the line for the glory of the almighty Flame, and I swore I'd make him eat turd someday! By the beauty of the belly of Nut above us, by the dump he's done both of us, and by my strong left arm, **this is that day!** Ned! Take this bitch in! Mannaluch or bust!"

"Aye-aye, cap'n, breaking holding pattern and commencing landing approach!" Ned laughed and the dragon made a sharp bank towards the palace. The great wings came closer to its body as Ned steered straight and fast for the langing platform on the roof of the imposing edifice. "I'll try to throw a mask on us, but between the three of us we make one Hel of a mana blip on their screens. Can't promise anything, we'll probably do better just going as fast as we can, hang on." The dragon dropped out of the sky like a bomb, aimed directly for the roof of Mannaluch's palace. "Yahoo!" Ned waved his silk top hat in the slipstream and whooped with excitement. "That boy won't know what hit him! The Old Gang rides again! Yeeehaah!!"

Suddenly, the dragon's wings slammed open with a tremendous thunderclap of stunned air, and a huge answering blast of exploding flame erupted beneath them. "Ha ha, thought you had us, you bastard! Sorry, Pwyl, nothing personal about Rhiannon, just a turn of phrase," Ned said in a completely insincere aside. "I always blather when I'm performing amazing feats." He turned and flashed a quick smile as the dragon dove between more bursts of flame that flew faster now as the defenses came alive. Ned made a few quick passes with his ebony walking stick, and suddenly the air around them was populated with a dozen flaming eagles, which darted and banked through the flame. The defenses were saturated and confused, and Ned dove the dragon for the roof once more. They slammed to a landing, and the dragon flew off again as soon as they had jumped from its back. The three men ran for the doorway, which suddenly opened to reveal a priest who levelled a wand at them and loosed a gout of flame.

Pwyl saw the priest and kicked into overdrive. He pushed Ned aside and raced directly towards the priest, drawing his ithildin sword as he ran, and the moon-linked metal, visible in the lunar light, flashed argent and scarlet as he easily parried the spell, sending it off into the heavens. He slammed into the awestruck priest, bowling him over, and pointed the blade at the man's throat before he had a chance to recover. "I'm Pwyl ap Glyn, and I've come to see my son! Call off the damned light show!"

There was a groan from behind Pwyl, and he turned. Mannaluch's round face appeared within the flame of a torch there. "Gods, Dad, you haven't learned a thing about tact, have you? You come in here like a damned strike force, a mana source the size of a djinn on a dragon, in the name of Ra, and you're surprised that I try to shoot you down? Where's your mind, Daddy-o, the Grey lands? I thought Mom had calmed you down a little." Mannaluch peered out of the flame. "Who's that with you? Girthaur? Oh, shit, not him. I couldn't believe it when I heard you were hanging around with--" The voice cut off as Pwyl gestured impatiently, and apported the torch over the edge of the battlements, where it fell into darkness, still whining.

He turned to Gir and Ned with a wry look on his face. "Maybe you were right, Gir, maybe he does need to eat a little turd. Let's go get him." They ran down the staircase ahead of them.

"Shigure, there is only one thing to do. We must feed the lizard Speed potion if we ever want to match their pace." Nam took a deep pull on his pipe, and held the smoke in his lungs until he started to snort. "Aaaahhh, yes, good one...Well, Martial Wonder, how about it? Are you going to feed the monster the stuff or not?" Nam glared at Shigure with glazed, blood-shot eyes.

"Master, we cannot do that. The lizard is high-strung now, with speed potion in him he might turn on his driver, which is to be my own unworthy self," Shigure whined, as he cringed away from the abuse he knew would surely fall on him.

"Swine. Scum. Coward. Piddling swine-licker. Do you truly wish to lead your horribly low existence forever? Either we speed the lizard and beat the Welshman to the foamy stuff, or you fail. It is that simple." Nam handed his unwilling lackey a large flask. "Here. do this correctly, at least, sniveler."

"Master..." Shigure melted under Nam's stare, and went to give the lizard the potion. He gripped the lizard at a certain spot under its jaw, and the lizard opened wide reflexively. He threw the entire soft leather flask into the lizard's maw and back-pedalled quickly. The lizard swallowed the flask, and Shigure regained his seat behind the head as the reptile's powerful stomach went to work on the thin leather. He turned to speak to Nam, and saw the magician stuffing more leaf into his pipe. "Master what are you smoking? We must be alert!"

Nam took a deep puff. "Black Elvish," he croaked. "Shut up and drive." He rocked back and almost fell off as the lizard suddenly began running frantically for open ground. "Lost hit, lost hit! Damn you, Shigure, you made me lose the hit! Swine!"

"Maaasterrr! The mount is out of control!" Shigure wailed as he clung to the back of the beast, which was running at a phenomenal pace for the hills of Marchwk.

"Give him his head, slimeling, he's going the right way. Don't you have a single brain in that helm?" Nam leaned over Shigure's shoulder with a pleasantly inquisitive smile. "More to the point, do you have alight, Shigure, old hairball? My pipe seems to have gone out."

"Master..."



R5c

THE WORLDS OF JACK VANCE

JOHN R. DAVIES



No examination of modern speculative fiction would be complete without a look at the works of Jack Vance. While Vance is widely known, especially among players of D&D, for his fantasy stories set in the **Dying Earth**, most of his best work is Science Fiction, rather than fantasy. Vance's work is characterized by remarkably detailed background and character development, and a striking genius for conceiving alien and human races and societies. His skill in working out cultures and situation can be an invaluable resource and guide for GMs developing a SF or even a fantasy background. There is no contemporary author who so completely presents the feel and reality of a world. A number of younger writers have taken inspiration from the style of Jack Vance, especially Michael Shea, author of the award winning novel **Niffit the Lean**, as well as a less than inspiring Vance pastiche **A Quest for Simbilis**.

Vance is known for his tendency to write in series, usually with a central character or theme. This is true of both his SF and fantasy works. Since our space here is limited we will concentrate on some of his best series and some of the themes which run through his works.

Alastor Cluster: Why not plunge right in. Ignore the tacky serial production of this set. These are some of Vance's finest and most original novels. They include **Marune**, **Trullion**, and **Wyst**. These are really excellent tales with the somewhat contrived theme of a superhuman interstellar ruler going among his people in disguise. They are the ideal showcase for Vance's skill for developing world background and detail, with footnotes and everything. In addition, they bring in some of the didactic elements which make Vance unique. This is probably his best or second best series.

The Demon Princes: This is a simpler series, consisting of five novels: **The Star Kings**, **The Killing Machine**, **The Palace of Love**, **The Face**, and **The Book of Dreams**. This is fairly straightforward adventure fare. They are united by a strong central character, **Kirth Gersen**, a man driven by vengeance to take revenge on the criminal masterminds who destroyed his family. These are grim novels, with brilliant background development, and a devastating sense of the sickness to which the human mind can aspire. Unfortunately, Gersen is not the most sympathetic character, and there is really no one in the novels who is anything but a victim or a villain. Even Gersen is too emotionally twisted to be really human. However, the action is brisk and the ideas outstanding.

Durdane Trilogy: This vies with the **Allastor** series as Vance's finest, and probably wins out because of the greater depth of subject matter. The series consists of **The Brave Free Men**, **The Anome**, and **The Asutra**. This is Science Fiction with a message, though making that message simple or easy to see is not Vance's style. This is a story of ambition, principle, power and movements, about the growth of a rebel in a repressive society, and his eventual ascendancy. It features some of Vance's best character development and some outstanding insights into human nature and needs. As usual, the society Vance develops shines, and in this case it is particularly well integrated with a selection of other elements of equal quality making a lovely balance.

Tschai, Planet of Adventure: This series is perhaps Vance's most complex, and probably not his best. It concerns a world populated by four races in addition to mankind, living in a strange and uneasy balance. The novels take their names from these races. They are **Servants of the Wankh**, **The Dirdir**, **City of the Chasch**, and **The Pnume**. This is probably Vance's most traditionally space-opera like series, and while the society which he presents is certainly unique, it is just too complex and too involved to be as believable as the unusual ideas it features deserve. In addition, the characterization is not that strong, with more reliance on action and circumstance than on idea and personality.

The Dying Earth: This series might as well be mentioned as well. This is his main fantasy work, a series of ongoing novels set in the far future when magic has come to rule the last days of the earth. While this is a widely praised series and the basis for the **Dungeons & Dragons** magic system, the novels are not as exciting as they could be, and seem almost like a pastiche of Clark Ashton Smith and some other sources of



traditional fantasy. The novels in the series include *The Eyes of the Overworld*, *Cugel the Clever*, *The Dying Earth*, and Michael Shea's *Quest for Simbilis* (It is interesting to note that Shea's own *Niffth the Lean* is infinitely better than this continuation of Vance's series, and better than Vance's own work in the series).

Some of Vance's best work is in novels outside of series, and though his large bibliography cannot be listed here, some of his best books can be. *Big Planet* is one of Vance's best adventure novels, where some interesting characters try to make their way across a huge and hostile planet. Many think that *The Languages of Pao* is Vance's best novel, and it is certainly one of his most provocative, though a bit static. It looks at language and the manipulation of societies through the manipulation of language. *Emphyrio* is another fine intellectual novel, giving an interesting look at social repression and the interaction of the individual and institutions. Some of his best presentations of an alien society can be found in the novels *The Blue World* and *The Grey Prince*. *The Dragonmasters* may be Vance's most famous novel, and seems to be the inspiration for others, especially Anne McCaffrey, but it is really a novelette, and not really his best work. In the realm of fantasy I'd recommend *Lyonesse*, the first of a complex new series which puts some interesting twists in an Arthurian-type background. *The Many Worlds of Magnus Ridolph* is Vance's best short story collection, concerning the adventures of an interstellar troubleshooter on a variety of worlds. It has some neat characters and weird societies, plus interesting plot twists, and is probably a good introduction to Vance's best skills for those not familiar with him.

Vance can be didactic. He expresses some principles which I actually find rather attractive. He often examines the subjects of individual liberty and identity, and contrasts repressive social orders with anarchistic or libertarian ideas and movements. He likes to look at what makes civilizations tick, and what they does to the individual living in them. His work both challenges the imagination and the social conscience. Remember that his writing does not exist primarily to push his philosophies. While his ideas may not exist only to serve his story, they exist in harmony and compliment each other, and many of his best stories would not be as good if they did not have an ideological element. Vance lets his interests and abilities work together for the ideal creation of adventure and imagination.

Some of his storytelling techniques are particularly interesting and should be mentioned. He is easily identified by his use of realistic fictional background factual material, essentially making up primary sources to add a feeling of reality, for example, catalog listings, footnotes, encyclopedia entries, maps, newspaper reports, histories, technical notes and the like, making a few works seem more like a historical novels. Other interesting tendency is toward the use of games and amusements as ways of expressing trends in a society, or his use of language variants and distinctions, both verbal and non-verbal to differentiate between different cultures.

Jack Vance is probably the single finest SF writer alive today. No other writer can put original ideas into a concrete form as well to create a believable race, world or society. He has an amazing understanding of human nature and the nature of human institutions and interactions. Through his career it is easy to see developing skill in other areas as well, and his work is continually improving and advancing. In addition, much of his work expresses an intriguing anarchistic philosophy, and he even has a sense of humor.

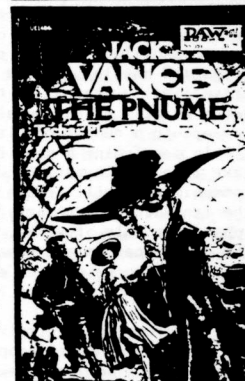
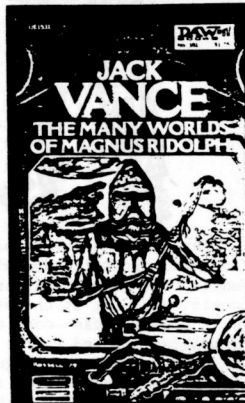
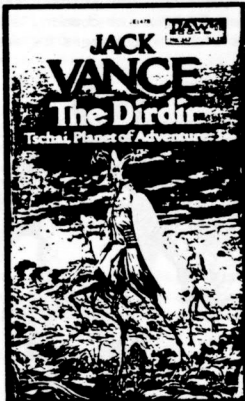
I can recommend no better aid for role playing game masters than his work. He has mastered the essence of designing worlds and cultures, and anyone no matter how experienced can learn from him, though few will ever be able to reach the level of inspired mastery which he has, or the skill in describing a scene or situation.

SOME OTHER WORKS

The Last Castle, *Son of the Tree*, *the Sons of Iszm*, *Dust of Far Suns*, *The Five Gold Rings*, *Future Tense*, *To Live Forever*, *Space Opera*, *Green Magic*, and a variety of others.

GENERAL NOTE

Most of Vance's work which is currently available is from DAW press in paperback, or else most easily available in new editions from specialty presses. However, some of his older and better works, such as *The Languages of Pao* and the *Durdane* trilogy are only available at this time in second hand stores or through British editions. Presumably, DAW will pick up on these, but publishing is a mystifying business, and things don't always work out as they should. The *Demon Prince* and *Allastor* series are the easiest to find, and I believe that the *Tschai* series is out of print from DAW. Look around. He's popular, so you should be able to find most of his works with a little worthwhile effort.



SILENT TONGUES

STAN COIT

Every role-playing world, even those set in the somewhat sketchy backgrounds common to **Dungeons & Dragons** and similar games, has languages. Now, in most worlds those languages, who speaks them, who is literate, and the like, are overlooked, or glossed over. The only time most players pay attention to a character's languages is when they are creating him. After that, they just assume that they can communicate as needed, just as they can outside of the game context. This is a natural tendency among even the best role-players.

However, there are times when being able to communicate and not be understood can be very important, and it is then that players turn back to forgotten sections of the character sheet to find languages, often to discover disappointing handicaps in communication.

Most games have fully developed language systems or some equivalent. That is not our concern here. Rather, let us look at the avenues open to characters who wish to communicate when they are in a crowd, but with only select members of that crowd being able to understand them. Such forms of communication are necessary for all forms of piracy, from wooing to plotting to negotiations and bargaining. They are an invaluable aid to spies, thieves, assassins, traitors, merchants and diplomats. The primary step in establishing clandestine communication is to be sure that the right people share a common, subtle language, and that others are as unaware of it as possible. As long as this requirement is met, a secret language of any kind is viable.

The simplest answer to this need is a spoken language which is known to only a select group, and which is generally mystifying to others, although they might know of it. This is the realm of traditional 'secret' languages, such as Romany, Cockney, Berleugar Nasser, Shelta and Polari. These may just be obscure tongues or regional dialects, or, like most of the examples noted, languages which exist specifically for secret communication, often involving encoding, cryptic alteration of grammar, spelling or syntax, or even more deceptive masking devices, like the rhyming slang found in cockney. The fault with this form of secret communication is that anyone may learn a spoken language, no matter how complex or involved it is.

Another answer is written language, though it has its flaws. In most fantasy worlds, if logically constructed, literacy should be a fairly rare quality. In such a situation written notes become virtually incomprehensible to the illiterate, and it is harder to learn to read than it is to learn to speak a new language. The very word 'Rune', the word for writing in older Scandinavian and Germanic languages, also means 'secret'. The problem with this is that there is no way of telling who can read, and in certain levels of society many can. As a result, coded writing might be necessary. In addition, writing is a bit obvious. If you are some wimpy priest passing a note to a myopic mage, the burly, illiterate barbarians around you don't need to be able to read to take umbrage at it and respond violently. The same problem comes up with spoken language, as it is pretty obvious when someone is talking and you can't understand. I'm sure that most people have had people around them speaking in a foreign language or passing notes, and felt naturally annoyed. The results could be quite bad in the rather violently oriented worlds of role-playing.

Perhaps the most viable and private method of secret communication is some form of sign language. Generally, people do not look for meaning in hand signals, except when they are used to punctuate speech. Signs are a silent form of communication, and will only be noticed by those looking directly at the signaller, and then usually only if he is aware of what to look for, as such signals can consist of the smallest gestures. It is a relatively subtle form of communication, and fairly easy to direct at a single target in complete privacy. Another advantage of a sign or gesture language is that it is hard for those not familiar with it to pick it up from observation, instruction is really necessary to learn it. Non-verbal languages have a history. American Indians used such a system for trade communication, some ancient priesthoods and guilds used sign languages, and there is of course the modern system used by the deaf. Such a development is logical, and could be of quite a bit of use in a role-playing context.

An excellent example of the use of a non-verbal language can be found in David Eddings' **Belgariad** novels, where a sign language is used by merchants and mages for privacy while travelling in groups, so that while one verbal discussion is underway, quite a different one may be going on at a silent level. Eddings' books give a good look at a working application of this concept in a number of situations.

In developing a sign language for use in a role-playing world there are a number of things to take into consideration. Generally, any gesture language developed will be artificial, as such communication will always be secondary to verbal methods in a society with vocal capability. As the language will be artificial, it will probably be as simple as possible in structure, consisting only of verbs, nouns, and a few necessary adjectives. Structure will also be simple, and communication might be oriented towards symbolic rather than literal expression. There would probably also be a brief alphabet for those items not in the standard vocabulary. There would be no cases, genders or the like, but there might be some extended vocabulary to cover special applications.

The groups most likely to communicate by gesture are priesthoods, guilds, mages, thieves and merchants, or any self-contained group which likes to keep its conversations private. In addition, there may not be just one such language. As there are many different verbal languages and dialects, similar variations would be likely within gesture languages, and each separate group



might have its own version. This would parallel the variations within those spoken secret languages used by secret societies in the middle ages and modern times.

How the GM handles non-verbal communication can be a little sticky, as it is hard to do it and keep other players from finding out about communications which their characters might not know about. This can be done best with notes, and having players roll for their characters observing the sign conversation, though the chance of noticing should be small. Learning a sign language should be mostly a matter of finding someone willing and able to teach it, and having the desire and inclination to learn. Generally, using secret languages of any type works best when only a very limited number of people know about the language, and an even smaller number know how to use it. The value of such a language is lost if it becomes widely known.

GUN MISFIRES

NICK OLAND

Guns are fascinating weapons, combining ease of use and stopping power. An increasingly large number of role playing games are set in periods when the firearm is the preferred and most effective type of weapon. Such games as **Daredevils, Mercenaries Spies and Private Eyes, Espionage, Call of Cthulhu, James Bond 007, Behind Enemy Lines, and To Challenge Tomorrow** have extensive sections on firearms of one sort or another. One aspect of these weapons which either isn't covered or is glossed over in most of these games is that of misfires and other fumbles specifically appropriate to this type of weapon.

To deal with this lack, a comprehensive system is needed, and here you have it. Cross-indexed on the table below are dates of weapon production and weapon types. The resulting figure is the percentage chance of a misfire fumble of one sort or another. In systems which use percentile rolled combat, such as TCT or CoC, a natural roll within the value given, not counting modifications to the roll will require a roll on the misfire table given to the right with 1D100. In other systems a separate %ile roll may be needed.

Misfire/Fumble Result	Roll
Misfire	50
Jam	75
Backblow(1/2 damage)	90
Explode(2x damage)	00

Fumble results are explained below. Note that the table of manufacturer nationalities below and to the right gives increases to the base percentage found in the table below. Thus, a revolver made in Denmark before 1860 would have a 10% chance of a misfire(8+2%). If you wish, you could even add modifications by manufacturer. Note that those weapons marked with an asterisk are only available as antiques in the periods listed, and are thin the process of declining in reliability.

Basic Misfire Chance

Gun Type	Date													
	1460	1540	1620	1700	1780	1860	1880	1900	1920	1940	1960	1980	2000	After
Hand Gun	12%	11%	10%	10%	10%	*11%	*12%	*13%	*14%	*15%	*16%	*17%	*18%	*19%
Matchlock	10%	09%	09%	09%	09%	*10%	*11%	*12%	*13%	*14%	*15%	*16%	*17%	*18%
Wheel-lock	---	10%	08%	07%	07%	07%	*08%	*09%	*10%	*11%	*12%	*13%	*14%	*15%
Snaphammer	---	---	07%	06%	06%	06%	*07%	*08%	*09%	*10%	*11%	*12%	*13%	*14%
Flintlock	---	---	09%	07%	05%	05%	*06%	*07%	*08%	*09%	*10%	*11%	*12%	
Breechload	---	---	---	10%	07%	05%	05%	*06%	*07%	*08%	*09%	*10%	*11%	*12%
Revolver	---	---	---	---	---	08%	06%	05%	04%	03%	03%	03%	03%	03%
Auto Pistol	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	10%	08%	06%	04%	04%	04%	04%
Rifle	---	---	---	---	---	12%	07%	04%	03%	03%	03%	03%	03%	03%
Auto Rifle	---	---	---	---	---	---	12%	09%	07%	05%	03%	03%	02%	02%
Machinegun	---	---	---	---	---	---	15%	13%,	11%	09%	07%	05%	04%	03%
SubMachinegun	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	13%	10%	08%	06%	04%	03%
Shotgun	---	---	---	---	---	10%	08%	07%	06%	05%	04%	04%	04%	04%
Auto Shotgun	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	12%	09%	07%	06%	05%	05%
Laser	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	12%	---	---	08%	05%

National Variance

Nation	Increase
Belgium	0
US	+1
UK	+1
Austria	+1
France	+1
Germany	+1
Israel	+1
Denmark	+1
Italy	+2
Czech.	+2
Denmark	+2
Swiss.	+2
Sweden	+2
Turkey	+2
Poland	+2
Brazil	+3
Spain	+3
Portugal	+3
Russia	+3
Mexico	+3

A Misfire result means that a round fails to fire, but the next round does carry on into the chamber, essentially a dud result. A Jam result indicates that the gun doesn't fire and a round is stuck, which needs to be ejected, examined, and the gun then needs to be reloaded, all of which takes time, and should incur appropriate costs and time loss. A Backblow indicates that the round goes off with unusual force, kick or discharge, resulting in half of the weapon damage being rolled and taken by the arm being used to fire it. An Explode result is essentially the same, but the weapon is destroyed, and the user takes 2 times the damage to the firing arm, and an equivalent amount overall. This fumble roll takes place every time a trigger is pulled, once for a single shot from a pistol, and also only once for a multiple-shot round from a machinegun or similar weapon.

One important note is that better weapons should be available at a higher cost. Generally, the misfire chance can be reduced by up to half, with each 1% removed from the percentage increasing weapon cost by 100%. Thus, to buy a \$30 Colt .44 revolver made in 1870 which is improved to have only a 3% chance of misfire would actually make the weapon cost \$120 total, and it would be optimum for its type and time.

This is a useful little system for both modern and future games, and adds a little air of mystery to gun combat. It is particularly important when characters are using found guns, cheap guns, antique guns, or in periods when firearms were fairly primitive. However you apply it, it definitely adds realism and a bit of a challenge to weapon use.

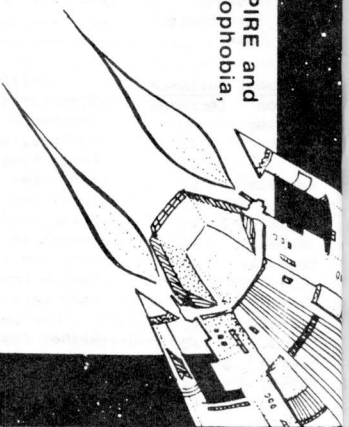
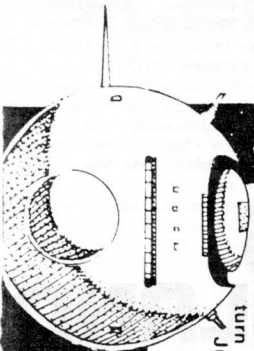
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- Capitol is a balanced game. Each player may buy a maximum of two setups per game.

"CAPITOL is fast becoming the standard against which other space warfare games are compared"



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Middle Passage



**THE GAME OF TRADE
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1680-1830**

Ragnarok continues to work on new projects and releases, including games, expansions, and play aids of all sorts.

Middle Passage has been very popular, threatening to overtake Field of Honor as our most popular mini-game. People must like roaming around the Atlantic buying and selling human cargoes and preying on defenseless maritime trade. As a result, we are preparing the first of several Middle Passage companion games for release. The first of these is **Passage to Cathay**, which will be out soon. It is by Eric Olson, and expands the world of maritime trade into the Indian Ocean, adding new ports, and new commodities and nations, with interesting added depth. It can be played on its own or in combination with Middle Passage. Other companion topics planned are Mississippi riverboats, and trade and piracy in the Pacific. **Passage to Cathay** will have complete rules, an 11x17 map, and additional record sheets. It will sell for \$4.95, but is available now on advance order for only \$4.

To Challenge Tomorrow has also been doing quite well, with popularity growing in response to the depth and quality of the first expansion set, **Triad**, which provides a unique and fascinating Science Fiction background at a level of quality which we hope to match in future expansions. Two new expansions are nearing completion, and are available for advance order.

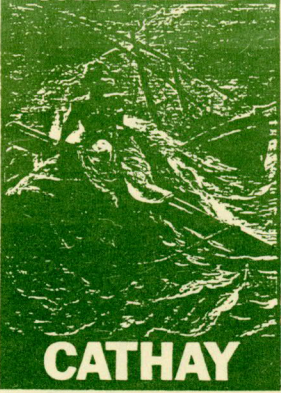
London by Night is an elaborate and complete look at the background of Victorian London with a number of excellent scenarios, plus lots of great resource material, including a 22x24 map of London, showing all streets and major buildings.

**TO CHALLENGE
TOMORROW
EXPANSION ONE**

Coming soon is **Challengers**, a superhero aid for TCT. **Challengers** will be as strong on new ideas and game mechanics as **London by Night** is on background, and will contain some excellent scenarios as well. As it is shaping up so far, it is going to be the simplest and most logically structured comic-book RPG around. Both are can be pre-ordered. **London by Night** is \$5 (the planned price will be \$6 or more), and **Challengers** is \$3 (with \$4 the planned price). Order now and reserve a copy.

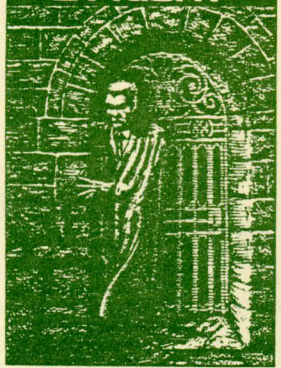
The world of **Ysgarth** continues to expand. Now, in addition to the basic rules there are three supplements, **The Wine of the Moon**, **Creatures Fair and Fell**, and **Expanding Worlds**. Each contains a mini-adventure, rule modifications, expansions and background articles. **Ysgarth** is the most progressive role-playing game around today, and with these supplements it is even better. Coming soon and available for pre-order is **The Ancient Powers**, a new supplement with more background material on **Ysgarth** and the forces which work behind the scenes to run the world.

PASSAGE TO



CATHAY

LONDON BY NIGHT



FEEDBACK RESULTS FOR #27

Article	Rating	Change
Conjurings	92	+7
In the Speculum	79	-6
The Vanir	97	--
Infernal Majesty	86	--
Quest & Country	87	--
Echoes...	81	+3
Fiction in Gaming	82	--
Mission of Intemp.	86	+13
Worlds of Smith	88	+6
Gaming By Mail	77	--
Eric Heinsoo	78	--
Mike Cranford	81	+12
Jim Guerriero	69	--
Yequi Dharsee	77	+25
Susan Van Camp	86	--
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