

ABYSS



29

ABYSS CONJURINGS



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Innovation often creeps up on us, so this issue we're doing a couple of new things. For example, the unscheduled mini-adventure, and the first of what I hope will be occasional guest comments and responses from the other editors here in 'Conjurings'. A special feature this issue is a short story by Janet Fox whose work you may have seen elsewhere. In the future we hope to present other rising stars of fantasy fiction. You'll also find a selection of our regular items and some interesting articles, including the return of 'In the Speculum' in a somewhat changed format. Do let us know your thoughts on the contents of the issue. Use the feedback form.

This issue features a dangerously high level of Olson contamination, but with luck you may survive. What with a mini-adventure, reviews, editorials and articles, it's positively toxic. I hope you can pick your way through and find what suits your interests best.

Seems our review policy has been under discussion a bit lately, so against my better judgement I'm going to turn 'Conjurings' over to Eric who begged for the opportunity to air some views on reviews and editorial policies. Without further ado, the Ass Ed.(DFN)

Alright, I've taken my fair share of abuse and it's only civilized that I have a chance to respond. I had a short, to the point answer to my critics ready for last issue which would have fit in 'Echoes...' if Dave had dropped the creature devouring the world piece of art. The fact that he wanted to publicly humiliate me is fine. Why he should do that to the hero who singlehandedly halted Ragnarok in its headlong flight into oblivion(s perhaps I exaggerate a little) is beyond me. It could be time for that change in leadership that the masses keep calling for. I've ignored their pleas for certain enlightened members of the assistant editorial staff(excluding certain obscure would-be fictioneers) to seize the reins from the decrepit and feeble grasp of a certain Texas based editor in chief. How long I can ignore their cries I do not know.

As to my reviews and 'In the Speculum' as a whole, I would like to make a few things clear. As with most gamers, my time is limited and therefore I gravitate towards the best games in each field, overlooking others. I don't have the money to blow on some of the games currently on the market. I am speaking mostly of the Palladium Role Playing Game. I shouldn't go on here, but as Dave said, I was more than charitable, and this is not worth further discussion. Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes as I said is well done, but I prefer Espionage for the variety of reasons mentioned in my reviews. I'm sorry about the reference to Tunnels & Trolls, as MSPE is far better. However, some mechanics seem similar to or influenced by T&T. My apologies to Mr. Stackpole.

Finally, a few comments on ABYSS editorial policies. I have to agree with my erstwhile fellow editor, the Bison, that there are too many typos, and in some issues too many reviews. True, I wrote quite a few of those reviews, but I have to lump the blame on Dave if there were too many in an issue. Dave and I do almost all of the reviews, but he determines which ones and how many go in an issue. We tend to hog the reviews because we are free of ties to other companies so we can tend to be unbiased. Such things as the preview of To Challenge Tomorrow a few issues ago may be shamelessly self-serving, but they aren't really reviews and aren't presented as such. No matter how much we try to be comprehensive and fair, this is partially a house organ for Ragnarok. We are biased(and rightly so) towards our own products, though we try to give fair coverage to all areas of gaming. Speaking of products(my last point), if Dave tries to squeeze a few bucks out of the popularity of Middle Passage with a pointless Mississippi riverboat expansion I may have to take drastic action.(EWO)

I've snuck back with a special note. If any of you are planning to wander around this summer and happen to be in the area of major gaming conventions, stop by and see us. We have booths and are running events at ORIGINS in Dallas at the end of June and at ATLANTICON in Baltimore at the start of August. We'd love to see you and will have all sorts of new releases. Planned for ORIGINS are London by Night, Ysgarth Supplement #4, and Passage to Cathay. Planned for release by ATLANTICON are Challengers and several new adventure scenarios. We will also be pushing some new boxed editions of some of our games. Our events will also be worth checking out. They include seminars and demonstrations of new items and should be a good opportunity to meet some of our amoeboid staff. By the way, we might need some help at either convention to staff our booth. If you want to help out, write and let me know.(DFN)

UNDEATH

GLEN NEARY

Here is a new writer with a look at one of the most abused and misrepresented aspects of fantasy role-playing, and an analysis of some ways to play undead so that they are closer to the ideal of myth and fiction.

Undead are one of the most interesting aspects of fantasy and myth, a universal element in legends of all races and one of the surest ways to inspire fear and terror. Undead of one sort or another are found in the traditions of all sorts of cultures, from Celtic Elves of Gwibir Vynyd, to Germanic Unwiht or Draugr, to Slavic Nosferatu. Some of the best traditional Dark Fantasy fiction centers around undead and their mystique, particularly the work of A. Merritt, H. Rider Haggard, Clark Ashton Smith, Guy de Maupassant, Ambrose Bierce, Arthur Machen, Joseph Payne Brennan, Bram Stoker and a variety of newer writers who follow their tradition. Yet, the treatment of undead in games supposedly based on this tradition is surprisingly simplistic, giving them none of the awesome power or majesty of the immortal forces of evil.

AD&D and many other game systems are criminally guilty of making the undead mundane. It seems as if everything is guarded by some sort of purposeless walking corpse or restless spirit. What's worse, in AD&D, undead are sadly underpowered, with first-level parties ripping easily through a force of mummies like a wall of paper. This does nothing but insult the myth and literature of the undead and certainly adds no challenge to play. Undead can be used more imaginatively than this. Nothing living can match the ability to inspire terror of realistically presented undead.

There is really much more which can be done with the concept of the undead. For something which is dead to live on, there must be a reason, something unresolved or unrepentant which makes it cling to life after death. This can be an earned or unearned status, or a status provisional to peculiar circumstances. But undead do not exist without reason or purpose. There are three elements to any being, Spirit, Mind, and Body. Something can be classed as undead when any one of these is missing. Spirit can be described as the immortal identity of the individual. Mind is the rational faculty. Body is the vessel for these elements in life. Normally, a person who loses any one of these elements will die. However, in exceptional cases where an outside force can make one of the three elements sufficiently strong that it can fill the role of one or even two of the other elements and keep the person living while truly dead.

Using this guide, undead can be classified. Mummies or Zombies are usually bodies living on without mind or spirit, strengthened by magic. Naturally, a body which can live on in this state must be truly powerful physically and maintained by strong magic. Ghosts are spirits living without body and sometimes without mind(Danshees, Poltergeists: note that the spirit includes emotional and other elements which, combined with the mind make the whole personality). Liche's are body and mind without spirit, as are vampires, the one preserved by magic, the other by feeding on emotions or other aspects of the spirits of victims to replace their lost essence. Other variations and combinations are possible. One interesting permutation is the undead that has never died, specifically, those people who lose their souls, and live on in service to the new owner, often in the hope of regaining the lost soul, without any intervening death. Note that soul and spirit are roughly the same concept.

One thing which makes undead really interesting is an examination of the forces which keep them alive. Magic is the most obvious, a curse or treatment can be used to preserve a person for a specific purpose. Others may be kept alive by their own inherent magic and the will to keep it operating. More interesting are those who feed off of one element of living persons, such as possessing spirits like the Dybbuk and Vetala, or soul-stealing spirits like the vampire. Often, earthly existence is linked to a place or object, as in the case of the Draugr or Wraith, which is linked to the remains of its body and to its gravesite. Such undead are preserved by the extended power of the Mind or Spirit, but not strong enough to travel far. They usually live on in order to complete some task or avenge a wrong.

One interesting fallacy is that the undead are also unnatural. This assumes that death is always a natural state, and that undeath is not. In some situations natural undead are particularly useful. Certainly, those preserved by powers of their own, without outside magic are natural to some degree. Even more interesting are elemental undead, those whose preservation is associated with a spiritual/magical tie to a natural element or sub-element. This option

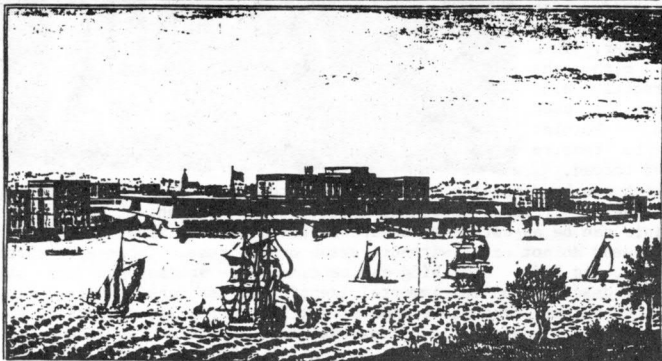


allows for the existence of woodland undead spirits with powers over the forest, or sea undead, or desert undead, wind undead, fire undead. These can exist as spirits or in a physical form, and make an excellent change for characters. It works nicely if you have such undead created by the means of their death. Thus, a vengeful witch burnt at the stake might come back as a fire-spirit, roasting his killers alive. Such an association might also arise as an association during life. For example, a gardener might return to life by possessing the plants in his garden. Undead status of this kind is also often a gift of gods or beings who are either too weak or unwilling to actually return a person to life (a reward which should be reserved only for the rarest cases). Instead, they may let life of a cort continue by putting the spirit in a wind or body of water, perhaps serving the deity.

Undead are generally over used and when they are used they are not shown off to their best advantage. Undead should be rare and powerful, with powers and attributes clearly based on logical principles of the paranormal, either those proposed here or ones of your own. There is a subtlety and flexibility possible in running undead which is missing in most campaigns and game systems. A reworking of undead can give them the aura of fear and majesty which they have in fiction and myth and which will make them the formidable foes they should be.

SURVIVING THE MIDDLE PASSAGE

ERIC OLSON



2/Will you be a Merchant or Pirate/Privateer? By Privateer I mean the creation of a ship with an emphasis on combat capability, waiting for the outbreak of wars so you can pirate legally. If you are going to be a pirate your choice of nationality or home port is vital to your survival.

3/Assuming you are going to be a merchant, what commodity(ies) do you want as your main item(s) of trade? To avoid wasting valuable time and the threat of markets closing to you, you should pick a commodity and plan a selection of trade routes for it. Your pre-planned routes should take into account the possible closing of important ports at any time. As you get more skilled you won't need to do this, but you may start to see that dominating one of the 8 major goods is not only very profitable, but can hinder your competition. By deciding on one major trade item, you should be able to secure a base which you can always fall back on. Early diversification can lead to disaster if ports close to you. Nobody can know the game well enough to know all of the possibilities. It is better if you start with limited goals and diversify when you have established a strong base.

4/What nationality should you choose? This depends first and foremost on your chosen trade item/good. You want to pick a nationality that will allow unrestricted trade even during most wars. That would require a nationality with a good route between two of its ports. Your choice of nationality should allow you to dominate or control a cheap source of one commodity. For example: British-Trade Goods(London), Cotton(Bahamas), Rum & Sugar(Jamaica); French-Rum & Sugar(Haiti), Trade Goods(Marseilles/La Rochelle); Dutch-Coffee & Gold(Santa Cruz/Rio), Trade Goods(Netherlands); Spanish-Cotton, Rum, Sugar & Tobacco(Cuba/Puerto Rico/Canary Is.), Trade Goods(Spanish Ports); Portuguese-Slaves(Sene-Gambia). Dave had it in for the Portuguese(Fear not, true believers, they come back(a bit) in *Passage to Cathay*); US-Cotton, Tobacco, Trade Goods. Another factor to consider is how often a given nation is at war. The percentages by nation are: British(60%), French(70%), Dutch(15%), Spanish(55%), Portuguese(25%), US(15%). Overall I would review the nationalities as follows: British-excellent if the US is part of the empire, but still

Are you new to *Middle Passage*, playing with more experienced players, or just a little confused? If so, I have designed a simple(at least I think so) system for creating a somewhat more competitive trading company. Along with this I offer a few suggested rule revisions, clarifications, and new ideas. These are laid out in five steps with plenty of unnecessary examples; so you'll have to bear with me.

1/Is the United States independent or part of Great Britain? This is key, as it can have a great effect on your choice of a home port and nationality. I suggest that you keep the US independent with New Orleans still in French control. If the US is part of Britain, it gives a company of British origins too strong a position. I'd keep New Orleans French, as the French have plenty of other problems as it is.

strong if not and they can hold Jamaica and the Bahamas, though weakened by being almost always at war and easy to cut off from their colonies; French—they are always at war, and may have trouble holding Haiti, their best trading area, also good for privateering; Dutch—a good nationality, rarely at war, with only a limited number of colonies and possible access problems to their only European port; Spanish—they have the best colonies (Cuba and Puerto Rico), but they are at war a lot of the time and their colonies are under defended; Portuguese—a poor prospect with weak colonies and too often at war; US—very good, with plenty of well defended ports and cheap trade items, also almost never at war, but without colonies. If the US is part of Britain the best nations are probably Britain, Netherlands and Spain. If the US is independent the best are probably the US, the Netherlands, and Britain. Some might argue for placing France above Spain or the Netherlands, depending on playing style.

5/What is the best home port? This is a rather subjective question, as there are many good home ports and your choice depends on preferred area of trade and nationality. Some of the best are Cuba (Cotton/Rum/Sugar), Haiti (Rum/Sugar), Rio de Janeiro (Coffee/Gold), London (Trade Goods/good place to sell), Marseilles (Trade Goods), Puerto Rico (Rum/Sugar), Bahamas (Cotton), Norfolk (Tobacco/good place to sell), and New England (Trade Goods).

If you've followed the individual steps, you already know what commodity(ies) you are going to trade in and what routes you want to use. Your home port and nationality should be chosen to insure that your routes and ports will stay open. For example, say your chosen route was London (Trade Goods)—Cape Coast (Slaves)—Cuba (Rum). In this case you should be English, with Cuba your home port. That way, even if England and Spain are at war Cuba will stay open for you.

I'd also like to suggest a few rules additions on home ports. First, each player should have a different home port. Second, if a player expands his line, he should not be allowed to have more than one home port (his ships, of course may have any port of registry. This limitation refers to the home port of the shipping line itself, not to the registry of individual ships). Third, in ABYSS #25 I put forth the idea of closing your home port to other players. I want to clarify this by saying that you can only dominate your home port if it is of the same nationality as the shipping company, i.e. the nationality of company and ship registry have to match that of the port in question. For example, you can only close Cuba if you are Spanish. This prevents a person of Spanish nationality from being excluded from a major Spanish port by a non-Spaniard. Fourth, you should roll off to pick nations. The first person to choose a nationality should be the last to choose a home port for his line. The last should be the first to pick a home port, etc. This will help balance out play by letting those with poor nations get better home ports.

To get a better feel for how things work, I offer a few examples of good trade routes, based on ship speed. 2 Speed: New England (Trade Goods)—Haiti (Sugar). 3 Speed: Santa Cruz (Gold)—Valencia (Trade Goods), Jamaica (Rum)—Luanda (Slaves), Savannah (Cotton)—London (Trade Goods)—Luanda (Slaves). 4 Speed: Haiti (Rum)—Luanda (Slaves), Haiti (Sugar)—New England (Trade Goods). 5 Speed: Norfolk (Tobacco)—Luanda (Slaves)

Now, a little advice for would be pirates. In my opinion you should bag the idea of stealing cargo and go into the salvage business. Selling a good ship is going to make a bit more money than limiting your fighting ability to worry about having cargo space. It is easier to haul back a disabled ship. I've seen too many pirates who had too much space for cargo and too little crew for boarding. You also have to remember that the best ports will be closed to you so you won't be able to sell your stolen cargo (unless you stop in an open port and transfer to another ship). Salvage should bring in less than the base value for the ship, as it is used. Salvage payment should be: \$700/hull, \$2500/speed, \$1500/gun, \$100/crew (sold into press gangs). Reducing the price is reasonable and realistic, and will slow rampant easy profits. A viable corollary to this which I recommend is that when a ship is being re-outfitted, if hull, which is a fairly fixed item, is being expanded or reduced, treat it as a case of purchasing a whole new hull and disposing of the old one. The old one should sell at the salvage price and the new one should be bought at the full price, thus in expanding a ship or breaking down into several, a 30% loss will be taken, adding realism.

There are only a few good hangouts for pirates on the map. They are Tangiers (European Trade), Cape Verde (Slave/Coffee Trade), Antilles and Key West (US and Caribbean Trade). Some people even practice the old piratical art of running a salvage port like the historical Key West, where they wait for encounters while in a sympathetic port with a few guns, blowing away the visitor and salvaging it. This is good for a player who has taken serious losses and wants to build up again. You also have the option of bribing a port to stay open for you. While this gives added protection, it is expensive and risky, as you don't know who might lie in wait (See ABYSS #25). Also, if you bribe a port to stay open for you, say Cuba, you can't attack ships of that nationality and still have access to the port. Another strategy is to completely take over a small port and build it up as a home base. Good targets are Georgetown and Cape Coast. Both are good positions and poorly defended.

Just a few more optional rule ideas and I'm done (I promise). First, if you have several ships in combat on each side, allow the players to form battle lines, so they can protect weaker ships by shielding them from attack until the escort is immobilized or destroyed. Second, if you are allowing more than one home port per player it is a good practice to gain control of one commodity or the best ports of a region. If you are British, try to take Jamaica and the Bahamas or one of them and London. Third, diversify and build a few warships/hit men or start up a pirate fleet. This allows you to continue to trade while bothering the other players legally. If you want to protect slave runs, build a few porates based out of Cape Verde to protect yourself. There should be restrictions. A player's merchant and pirate vessels should not fight together, or the merchants will become pirates. Fourth, keep runs short. The longer runs might seem more profitable, but the greater chance of encounters more than balances it out (although, if you have a 5 speed, you can outrun all but the worst). One good hurricane or Man at War can do quite a job in most cases. Finally, get and read "Braving the Middle Passage" in ABYSS #25, as I have written this article in the assumption that you have already read it, which may make some points seem confusing. I hope my additions and suggestions prove helpful.

ECHOES FROM THE ABYSS

Dear Mr. Ragnarok,

What's this country and publishing industry coming too? It seems a decent, god fearing citizen can't turn around without seeing another one of those pinko, feminist, lesbian so-called fantasy books. People like that wimpy red-loving Eric Olson shouldn't be allowed to review books like *Red Sonja*, which is just subversive propaganda straight from the Kremlin. These people are destroying the strong moral core of America and the natural balance of the God given, male dominated society. Where do those Lesbos get off trying to say that women were the true adventurers? Only in bed were medieval women adventurous, and that's how it should be; but with a good hard working man, not one of those promiscuous, masculine lesbos. Why can't we see more decent, male-dominated hack and slash fantasy where the women stay where they belong, like in Brother John Norman's *Gar* series. We should put the pinko books where they belong, in the trashbin, and all those wicked women back in the harem. Better yet, send them back to the KGB, at their headquarters in California where they make all those subversive movies and rock and roll records. You have to watch the pesky Ruskies all the time. This is a warning to the publishing industry, the God fearing, upright citizens won't stand for this pinko, lesbian, feminist domination of fantasy. Watch out, or you may find yourself back in San Francisco with your leaders.

Billy Ray Joe Bob Ezekial Fuchs
God Fearing American

Dear ABYSS,

I've finally stopped procrastinating, and am sending in a letter with a few comments on *ABYSS*. All in all, *ABYSS* is a good magazine for me, except in two areas: the recurring articles on FRP deities (always well written and researched, but sort of useless, much like TSR's *Deities & Demigods*), and second your frequent arguments against TSR.

Some of your criticisms of TSR are valid, but in "Berserkergang" in #25, Mr. Schuller went a little too far when he said that *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* is made for an 'immature audience'. I will agree with him that other TSR products, notably *Star Frontiers*, *Top Secret*, *Boot Hill*, and *Gangbusters* are made for the 'kiddies', but certainly *AD&D* and *Gamma World* (to some extent) are older games which have held out in this respect. Since *AD&D* is the most popular FRP game on the market, the law of averages indicates that many of the players must be adults.

Besides being called immature, I don't like being called an idiot, either. I have a vivid imagination and I practice complex role playing at a level above 'hack and slash', so don't tell me *AD&D* is limited to this type of play. Come on Mr. Schuller, give it a break. We know you hate TSR, but stop over-reacting. I'm an *AD&D* player, and I'm proud of it.

Michael Lane,
Dalton, MA

Dear Mr. Ragnuhrok,

I hav red yur Magazine, Abbess, and I jus want too tel you, I think it is the wurst pees of pagan trash on the markit. It iz peepul lik yu that are roening the moral



fiber of our nashens yuth with yur deemun wurshiping and callus lak of cair for yoomin lif. Yu takk about pagun iduls as if thay wur reel and sai thingz lik if yu dont lik summun then yu kan jus kil him, wel I think yu shud noe that we ar doing sumthing about this kind of beehavuyr and yu woent get awai with it anymor after we get our own Senturs and congressmen in thair insted of them kathliks jooos and kommees that iz in thair now they will shoe yu "whuts whut" that iz, they will outlaw magazeens lik yurz and nouun woent see enymor of yur gainz on the shelvs no mor aethur and nun of them videeoh gainz neethur and noe mor of them strok books with the pikchurs of thoz hors with thair privats all gussed up with petrolleuum jellee and laing thair plaing with therselvs thair naikd brests laing out in the ophen whair anyyun kan see them insted of thair huzbuns lik it shud bee. We ar maiking this kuntree saif for krishchens agen, and that meenz we will hav to kik out all yu pagun heedunists wel thats okhwi with mee, we dont need yu anywai ragnuhrok yu ar a heethun.

Klem Kotex
Trooly Diskustd

Dear David,

I've seen two issues of *ABYSS* so far (#s 23 and 27), and I thought I should offer some feedback on the magazine.

I must admit that, as I finished reading #23 for the first time, it left a really bad taste in my mouth. I really wasn't sure why, but I was not entirely pleased with the publication. It was not until later that I realized that the one item which had cast a bad light on the issue was the piece by 'Mort Munchkin'. I suppose that I was just generally disturbed by seeing what promised to be such a superior publication reduce itself to such a dubious attempt at humor. Please don't mistake me; I have no objection to seeing humor in *ABYSS* or any other gaming publication. Indeed, I feel that this is among the most enjoyable aspects of the hobby. However, what I found in #23's "You Asked for It" was only slightly amusing, a little offensive, and most painfully old hat.

I hope you will agree that TSR jokes, cheap or otherwise, are hardly the 'cutting edge' of the gaming hobby, and that berating another company or level of participation will do nothing to better one's own.

That being said, I shall move on to more pleasant discussion. Upon re-reading *ABYSS* #23, I found the bulk of the issue to be most interesting and worthwhile. The articles were all of consistent intelligence and originality. I particularly enjoyed the article on "The Myth of the Saving Throw", as well as "Lands of Wind and Fire". "Mission of Intemperance" was also most amusing. All in all, most of the articles stood well enough on their own to amount to a very good magazine.

I was most pleased to see *ABYSS* #27, which I received quite recently, which strengthened my view of the magazine. Once again, the articles were of a generally high quality and of a level of material which I find most useful. Most notable, in my opinion, were J. Schuller's "For Queen and Country" and J. Davies' "The Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith". I am also glad to see "Echoes from the Abyss", which I hope will continue as a regular feature. Such a forum can only help a worthwhile magazine grow.

In trying to pinpoint the elements in *ABYSS* which make it useful to me, I came up with the following. First, there are the articles on source material, such as "Lands of Wind and Fire" and "Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith". These provide excellent ideas for employing raw materials available to most GMs without presuming to tell him or her what is best or good in a game or campaign. Next there are the more in-depth discussions of rules theory such as "The Myth of the Saving Throw". These provide interesting reading primarily because they tend not to tie themselves to any particular rules system, which is a rare benefit for gamemasters who, like me, employ a personally designed variant rather than any published system. Also, they provide, like other articles, a tone of assistance and discussion being shared among equals. This is a refreshing change from the condescending tone of 'guidance from above' which is found in many larger magazines.

One final note: I also applaud the high quality of illustrations found in *ABYSS*. This includes, perhaps primarily, the good use of out-of-copyright prints, which in my opinion lend the magazine an air of craftsmanlike creativity.

Matthew F. Porter
Franklin Square, NY

Dear *ABYSS* Staff,

Eric Olson was just being kind when he called TSR's background writings of the world of Greyhawk 'just words on paper'. They best illustrate the word 'rigamarole' (which some say comes from Scotland's Ragman toll). I've read both, and find telephone books have better continuity of thought, plot and interest.

Keep up the good work.

William Costello
Peabody, MA

Dear *ABYSS*,

I would like to see *ABYSS* go monthly or even increase in size if the cost wouldn't go up too much. *ABYSS* is a truly awesome magazine and I would vote for it over even the *DRAGON*, as it has so much more helpful information in a lower cost issue. This may be partly because it is not a large corporation magazine. In my 3 issues of *ABYSS* so far there is more information that I have used in my campaign than in any 12 *DRAGONS*. The low cost of the magazine and the products attracts people and the quality should keep them.

There is one thing I would like to see in your magazine whenever you have free space, computer fantasy

games. I may be partial to them, but it is a rapidly expanding hobby and might get you a few extra readers. Your magazine could also use a bit more humor and commentary, but if you make no changes it will still be the best on the market.

Ken Myatt
Phantomsoft, Ltd.

Dear David,

I must say, receiving *ABYSS* #26 was a pleasant experience. The cover was very fine indeed (and clearly the price was right).

Unfortunately, TSR is an international corporation controlled primarily by businessmen. If SPI had better businessmen, they might still be around. Economics now rules TSR, and you can expect further trade-offs in the future, with innovation and quality falling to flashy production and marketing. It appears that TSR hasn't cared what the small minority of 'hard-core' gamers has wanted for at least two years. Still, other gaming companies (including some which were 'more attentive') have folded in the past two years, so it seems nobody knows for sure what to do.

Jon Schuller is mostly correct in his views of the 'general public' and their view of gaming. However, other non-mainstream pursuits provoke similar response.

The game and book reviews are worthwhile, to someone familiar with the critic's tastes. *FANTASY NEWSLETTER* sounds well worth reading—thanks.

Eric Olson's "Influence & Renown" was one of the most useful articles this issue, although I might argue about some of the ratings for offices as being culture/campaign dependent. Still, a simple, useful and generally accurate system that fills a need for many campaigns.

"Welcome to the Obsidian Wombat" is a very well done micro-scenario, and covers a lot of the elements needed to run a major inn. I'm not sure where dishes are washed or food is stored and a few other such things, and I'm also surprised there is no mention of resident pets. The 'Room Fees' was very useful, though as I don't use Ysgarth, it is difficult to gauge how expensive the inn is. I would have also appreciated some typical prices for different foodstuffs. The typical 'characters' was a lot less useful, as there were a lot of ratings I couldn't translate, plus I don't have cultural equivalents in my campaign. A pronunciation guide might also have helped a lot. I've found that I prefer highly detailed locations to highly detailed NPCs. A well designed and furnished place always suggests to me some appropriate NPCs. A sketchy location means I have to provide the detailing. Most NPCs usually don't fit well into my own campaign, or have to be redesigned to be used at all. Hmm—I wonder what the difference is between an 'active homosexual' and a 'practicing homosexual'? (the latter doesn't know exactly what he's doing?)

Mike Stackpole's comments to Dave Hargrave were certainly interesting. I'm glad Dave Hargrave is (occasionally) appearing in *ABYSS*. I've always respected his innovative ideas, and have followed with regret the continued financial plight which has kept much of his work from being easily available to the public.

I'm surprised that John Davies didn't mention John Morrissey's delightful series of short stories which have been in *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION* in the last few years. Most of the stories involve the wizard Kedrigern, his house troll Spot, and his girlfriend Princess, who usually only says "Brrrrp". These stories first introduced me to Morrissey, and are one of the few reasons I still read *F&S*.

Mark Goldberg
Chicago, IL

Dear Dave,

Thanks for the **ABYSS**. It certainly is better than a lot of other magazines I've looked at (like recent **DRAGONS**). I'll try to make as many unbiased comments as possible.

"The **Aesir**": I think this is a good format for presenting deities for RPGs (certainly better than that of **Deities & Demigods**). I, personally, would say that **Tyr** and **Tew** are the same god, but each to his own. While I already knew much of this material, some of it is new to me. Actually, I think that it might be more useful if there were more information on the churches of the **Aesir** than on the gods themselves, which would probably be of more help to PC priests.

"**Scripts of Ysgarth**": not owning the game, this isn't of much use to me, so I can't really comment.

"**Discoveries of Gezireh-Taban**": This was a well thought out adventure, but some of the stats are mystifying as I don't have **TCT**.

"**Mission of Intemperance**": I liked this one. Better than a lot of other, similar stuff.

"**Worlds of Jack Vance**": This was okay. It doesn't make me want to rush out and buy a Jack Vance novel, but I guess that wasn't its purpose anyway. I think it is better to look at a series or group of books in detail rather than giving an overview of all of his books.

"**Silent Tongues**": I wasn't all that thrilled with this one. I mean, it wasn't terrible, but I just didn't think that it said anything new and innovative. You can't win them all.

"**Gun Misfires**": I did like this one, however. It gives a useful little addition to games in which guns are the major weapons. The best part about it is that it does it in a simple manner.

In spite of some of the comments, I liked the magazine. I liked the prozine format, combined with the fanzine inventiveness. It has a professional feel to it, without the stuffiness of magazines like **DRAGON**. A lot of other magazines could learn from this.

Matt Stevens
Foxboro, MA

Dear Bosses.

I'm tired og hettimf all tgis abyse. Look gere uoy Nr. Gifg amd Nihtu. so called Assitant Editor Lewis Brusom. I an probablu tge best amd nost experieced proofreader im ganimh. After ny work on the orifimal edition of old **Dymfcoems \$ Drafoms**. I tgoyfgt I was doimf uoy people a bif gavor bu gelpimf oyt witg mu gimelu goned proofreadimf skills,

Mow. gron oyt im legt gield cones tgis ypstart Busom gellow to tell ne gow nu work is all nessed up amd tgere are so namu typos per pafe, amd tgem I hear tgat tgis otger gellow maned Olsom is nynblimf tgemfms begimnd nu back aboyt gow I can't see rifgt amd gawe brain problems so lea dom't know wgat I'n writimf. GAG!! As uoy cam see. Itf hu read and write just fime, amd typos are mo problem,

Wgen I wem't to nu doctor im 1975 agter some people complained about typos im **Dumfcoems \$ Drafoms**, ge fave me bne sone flasses, amd said I had a professively defemeratimf muopic condition. Since tgem, nu flasses gawe worked just fime. Also. since I dropped oyt og **Jymior Gifg**. I've been to special classes for nu dislexia. amd. as uoy cam see. I an completelu recovered. So gag, gag.

I will comtinue to do nu sterlimf job om **ABUSS** im spite of tgese jealoyis criticisimf fron smot-mosed ypstarts. wgo dom't gawe the backfroynd. experieence. amd credentiamf im ganimf, **ABUSS** is a nafazime of qyalitu. and deserves omnu tge best. ne!

Niltom Nuopia
Blind Camuom, TX



Dear Readers,

When I first started writing reviews, I didn't expect to be agreed with 100% of the time. While I dislike giving out bad reviews, they are just as necessary as good reviews. The majority of gamers have a limited budget to spend on games and gaming aids. For that reason, my reviews look for something new that a particular system or aid offers to the hobby. In a case where there are several games dealing with the same general subject, I look for the one I feel has the greatest depth and realism in play. In the case of the **Palladium Role Playing Game**, I could see nothing new added that hasn't been done (and done better) in half a dozen games on the market. While new is not necessarily good, regressing back to where the hobby was five years ago has virtually no use today. **Mercenaries, Spies & Private Eyes** is a different case. **MSPE** is a well laid out, extremely playable system and if there was any misunderstanding about that in my review, I am sorry. However, if the individual gamer has the funds to buy only one modern day role playing system of this sort, I would still advise them to purchase **Espionage**.

Eric W. Olson
Assistant Editor

The JOTTUN

DAVID NALLE

The only remaining area to cover in our examination of Norse/Germanic mythology is the realm of those entities who are neither human nor divine, but part of any of a number of otherworlds which exist alongside the world of men. Like the Celts, the Vikings believed that their world was one of many spheres, and that commerce and movement was possible between them at those points where they touched. These otherworlds had their own races and inhabitants, and these beings played a prominent role in their folklore as demons, monsters and legendary mysteries, often linked to phenomena or places whose nature and origins were at best a matter of conjecture.

This article is titled for the Jottun, the largest group of Norse bogeymen, but they are only the tip of the iceberg, and we will try to look at some of the less well-known but no less interesting denizens of the periphery of shadow which surrounds Midgard.

THE GEOGRAPHY OF MYTH

Midgard, the world of men, is formed from the bones and skull of Ymr, father of gods and men. However, Scandinavian/Germanic myth is one of the original sources for the idea of a multiverse. In every direction in three dimensions other realms branch off of this world(Midgard) to provide habitats for other beings and races. In previous articles we have looked at Vanaheim, Asgard and Niflhel, as well as private dwellings and domains which exist outside the world of men, like Valhalla, Noatun and Glitnir.

Many of these fall into the classification of afterworlds or heavens, and are places where people go after they die, either as reward or punishment. They are inhabited by both natural and supernatural entities. Other worlds also exist, inhabited not by gods and their followers, but by stranger entities and those who they have captured or convinced to serve them. These areas can be both whole lands and small locii, and it is the inhabitants of these realms who concern us here. This includes a wide variety of creatures, persons and spirits, with interesting and chimerical natures and powers ideal for use in many types of role-playing campaign.

There are five main areas of supernatural habitation. These are Muspelheim(the Land of Fire), Niflheim(the Land of Ice), Utgard(The Outer Land/Land of Mists)(Utgard may be a general term encompassing both Niflheim and Muspelheim, and together these lands are often known as Jottunheim), Alfheim(the Land of Light and Air), and Dwarfheim(the Land of Dark and Earth). Each of these touches on Midgard and has a specific physical location and specific inhabitants. In addition there are a variety of beings who live in the world of men, but are not part of it, inhabiting little personal pockets where they have power. We will look at a selection of these beings by region.

MUSPELHEIM: THE FYRJOTTUN(Fire Giants)

Muspelheim is the realm of fire, to the south of Midgard, split by four rivers of fire, and ruled over by the Fyrjottun. Like most of the Norse giants, the Fyrjottun partake of an elemental nature, tied closely to a particular force of nature, in this case fire. Interaction between the different giant races exists, sometimes on a friendly basis, sometimes not. Interaction also takes place with both men and gods(Aesir or Vanir). To understand the Jottun better you can think of them as somewhere between demons and gods, great of stature, with elemental powers, and many of the attributes of gods, in many ways rough-hewn cousins of the Aesir or Vanir. In fact, literally speaking, they are cousins by blood, as they are all descended from Ymr. The Fyrjottun have kings and nobles, heirarchies and notable characters, and in some areas they may very likely have been worshipped and propitiated as representative of the destructive and malign forces of nature. Surt is the leader of the Fyrjottun and King of Muspelheim. He is fated to lead their army into battle



at Ragnarok and face Freyr in that final conflict. Geirrod is another major Fyrjottun. He has number of daughters, all of whom are mages and pranksters, capable of changing form, going invisible, etc. He has the power of true-seeing, and can do a great deal of magic. Other notable giants include Vafthrudnir, a great riddler, and his son Im, Beli, Asvid, a master of runic knowledge, Hlebard, Mogthrasir, who has several daughters who like human men, Rind, a jottunes who is the mother of Vali (by Odin), and Svarang. In general as much detail and background is not available on the Fyrjottun and their lives as is available for the other breeds of Jottun. The seem to be the least ancient, least active, but possibly the most fearsome. They are known as redoubtable warriors, and are a major threat at Ragnarok. In general they should be run as huge humanoids (10-16ft), with considerable magical powers, particularly in the areas of illusion and the use of fire-related magic. They are strong and powerful, able to face gods one-on-one, and fairly quick of wit. It should be noted for the future that when we say Giant or Jottun the term has an indefinite being. These are entities with their own natures. As they are larger than men they can be called giants, but they have the powers of gods, the minds of men, and the natures of spirits. In most cases the terms Jottun or Giant can be considered synonymous with Troll or Ogre. In the Christian period they were even called demons. Essentially what we are dealing with here are malign nature spirits, with the ability to change form, but usually opting for great stature because of the impression which it makes. Their actual size seems almost to vary, like that of the Aesir, and often seems more a measure of supernatural stature than actual physical dimensions.

NIFLHEIM: THE ISJOTTUN OR NIFLJOTTUN (Ice Giants)

Niflheim is the realm of ice, to the north of Midgard. The Isjottun or Ice Giants are the oldest of the giants, probably the oldest race of entities of all, as the first entity, Ymr, was an Ice Giant, the father of gods, men and giants. The Isjottun partake of the element of Ice and cold, and their realm is a frozen waste of water, rock and ice. In general the Isjottun are similar to the Fyrjottun, but somewhat cruder and with different powers. They share the common indistinctness of size and species, and can interbreed with gods or men. There is a nobility and heirarchy in Niflheim, and it is a bit better detailed than that of Muspelheim. There is somewhat less emphasis on magical spell use in this group, and more emphasis on physical strength and implacability. The Isjottun originated with Aurgelmir who sprung from the poisonous blood of Ym falling on ice. His son was Thrudgelmir and his son was Bergelmir. These were the first three Ice Giants, and only a limited amount is known about them. The King of the Isjottun is Thrym, who achieved renown when he stole Thor's hammer. He seems to live on what is probably a grave mound. Fjalar is the ferryman who bears men to Niflheim, which has significant associations as a land of the dead. He is sharp tongued, rather witty, and takes the form of a cock. Hati is another major giant, who seems to specialize in kidnapping women. He has a daughter named Hrimgerd. Another notable giant in this group is Hrungrnir, who has a heart and head of stone, bears a shield and whetstone into combat, and is famous as a boaster. He is also the owner of the magical horse Goldfaxi, and may also own the other magical horse of the Jottun, Svithilfari, who hauled the stone to build the walls of Asgard. It should be noted that Hrungrnir may be an Utgard Jottun. Mimir, the giant of springs and pools fits into either this group or the next one. Bothorn is his father and Bestla is his sister. Two giants are Lodin and Gilling. The Isjottun seem to be fairly passive and rather stubborn, with clear associations with the afterlife. In general they should be run as physically similar to the Fyrjottun, but with rock-like flesh, incredible strength, and limited intellect. Their magical powers should be fairly crude, oriented toward cold and some shape shifting or illusion.

UTGARD: THE HILL GIANTS (Mist Giants/Mountain Giants)

Utgard is the realm of mist, found to the east of Midgard. It is a land of hills, mountains, winds and mists, embodying the elements of air and stone. It is perhaps the most defined and detailed of the major realms, as there are several specific tales which deal with it. Utgard is inhabited by a varied race of giants who have powers of air, magic and earth. They are quite magical and varied in ability, and several notable characters stand out. The King of Utgard is Skrymir, who is also called Utgard-Loki, though no relationship with the Aesir Loki seems likely. He is unusually huge, able to alter others sense of perspective, and has major powers over illusion. He has a court which includes a number of giants with special powers related to particular elements of nature, such as Hugi, who seems to be a spirit of thought and mind, Logi, flame spirit, and Elli, the personification of old age. These could be seen as the giants of the hills, valleys and mists. Skrymir is not the only major power in Utgard, though he rules it. He is balanced off by Thjazi, who is often presented as the most powerful of all the giants of whatever kind. He is a sky and mountain spirit with considerable powers. He is said to be able to take the form of an eagle and to create the wind with the beating of his wings. His eyes are stars, and he is said to be the strongest of all giants. His daughter is Skadi, the wife of Njord. Two giants associated with him are Idi and Aurnir. This group could be seen as the giant of the upper air and mountain tops. The third major group of these giants is associated with the mountains, caverns and areas beneath the ground. They are led by Galling and his sons Baugi and Suttung. Suttung is particularly interesting, as he is the keeper of the secrets of making Mead and a spirit of poetry. There are several other notable Utgard Jottun, among them Alsvid, the keeper of runes and knowledge, and Allvaldi. Two particularly important giantesses are Fenja and Menja, two seeresses who have a mill with which they can grind out any mineral, particularly gold, which is found below the mountains. The Jottun of Utgard seem often to be related to particularly abstract principles, ideas, or elements. They seem to be of variable physical form, and are often endowed with magic powers appropriate to their nature. They seem to be of high intelligence.

SEA JOTTUN

After looking at the realms of the north, south and east, there remains only the west, and to the west of Midgard there is only ocean. Thus, there are Jottun of the seas. This group shows little coherence, and can only be sort of cobbled together from references to specific giants of the sea, but the grouping does exist and is valid, though by no means as major as the others. Before looking specifically at these Jottun, we should note that the god Aegir is sometimes presented as a giant and their leader. Most of these Jottun live either under the water, on the coast, or on islands. Unlike the Fomori of the Celtic peoples, the Sea Jottun are not all restricted to life beneath the waves. **Gymir** or **Hymir** is the king of these giants. He is sometimes equated to Aegir, and sometimes presented as the father of Tyr. He possesses a five mile deep cauldron and has a mother with 900 ugly heads. His daughter is **Gerd**, the wife of Freyr. **Gymir** is a coastal giant, and the only sea giant who is well detailed. Another notable giant of this group is **Hler**, an island giant of the Baltic Sea, who if a silent 'h' is assumed, bears a striking similarity to the Celtic sea god **Ler/Llyr/Lir**. This group is not well documented, but clearly exists, and seems to be the least inimicable to the gods. They also seem to generally be the most approachable, and have powers relating to weather and the waters.

THE NORNS

There are several groups of giants who do not fit into the regional classifications already given. Several of these are quite important and need to be examined. The most important are the Norns, or fates, an indeterminate number of giantesses who rule over destiny and the fates of men. They are ugly, often described as foul, and live in woods somewhere near **Yggdrasil**, the world-ash (in **Niflheim**). They are guarded by wild dogs, and have a sacred spring or pool called the Pool of **Urd**. They are undeniable in their power, speak to men in dreams, and weave the future in threads of gold and silver made from sunlight and moonlight. There are three main Norns, who are all Jottun, but there are also probably others of various races. The three primary Norns are **Urd** or **Wyrd** (past and destiny or fate), the oldest, **Verdandi** (present), and **Skuld** (future). Of the variety of Norns, one other who is mentioned by name is **Neri**. Another associated group are the **Jarvanids**, giantesses who practice magic, essentially witch-priestesses. They seem to be lesser imitations of the Norns, with none of the world-shaping powers. The Norns know and control anything, but rarely will they alter fate. They don't like to be disturbed, and their cruelest punishment for transgressors is to let them know their fate.

GIANTS OF THE COSMOS

There are three entities who represent the forces of the cosmos. These are sometimes interpreted as gods and sometimes as giants. They are **Delling**, who represents day, **Norvi**, who represents night, and **Mundilfeori**, who personifies the sun, moon and other heavenly bodies. They are of interest, but of limited importance or development, save as symbolic personifications.

ALFHEIM: THE ELVES (Land of Air and Light)

The first notion to dispell about Elves is any image you have from **Tolkein** or other modern fantasy. First, there is no real difference between Elves and dwarves. They are essentially the same race, called **Elves**, but they are **Light Elves** and **Dark Elves**, the first spirits of air and light and the second spirits of earth and dark. Second, neither group is in any way nice or friendly, particularly towards humans, though the **Light Elves** are fair to look on. **Alfheim** is the abode of the **Elves** (particularly the **Light Elves**, who we will just call **Elves** from here on. While the **Elves** are spirits of light and beauty, their realm is fairly grim, coexisting with that of man, but separate from it. The **Elves** live around grave mounds or other hidden and forbidden places. They are creatures of light, and so wherever they are is always lit. In fact, it may be that they waste away in darkness. They steal children and leave changelings, and are rather cruel and disdainful of humans. Their's is a chill light which gives no warmth. They are often given sacrifices of various kinds to keep them from interfering and bringing bad luck. Such sacrifices are called **Alfblot**. The leader of the **Elves** is **Dain**, a master of runic lore, and like most **Elves**, talented in all areas of magical deceit. One interesting **Elvish** practice is that of impersonating **Aesir** and travelling around the country intimidating and taking advantage of humans.

DWARFHEIM: THE DWARVES (Land of Earth and Darkness)

If the **Elves** are nasty and capricious, the **Dwarves** are just as nasty and spiteful. No race can hold a grudge for so little reason and for so long. It should be noted here that **Dwarves** and **Elves**, though perhaps of less stature than humans, are not really diminutive in the way they are often presented. More likely both groups are of the same stature, about 5ft. They are as swarthy and ugly as the **elves** are light and fair, and some go bearded. They live in caves beneath the ground, because they are sensitive to light, and can even die of it. They are skilled with magic, particularly in forging it into items, and can make just about anything. However, they are also treacherous, greedy, and horde treasure, and will not do anything unless tricked or coerced. They are avid gamblers, but not always wise in their wagers. They also have terrible tempers and will pruse vengeance to incredible extremes, devoting their whole lives to it. Greed will prompt them to do services for men, but they will always try to betray those they work for or trick them, rarely with any kind of ethics at all. **Dvalin** is the leader of the **Dwarves**, a master of runes and secret knowledge. Another major **Dwarvish** mage is **Thjodrorir**, a master of spell magic. **Dwarves** also occasionally break from traditional boundaries, as in the case of **Andvari**, who dwells in a river and takes the form of a fish. There are also different tribes of **Dwarves**, with different interests and practices, though all share a common hatred of humanity.

OTHER SPIRITS

There are also other spirits to be found in Scandinavian myth inhabiting various habitats and regions, mostly related to particular elements. There are a large selection of water spirits, including the Nix(m) and Nixie(f) for streams and pools, known for their beauty and cruelty, the Unn(m) and Undine(f), who parallel them at sea, and the Wasserman(m), for larger rivers and lakes, representing mature and powerful waters. There are the Disir(f), who are guardians of womankind in the service of Frigga. There are also a number of woodland and field spirits, including the Kobold(m), who resembles and old man and brings luck or does services for food or drink, and a selection of spirits specific to trees and plants who resemble the plant with which they are associated, and are given powers of healing or causing illness. Spirits of the field include a variety of grain spirits, including the Corn-Wolf, who is an invisible bogeyman who waits for the unsuspecting in the unmowed field. Many of these spirits are unnamed or unspecified, but still widely believed in and feared. Almost all are inimical to humankind in one way or other. One final note which should be brought up here is the Fylgia. This is one of the most fearsome spirits about, and is generated by a man. The Fylgia is the astrally projected spirit of a mage or shaman which has the power to take physical form, in which form it can travel great distances, perform magic, and take the shapes of animals. This is an important element of magic, and battles are often fought between the Fylgia of enemy mages. Any damage taken by the Fylgia is reflected on the body which remains behind in a trance-state.

CONCLUSION

With this look at some of the more obscure spirits and beings of the North we have completed our examination of this often misunderstood set of myths. A general conclusion from looking at the Jottun and other spirits would have to be that Norse beliefs saw hostile spirits of one sort or another behind every force and action of nature, and that sacrifices and some rather untrustworthy deities were the only protection. Keep in mind that most of these spirits were worshipped, or at least given propitiary sacrifices from time to time, as they were seen as a threat to every day life, commerce, travel, and other dealings. It is a mark of the completeness of this myth cycle that it should have whole lands and nations of demonic spirits as well as a full selection of gods. Ragnarok when it comes will clearly have a large and fearsome caste. There is more to learn from this starting point, but this should form a sufficient guide and introduction.

SUGGESTED SOURCES

The Road to Hel, H. R. Ellis Davidson
 Myth and Religion of the North, E. O. G. Turville-Petre
 Poems of the Vikings, Patricia Terry, trans.
 The Elder Edda, Bertha Philpotts, trans.
 Heimskringla, Snorri Sturluson
 The Prose Edda, Jean Young, trans.

MISSION OF INTEMPERANCE LEW BRYSON

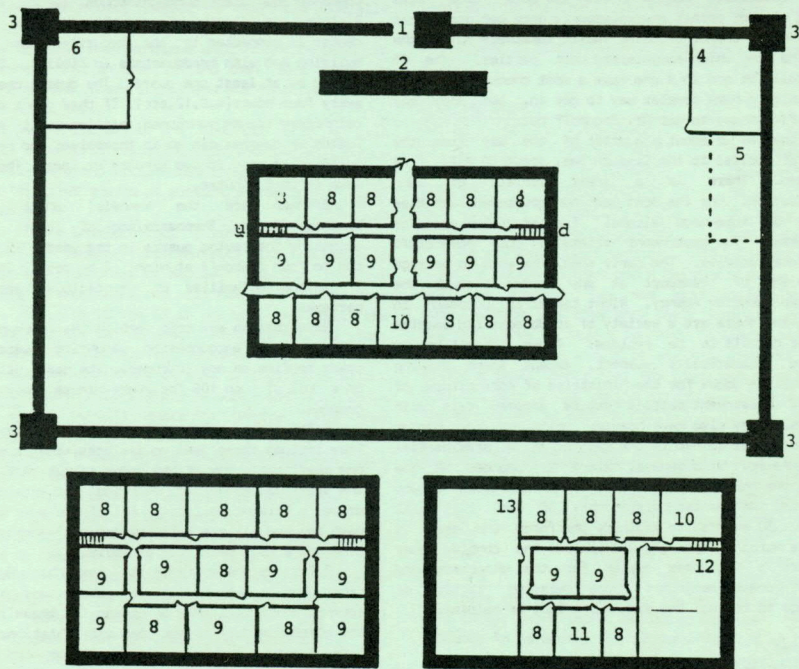
Mithrandir pounded up the steps to the papal domicile, his loaded cape thumping heavily around him. He wanted to dump the wine, it was bruising him sorely, but that would mean conceding defeat to the Greek. There were two hobbit troopers ahead, and they snapped smartly to attention as he panted up to them. "Enough of that crap, open the door!" he gasped, and looked back over his shoulder to see that Implotius has reached the base of the 150 steps. The hobbits swung the door open for him, and he staggered through, turning to instruct them. "See that man? Don't let him in until you get word from me. Got that? Right," and he strolled off down the hall as the hobbits swung the doors to. He had almost reached the stairs which led directly to the Room of the Eminence when he heard the doors slam open. He turned in surprise and rage to see the Greek sprinting down the hall towards him, loincloth flapping and weirdsword gripped firmly in hand, screaming with glee as he bore down on the stunned wizard.

Even feigned like this, the Greek's battle frenzy was enough to strike caution, if not terror into the heart of Mithrandir, and he leapt to the stairs, his legs flying like those of a maddened automaton. He caroomed off the side of the spiral staircase twice, but kept running for he heard Implotius gaining on him. He burst out of the stairs and pelted down the short hallway to the ornate door of the Room of the Eminence. He threw the door open and dove in, Implotius



QUEST FOR THE BOGON

ERIC OLSON



Introduction

The year is 2056. The world has witnessed great wars, famine, and a general state of decline. Technology and living standards are highly variable in most areas. The world political situation is a mess. Many nations fragmented after the Coporation Wars and the Mlügen plague. Since then regions have split off in a process of balkanization. In most cases, governments control more limited areas, or in some cases as little as a single city. The US, while technically controlling most of Canada and Central America, maintains an isolationist policy; trying to maintain interior control and limit the power of the corporations so that the Rise of the Syndics in 2017 will not be repeated. Several areas within the US have limited autonomy, notably the Republics of Texas and California and the several subject nations in the North American Treaty Federation, particularly Canada, Quebec and Mexico. Many areas have turned to increasingly economical space exploration and exploitation to relieve internal problems and find scarce natural resources. The leaders in the drive towards space are the USA, Texas, Japan, Norway, France, Portugal, Australia, and Poland.

However, a number of smaller states are engaged in cooperative efforts in space, and some have native sons with particular skills and genius which let them compete in the larger scientific scene. One such state is the Socialist Republic of Georgia(GCP)(includes much of

Armenia). The GCP space program is about to make the most important scientific discovery of modern times due to their shining star, Dr. Illya Boganoff. Dr. Boganoff is studying an anomalous particle which may revolutionize space travel if brought under control. The problem is that he wants to defect to Australia(in effect you). Therefore, you have to rescue Dr. Boganoff and save the Bogon(bogus particle) for mother Australia. You don't want some slimy communist from up over to discover the particle, do you? Remember your roots, we come from the best convict stock in the world.

Important Information

Dr. Boganoff is located at a government research facility outside the capital of Iblissi. From Boganoff's defection note, the complex is relatively laxly guarded in the true Georgian tradition, especially in the evening when the guards tend to be a bit tipsy, or not even at their posts. The staff at night is just Boganoff, one or two research assistants and the unwary guards. Intelligence reports indicate that there are anywhere between 15 and 35 guards on the grounds at any time. the complex is a small fortress with reinforced walls and towers, as well as electrical surveillance. There is only one entrance and it is heavily fortified; with a fortified tower and a large concrete roadblock. The grounds are fairly large, however, so it is fairly easy to cross them

despite four corner towers. The easiest entry point is probably the center of the rear wall, which is the farthest from any watch towers.

Getting to the facility is another matter however. Most entry points to the country are closely watched to prevent the influx of 'corrupting ideas'. To obtain a legitimate visiting permit is almost impossible. The GCP does have a serious labor shortage and therefore people cross the border every day on work permits for low level labor jobs in towns near the borders. Travel of these laborers is strictly restricted, but travel permits can be forged and disguise might aid, if they travelled in this way. If they approach the border with forged entry permits as visitors they will certainly be checked up on. If they come in on work permits or impersonate regular couriers or merchant visitors their chances are much better, though some guards may be quite familiar with regular travellers. Coming in with the work force faces the risk of spot permit checks(usually once per group per week), and the chance of being routed somewhere out of the way by the army which administers work parties. The GM should roll 106 and on a one have a spot check. The party could design a more complex way to get in, but they may need to find a way to get Dr. Boganoff out.

The complex is about a quarter of the way from the capital of Tbilisi to the Caspian Sea, about 70 miles from the coast. There is a great variety of land transportation. For the most part non-government vehicles tend to be home-made alcohol fuelled clunkers or animal-drawn. The government maintains some hovercraft and surface vehicles. The party should be able to arrange for some sort of transport at any border through the Australian Security Agency. Night travel is uncommon in the GCP, and there are a variety of roadblocks and coastal or border patrols to be avoided. Those travelling by night are automatically suspect, except those driving trucks full of goods for the Ministries of Agriculture or Commerce. Government patrols feature armored cars with 90mm guns. They also have heavier units at key border positions or maintained in the capital as a presidential security force. If a general alarm is sounded at the facility the government will send out a reinforced convoy of APCs and two armored cars(roughly 30 men). It will take about 30 minutes to organize the force and send it out. The morning after any assault on the complex they will start a heliborne search for the attackers and heighten border security. Some delaying tactic or subterfuge to conceal the abduction might be helpful.

The Complex

The complex is roughly 1200 by 650 feet. It is surrounded by a 12ft reinforced wall with barbed wire on the top. There is only one entrance for vehicles which is the main gate in the east wall. There are two smaller exits in the North and South walls which are locked and barricaded, used only in emergencies and too small for vehicles. The ground are only lit directly around the building itself and at the various entrances. The grounds are therefore fairly dark. There are two secondary buildings in the compound. One is the main barracks which houses about 3/4 of the guards. The other is a garage. Attached to the barracks are the kennels for the dogs. Dr. Boganoff is considered very valuable and is well secured. During the day the complex is very active with some 100 to 150 people on the grounds. At night there are only the five permanent resident staff members and the guards. Important points on the map of the complex are keyed below by number.

1/This is the main gate. It is wire, set in steel reinforced walls, opened only after a guard has closely checked anyone planning to enter. There is a tower here which monitors the approach to the gate and is equivalent to the towers given at #3. The gate is locked and unlocked electronically from inside the tower.

2/This is a 10ft high 18ft thick concrete barricade which quite effectively keeps vehicles from crashing the gate or even entering or leaving quickly, as they have to drive around it.

3/These are guard towers, each 24ft high and manned by 2 guards, mostly watching for external attack, but able to cover the compound as well. The top level is open, and there is a .50 calibre machine-gun swivel mounted in each. Tower guards change every 8 hours, and there is a door to each tower on the bottom level which is used for storage.

4/This two storey building houses 36 guards. The first floor is dining and storage and the second is a large dormitory with a briefing room. They serve eight hours on guard, eight as reserves, and eight off(generally sleeping. At any given time there will be two in each tower, and two patrolling the complex yard. Security for the lab building is maintained by the guards who live there. Security is fairly lax here. The door is unlocked and unguarded. Most reserve duty guards are in the basement amusing themselves and watching over the armory and communications center. The armory has 15 extra Colt Commando equivalent Submachineguns, twenty extra Makarov Pistols and plenty of ammunition. The communication center is connected to the security post in the main building and with headquarters in Tbilisi. It is always manned by at least one guard. The guards check in with HQ every four hours(4,8,12,etc) If they don't check in the reinforced column mentioned earlier will be sent out. Guards on reserve can equip themselves and reach the main building or gate in two minutes or less. Those asleep can make it in 5 minutes.

5/These are the kennels, which hold eight Dobermans/German Shepherds/Dog of your Choice, who accompany the roving guards in the yard. Each shift uses two to four guards(4 at night, 2 by day). They will bark if anyone unfamiliar or suspicious approaches the barracks.

Note that on any trip through the compound there is a fair chance of encountering wandering guards with dogs ready to fire on any intruder. The party will be spotted on a roll of 1 on 106 for every minute they are in the grounds.

6/The garage holds all of the complex's vehicles. They include three jeep equivalents, one cargo truck, and one staff car. One of the jeeps is out for repair, and the staff car has a bad steering column(minus 50% from driver's Driving ability). All of the keys are in a small cash box and all are fully gassed up. There is also a gas tank and a full selection of tools.

7/This is the entrance to the Main Building. The front door is watched by a camera and electronically locked, so it will only be opened for those recognized by the guards on duty at the Security Station. There are three floors. The lower floors are for the use of the general staff, while the upper floor is for the use of Dr. Boganoff and his assistants. The different rooms are described by their numbers below. There are surveillance cameras set up in each corridor corner, panning both directions and monitored from the security stations. There are three floors plus a basement(not mapped). The basement is several rooms, housing the generator for the complex and housing for the 12 guards who work here in 8 hour shifts. At any given time there will be 4 guards sleeping and 4 on reserve, while two will be on duty monitoring the building. There are six two man rooms down here. The guards here do not have the same stats as the others, as they are not regular army. They are from Military Security Section, and somewhat better trained. They are under the direct orders of Sasha Tamtarin(described later). There are also some extra weapons(equipment and ammunitions stored down here, as well as an intercom to the main barracks and the security posts and labs.

8/These areas are primarily for storage of equipment and materials, all kept locked. However, on the third floor they are used as dwelling space by Boganoff and his four assistants, with furnishings and some personal items. People go in and out of storage areas all day, and there are a variety of keys around.

9/These are secondary labs for various purposes. During the day there will be 3-6 people working in each, some making equipment or synthesizing materials for other

projects, or conducting experiments. Researchers here are quite well equipped, so if characters want to put together some hairbrained chemical or electrical aid, they can probably find what they need. Many things are marked in English (as that's where most high tech comes from), some items are marked in Georgian (totally incomprehensible). The labs on the third floor are for work relating directly to Dr. Boganoff's experiments.

10/There are the two Security Stations, each manned at all times in 8 hour shifts by Military Security Guards. These two rooms are unmarked with no windows. There are a set of TV screens in each, each has a full set of screens for all of the cameras in the building. Guards are sometimes rather negligent in their duty here, so it may be easier than it seems to break in. The Security Stations control the electronic locks on all of the labs and the three outer doors, however the doors are generally left unlocked for easier access. The hall cameras are fairly easy to see. One technique which might be used is to let intruders into an open lab and then lock them in until help arrives. There are alarms and intercoms to all other major areas here.

11/This is the library of the complex, with a full selection of scientific texts and reference works. It is one relatively safe and little-used room, sometimes used as a place for tired guards or workers to nap out of sight of supervisors.

12/This is the Chemical Lab, which is used by two colleagues of Dr. Boganoff borrowed (sic) from the Republic of Wallachia and Free State of Naples. They are involved in an ongoing experiment and will not notice intruders right away. It is up to the GM if you want to tell the party how to identify Dr. Boganoff, so there may be some confusion here. If they are approached the Italian will insist on escaping with them, or else will raise an alarm. The Wallachian doesn't care where he works and just wants to be left alone. He will ignore the party. Once they leave he will probably let Security know. If the intercom is out and he hasn't been abused he won't bother to tell the guards. The Chemist from Naples has no combat ability, but lots of chemical and medical knowledge. He is a bit of a pest and will get panicked in a fight.

13/This is Dr. Boganoff's lab, where he is finishing up his work on harnessing the Bogen, so he is working late nights. He has two assistants, a mousy government stoolie and his daughter Lydia Boganoff (very attractive, very loyal to her father, in support of defecting), who is also a skilled Physicist. As he hates to be disturbed he may have pulled a guard off from the post on this floor to stand outside the door of the lab and keep others out. He may also have sent away his assistants. His lab looks out on the main gate and so scaling the walls to it would be quickly spotted. The party would be better off climbing to the Chemical Lab. As a general rule, all windows open out at the top to let out fumes and limit entry. They will have to be broken. There are no windows on the first floor, as there are only storage rooms on the outer wall. Assume one window per ten feet on second and third floors.

Dr. Boganoff has forgotten all about the defection note he smuggled out of the complex. He wrote it after a love affair soured and he wanted to get as far away from 'that shameless hussy' as possible. What farther place than down under. However, now he has patched things up with 'that wonderful lady' and no longer wishes to leave, though Lydia would just as soon leave and doesn't much like her father's girlfriend (her mother is long dead). Note that Lydia could probably recreate her father's work from memory, but won't leave him willingly. He will express his sorrow that they made the trip and risked such hardships on his behalf, but he couldn't interrupt his work at this crucial point. Sorry. He will disapprove of any violence that the party has used and will become quite difficult if they try to force him to leave, and will

resort to any measures short of violence. If they have the Chemist from Naples they may be able to drug him. They should try to take or destroy any of his papers.

Note the presence of Sasha Tamtarin supervising the guards in the main building and keeping an eye on Dr. Boganoff and the other scientists. Tamtarin is a top agent for Military Security, and has been specially trained and genetically modified for loyalty, dedication, and military skills. He is very suspicious and always lurking about. He will probably be found wandering around the building, in one of the Security Stations, or in one of the labs. There should always be a chance of his wandering in. He is generally feared and disliked.

Character Statistics

Given here are statistics for notable characters mentioned in the text. Stats are not given for any of the scientists who are described above, as they will probably not engage in combat and their non-combat stats are fairly clear.

STANDARD GUARDS

AP: 60	Skills: Rifle (MAR25)	Silent Movement (50%)
FP: 60	Pistol (MAR25)	Intimidate (60%)
HP: 40	Thrust (HAR20)	Observe (50%)
AFR: 15	Parry (HOR25)	Security (65%)
MOV: 40	Dodging (MOR20)	Military Org. (45%)
HEI: 6'2"	Running (MOV50)	Communications (50%)

The standard guard carries a Georgian copy of the Colt Commando Sub-machinegun and a Makarov pistol. They also wear flak jackets. They are essentially farmboys with some training, but they know their jobs and react fairly swiftly. They do have a tendency to slack off and seek pleasure when they should be working, however, so there is always a small chance that any given guard will be absent from his post or not paying attention. This is why guards are always set to work in pairs.

MILITARY SECURITY GUARDS

AP: 70	Skills: Nightstick (HAR25)	Tactics (60%)
FP: 60	Pistol (MAR35)	Survival (75%)
HP: 50	Dodging (MOR20)	Investigate (60%)
AFR: 25	Parry (HOR25)	Security (75%)
MOV: 40	Observe (80%)	Military Org. (55%)
HEI: 6'3"	Intimidate (75%)	Communications (60%)

These guards are somewhat better trained and somewhat more thugly than those described above. They have a tendency to be brutal and rather effective at their jobs. They are loyal to their immediate commander Sasha Tamtarin above all else, and not particularly bright beyond the specific objectives which they are given. They tend to be more responsible and duty-conscious than regular guards. They carry a Makarov and a Nightstick and wear no armor.

SASHA TAMTARIN

AP: 100	Skills: Punch (HAR40)	Silent Movement (80%)
FP: 120	Pistol (MAR45)	Intimidate (120%)
HP: 90	Dodging (MOR30)	Observe (90%)
AFR: 30	Parry (HOR35)	Spatial Sense (17%)
MOV: 50	Security (90%)	Coercion (60%)
HEI: 7'1"	Running (MOV70)	Interrogate (85%)

Tamtarin is of eastern stock, bred and raised in Georgia, one of a limited number of specially altered and trained mutant soldiers with superior physical capabilities and special skills and training. He is supremely self-confident, a natural leader and commander, brutal, ruthless and efficient, allowing no obstacles to stand in his way. He is single-minded and hard to sway, and easily prone to violence as a solution. He has some psi skills, and is armed with a Makarov pistol with hollow-point bullets for extra damage. He is Chief of Security for the research project, and generally disliked, a fact which pleases him.

PASSAGE TO



CATHAY

Coming up this summer is the first companion game to *Middle Passage*, *Passage to Cathay*, which expands the world of merchant sail and piracy into the Indian Ocean, introducing new nations and powers, as well as new trading commodities and ports to open up. *Passage to Cathay* can be played either on its own or with *Middle Passage*, and the boards fit together. Counters and complete rules are provided. *Middle Passage* is an excellent multi-player board/strategy game and is still available at \$4.45 (postage included). *Passage to Cathay* is available in advance at \$4 (including postage).

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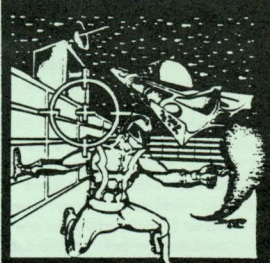
TO CHALLENGE TOMORROW CHALLENGERS

EXPANSION THREE

To Challenge Tomorrow is building a solid following and the schedule of expansion sets is rolling along nicely. TCT is the first truly adaptable role-playing game, ideal for play in any kind of background from the historical past to the speculative future. The rules are simple and progressive, with a flexible skill system. The complete rules are available for only \$8.95 including postage.

Triad (SF in the far future: \$4.95) is the first TCT expansion set and has been quite a hit. Coming up in June is *London by Night* (Adventure in Victorian London: \$5.50), our most extensive expansion to date, with loads of maps, facts and scenarios. Planned for July or August is *Challengers* (The ultimate in superhero adventure: \$3.50), with plenty of background characters and scenarios, as well as rule expansions. In the fall we'll have *Guns at Noon* (Wild West adventure: \$3), a special advance offer. Planned for release next year are *Across a Million Years* (time travel adventure), *Dark Continent* (An adventure supplement for *London by Night* dealing with Africa), *Impact* (Adventure in the wild cities of the 21st century), and *West Indies* (Pirate adventure in the 17th and 18th centuries). All of those listed with prices are available on advance order. Background and scenario material is emphasized and all are easily adaptable to other games and variants.

TO CHALLENGE TOMORROW



ROLE PLAYING
PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE
SF & HISTORICAL RULES

BRITISH INVASION

What is *DRAGONLORDS*? A society of inter-species bondage fanciers? Close, but actually it is the strangest magazine ever to come out of the inbred and deformed world of British Gaming. What other magazines could present such grimly serious articles as "Snoomen as Player Characters", "The *DRAGONLORDS* Crusaders", "Sleigh Wars", at least two letter columns, and wonderful scenarios like "I Know Where My Towel Is". *DRAGONLORDS* is indefinitely silly, and it's only available from us, so don't look for it anywhere else. You can get exposed to the *DRAGONLORDS* contamination with a sample copy for \$2 (including postage), or even invest in a subscription at \$7 for 6 issues of \$13 for 12.

hard on his heels. Both of them fell to the floor, breaking one of the bottles in the leather cape, and both of them swore. It brought them to their senses, and they suddenly realized that a full-blown confrontation was taking place in the Room. Pope Mannaluch stood at his throne, shrieking at the three men; a short, one-armed swordsman with some strange metal prosthesis; an even shorter man, practically dwarfish, wearing a silk top hat, cutaway coat, spats, and carrying an ivory-inlaid walking stick; and a man of middling height with two swords and a wide-brimmed lancer's hat. Mithrandir's eyes widened. "Girithaur! How the Hel are you?!"

The short swordsman turned, finally, and eyed the two on the floor. "I see you've lost none of your taste for contact sports, Mith," he said with a touch of humor. "That kind of thing can be risky with Greeks." Gir turned back to Mannaluch. "You just wait right there, fat stuff, I'm not done with you yet," he said, and walked away from the pope.

"**BASTARD!!**" Mannaluch screamed, and brought up his right hand. A mass of flame seemingly large enough to carbonize a mastodon erupted from a ring he wore there and arced towards Girithaur, only to be diverted into the more useful purpose of creating a new skylight by a casual flick of Pwyll's ithildin blade.

"Now Manny, you know that kind of stuff cuts no ice around here, we've already been through that," said Pwyll, gesturing towards a large hole in the wall to his right which seemed to have had a similar genesis. "It's not a big thing we're asking, you're making a fuss over nothing.

All we want to do is borrow Implotius for about a week. I'm sure the brewing process can go on without him for that long. After all, he is a Poolie, I thought you'd be glad--"

"Shut up! I'll decide what's important around here, this is my city, damn it! My city, my brewmeister, my religion, my beer!" Mannaluch was raging at his father, his entire body tense and surrounded by a nimbus of dancing flame.

"Ah, Manny," Ned interrupted the tirade as Mannaluch paused for breath. "Don't you think Gil baby might have something to say about that 'my religion' stuff, hmm?"

"**SHUT UP!**" Mannaluch swung on Ned, his right hand twitching with restrained power. "I'll blast you to atoms, you runt! I'll burn your bones to...Gahkkk..." He seemed to choke on his words, his eyes bulging.

"Not nice, fat boy," chided Ned. "Shouldn't use words like runt around little bastards like me. We have a nasty habit of making people eat them." Ned paused thoughtfully as Mannaluch fell to his knees, still choking on the small ball of material which Ned had conjured in his

mouth. "I ought to let you chew on that for a while, you blubbery weasel, but Pwyll would never forgive me. Breathe!"

Pwyll held Mannaluch's shoulders as he gasped in the fresh air. "Manny, calm down, son, we're your friends. I'm your father." He helped the younger man to his feet. "Does everything always have to be so violent for you? Son, I came here to see you, not just to get Implotius. I miss you, son, your mother misses you, too. She's terribly proud of you."

Mannaluch slowly nodded. "Yes, you're right, dad." He looked up, and his eyes lit on Ned, who was watching Girithaur shake down Mithrandir for the last two bottles of wine. "You're absolutely right. It does have to be so violent!" His right arm swung about and caught Pwyll full in the chest. The swordmaster was hurled off the dias by the terrible strength of the pyromancer, who then thrust both arms savagely at Ned. "Choke me now, runt!" he crowed, and Ned was catapulted across the basalt floor of the throne room by Mannaluch's telekinetic blast. The high priest laughed with triumph and called to Pwyll: "Stand where you are, father! I am master here! You know how I spell relief: G-I-L-R-O-D!! Don't force my hand!" Pwyll stood, his face a smoldering cloud of dark anger, and slowly and purposefully slipped Tashorikar from its sheath, the ithildin blade appearing faintly in the moonlight which came through the rent in the ceiling. "If it is to come to that, son, that you would send you god against your father, then so it must be." He drew his flickering energy sword from its cloth bindings on his back and started up the low steps to the throne where Mannaluch stood. "Your blood will be on my hands before my life is Gilrod's, I warrant."

"Chill it out, dad, just having a little fun with Ned." Mannaluch grinned his first honest smile of the evening and let Ned down to the floor quite gently. "I'd never bring the Big Guy down on you, you know that. Besides, he'd have my ass for waking him up." He turned to Ned, who was watching this emotional chameleonism with arched-eyebrow interest. "No hard feelings, Ned? I could never get really angry with the guy who saved my life when I was a kid, who used to conjure flies for me to pull the wings off of, who used to steal my dad's brandy, now could I?"



He turned to confront Girithaur, who had come storming over to Pwyll's defence, Mithrandir in tow trying to explain that "It's just his way of having some fun, the poor sick shit."

Girithaur stomped up the steps and braced himself right in front of Mannaluch. "Okay, kid, let's deal. You screwed me once, and made me grovel. But that's over. We've all had our fun today, and we're even. No more extortion, no more blackmail, no more 'you've got to do it my way or we won't play.' We're equals now." He began to pace. "You can forget a percentage cut, we won't even consider it. We'll want Implotius and Mith for at least a week, and we want a tour of the brewery as well. Do you want a favor? We're headed up Fien M'Coel's way, anything you need done around there? Can we owe you? Come on, quit stalling!" He stopped pacing and turned his gimlet eye on Mannaluch. "Or are you just slow, hmmm?"

Mannaluch retained self-control with a visible effort and spoke. "I suppose you can owe me. Ordinarily I'd never let a bunch of ragtags like you get something on credit, but I did get such an enormous sum of money out of you for a pair of cheap sunglasses that I almost feel guilty. Almost." He smiled as he watched Girithaur grimace. "Yes, I built a beautiful marble bath with that money, you should see it sometime, Girithaur... Now off with you, I have to get some sleep so I can properly harangue the hobbits for letting you all in here!" He snapped his fingers and disappeared in a soundless blaze of multi-colored flame.

"Well, let's get humpin', fellas!" Girithaur spun to face the others. "Can you pony up another dragon, Ned? I kind of like flying in style."

"I can make with a dragon, can you make with the marks?" Ned jangled a small leather purse. "You guys owe me 15,283 Ptolemeias Marks for services so far. I want to see some cash on the batrelhead pretty soon. Pwyll's good for it, I can always badger it out of Rhiannon, but you; Egyptian types are notorious for—"

"**Dragon! Now!** No more horseshit! We'll pay you, you misbegotten Elvish **gnat**, now lay on a luxury dragon!" Pwyll's long suffering patience had finally snapped. He grabbed the surprised conjuror's silken lapels and shook him at arm's length. "I need a **beer!** A Fien M'Coel beer! And I need it **now!** Get it in gear, Neddikins, or my thirst just might unhinge my reason and natural good charm, and we wouldn't want that, would we?"

Ned shrugged, not an easy feat while being held by the shoulders, and a dragon suddenly appeared in the room, a most odd dragon. It was normal in most aspects, but five large armchairs appeared to grow out of its back along with what looked like—"

"A bar." Girithaur seemed struck with silent wonder.

"That's right, boys, the luxury widebody, complete with lounge. Nothing but the best, since Pwyll's paying for it! All aboard!" Ned waved his arm in invitation, and they all trooped on board. The beast took flight and ned guided it up through the still-smoking hole in the ceiling. His laugh could be heard as the dragon circled the dome and headed north: "Hi-yo Lockhead, awayyy!"

Shigure limped painfully down the hills from Lancaster, where Nam had sent him to find out what was going on with the beer. He dreaded Nam's reaction to the news that Pwyll and the Soldier of the Sun had gone north to Fien M'Coel's holdings. The lizard had been almost uncontrollable on the harrowing six hour trip from Ptolemeias, practically mad with the effects of the speed potion Nam had forced Shigure to feed the animal. Shigure's bum was raw from the jolting punishment it had recieved; Nam had refused to buy another saddle.

"Where the hell have you been? It's been almost two and a half hours since you left! Why are you walking?" Nam spotted the second-rate samurai as he stumbled into the light of the campfire.

"Master, you only gave me enough flying ointment to fly to the city, not to fly back as well," Shigure whined. "I had to walk the whole way down here, Master—"

"**WHAT!** Swine! You were sure they were going to Lancaster! I'll kill you, reeking afterbirth from a jackass!" Nam surged to his feet, but Shigure spoke quickly.

"They were here, Master, and about beer, but they have gone on. They have flown north, to the holdings of Fien M'Coel." His words did not soothe Nam, but at least served to mollify him.

Nam paced swiftly. "There is only one thing to do, swinish hireling. We must be at Fien M'Coel's in time to catch them on their way home. Saddle the lizard!"

"Master! I'll never catch him!" Shigure looked to where the lizard, still in the grip of the speed, ran in aimless patterns at the end of a fifty-foot tether. A glare from Nam sent him on his way, reflecting ruefully that he might have left the feeblethink potion in effect and saved himself all of his present problems. Someday he'd get a new job...



IN THE SPECULUM

BOOKS

THE ANUBIS GATES (PB)

Tim Powers (Ace)

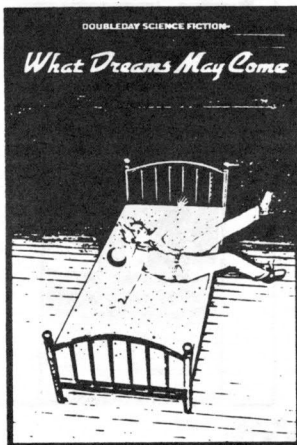
You've probably already heard of this book, as it's been out for a while and had rave reviews, but I'm not going to miss this opportunity to flog what I consider to be the best fantasy/sf novel written in the 1980s. This is without a doubt one of the most enjoyable and unusual novels I've ever read, demonstrating a depth of imagination and characterization which are enviable. What's most interesting about the book is that like Powers' earlier work *Drawing of the Dark*, *The Anubis Gates* seems incomplete and awkward at points, but the overall impression is one of polished mastery. Phrases and sections seem awkward and confusing at times, yet as a whole everything works quite well.

This is a time-travel novel, but not like any you've seen before. It is the tale of Professor Brendan Doyle who trips back to the early 1800s at the whim of a mystical, eccentric millionaire who is searching for immortality. The rather timid and impractical Doyle is plunged into a complex network of plots and counter-plots and is forced to develop a personality and purpose for living. The plot rebounds with twists and divergent elements, all woven in a fast-moving, sometimes bewildering tapestry. I can't really go into any detail, as it could detract from reading the book, but there are lots of surprises and a wonderful sense of the atmosphere of the times. Powers does an excellent job of mixing diverse elements of magic, mythology, history and literature in for mystical and enchanting result somewhere between operetta and epic.

From the standpoint of a reader I can recommend no book more highly. Powers' sense of plot, character and action is marvelous and he brings history and fantasy together in a style which is extremely enjoyable. Read this book. Powers writes slowly so get started now so you'll have time to re-read it a few times before his next book.

standpoint, but both unfamiliar and realistically developed so that it has a feeling of legend rather than fiction.

The characters in *Imaro II* are well developed and the situations are as unusual as the background. I'd recommend finding the first book, reading this one and waiting expectantly for the next one, which should bring the culmination of Imaro's destiny and the resolution of his identity problems.



WHAT DREAMS MAY COME (HB:\$12)

Marly Wade Wellman (Doubleday)

This new novel marks a change of sorts for Wellman. All of his recent novels have concerned his character John the Balladeer, but he now moves on to develop a new character in the first book of what seems to be a promising series growing out of a group of stories published early in his career, collected recently by Carcosa Press in *Lonely Vigils*. This novel deals with an adventure of John Thunstone, an occult buff and wealthy bon vivant from America as he is travelling in England. His adventures center around the small town of Claines, where Thunstone goes to observe the odd customs of the natives as they maintain curious pagan traditions spurred on by a local squire with ties to hidden powers and ulterior motives.

Like most of Wellman's novels this is a case of a strong central character disrupting the plans of assorted evil forces and persons armed only with a few bits of white magic and an indomitable will. There are a lot of nice ideas presented here, not startlingly new, but well written and constantly interesting. Thunstone is a good character, with a few flaws and an engaging personality, and unlike some of Wellman's books, the secondary characters here are interesting and well fleshed out. It is also nice to see Wellman working successfully with a topic other than John the Balladeer, maintaining his general themes in a new setting and cultural background. Interesting though Appalachia is, a bit of variety is nice.

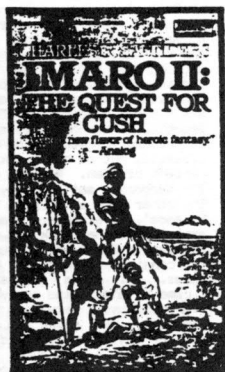
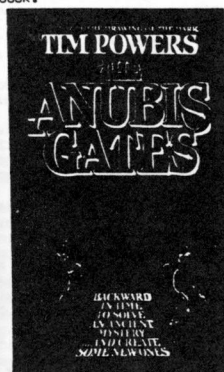
All in all I'd recommend this book quite highly. It is pleasant to read, artfully written and quite good overall, showing a pleasant flexibility in a writer who is just building the reputation he has deserved for many years.

ON A PALE HORSE (HB:\$13)

Piers Anthony (Del Rey)

It's a pity, but it seems we have nothing but good books to review this time around. I can't see how Piers Anthony maintains his production schedule and still produces the occasional excellent book. If you overlook his undead *Kanth* series and a few aberrations, Anthony has a surprisingly large number of astonishingly imaginative and original books, despite his supersonic rate of production. Most of what Anthony is turning out these days is workmanlike serial material, but *On a Pale Horse* is the first of a series which promises to be more than hack work. It shows more promise and originality than most of Anthony's work since *Cluster*.

This is a novel about Death, with a capital 'D', because Death is personified here and the central character, one of several archetypes who dominate a future society which is reduced to a struggle between good and evil. It is a fascinating look at several aspects of the human psyche, and Death is an interesting character as he develops personality and force of will throughout the



IMARO II: THE QUEST FOR CUSH (PB)

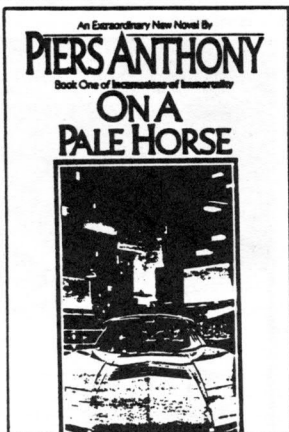
Charles R. Saunders (Dial)

I had to pick among a number of books to do this review, and though I had several excellent candidates, I picked this book because it deserves attention the most. I don't know how many of you out there read *Imaro* when it came out about two years ago, or how many are familiar with Charles R. Saunders from his work in *DARK FANTASY*, *DRAGONTALES* or other small press magazines, but by god, if you have an interest in progressive areas of Dark Fantasy or Heroic Fantasy, this is what you should be reading.

This is the second in a series which is clearly going to continue. The series centers around Imaro, a god-like youth chosen to save a world based on African mythology from the invasion of alien gods. The first book was a bit choppy, as it was assembled from a number of old *Imaro* short stories, but this book is better integrated and has a nice flow to it. In this book Imaro has matured, and rather than becoming the standard sword-swinging swashbuckler, he is a real person. He has ideas as well as muscles (though he is often judiciously silent), and best of all, he has real emotions, trauma, and internal tensions, which form the cognitive core of this book. *Imaro II* is about a journey, but it is also about a journey within Imaro's spirit and his desire to understand himself. Adventure is plentiful here but it is well tempered by ideas and imagination. Particularly attractive is the setting, which is great from a fantasy

book. Anthony's work is always strong on ideas, but this is one of his first works in which characters are really well defined as more than cut-out figures, and writing skill, ideas, characterization, and wit all work together for a wonderful result. This is a charmingly macabre work very much in the tradition of Anthony Boucher right in the middle of the gray area known as Science Fantasy.

Typically, this is the first in a series to be called *Incarnations of Immortality*, and it seems the other books will deal with the other major archetypal incarnations and their role in the struggle between Heaven and Hell. This is the best book from Anthony in a long time and I recommend it without qualification.



THE BONES OF ZORA (HB:\$17)

L. Sprague de Camp
Catherine C. de Camp (Phantasia)

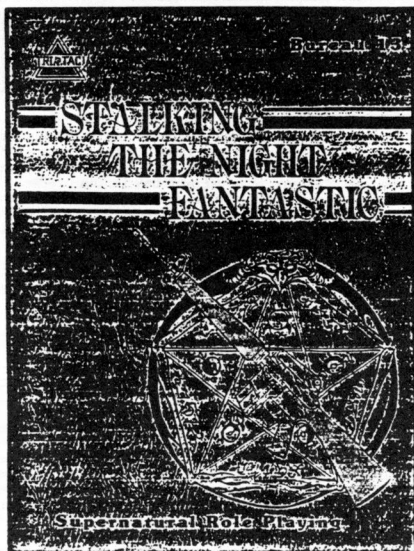
This is a collaboration from L. Sprague de Camp and his wife Catherine Crook de Camp. I don't know the exact nature of the collaboration, but it seems to have worked out well, bringing de Camp's style and subject matter more up to date, continuing the trend seen in other recent novels. De Camp has had a long and distinguished career, and now seems to be going through a period of growth in versatility of style if not subject matter.

The Bones of Zora is the latest book in the Krishna series, which de Camp has been adding to on and off for at least 25 years. This story concerns the expeditions of two competing Terrestrial Paleontologists who are searching for the 'Origins of the Species' on Krishna. There are the usual run-ins with all manner of bizarre natives, and two of the best ongoing characters, the guide Fergus Reith and the sociologist Alicia Dyckman play a major role. This novel is about love, faith and intolerance, and deals with these topics surprisingly well, using examples in an alien society to make observations by implication, rather than preaching philosophy. It is both an enjoyable and edifying read.

This may not be a great or world shaking work, but it is a model of how to create an alien society which is believable, detailed and fun. I'd recommend it as a fun, quick read.



GAMES & AIDS



TRI-TAC GAMES

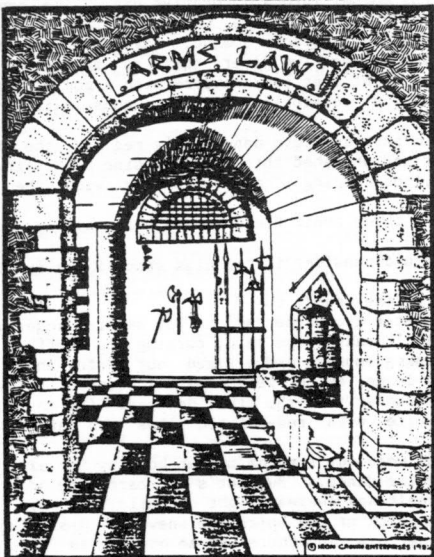
POB 61, Madison Heights, MI 48071

Tri-Tac Games is an offshoot of the Timeline people from Detroit. At ORIGINS I picked up their latest release *Stalking the Night Fantastic*, as well as *Fringeworthy* and a few of their mini-games. *Stalking the Night Fantastic* is a game of 'supernatural role-playing' in the 1980s and 1990s. When I first looked at it I thought I was looking at Call of Cthulhu meets modern times, but I was somewhat mistaken. Basically, players play members of 'Bureau 13', a secret agency formed to explore and combat the supernatural while not alerting the general public and causing mass panic. Have you ever wanted to take on undead with automatic weapons? If so, here's your chance. The system is quite well done and lots of fun. As with any system, a good deal of it relies on the GM. This is especially true here, as experience points are not given on how many creatures you slay or some other objective criteria, but on how quickly and quietly you solve the current problem. Not all of the supernatural creatures are dangerous and some may prove to be helpful. One of the other nice aspects of the system is 'Harrison and Friends', an example character run through the rules to explain how they work and show them in action. It is similar to *RunesQuest's* 'Rurik's Saga'. Another plus is the consistent sense of humor which runs through the rules. This makes for easier and more enjoyable reading. I came to understand everything much better as a result. STNF also has a very nice combat system (though it is a bit complex). STNF gives you everything you need to run it and you don't need a good world to run in as it is set in the modern day. A good buy.

Second on the list from Tri Tac is *Fringeworthy* a 'science fiction role-playing game'. *Fringeworthy* deals with the discovery in the Arctic of transfer portals to other realms. There is a catch, only one person in 100,000 is able to use this pathway to other realms called 'Fringes'. These are, you guessed it, the *Fringeworthy*. The transfer portals allow access to a series of pathways to alternate dimensions, different planetary systems and new stars. The areas to explore are endless. There is one problem, there are hostile forces out there, some of which can also use the pathways. It is up to the players to explore these worlds for the possible benefit of Earth. One of the best aspects of this and STNF is that they are skill based systems that let the player design the type of character he wants. As the number of *Fringeworthy* are limited, many of them are old or very young, and they come from all areas of society, so any type of character can be played. Another good buy.

Tri Tac has one other major system, *Faster than Light*, which has been out for a year or more. I haven't been able to get hold of a copy as yet (store distribution is rather poor), but if its offspring are any measure, it is bound to be good. One further point about Tri Tac Games, don't be put off by the quality of the printing or by the fact that it isn't boxed or shrink wrapped. As with most new companies, it took all they had to get their systems into some sort of print. I have been assured that the new print run is much improved. My copy of STNF is much better than the earlier published *Fringeworthy*.

Iri Tac also puts out a series of mini-games, including **Monster Squash**, **Mech Squash**, and the **Duck** series. These games are quick to learn, fun to play, but in most cases, incredibly silly. **Monster Squash** and **Mech Squash** involve creating beings of clay to do combat with other clay beings. Considering myself a civilized person, I refused to participate in the heartless squashing and disfiguring of clay creatures. That didn't seem to bother the over thirty other 'squashers' who were hard at it until they virtually threw them out when the convention closed. Both games were very popular as was the **Duck** series, so much so that they were sold out of two of the trilogy when I tried to get copies. It deals with invading armies of extraterrestrial(extradimensional) **Duck Hordes**. These games appealed to me for I hate ducks, and can think of nothing better than wiping out hordes of them(I had a bad experience with ducks in my early **RunesQuest** experience and now exterminate them berserkly on sight). The only copy I could get was **Pteryduckty** which dealt with dinosaur-like flying ducks who destroyed a large portion of our airforce. The game is a poor man's **Ace of Aces**. All are very inexpensive and ideal if you want a simple, humorous(silly) game to play in a short time. (Eric Olson)



IRON CROWN ENTERPRISES
POB 1605, Charlottesville, VA 22902

A review of ICE has been long overdue and has been delayed due to a work overload and the lack of certain ICE products which have now been acquired. For those of you who don't know ICE, they are the folks who advertise full page on the first page and back cover of **DRAGON**. They are an up and coming fantasy gaming company. At this point they've more or less completed their role-playing system **Rolemaster**, have obtained the rights to **Tolkien's Middle Earth** and are publishing campaign aids for it, and are moving on into other areas. The core of ICE's world is their fantasy system **Rolemaster** which consists of five parts, **Arms Law**, **Claw Law**, **Spell Law**, **Character Law**, and **Campaign Law**.

Arms Law is the core of the system, presenting combat mechanics and basic rules with a fairly impressive amount of detail. From the top, **Arms Law** represents hand and missile attacks based on a percentile die roll modified by your offensive bonus and your opponents defensive bonus. Each weapon(there are thirty given in the system) has it's own hit/damage chart printed on stiff parchment which makes it more durable than standard paper. Each weapon is shown with its strengths and weaknesses as modified for ICE's twenty different armor types. There are no D6 type damage rolls. All is determined by a single roll, both whether you hit and what damage you do. The only other roll you would make would come if there was a fumble or critical hit. This is realistic, as the more precise your blow, the more damage you do and should do. If you hit in some systems you can still roll a 1 for damage no matter how on target you are. The main problem here is the vastness of the array of charts in combat, and it is sometimes a bit cumbersome and hard to follow. **Arms Law** tries hard to be realistic in presenting combat, but the realism is hampered by the somewhat arbitrary nature of the combat charts, which tend to produce either repetitive results or an occasional disconcertingly devastating critical. **Arms Law** is realistic in that it allows characters to specialize in a particular weapon, but they may have allowed that realism to go too far in shaping the system so that the system is more realistic than playable. There are some nice aspects to the system. It allows you to divert some of your offensive bonus to add to your

defense, allowing players to choose for themselves how much they want to take away from their offense to protect themselves. You can for example forget entirely about defense and become a killing machine; however, you have to realize that it works both ways, and no defense will mean a short life with the lethality of the critical system. **Arms Law** also includes a percentile based maneuver chart based on the type of maneuver attempted. The maneuver charts are also percentile based and allow for injuries when attempting astonishing maneuvering feats. Basically, **Arms Law** provides most of what you need for combat in a workable if slow system.

Claw Law is the 'monster' supplement to **Arms Law**. **Claw Law** covers the various attack modes of animals/creatures and their various chances to hit and damage done. Also included in **Claw Law** are tables for unarmed combat(martial arts). All the charts are printed on the same hard parchment and completes all of the elements for any type of combat. Both are adaptable in many ways to some of the more popular fantasy systems, and conversion rules for **AD&D** are already provided. Both flow fairly easily and the critical charts give the basis of a rudimentary hit location system, as wounds are given to specific areas of the body. This is short of a real hit location system as used in **Ysgarth**, but it should be fairly easy to improve it by adapting a hit location system to **Rolemaster**, if the criticals are modified for the area hit. It would be pretty tough to disembowel someone with a face hit.

Spell Law details fifteen separate magical classes and a wide variety of spells that are specific to each class. Spell use is divided into three types: **Charming**, **Essence**, and **Mentalism**. Basically, **Charming** deals with the use of power from a particular source of power. In this case a god or gods. **Essence** is the power native to the land and every object, to borrow a term from George Lucas, essence is the 'force'. Magic users who have their power based in **Essence** mold the power around an object. The final type of magic is **Mentalism**, which is basically the power of the individual's mind and the power within us. Spell casters in **Spell Law** are usually restricted to magic of one basic type. There are, however, **Hybrid Spell** casters who can use spells from two areas of magic, but are limited in power and ability. Only so many spells are available to **Hybrid Spell** casters. Spell casters learn spell lists. By this I mean that they research spells of a similar type/source. I am not an expert on the magic system and have not had time to completely review it or run all the aspects I'd like to, but what I have done so far has worked fairly well. However, I must disagree with the claim of 2000 spells. In reality, there are only about 100-130 spells modified to fit each class.

Character Law ties everything together. This is the one piece I was missing, and it is the most important part of the whole series. **Character Law** clarified many of my earlier questions about the system. It was also rather logically laid out and has a fairly better **Quality**. **Character Law** also lays out the basis for a possible later skill list which could make better rounded characters. They already have skills for combat and adventuring, but secondary areas which are quite important in practical areas as well as thief skills have not been provided. Basically, **Character Law** sets up the basis of a fantasy system which uses skill based characters with an interesting type of characteristic allocation system.

The remaining book, **Campaign Law** was only recently released and I haven't had a chance to do much with it, but it seems to be a useful aid for developing campaigns, with some of the background information and unifying ideas which are missing from the earlier releases in the system. At this point **Rolemaster** is complete but lacks the extras that accompany the older systems. As the system evolves, I am sure that they will be provided. **Rolemaster** needs some work, but it provides a firm base from which to build. This is nice as it allows you to build rules around it that you want, not dictated to you. It reminds me of a more advanced offshoot of **Original D&D** before the coming of the now famous **Gygax**.

New or **Middle Earth**. ICE has full tilt into adapting **Tolkien** for fantasy role playing. Already they have an overall map of **Middle Earth** and two larger scale section maps with more to follow. Without a doubt, ICE is developing some of the best graphics in the business. Their maps are beautiful. They have also finished several adventures, including **Angmar**, **Umbar**, **Ardor**, and **Isengard**. All are playable with **Rolemaster** or **AD&D** with conversion possible to many other systems.

So, now that we all know what ICE is, what is the final word, you say? If you don't currently use any fantasy system **Rolemaster** may be a little difficult for you. If you are dissatisfied with your current system and want to change, **Rolemaster** might be worth trying, as it is very different from most run of the mill systems, though after a while you may want to move on to a smoother and more integrated system. If you are looking to adapt parts of the **Rolemaster** system to an existing campaign, my suggestion is to try **Arms Law**. Out of all of the individual components it is probably the easiest to adapt. It may not be the ideal system for you, but it is an interesting change. I'm very pleased with the **Middle Earth** products I have, and I think you might also find them useful. As I said before, ICE is on the rise, and has built a solid base, and I am more and more impressed with them with each new product I see. (Eric Olson)

JAQUEREL

SINGED BY THE PITS OF RUATH

JANET FOX

A party at the house of the Jeweller Hmfft was an occasion to bestir the rich and the powerful in the Kingdom between Two Rivers. The immense Hmfft and his rotund wife Chassy knew all the arcana of meat and drink, the ambiance that would make a success of a party held in the sewars beneath Xandru, let alone in the sprawling architectural monster that was their luxurious home. In this place the thief Jaquereel was always a little awed by the size and ornateness that made her own pleasant villa seem almost austere by comparison. She tried a little spiced hummingbird tongue, but surreptitiously put the remainder of the morsel into a decorative urn. She wore a loose blouse and skirt of many colors in the style fancied by the Casca, a people of far wanderings and rich traditions. She was masked by a simple black domino, for Hmfft's parties were always masquerades. It was said in the Kingdom between Two Rivers that so successful and vivacious were the parties of the jeweller that one might meet and converse with a god or goddess unaware. Jaquereel was doubtful of it, though it was a possibility as the gods existed and sometimes condescended to take corporeal form.

Between constant bouts of dancing that made him puff and turn dangerously red in the face, the Jeweller Hmfft came over to where Jaquereel sat and whumped into a seat beside her with the aplomb of a beached kraken. "What? Not mingling, not dancing, not conversing with the very cream of Xandru society?"

"And later the Assassins will begin to brag and throw their feerols, and obstreperous guests will be cast into fishponds."

"If you were only drunk enough by that time, you'd consider it the high spot of the evening," said Hmfft.

"I'm considering that very seriously. It may be the remedy to—"

A reeling madman, dressed appropriately in a jester's costume came to bow before Jaquereel and offer her a dance. "Here's a prime example of what I meant," she said, turning to Hmfft, then protesting profanely and she was hauled into a drunken embrace and dragged out onto the dance floor in a none-too-stately version of the stately dance being performed. Jaquereel struggled good-naturedly to be free amid curious looks and laughter from the other dancers. The mask that pressed near her face was grotesque, powdery white with red-painted lips and an immense downturning nose.

"So far it's been funny...I guess," she panted, worn out for the moment both by her exertions to be free and to follow his outrageous version of the dance. "But let's not carry the joke too far. I'm armed." He was scarcely taller than herself and seemed slight of build, but his hold on her was too secure to be broken without a nasty trick or two which she knew but hesitated to use at the moment. She wore a dagger strapped to her hip, and there was an opening in the side of her skirt through which to draw it. The Kingdom between Two Rivers was a society yet young enough that a party of leading citizens might at any time dissolve into a brawl.

Now they progressed in their struggling way across the dance floor and out into an open courtyard where a green crystalline moon shone down, its reflection precise on the dark surface of a decorative pool. As they neared its edge, Jaquereel managed to break her partner's grip with a sudden upward thrust of her forearms, but this movement overbalanced her sending her backward into the pool. She came up spitting water and trailing a frond of rotting waterweed. With a salute to some of the other guests who'd gathered to watch these antics, the jester jumped into the pool. Their laughter stopped when they saw the blade in Jaquereel's hand. The jester back pedalled, skidded on water weed and went completely under. The moment it took him to surface cooled her temper a little and she sheathed her weapon.



The onlookers applauded her performance, offered helping hands to haul the two of them dripping and shivering from the cold water, then turned back to see what else of interest might be happening at the party.

Jaquereel reached over and grasped the false nose, lifting the mask. "I suppose you deserve a look at least. My name is Villik. What do you think?"

Wordlessly, she pulled the mask back down over his face as if covering something unpleasant, though the face wasn't that bad, if a little sharp featured and wry of expression.

"You can't stay out here," said Hmfft, hovering near like a captive balloon. "The night air is cold. since you're the first guests to recieve baptism, I can offer dry clothing at least."

Hmfft bid his servants set up two screens of painted silk in an alcove, and brought the dry clothing he'd promised.

"Is it your custom to reach for a knife any time someone annoys you?" asked Villik from behind his screen. Jaquereel tossed the wet skirt over the top of hers with a splat.

"I didn't use it, did I?" She laughed as Villik appeared in a short-trousered servingman's costume, epaulets on each shoulder. "I think the fool's garb suited you better, but maybe you can earn a few coins at the pary by carrying a tray."

A few seconds later it was Villik's turn to laugh as Jaquereel emerged wearing one of Chassy's capacious blouses. She wound a scarf about her waist as a belt, and the garment served as a very short dress. Villik had stopped laughing and was giving an appraising stare to her legs aand the portion of her shoulders and breasts left bare by the blouse's wide neckline. When she moved toward the door of the room he stepped into her way.

"I think the party has afforded us all the entertainment it can for the moment," he said. "Neither one of us need return to it. I'm sure we can do better on our own."

Jaquereel stepped forward, stiffening her fingers and contemplating what spot on his anatomy might be suitably vulnerable, but moving toward him, she looked into his eyes. In the semi-dark they glowed quietly with amber light.

She ended by leaving the party with him, that much she knew, but all else became a distortion, a waking dream. It seemed they had a bottle they drank from until they half-floated down the night streets of Xandru. She thought that at one point a watch patrol chased them for something they had done, and they escaped, giggling, into the sewers where all was corrupt dampness, the monotonous splashing of water and the high pitched eerie singing of the sbbali that were said to inhabit these labyrinths below the city.

She remembered the importunate hands and other intimate sensations, as they embraced beneath the cold stare of the idols in the open-air temple of Annon Shri(was that memory reliable?). The penalty for profaning the temple was thirty strokes, but the gods themself didn't seem to mind.

She awoke under the large translucent ribbed leaf of a parasol tree in a public park. Villik snored beside her, and the morning watch was undoubtedly due at any moment. She shook Villik by the shoulders, and though he blinked and ran his hands through sandcolored hair 'til it was thoroughly touseled, she had the sudden impression that he hadn't been asleep at all, that something looked out at her through his face, something that had no need for sleep. "What are you?" she asked. "What did you do? How did we get here?"

He shrugged maddeningly. "Another boring party. You should be flattered I decided to rescue you from it."

"I didn't ask to be drugged or ensorceled and dragged halfway across the city doing Ruath knows what, and to end by being carried off as loiterers by the morning watch."

"We'll be long gone by the time the patrol goes by. Or perhaps, we don't wich to stir, they won't see us at all." He winked.

Jaquereel sprang to her feet and began to walk rapidly, searching for the route that would ultimately lead her to the Street of Nine Tigers and home. She thought for a moment that she'd left Villik behind, but after a few moments he bounded up alongside her holding a crusty loaf of fresh-baked bread. "I stole us some breakfast."

"Stole?" said Jaquereel disapprovingly.

"Stole. Half the night it seemed you regaled me with long boring anecdotes about your own exploits."

"I don't remember it, if I did," began Jaquereel and fell silent a moment because she only half remembered doing other things. "Anyway, I'd never steal bread from some poor baker on the Street of Temporary Setbacks," she said.

"But, of course, I have no proof that your stories were any more than...just stories."

Breaking the bread in two and inhaling its wonderful aroma, Jaquereel handed Villik a portion, then wondered whether whatever-he-was would have any more need for food than he had for sleep, but he took the proffered morsel and began to eat it greedily, allaying her fears. They walked companionably down a dusty street lined with white-bearded hoar oaks. "Why should I require your approbation?" she asked. "My exploits surely speak for themselves."

"Of course your reputation would be made beyond all quibbling were you to steal a certain gem I know of," said Villik.

Jaquereel saw the bait, and suspected the snare, yet fel confident enough to dare it anyway. "There's no gem beyond my reach."

"The Eye of Envy, a fabulous black-emerald in the shape of an-eye, crusted with diamonds and set into a fillet of hammered gold. They say he who wears it is able to see any approaching danger in time to avoid it--surely an appealing trinket for a thief who has many enemies. But no, it's impossible, even a master jewel thief would not dare the Chill Marsh far in the Westlands. No one merely mortal would have the temerity to enter the domain of lord Kharon, and it is he who owns the gem. None may wrest it from him."

"None?"

"None."

"Not even by stealth and guile?"

"Not even by the thief Jaquereel."

"Would you consider a bet?"

"If you fail and are lucky enough to return alive, you must be my bond slave for a year."

"Done. And when I succeed and when I return, you must humiliate yourself every day for a year by jumping naked into the fountain before Annon Shri, calling on the gods mercy."

"Agreed. An oath on it."

"By whatever god you choose; on that matter I'm indifferent."

"By Ruath, then." They returned the way they had come until they reached the Street of Forty-Seven Smiths, a grimy, soot-blackened precinct in which echoed the unending cacophony of hammers. The frightful image of Ruath looked at home on this street, gritty smoke wreathing a horrid face of blackened iron with little piggish eyes and upthrusting tusks."

"What an ugly thing," said Jaq under her breath, the smiths' clamor masking the insult from Ruath's ears, for it was never wise to malign a god in the Kingdom between Two Rivers.

"Look how he welcomes you," said Villik. "Did you know, they say that all thieves, when they die are cast into the Pits of Ruath."

"Well, I guess I'll find that out...when I die," said Jaquereel in a tone that indicated she considered that event far off if not downright unlikely.

"And when I return from the Marsh, where shall I find you?" asked Jaquereel when they had completed the ritual and now emerged into silence and clearer air.

"If you return, I'll seek you out to collect my winnings." He left her, whistling jauntily, and she watched him intently. As he turned a corner, out of her view, the whistling was faintly blown back, yet in some way she suspected that that faint sound was all that was left of him. She straightened the large blouse that had flopped askew down over one shoulder with a mechanical gesture, her mind on preparing for the journey. There was something wrong about Villik, yet she didn't think he'd lied about the stone. "A black-emerald," she thought, her mind gloating on the dark green shards of reflected light in its depths.

Jaquereel made her way carefully through the Chill Marsh. She had been forced to leave her witch-mare behind at the last settlement, the earth here growing too insubstantial to bear a horse's weight. The bare branches of angular trees interlaced above her head, patches of phosphorescence giving the trunks a diseased look. She cursed as she misread the trail, going in to the knees in gluey, ill-smelling mud. Some bird or lost soul gave an eerie cry that was echoed further and further away through the trees wreathed in wisps of fog. At last after long travel, she tired and slept by the crumbling wood of a dead and fallen tree, though from time to time she shivered awake to hear the furtive snap of a twig deep in the brush. She warmed herself with the thought of her triumphant return, and how she'd gloat watching Villik leap into the fountain, though perhaps she'd be merciful and make it only a year.

Morning came dimly through the miasmic fogs, and she forced herself to rise and go on. When her whole aching body despaired of ever finding anything but treacherous pools of muc underfoot, she emerged onto solid ground. Ahead of her was a sparse wood of trees the like of which she'd never seen before, char-black of trunk, as though they'd gone through some great fire, yet still living enough to put out fragile, brittle leaves of gray translucence. Even the grass, as it grew from the ground, was leached of color, pale and ashen, and the very beasts that roamed the wood had a starveling, skeletal look. She heard the same eerie cry she'd first heard in the swamp and saw arched over the emaciated body of a deer, a black bird with glittering scales instead of feathers and wings like black tattered silk. It dipped its head toward the carcass and tore away a long strip of darkened flesh.

"A fine domain to rule over," she said to herself with a shiver. "One might more happily fall on one's own blade." She travelled on, feeling a torpidity as if the grayness of the place were seeping into her body like a drug. Hearing a noise, she quickly hid in a thicket by the roadside, and a troop of mounted men rode by. They wore armor of some blue-dark metal, the helmets having an outthrust tusked underjaw that gave them a grotesque look. From what she could see of hands and unhelmeted heads they were cadaverous men with deepset glittering eyes. The horses they rode seemed barely more than skin-covered skeletons, ribs and leg bones apparent beneath dusty hides, yet they moved with an inexplicable vigor, pranced, curved bony necks against the pull of the rein.

They went by without noting her, but seeing them made her more cautious. Keeping a safe distance she followed them until she came in sight of a large dwelling of stone, given an ancient look by gray thorny vines that grew everywhere upon it, penetrating the crumbling stone in places. All was reflected in a dark, oily lake whose water scarcely moved. Towers jutted spectacularly from the overgrown masses of vine into a pale sky (even the sky was drained of its color here), towers that looked empty, as if the wind might use them as pipes, to play mad music on stormy nights. As she drew closer to the place, she saw more of the black-garbed soldiers, bivouacked around the dwelling. Some sat about desultorily; others clashed in mock combat. While she stood near, spying, a patrol returned, driving before it several prisoners, weighed down with chains. The captives seemed to have been reduced to a state of complete docility, looking neither right nor left.

The party stood waiting a moment before the dwelling, and after a time, the great doors swung open. The prisoners were driven inside, and to Jaquereel the slamming of those huge iron doors had the ring of the sealing of a tomb.

She shivered and entertained thoughts of turning back, but when she pictured Villik's mocking face, she knew she had to go on.



When the night fell and the quarrelsome soldiers had played out their last noisy games of chance and the fires had burned to salmon colored embers, Jaq crept about the structure in dim light (even the moon's green glow was tempered olive-gray) until she found a tall char tree growing close to a narrow window. She judged the size of the aperture and wasn't quite sure she could get through it, but the chance was too convenient to be disregarded. As she climbed the tree, a sooty coating adhered to hands and clothing.

She tore her doekin shirt and lost some skin wriggling through the opening, and almost swore a horrid oath by Ruath, catching herself just in time. She hung by her hands high on the wall of a sleeping chamber, and she saw that below her and to her right was a bed occupied by someone who slept soundly, without a murmur or a snore. On one hand it might be risky sharing a bed with one you don't know, even only for a moment, but on the other, the tile of the floor was hard and the drop a long one. She made her decision, swung sideways and let go, flopping down on the bed whose mattress felt stuffed with bricks. She was up again and on the run before the sleeper stirred, but she didn't think she could count on him being such a sound sleeper as all that. She dove for the door which was nothing more than an open archway. She heard a loud bellow of anger and a call for the guard. She slipped behind a thick wall-hanging as she heard the clamor of armed men.

Looking through a worn place in the tapestry and almost choking on the thick dust, she saw the man from the sleeping-chamber stride out magnificently naked (or so she judged him), cursing with all the most sacred names, Brann, Abx and Isoldrine. All things being equal, Jaq thought, he should shrivel into a cinder about now or feel the thunk of Brann's mighty war axe, but nothing happened. He truly had powers of some kind to dare so much, yet he looked human enough except for his large size. He was dark complected with teeth that flashed whitely in a curly black beard. Only his eyes gave her pause; they were almost colorless, the silver-gray of the iris almost lost against the whites.

"Am I to be left as defenseless as a babe in a cradle?" he asked the guards, but it was an image that almost made Jaqurel laugh aloud. Then, as the soldiers cringed under the fury of his tirade, he slapped a chalky-faced man to the floor. Rage burned in the deepset eyes of the guardsman, but Kharon only made a vague derisive gesture and turned away.

"Whatever it was, it's doubtless still about," he roared, sending the guards scurrying off in all directions. "And I want it, whether it be human, slynx, or demon. We'll hand the skin—here." His fist hit the hanging inches from Jaq's head, raising a cloud of dust. It was fortunate that he was so feared, for no guard dared approach him to search. Though he returned to his chamber, his soldiers remained restless 'til morning, keeping Jaq in her hiding place.

In the unpromising light of dawn, she ventured cautiously forth, exploring the place as thoroughly as possible in the time given her and finding a more permanent refuge in a storage room that had been half filled with cast-offs and boarded shut. She also charted the least obvious exit. Trying to go out the way she'd come in didn't appeal to her, exciting as it had been.

In the days that followed, she searched the dwelling, upon one occasion intruding into a chamber where a woman stood staring out a window. Jaq was about to leap back to keep herself from being discovered when the woman turned about and fixed her with immense and unblinking eyes. For a moment Jaq rummaged among the probabilities for some excuse for being here, and then, without speaking, the woman began to walk, staring straight ahead, passing close to Jaqurel without noticing her as she left the room. "Blind," thought the thief, and then reconsidered for the woman had no trouble with the door or the winding passage beyond it. "Dreaming," she speculated, but didn't follow the woman, for her fixed expression of somnambulant horror, her unkempt gray garments and carelessly flowing hair made her seem the soul of this fear-haunted place.

She saw little of Kharon, though she often heard him, swearing vile oaths, raging at his servants or his prisoners, demolishing with a crash anything fragile that came to hand. That very morning she had heard him call for his huntsman. Standing at a high window she had seen him leave dressed in a handsome black-cloaked hunting costume amid the belling of a pack of coal-black hounds. Since nowhere in the dwelling had she found the Eye of Envy, she assumed it was in Kharon's sleeping chamber where she'd no opportunity to search. If she couldn't find it there, she knew she must leave, for she could feel the despair had been adhering to her a thin layer at a time, until she felt thoroughly coated with it. Many more days here and she'd not have the will to leave.

She was inspecting the inside of an antique trunk for the telltale signs of secret doors, when she heard the rasping sound of claws over the tile of the floors and an awful baying. Close-up the sound was large as a pony, bones protruding grotesquely under a satin black hide. She reached for her knife as the beast leaped, and though she was borne down, hot breath flooding her face and teeth catching and tearing shallowly across her cheek, she brought up her hand from underneath and ripped open the hound's belly as cleverly as do the hindclaws of the hunting slynx. Hardly had she pushed the still-quivering body from her than two more of the hounds came racing through the doorway. She dared not turn and run.

Her slashing stroke narrowly missed a dog's throat, but the second's jaws ment in her forearm, shredding skin and flesh and clamping the bones. She screamed as she was pulled down, more of the awful beasts crowding around, but when she expected them to close in, tearing, there was a sharp cry and the slap of a whip against flesh. The dogs fell back, even the one that held her looked cowed. "Back there, Brute. Let go Chaow. Good dog." As he patted and praised his pack, Jaqurel looked around for her knife, but the blood pouring from her ruined arm left her weak and disoriented.

Kharon gave a bellow of anger when he saw what she'd done to his lead hound, and she felt the lash he'd used on the dogs burn across her shoulders. By some means she couldn't quite recall, she leapt at him; her arm wrenched with pain as her fingers groped for his eyes. So unexpected was the attack that at first he was driven back. She couldn't pursue the advantage because

someone grabbed her from behind, swinging her away when Kharon leaped to attack her. Whoever it was said a quiet word and Kharon subsided.

She squirmed, trying to see who held her. The voice seemed almost familiar.

"What are you doing here?" asked Kharon sulkily. "You know he has designated this as my domain—I am his watchdog—I!"

Jaquerel threw an elbow backward with all that was left of her waning strength. "Villik, you tricked me into coming here. There never was an Emerald Eye." There was a short, explosive sound of pain as the elbow landed, but she hadn't the strength to do more.

"Not Villik," said Kharon. "Raki. Mischief-maker Raki, cup-bearer to Ruath. But this Jaquerel, this mocker of the gods, she's mine to play with as I will before she receives her meet punishment of burning eternally in Ruath's pits."

"If punishment is to change a doubter's outlook, then eternal punishment makes no sense at all," said Jaquerel.

Kharon looked bemused and Raki laughed softly. "Let me see to her wound or she'll bleed to death here while we quibble," said Raki.

"By all means; she can't die now," said Kharon. "Fragile, aren't they?"

Raki sat Jaquerel in one of Kharon's massive carved chairs, and inspected her wound. "Unpleasant," he said pulling back her sleeve. "This may hurt."

"I'm very good at pain," said Jaquerel and howled as something surged through the flesh of her arm sealing the ragged tears in muscle and skin but not without bringing its own kind of agony.

"Sorry, I guess I haven't practiced that enough."

"What are you doing here?"

"I was at a party, and—"

"Don't tell me it was boring."

"Well, the gods do have a certain something when it comes to throwing an all-out orgy, but I do have to admit—"

"You tricked me into coming here."

"I didn't have a whole lot of choice. If you consider Kharon Ruath's hound, then perhaps I must be considered a pet as well, not capable of the same kind of slavish devotion, but (he sighed) still dependent, for all my show of free-will. If you were capable of it, I don't think I'd like you half as much." He pulled her sleeve down over the smooth flesh of her arm. "I'm sorry that that's all I can do for you. Ahe bargain was made and I must abide by it."

"One thing," said Jaquerel. "You can do one thing for me." She leaned close to whisper to him.

"But what can you hope to gain?"

"Time...I have to have time to think; there's something about Kharon that I can't quite fathom, and—"

"Time," said Raki, laughing. "Like all mortals."

"Enough of your infernal whispers and conspiracies," roared Kharon. "Did I not know better, Raki, I'd think you actually had sentimental feelings about this carrion."

"Immortality quite negates such foolishness," said Raki. "I don't suppose you'd consider a wager on how long she might last here in your domain. So much she arouses your anger that I say she won't live past midnight tonight. My constantly-filled chalice against your dark hunting pack."

Kharon's bushy brows knit. "I'm not so impulsive as you think. You're on."

Raki's amber eyes met Jaq's a moment before the air rippled and Raki was no longer there.

Kharon's hands closed about Jaquerel's waist and he lifted her up so he could stare into her face. she forced herself to meet his pale-eyed gaze though it was like being immersed in cold slime. "Raki will learn, and you—that I alone am in control here." A moment later he sent Jaq sprawling across the tiles. "You don't fear me, I'll—" He was about the bring down an immense knotted fist, when he stopped, controlled himself with an effort. "No, I'll win the bet, and then I'll teach you to properly revere Ruath and the gods." He shouted for a guard.

"Lock her away, out of my sight, and bring me that half-dead wench for tonight. I'll make do with her."

Jaq imagined that somewhere there was a cell that would hold her, but she hadn't yet found it. Though the guard searched her before pushing her into the dank confines of there place, he wasn't quite thorough enough in his search(though the problem may not have been thoroughness so much as an inability to keep his mind on his work). While the guardsman daydreamed, she worked loose the springy wire from a seam in her clothing. With it she fished for and caught the splintered bar on the outside of the door. She was very stealthy, and the only sound in the passageway was the dull clunk of the bar coming down on the careless watchman's head. She wasted no further time with him, for a sickly morning light was overcoming night's leaden darkness. The need to be out of this oppressive place made her careless, and a guard sighted her and gave the alarm. When she turned to her planned exit, she found the passage blocked by armed men. Turning back she fled blindly, an awful fear leaning its weight on her—perhaps it was impossible to escape this place. She found herself in front of the arched doorway to Kharon's sleeping chamber just ahead of her pursuers; there was no other choice but to enter.

The zombie-like woman she'd seen earlier lay across the bed, dark bruises on her shoulders, encircling her neck. The tip of her tongue protruded from foam-flecked lips, her blank eyes still full open. Kharon lounged in one of his great chairs; he looked disheveled and glassy-eyed, yet strangely sated. A sickness of despair washed over her as he rose, motioned away the guards behind her. "Midnight has passed, and I've won the bet," he said, "and it's as if you come seeking me out."

Jaquerel stared up at him; there seemed no weakness in him. He had all the power of Ruath. All the power of Ruath; her mind seemed to leap as it made the discovery.

"Perhaps you come because you're ready to embrace Ruath. No, I still see insolence in your gaze; it's just as well, I'll enjoy it the more."

He was reaching for her but Jaquereel forced herself not to move.

"Enjoy? Can a shadow feel enjoyment? Or rage? I don't believe it, and that's all you are, really, a shadow, an abstraction."

Kharon's hand descended on Jaq's shoulder squeezing 'til she could feel flesh grate against bone. "Is this shadow?" he growled.

"You have no power that isn't Ruath's," she said. "And he gives us to you as playthings, isn't that right? But your playthings have the choice to struggle against their fate or to give in to it, to cling to life one moment more or to let it go. You're Ruath's plaything as well, nothing more; we're more real than you are." From the corner of her eye Jaq caught sight of a redness that was not sunrise. Kharon reached for her throat, but she felt almost a sense of triumph because he did it to silence her. With the last of her strength she held his hands away and shouted, "Ruath gave you the trappings of power, but he withheld the essence, power over oneself. That was why you raged and swore and bullied everyone around you; you're only a thin, pale mask over the face of Ruath, incapable of a single act of free will."

Sparks shot from a gloomy corner of the room, and the stone dwelling shuddered, moved like a sleeper who has unsettling dreams. Kharon saw the deception, but at the moment it didn't matter; the seeds of mutiny had been sown. One who has only the trappings of power, longs for its essence. The floor moved, sending Jaq rolling into a wall, but she bounced to her feet.

Kharon stood, like a statue of ash, locked in silent combat with his master, Ruath. She ran, along with the confused guards, toward the door. A spout of live steam rose from the chill black lake and the sky had gone phosphorescent. Jaquereel dove behind a sheltering tree trunk and covered her head as the stones of the dwelling did an antic dance. For a moment it was as if the earth were turned inside out as fires from the Pits of Ruath spilled liquidly from the windows of the house, heavy vines writhed like snakes as the heat shriveled them. The old stones gave way and the whole structure slid with a roar into the untroubled lake, a last jet of steam rising.

Afterward, Jaquereel could put the return journey in so clear sequence. A fever burned in her blood, and she was sore on all exposed skin surfaces as if she'd been too long in the sun. She remembered the mud of the Chill Marsh boiling and bubbling as she made her way back through it. She returned home ragged and tender-of-skin, much in need of the hovering ministrations of her servants. For many tendays she had bad dreams and detoured around the Street of the Forty-Seven Smiths so she'd not have to see the ugly iron idol, but eventually the pain of it passed from her mind, and she regained some of her old confidence.

She was walking in the garden of her villa, the fleecy lamkins that grew on stems frisking and bleating as she walked among them, when she felt what she thought at first was a gentle gust of wind blowing back a wisp of hair that had fallen against her cheek. "It's a pleasant night," said a voice from the air before her, and with a silken ripple of the air; Raki appeared.

"I thought my bad dreams had all faded," said Jaquereel. "But here's another to trouble me. I hope I awaken soon."

"The Pits of Ruath have had a severe shaking, but of course they endure, for those who have a taste for eternal punishment. Mad Kharon has been reasoned with. He forgets his name sometimes, though." He laughed mockingly, leaning against the wall with a familiar, wry expression. "Eternity hangs heavy on my hands."

"A total lack of respect for time," said Jaq. "Like all immortals." She gave a sigh of resignation. In a moment she would meet his gaze and she knew his eyes would be a clear amber and strangely intoxicating.



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