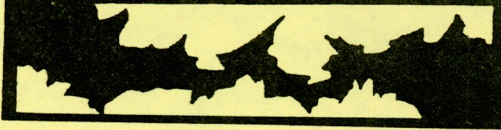


ABYSS



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ABYSS CONJURINGS



VO 6, NO 3 EST 1979 SUMMER '84

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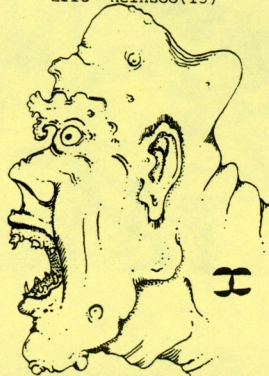
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At this point Abyss has been published on a more or less regular schedule for 30 consecutive issues, with a total of close to 800 thousand words in print. Of the many semi-pro or big-time amateur fantasy gaming magazines which have appeared in the 5 years since we started publication we seem to be the only survivor. In fact, if we include APAs and grozins, only Dragon, Different Worlds, Spacegamer and Alarums & Excursions can match or beat our longevity. After all this time, and work we've earned the right to a little self-indulgence, thus you hold in your hands our first retrospective issue (and our last at least until #50).

In the 5 years we've been publishing Abyss the magazine has grown in many ways, not only in size and circulation, but in quality as well. Since #1 the number of pages per issue has increased 75%, and the amount of text has increased by at least twice that amount. Circulation has enjoyed similar growth, slow though it has been, and we now put out 25 times as many copies as we did at the end of the first year. Along with this growth have come changes in appearance and style. Issue #1 had no art, just tightly packed text on very specific topics, with the table of contents printed right on the cover. Now we use a variety of art both for interiors and for covers (even with some color), and feature much more general and flexible articles.

There have been disappointments along the way. To be nominated for an ORIGINS award as 'best amateur gaming magazine' four times is nice, but to lose out each time to wargaming magazines supported by block voting is a bit discouraging. To be truthful, growth has not been as rapid as we would have liked. We do have a strong and loyal following, but there seems to be a threshold of sales which we just can't cross despite a level of quality which is consistently praised as higher than almost every other magazine of any type in the field. We've had a particularly hard time getting distributors to pick up Abyss for store sales, seemingly because of our small page-size (something which may have to change). Yet, in the UK this seems to be no hindrance, and we now sell 5 times as many copies through stores overseas as we do in the US. All in all, we wish we sold more copies, but Abyss, like so many magazines remains a 'break-even' concern at best, and we are happy that we can keep prices reasonable while still providing the best in new gaming ideas. Oddly enough, it seems that if we overcharged it would increase store sales among those who live by the motto 'it costs a lot, it must be good' (seemingly the only selling point for Dragon).

Anyway, as Abyss has grown and changed it has continued to represent the changing interests of the editors, and we hope that it has kept the interest of the readers. I hope that as we carry on we'll be able to do more of the same and break new ground as well, while keeping up the sort of informal style which we've had in the past. Stick with us and we'll do right by you.

As far as the contents of the issue and any news, note that you won't be seeing much of Eric at least until the Fall, as he is hidden away in Newport (RI) in training as a Navy officer. With any luck you will see more of Lew and a few interesting new regulars who are currently bringing in to help fill out the staff of the magazine. I'm afraid you're permanently stuck with me, as someone has to draw it all together.

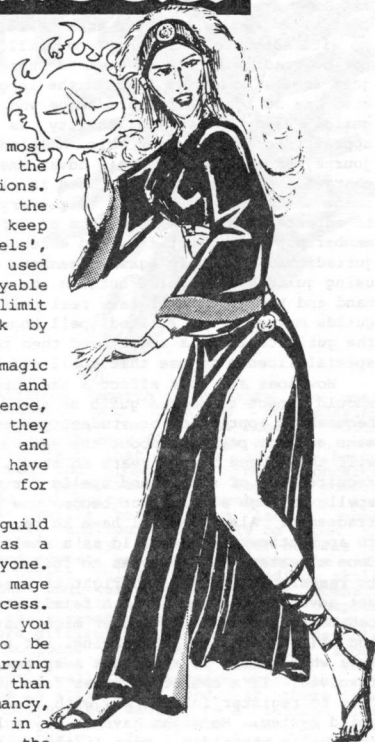
Looking through this issue you'll notice that we've tried to keep a balance. While there are a few retrospective items (particularly the 'A Look Back' insert section), we've also kept in some of the regular types of stuff (though you'll notice the absence of 'Echoes', as you have to write us for a letter column to work). Particularly interesting this issue is our summer news feature on ORIGINS and the background article on 'Demons, Djnnis and Devas'.

Read through the issue, enjoy, send in your feedback, and write to let us know what you think of the directions we're going and the directions we should be going. Happy 5th anniversary! (DFN)

RE
GAMES

GUILDS & STATUS

carl jones



In any well developed fantasy campaign world one of the most interesting and viable ways of monitoring and guiding the development of mage power is through social institutions. Rather than impose some arbitrary magical restrictions on the use and availability of types of magic which you want to keep rare, and rather than define mages solely in terms of 'levels', experience or power, social relationships and status can be used to do the work for you in a far more realistic and enjoyable way. The key to this is the mage guild, which can both limit the power of mages and establish the terms and framework by which their status can be measured.

Mage guilds serve several functions in a society where magic is practiced. They protect the mages from outside meddling and control, they regulate training and certification of competence, they protect the public through quality assurance and they protect themselves by defining areas of practice and professional standards. In an urban society where guilds have significant power these functions can have profound meaning for the individual mage character.

In order to preserve the value of their craft, a guild limits access to the secrets of that craft, keeping it as a 'mystery'. They don't give out their secrets to just anyone. The practical way to learn these mysteries and to become a mage is to enter a guild and go through their educational process. Now, in setting out to become an urban, commercial mage, you have to consider that in a large city there are liable to be more than one mage guild, probably a dozen or more of varying sizes for different areas of magic, some more reputable than others, such as Pyromancy, Necromancy, Enchantment, Aeromancy, Geomancy, Beastmaster, etc. There are two ways that guilds in a city would carry out training, depending on how populous the

city is and how closely different guilds work together. If the city is large and the guilds are closely linked, there will probably be a Mage College for training in all areas of the magical arts, just like a modern college, with students majoring in certain types of magic. If the city is large and the guilds are hostile to each other or fiercely competitive, there may be either private schools sanctioned by particular guilds to teach one or maybe a few mysteries to students contracted in service to a guild, or guild schools run directly by the guilds. If the city is smaller, there is likely to be individualized teaching by apprenticeship, where youths are apprenticed in their pre-teens to a particular mage/master of a particular type of magic, with a service contract to pay for his training and a bulk payment up front. The master will support the apprentice for about 7 years, and train him, and the apprentice is expected to work for him during that time. In most cases cities of whatever size will probably have a combination of these systems, with different guilds taking different courses and apprenticeship always available as a one-on-one alternative. These systems assure the availability of knowledge with a retention of guild control, as the guilds will run schools either directly or by license, and guilds dominate apprenticeships by setting rules and controlling certification.

The step up from basic training is certification. In a school system this is done by examination and graduation between the masters of the school, and in an apprentice system it is done between the master of the apprentice and an examining board from the guild. Mages from the guild are always involved in certification. Once a mage is certified, his status in his guild (the one he has trained under and been certified by) is that of journeyman, which means that he may practice the arts, but only under the supervision of a full master of the guild, but for payment. He may not work within the jurisdiction of the guild without supervision, and in most cases a new journeyman will continue to work for his old master, or if it is a college situation or the journeyman wants to change bosses, the guild maintains a hiring service. Journeymen are usually a discontented lot, and often cause trouble in the guild, trying to get more rights and self-determination.

The step up from here is to full status in the guild, that of the master. This is essentially a sign of wealth and success. A person becomes a master when he can establish his own shop and carry on business successfully in his own right. This usually takes an enterprising journeyman 5 or more years of saving and borrowing. Only masters are allowed to vote in the councils of the guild and to hold guild offices, and in many cities only masters in guilds (all

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guilds, not just mages) may hold office or property in the city. Masters may take on apprentices or teach in guild schools, but the number of apprentices and who may take on how many is determined by the guild, and there are strict punishments for violations.

The regulatory role of the guild is particularly important. Mage guilds control the spells, how they are used, and who may use them. They do this in order to make sure that they maintain control and power in their area of skill, and to make sure that those who follow their trade do so will adequate competence and skill. This is a protective role, so spells from one guild may not be readily available even to those of other guilds, and certainly not to those who do not join the guild and go through the lengthy time and money commitment of training. A guild won't give one of its spells to someone who is not properly trained, certified, and enrolled in the guild. Ready spell availability is limited to masters in the guild, and journeymen or apprentices can only get this knowledge through the masters they serve, so an unemployed journeyman is limited in his advancement in knowledge. How the spells are used, how much is charged, and where they are used is also controlled by the guild, as they don't want to get a bad image and want to make sure that everything is done properly and within their control. In order to enforce this there is an arm of enforcement in every guild, a group of wardens elected by the membership to collect fees and enforce rules, and they tend to be forceful and to be allowed jurisdiction not only against members of the guild, but against anyone violating guild rules by using guild spells while outside the guild. Remember that guilds and government work hand in hand and the guild will have real political and social power. For those in other guilds some guilds may give out limited spell knowledge in a reciprocal arrangement and for large payments to the guild to learn a spell, and then the person purchasing a spell from another guild will have a special license to use that spell and his use of it will be watched and regulated.

How does all this effect a character? If the character wants to learn magic in a city, he should expect to join a guild or spend a lot of money in a dangerous blackmarket. First he becomes an apprentice or student (people much out of their teens won't do). He is expected to make a large payment, about the equivalent of 2 or 3 years earning for an average tradesman. He will then spend 5 to 7 years in study, and be reviewed at the end. It is nice to set up requirements of skills and spells for passage to journeyman status. Next he will have to get spells through a master or become one himself, an investment of 10 years earning for an average tradesman. Also, he will have to pay a yearly fee after apprenticeship (students are equivalent to apprentices to the guild as a whole). This fee is about a third of the original entry fee. Once a master, he still has to follow regulations, but he has a voice and vote, and free access to research materials and right to practice within guild rules. You can use character levels to set advancement, but it is a fairly unrealistic practice, as a journeyman can be skilled but a bad businessman, and a master might have minimal qualifications. Basing rank on spells, skills and ability is more interesting. If someone who comes to a city with a system like this from an area where there is also such a system, reciprocal arrangements can be made with a payment involved. If a character comes from somewhere with no guilds, but has magic knowledge, he will have to register in some way with the guild, and what happens depends on the rigidity of the guild system. He might have to pay a large fee and practice under license, informing everyone that he is unguilded. More likely he would be examined as well. There is a chance he might have to become a journeyman or go through a brief apprenticeship, and maybe not get full status even then. In any situation a large fee would be involved, with strict supervision and limits. Guilds don't want many people practicing their craft as it lowers demand. In cases where someone tries to start a duplicate guild the regular government will usually step in and crush it.

These ideas are based on historical guilds from Europe and the Middle East, and it is reasonable that magical guilds would have the same concerns. Other things to consider are the black market in spells which would develop (possibly selling defective spells), the occasional mage who was so powerful that he could ignore guilds, and the problems of competition and conflict of interest (spells which might fall under several guilds). A guild council where problems are worked out is likely. In many cases guilds will try to let members work with other guilds as needed, but such work is limited. A key point is that it is inevitable that these controls won't exist throughout the world, and there will probably be shamans and wandering mages who teach the same spells, leading to some problems. This all depends on communications in your world, and as communications become easier (printing and the like), the guilds will become more paranoid in guarding their mysteries. Another thing to consider is the possibility of magic being illegal and guilds existing secretly mainly for protection and self preservation through unified action. These controls and limits benefit all guild members in the long run. The only people who don't benefit are those outside the system, and if the system works, they have no power.

Why should you use this system? It's realistic. Magic is a source of power. Those who have power seek to control and guide it and limit competition and access to that power. It helps control magic in your world and gives a structure to the magic practicing community, fitting it into the society. In many worlds magic can get out of control, not in specific spells being too powerful, but in access being too easy. Magic should be an art and mystery, and achieving it should involve time and effort, justified by significant dedication and self sacrifice. These ideas can be used in any campaign, and expanded logically by most GMs. Many worlds have mage guilds in their big cities. These are commercial and governmental institutions, and if you have them you might as well make the most of them. Think about your guilds and put them to use. They might improve the quality and value of magic in your campaign and keep it from becoming cheapened by free availability.

A NEW YSGARTH WEAPON SYSTEM

RICK BUEKER & DAVE NALLE


CLUB WEAPON GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Cudgel	2	--	--	28	--	--	14	--	--	7	9	8
Hammer	3	--	--	26	--	--	16	--	--	8	7	6
Mace	3	--	--	24	--	--	15	--	--	7	8	6
Battle Mace	4	--	--	30	--	--	13	--	--	10	10	9
Staff	4	--	--	16	--	--	14	--	--	4	6	4

BLADE WEAPON GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Daggor	3	3	--	22	24	--	15	13	--	3	7	7
Short Sword	--	4	4	--	24	27	--	17	16	--	3	6
Broad Sword	--	5	7	--	26	29	--	15	17	--	5	7
Bastard Sword	--	6	9	--	30	36	--	14	18	--	7	9
Great Sword	--	7	11	--	36	46	--	12	20	--	9	11
Falchion	--	3	5	--	28	31	--	18	20	--	6	11
Scimitar	--	5	8	--	26	32	--	15	20	--	6	8
Epee	--	5	6	--	23	24	--	18	16	--	4	5
Glaive	--	6	8	--	31	36	--	15	18	--	6	9

THRUSTING WEAPON GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Spear	7	7	3	30	32	28	17	14	15	5	5	7
Trident/Spetum	5	--	5	32	--	29	17	--	14	6	4	7
Pike	--	--	6	--	--	56	--	--	25	9	18	7
Rapier	--	--	5	--	--	23	--	--	17	4	6	--

AXE WEAPON GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Hand Axe	3	--	--	25	--	--	14	--	--	8	8	8
Battle Axe	6	4	--	31	27	--	18	12	--	9	9	6
Double Axe	5	5	--	36	31	--	15	10	--	10	10	8
Halberd	8	6	7	38	36	41	17	13	19	7	11	4

ARTICULATED WEAPON GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Flail	7	--	--	38	--	--	12	--	--	15	16	8
Lariat	--	--	--	40	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	8
Morningstar	5	--	--	34	--	--	14	--	--	12	15	9
Nunchaka	5	--	--	24	--	--	15	--	--	8	12	8
Net	8	--	--	31	--	--	20	--	--	5	5	5
Whip	--	6	--	24	--	--	20	--	--	18	5	6

UNARMED COMBAT GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Bite	3	2	--	23	27	--	18	18	--	--	--	2
Hand/Claw	2	3	4	18	21	25	15	13	17	8	6	7
Head Butt	3	--	--	45	--	--	25	--	--	--	--	4
Foot/Kick	4	6	7	29	33	35	13	17	15	12	9	5
Dodge	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	--	--
Trip	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	6	--
Throw	10	--	--	--	--	--	20	--	--	--	7	10
Grapple	8	--	--	--	--	--	20	--	--	--	8	8

SHIELD COMBAT GROUP

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	DR	DA	UB
Buckler	4	6	--	23	26	--	15	18	--	4	7	9
Round Shield	5	7	6	26	30	28	17	20	18	6	9	7
Chevron Shield	6	9	--	31	38	--	20	22	--	9	11	6
Legion Shield	7	--	9	34	--	39	24	--	20	11	12	5

ARCHERY SKILLS

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			Range			WDF			
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	
Crossbow	--	--	5	--	--	55	--	--	25	--	--	30	--	--	--	12
Shortbow	--	--	6	--	--	38	--	--	18	--	--	20	--	--	--	6
Longbow	--	--	8	--	--	30	--	--	15	--	--	17	--	--	--	8

CAST WEAPON SKILLS

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			Range			WDF			
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	
Daft	--	--	3	--	--	24	--	--	24	--	--	30	--	--	--	2
Javelin	--	--	4	--	--	28	--	--	16	--	--	19	--	--	--	6

Although **Ysgarth** is probably the most progressive and flexible role-playing system around, one of the things which makes **Ysgarth** more than just another game is the fact that it is always being improved and updated as new concepts present themselves. The **Ysgarth** combat system is quick and playable, but the combat skills have always lacked some definition and could certainly be open to more flexibility. What we offer here is a revised system, essentially compatible with the current rules, but expanding skill options and variable styles of combat. This system will at first seem more complex than the current system, but it is actually no more difficult to use and considerably more logical. One other nice thing about this system is that it can be used perfectly well in a campaign where the old system is still being used, if there are some players who want to be a little more imaginative and some who want to keep things basic. It also lets fighters specialize in more unusual and specialized forms of combat and regularizes some alternative combat moves and techniques.

Combat skills work essentially as before. The tables to the left list a selection of weapons and a series of costs next to them. These are the costs to learn particular skills with those weapons. In addition to attack and defense skills there are several added options available, though not all are available with all weapons. In the area of attacks, the skills are broken down by Club, Edge and Point groups, and with some weapons it is possible to learn more than one type of attack. In these cases the different types of attacks are spent on and learned separately. The second area given is Strikes per Round (S/R). To make this work, characters should start out with one less basic S/R than found on the table in the rules, but with this system it is possible to enhance that by learning levels of S/R by attack type at the costs indicated. Each level of S/R skill with a given type of attack with a given weapon adds one S/R. Next we have Damage, which is essentially a refinement of the Damage Strike skill with the cost varying with weapon and attack type. Each level here adds two to the WDF of the weapon, and WDF broken down by attack mode chosen is given at the end of the table. Given next is a Defense Rating skill, essentially the skill of using that weapon in defense, which increases the character's DR by his levels of DR with that weapon while he is using the weapon. Dodging is given under unarmed combat, and applies as before. DA stands for Disarming Attack. Base Attack Rating can be used here, and levels of skill with DA add to that to give a DA rating which is used to attack to disarm, which is rolled as a regular attack, using the target's DR

THROWN WEAPON SKILLS

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			Range			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P
Knife	5	5	5	2	2	2	8	8	8	5	5	5	5	5	5
Hammer/Stick	3	5	5	24	27	27	15	15	15	23	23	26	6	6	6
Pilum	5	5	5	32	32	32	13	13	13	19	19	19	6	6	6
Axe	4	4	4	30	30	30	14	14	14	24	24	24	6	6	6
Shiruken	3	3	3	17	17	17	20	20	20	25	25	25	3	3	3
Bocmerang	6	7	7	25	28	28	18	18	18	24	24	24	6	6	6
Discus	5	5	5	25	25	25	16	16	16	23	23	23	6	6	6

ARTICULATED MISSILE SKILLS

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			Range			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P
Net(Entangle)	6	6	6	30	30	30	30	30	30	4	4	4	UB	4	4
Bola(Entangle)	5	5	5	30	30	30	25	25	25	5	5	5	6	6	6
Sling	4	4	4	24	24	24	20	20	20	26	26	26	3	3	3
Atlatl	6	6	6	30	30	30	14	14	14	18	18	18	8	8	8

BLOWN WEAPON SKILLS

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			Range			WDF		
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P
Blow Gun	3	4	4	20	22	22	28	24	24	30	35	35	2	3	3
Spat Missile	2	3	3	18	23	23	35	30	30	35	40	40	0	1	1

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			DR	DA	UB	Base
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P				
Short Sword	5	5	5	2	2	2	8	8	8	5	5	5	Base
	4	4	4	24	27	27	17	16	16	3	3	3	Cost/SL
	17	7	7	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	10	10	SL Bought
	4	6	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	5	5	SL Contri
	26	18	18	4	2	2	8	8	23	10	10	10	Total

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			DR	DA	UB	Base
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P				
Spear	5	5	5	1	1	1	4	4	8	5	5	5	Base
	6	7	7	30	32	28	16	14	15	5	5	7	Cost/SL
	2	15	15	1	1	1	1	2	3	8	4	4	SL Bought
	2	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	8	4	SL Contri
	7	7	23	1	1	2	4	6	12	23	11	9	Total

Weapon	Attack			S/R			Damage			DR	DA	UB	Base
	C	E	P	C	E	P	C	E	P				
Staff	5	5	5	2	2	2	4	4	5	5	5	5	Base
	4	4	4	16	16	16	14	4	8	8	8	8	Cost/SL
	8	8	8	2	2	2	1	1	1	5	5	5	SL Bought
	13	13	13	4	2	2	8	1	1	36	15	10	SL Contri
	13	13	13	4	2	2	8	1	1	36	15	10	Total

it is purchased mostly with CSP. If a level is bought with any CSP it does not contribute at all, even if it is partly paid for with real LSP. Thus, within a group, an edged attack contributes to any other edged attack or any edged skill(S/R or Damage) with the same weapon, and to DR and DA, and the same general pattern applies to other types of attacks and weapons. Defense, Disarming, and Unbalancing contribute across the board to attacks, strikes per round and damage of all types. All contribution is free, so CSP apply to all skills which fall into the range of the skill actually bought.

Another matter to be noted is that of Skill Benefits. Naturally, under this more varied system the Skill Benefits for race don't really work quite as well. Eventually we should have out a new more detailed listing of SBS, but for the time being, in most cases a SB on a weapon indicates a benefit on the cost of the standard attack(highest damage, lowest cost) with that weapon. An alternative to this is to let the player use that SB on any one skill with the indicated weapon. Under no circumstances should a character get the SB off more than one of the skills with that weapon.

This may not all be totally clear, so given after the skill lists are three examples of fully worked out weapon skills indicating contribution and different approaches to combat. In each case only 150 LSP are used to buy the skills, and average starting stats are assumed. Given are Bases(AR,S/R,WDF,DR,DA,UB), Cost/SL for the different skills to modify those bases, SL bought of those skills, SL contributed from other appropriate skills, and Total with base being modified for skill(final AR,S/R,WDF,DR,DA,UB). In the examples we have a balanced example of Short Sword, with an emphasis on edge attack and secondary interest in point attack, defense and extra strikes. In the second example you have a spearman, with an even emphasis between point attack and defense, with other ratings purely from contribution, and rather low. The final example is for staff, with a heavy emphasis on defense and a secondary emphasis on disarming, so that the AR resulting from contribution is rather low, but the DR is nice and high. As these examples show, it comes out rather balanced from any approach. All the characters start with the same points. The short sword has a maximum potential of 32 points of damage per round, with an average of DR and AR of 24. The spear has a maximum potential of 24 points of damage per round and an average AR and DR of 23, but is a bit more flexible. The staff has a potential of 32 points of damage per round, with an average AR and DR of 24. Each has its benefits and strong points, and the weapons and how they are used are clearly differentiated.

The benefits of using this system should be clear. A warrior no longer has to just hack away at an opponent. These changes offer him a nice selection of combat options and styles with almost any weapon, and the results are pleasantly balanced. The fact that it is compatible with the original Ysarth system is also nice. For those using other systems it could easily be adapted. This would involve a little number manipulation for RuneQuest or systems of that type, but for Advanced Dungeons & Dragons you would have only to give the character surrogate Skill Points to buy the skills, something along the lines of (30-His Level) per level, so that at 5th level he would have 135 SP to use. All other aspects would work as described here, and AR/4 would work as Level when attacking, and (DR/4)-5 would subtract from AC for defense in combat. This would make the AD&D system a bit more flexible. How you wish to use these ideas, if at all, is up to you, but we think they can add some depth to play.

as his effective DR against a DA. A hit means that he will have to make a DEX save or drop his weapon. UB indicates Unbalancing or Immobilizing attack. It is set-up the same way as Disarming Attack, but will cause the victim to fall down if the attacker hits with his UB rating(AR+levels of UB), and the hit target falls an AGI save. As indicated, Weapon Damage Factor (die type rolled) is shown last by attack type for the weapon. All of these skills are discrete skills learned separately at the cost indicated.

One important other new aspect of this system is a change in the contribution rule. Rather than of limited contribution we recommend more comprehensive contribution, with each skill contributing to every other appropriate skill within set limits. Skills contribute one free SP to spend on other skills for each level of skill the character has bought with real SP. Contribution is to any and all skills in either a vertical or horizontal line from the skill being contributed from, but never diagonally, and skills bought with contribution points do not contribute.

A skill can now contribute to all skills in a vertical or horizontal line simultaneously. An example can make this most clear. If you spend 100 LSP to get 20 levels of edge attack with Broadsword, you get 20 Contributory Skill Points which can be spent on each of the other skills with broadsword or on any other edge attacks in the blade weapon group. This means 20 free points to use on point attack, strikes per round with edge, damage with edge, DR and Disarming, as well as all the other edged attacks in the group. In a case like this where there is more than one attack type, the contribution does not apply with other applications of the skill which are more than one area removed from what the real LSP are spent on, thus, there is no contribution to point S/R or damage from levels of edge attack, though the character would get 2 free levels of point attack, 1 of edge damage, 4 of DR and 2 of Disarming. He might spend an additional 6 real LSP to add to his 20 free points and get one extra S/R. That level would not contribute, as

DEMONS DEMONS DEMONS JON SCHULLER



In any well developed fantasy campaign there are powers which meddle in the realms of men to advance their alien interests. Even the most inexperienced GMs give some consideration to the possible variety of deities and god-like entities who are worshipped and have influence in the world through their church and at the supplication of their worshippers. Yet, while variety of beneficent deities is common, too often far less consideration is given to the variations possible in the cruel and violent powers which seek to wreak havoc in the world. In most campaigns there will be many gods and powers to pray to and revere, but often only one source for powers of evil to be placated and feared. Making this a division between good and evil is too simple, as not all deities are good and not all destructive powers are evil, but it is safe to say that gods are those entities which are worshipped in a supplicant mode, sacrificed to and served in order to gain grace. Their essence is creative and they work in the world through their gifts to men, even when they are somewhat twisted. Here we want to consider the under-explored area of entities who are worshipped out of fear and are sacrificed so that they will not interfere, so that they will not use their destructive powers to hurt and hinder men. These beings are not really worshipped so much as they are bribed with offerings and service. These powers are as interesting, if not as pleasant as most deities, and they are available in great and unexplored variety.

Time and space do not permit a complete look at the inimical forces of every mythology, but we can explore some of the variety of alternatives which are available. Many campaigns enjoy only one vision of hell and the powers of darkness, but in almost every mythology there are demons to oppose the gods, and in a well developed campaign where pantheons compete for power and influence, there could also be more than one pandaeon competing for supremacy in evil. In general, 'demon' can serve as a term to cover all of these entities of evil, just as 'god' serves for a many different types of deities.

Most gamers are fairly familiar with the demons of Christian myth, the legions of oddly shaped and motivated beings(both fallen angels and gods) inimical in every way to good and human life. Yet, most mythologies have similar forces, with which we are less familiar. It adds a lot of depth to evil to have several competing or collaborating demonic groups available to meddle in human affairs. An overview of the alternative offerings in popular myth systems may be useful. Remember that each of these groups is different, and evil can be manifested and applied in many ways.

Christian demons are familiar fare, but those who get their ideas straight from AD&D or their local church may not be aware that there are a number of variations on the general themes of Christian mythology. Every demonologist has his own analysis and interpretation of Hell and its forces, and some may suit your campaign better than others. First, there is almost nothing concrete about Hell or its inhabitants in the bible. Almost everything comes from secondary works of demonology or biblical apocrypha. There are essentially two types of demons in this group, fallen angels who rebelled against god and false deities who ensnare the weak-faithed with deceptive religions. Beneath these are various lesser spirits and entities created to aid them. As they matured in myth these demons took on clear attributes and areas of dominion, with some experts even classifying demons by type, power and position in an elaborate heirarchy. Revisionist religion has tried to play down the army of demons which lurks for the unwary, preferring to soft-pedal it with a less specific concept of evil. The interest which has been shown in Hell and its denizens is demonstrated by the fact that not only are their major disagreements about the structure and occupancy of Hell, but there is even some question as to whether Hell is ruled by Satan, Lucifer or even Beelzebub, who may all be the same entity, rule jointly, be ranked in any of a number of ways, or be different aspects of the same being. The Christian Hell draws on so many literary and mythological sources from other religions and the imagination of faith that there can be as many versions of Hell as there are sects of Christianity. What this means in game terms is that GMs should not feel limited by what they find in one set of rules when they present the forces of evil in a Christian context, because Hell is no more cut and dried than the variations of mythology in any of the(more or less extinct) pagan religions. There is a wealth of material to work with here, and there are clearly

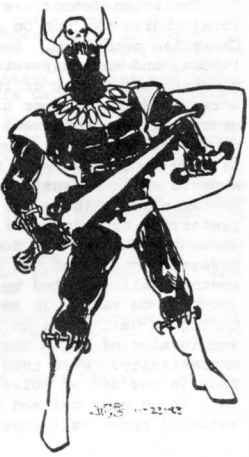
forces and factions within Hell(rebels within the rebellion), and with so much power and ambition in one place there is bound to be conflict, competition, and significant evidence of these factions and divisions in the power of evil and how it acts in the game world. After all, demons like Moloch and Baal were once ruled as gods in their own right. Ambition and intrigue are both tools and working principles of the forces of evil.

The inimical forces of other contemporary and past religions are less familiar and often just as well developed as the Christian demons, and can offer a nice variation, a set of unseen forces which may be a bit less familiar to most players. A look at some of the more interesting can illustrate this. Remember that there are religions which do not include such organized opposition forces, relying instead on evil forces within the main pantheon, or other internal evils, but there are a surprising number which do have detailed heirarchies of evil in ongoing battle with the gods.

One interesting and very well developed group is that of the Djinni, the demons of Islamic mythology. These beings follow some of the patterns of Christian demons, but tend to be less significant as individuals than as a group. There is a hell in Islam, usually called Jahannam, and ruled over by a devil either called Iblis or Sheitan, but in this case there are two competing traditions which cause some conflict and contradiction. There is a demonic tradition which parallels that of Christianity, where Jahannam is emphasized and ruled by Sheitan, but there is an opposing tradition drawn from older sources which places the Djinni or Djann in realms closely adjacent to earth, but unearthly, presenting them more as elementals than as demons(in fact, some even accepted baptism). To add more complexity, there are really at least four races of Djinn. There are the Djinn, who the Koran says were 'created of subtlest fire', and are the most powerful breed, living in their extra-planal city Nihas Asfar(made of bronze) and ruled by their king Malik Katshan. The Djinn are elementals of fire, with great power, capricious, and often evil, but sometimes helpful. Djinni usually appear as huge, golden-skinned men. They are the best known of the different breeds. AD&D players might want to note an error in that system, which says that Djinni are air elementals, when although they can fly and turn invisible, their true element is definitely fire. The air elementals/demons of this mythology are the Ifriti(Afreets, Efrits, etc), who are the second most clearly explained in the literary material(as with Christianity, the best sources are literary and apocryphal). Ifriti rule the air, rather than fire as AD&G mistakenly indicates. There are numerous references in a variety of sources including the Koran and The Arabian Nights describing their attributes and powers. They are tall, black skinned humanoids with two sets of arms, one human and one those of a lion. They have great bat wings and glowing red eyes and eagle claws for feet. Both they and Djinni are totally protean, essentially able to take any form they want. They are particularly fond of games of chance, in addition to their powers of wind and storm. They also have a city and king of their own, attached to but not part of this plane. Less well detailed in the sources, but supposedly more powerful than any of the others(in a slow and subtle way) are the Marids, elemental/demons of the waters, particularly the oceans and storms. There is not much known about their specific attributes, save that they often manifest as water spouts. The final and equally obscure group are the Sheitans, or elementals of the earth, particularly caves. They are relegated to little more than a mention, but it is presumed that like the others they have a society and ruler(possibly Malik Ta'un, the demon of plague and disease). Generally, Iblis is presented as ruling over all of these elementals, and various explanations of their role in faith and nature are proposed, most of them just rationalizations for their survival from older religions. The Djinn as a general group tend to stand on their own a bit more than Christian demons, and because they can be seen as distinct groups closely linked to this world, their presence is greater as is their competition, particularly between the Djinni and Efriti. It should be noted in closing that the Koran states that almost all the Djinni of all varieties were imprisoned by Suleiman in one way or another, but they still crop up in stories set after his time, so that could be more revisionism. With this group you have an active selection of factions and powers which are a bit unfamiliar, and yet varied and contradictory once that you can suit them to your needs quite well.

Staying in the east, we enter the realms of the Daevas(Devi, Devs, Devas, Divs, etc). This breed of demons is shared in one form or other by several cultural groups and faiths, most notably Zoroastrianism and faiths sharing a common background. The greatest of these Daevas is Angra Mainyu(Ahriman), the Zoroastrian devil, and he is followed by a full selection of powers including Ako-mano, Sauru, Naonhathya, Aeshma and others, who seek to drive men to their doom, representing vices and evils which exist within all of us, and opposed to the spirits and forces of good and light. In addition to these Daevas there are lesser spirits which serve them, such as the mischievous Druj and the violent earth elementals called Parikas. Together these form an army of evil which dwells in the darkness beneath the earth and motivates the practice of evil and magic among men.

The Rakshasas of India are another group in this same vein, sharing characteristics of Djinni, Ifriti, and Daevas. They are huge, deformed, multi-function elementals of destructive nature and magic. No two look the same, and many have the features of animals, but they can also use magic and change their form pretty much at will. They are an army opposing the powers of good in an ongoing violent conflict. They do all sorts of mischief and have a number of disgusting and inhuman habits, such as cannibalism and the practice of



necromancy. Their king is called Ravanna, and they have a society and organization. Certainly they are as interesting and developed as some of these other groups, and might be useful for a change or to add a new perspective.

Perhaps one of the most interesting of these alliances of evil is that of the Fomori, the demons/anti-gods of the Irish Gaels. These god-like creatures of evil live beneath the waves of the Atlantic, and are at constant war with the Tuatha da Dannan, seeking to bring about their destruction. In structure the Fomori are like a pantheon of gods, but they are essentially destructive and negative in intention. The chief of this tribally organized group is Eathan the Golden, a patriarchal sort. The warleader is Balor, a giant bull headed man with one eye normal and the other always kept closed, as it can destroy foes with a glance. The real leader of the group is Bress, the son of Elethan, who is the spirit of vanity and self-deception, and actually usurped the throne of the gods for a time. Like any pantheon, there are Fomori in a range of occupations, such as Dulg, their smith, or Morc, their totally un-musical bard. There are many other Fomori, and also a lesser race of servitors called the Gaborchin. Fomori are often characterized by physical deformity, often having the heads or other attributes of some form of animal, particularly bulls, rams and horses. This is a really well developed demonic group, with clear objectives and a clear location in their dark realm beneath the sea. By themselves they represent the interesting concept of an alternative pantheon of gods of evil utterly opposed, almost parodying the true gods.

One major demonic group which has been covered recently in these pages is the Jottun, or the giants of Scandinavian myth. The Jottun share aspects of deities and demons, and are broken down into several rival factions, all of which seek to bring down the gods. They are fairly subtle in personality, some having elements of good, and some even on the side of the gods, just as some of the gods are on the side of the Jottuns. They break down into two major groups, the Fire Jottun and the Ice Jottun, the first group under the leadership of Surt, and the second ruled by Thrym. They have their own lands, Muspellheim and Niffelheim, at the opposite ends of the world, and rule over the spirits of the dead. They are very magical in nature, and love to meddle in human affairs, with a number of memorable individuals. There are also two other factions, the Hill Jottuns led by Skymir and the Sea Jottuns under Gymir. They have a lot of human characteristics, but are linked to particular elements and supernatural activities. They are destructive by nature, but not as vindictive or vicious as their parallels in other mythologies.

Returning to the Celts, specifically the Cymric or Welsh Celts, organized demonic entities can be found in their elves, which are actually a far cry from the romanticized versions which have been recreated in modern fantasy fiction. Cymric elves may have been the source for Tolkien and his many imitators, but the Celtic Tylweith aren't really nice little woodland creatures any more than are the Scandinavian Dokkalfs. In this mythos, the elves are demonic demi-deities, closely linked to gods who are not necessarily purely gods of evil, and are part of the main pantheon, though the elves may not be. As in many other cases, there are several types of Tylweith (a general term for elves and spirits). There are two main deities who preside over the elves, neither of them really evil. Arawn is the lord of rivers and islands, ruling the realm of Annwn, an abode of the dead which is separated from the world by a wall of mists, and is an adjoining but independent plane. The elves which follow him are known as the Gwragedd, and are denizens of the coasts and misty realms. Gwyn is the god of mountains and war, ruling the realm of Gwibir Vynydd, which is inhabited by the Gwyllion elves, a harsher, rather warlike race as harsh as their deity, who is called 'escort of the grave', and is definitely a god of death, particularly death in battle. All of these elves have magical powers, and generally resemble men physically, but are inimical to human life, and like to lure the unwary to their deaths. They dwell in areas which are dark and unknown, such as mountains, caverns, grave mounds and the like. Another group of demon-like entities who are not part of the Tylwith are the Korranyeit, a dwarf-like race who dwell in the woodlands, and once engaged in a war with the gods, using their magics and secret knowledge in battle. They are akin to the giants or Powars, huge humanoids who dwell in mountainous areas and persecute humans whenever possible. All of these beings are magical in nature, and opposed to the aims of men and their gods, and although they are sometimes more friendly, and can interbreed with humanity, they embody the dark and hostile forces of magic and the spirit world which have power on the unknown borders of our world.

The concept of an outside threat to the established order pursuing deadly and inimical aims is common to many mythologies, and takes many forms, not only those of demons and organized supernatural enemies which we have already looked at. Certainly the most common practice in many societies is to take conventional enemies and treat them as if they were demons, at least in the popular and literary imagination. There are several excellent examples of this in semi-mythical cycles which vilify the enemy and ascribe supernatural powers to enemy leaders, or put them in league with the powers of darkness. One of the earliest examples of this is the Greek perception of the Persians as almost supernatural, inspired by evil and corruption, and then in the time of Alexander, it is clear that the Persians saw the Greeks the same way, and many saw Alexander as the equivalent of the antichrist, the earthly embodiment of evil (and not without reason). This same practice arises in the Arthurian period, when the Saxons are presented as supernaturally bestial, seeking to tear down the core of civilization (an attitude which gives the word 'Saesne' a derogatory connotation even in modern Wales). Another good example is the view held by the later pagan Scandinavians of their christian neighbors, who they saw as brutal and evil, coming from the south in the service of the giants of Muspellheim. In the same period the Franks under Charlemagne saw the Moors in Spain as the embodiment of evil, and often linked them to supernatural and demonic powers, with a heavy emphasis on foul magics as shown in the *Chanson de Roland*. Another good example comes soon after this period, at the height of Kievan Russia, when

Vladimir the Great and his followers lived in fear of the alien and demonic Mongols whose leaders are ascribed all manner of evil powers in the Byliny cycle of folk tales. In all of these cases the central societies are preserving tradition or trying to establish a new order while being pressed by a major enemy which is about as alien to their society as it can be. In all cases the enemy speaks a different language and is noticeably different racially. In most of these cases the two groups are completely separate racially, and more examples along the same pattern crop up in the colonial period between the British and Indians, Americans and Amerinds, and various groups in Africa. This type of situation is mainly a matter of attitude or a sort of folk-propaganda, and those who are heroes from one perspective may be villains from another. It is interesting to note that it does not occur in most wars between fairly similar peoples, however intense the political and social necessities behind the war. Anyone or any group can be ascribed a demonic nature if conditions demand it, so if a society does not have demons in its mythology, it can make them as needed.

The types of demonic groups which we have looked at here are common, but it is only fair to give a mention to the other major strains of evil in a number of mythologies. In many cases the forces of evil have a single, dominant focus, and the supernatural destructive powers are concentrated in that entity, though there may be other beings who serve him. This pattern is close to that which we have been dealing with, but rather than presenting an enemy army, it is more a case of the lesser powers of evil being an extension of the greater. This situation is exemplified by Nergal in Babylonian mythology or by Tezcatlipoca in central American mythology. The other major source of evil is that of something or someone twisted within the major pantheon, a god of evil who is part of the general world of the gods, or a god who was of the pantheon but is cast out. Two good examples of this sort are Set and Loki. However, individual sources of evil, though enjoyable, do not offer the variety or possibilities of legions of whatever vision of hell appeals to you.

In using demonic entities in a campaign there are many courses which you can take, and you have the opportunity to use the available diversity to your advantage. There is no reason why evil needs to be one-sided or one-colored when most campaign worlds have fully developed forces of good. Evil also deserves fair representations, and if you open the door to competition and conflict between different sorts of demons you can add some interesting contrasts and undercurrents. It is also important to understand that good and evil are relative concepts, and that some forces which are good or evil from one perspective may be quite the opposite from a different view. Pantheons and groups of gods which are objectively good may hate each other vehemently on matters of subjective principle, and they may see evil forces opposed to their foes as desirable allies in a conflict between groups of gods. For example, a strongly polytheistic campaign might set the Egyptian and Norse gods in opposition, and the Jottun might ally with the Egyptian gods against a common enemy. Consider the possibilities of demonic forces as a way of adding depth and intrigue to your campaign. Too often evil is oversimplified and stereotyped, but it can be active and versatile, taking many forms, perhaps adding something to your campaign through that variety.



ORIGINS 84

MEDIOCRITY IN THE METROPLEX

Controversy and ego plague us. **ORIGINS** is supposed to be the national gaming convention. Certainly, for many years it was the largest gaming convention in the nation, thriving in a nice central east coast location. Then TSR had to go and boast (after their break with GAMA) that **GENCON** was the real national gaming convention because it was more centrally located. So in reaction GAMA decided that it was time for **ORIGINS** to go wandering around the country to give it a truly national flavor. Thus, in 1981 **ORIGINS** went to California, and as might be expected, it was a flop, with about a 5th of the attendance of the year before.

When it returned to Baltimore in '82 it went fairly well, with excellent organization and events, but in '83 it was off to Detroit for an unmitigated fiasco of mis-management, with few people daring to venture into the urban wasteland (maybe a bit over 1000). Then, since the third time proves the point, '84 was the year for Dallas, the magnificent metroplex, in one of the largest urban areas in the nation, a double city dwarfing the population of all previous sites. **ORIGINS** went to the mighty 'Metroplex' of Dallas this year. We were there, and a few comments seem appropriate in retrospect.

A LOOK BACK

After 30 uninterrupted issues, a look back at our past seems reasonable, and maybe of some little value. In this insert section you will find an index to back issues, some facts and history on *Abyss* and a few other items which may be of interest. By remembering our past and traditions we will be able to continue to improve our quality in the future.

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SAMPLER

ON DESIGNING MAGIC ITEMS(#15) Jon Schuller

SOME SILLY SWORDS(#3) Bill Hedges

The Sword of Sorrow: This mighty +4/+2 blade has several magical powers. These are to detect illusion, phantasms, projections and non-humans. It also gives the ability to automatically slay one creature of fewer than 40 hit points each day. Unfortunately, every time you kill something with it, you are filled with remorse, and refuse to bare steel in anger or for any other reason which might lead to violence for at least six hours.

The Sword of the Cyclopes: With this enchanted blade there are some added features in addition to its bonuses of +2/+3. Unlike other weapons which may do a critical on a roll of 20 and a fumble on a roll of 1, this blade does a critical on 17, 18, 19 and 20, and fumbles on 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6.

The Singing Sword: This is a disgustingly cheerful, moderately intelligent sword, which is +5/+4 and has +20% on location. Its problem is that it sings. Not just sometimes, but almost all of the time. It specializes in singing loud drinking songs while you creep stealthily through the lair of a golden dragon, or singing songs about an ogre's mother while you are fighting him. The good point of this is that it can throw its voice, and will do so a third of the time if asked, good for distracting foes. The bad aspect is that it makes secrecy and surprise all but impossible, and can send foes berserk with rage at its insulting lyrics.

The Sword of Vassalage: This will only use its powers in the hands of a very lawful character. While using it he will feel an urge to pledge vassalage to every being he meets, and will actually try to do so about half the time, especially with people of higher social status. This can lead to complications as he will feel compelled to live up to his obligations. It is also +2/+3.

THE THERAPEUTIC ASPECTS OF D&D(#10) Tom Curtin

Depression and anxiety begin to take their toll. You're a college senior and almost out the door into the cold, cold world. The deans have it in for you after that charming display of anatomy you indulged in during your last lost weekend. Besides that you've got three bank loans out but no signs of impending employment, not to mention the \$468 the library is asking in overdue fines. All this plus finals and root canal surgery in two weeks. The 7,762 pages of back reading rounds out the picture and makes your life complete.

Never fear, I have the temporary remedy for these pressing problems. It is my belief that a few good nights of D&D can cure the deepest seizure of depression (of course alcohol does help), D&D is a fascinating and novel game. It is the only game I know where you can literally get away with murder, or if you're thirsty, kill for a beer. And now that rock 'n' roll has come to the good old world of Ysgart (in the guise of the Berserker Bard, Elvish Costello), you die hard rockers can sell your soul for rock 'n' roll. The possibilities are endless. Your characters don't have to worry about defaulting on bankloans...hell, they can just skip the plane. And deans, HAI Your character doesn't have to be polite to anyone...unless they're bigger than him (that's why you call dragons "Sir").

For me D&D is a little oasis of chaos in the mundane world of good and order. I really feel rejuvenated after frying some deserving and obnoxious hobbit. It's my favorite sport. In a good long D&D game my depressions, anxieties and doubts vanish as I fiendishly collapse the tavern roof on the local yokels.

I must admit that some members of our campaign do get carried away in their continuing efforts to work out the week's frustrations. On one such occasion one poor Ork took an unlimited amount of abuse. They captured this poor creature, and started to interrogate him mercilessly. They would slice up his face and immediately heal the damage with a gem of regeneration. It was cruel, but we all relished the poor Ork's trauma. This episode was a great way to work off the tensions of an Astronomy quiz.

D&D is the best outlet for a week of failures and the attendant feeling of helplessness. It is a chance to clear your mind and start out fresh. So go out there and do some disgusting and humiliating things to a family of trolls. You'll feel better in no time.

Why is there such a fascination with magic items in most FRP campaigns? There is little support for such a widespread presence in most fantasy literature, yet many campaigns are afflicted with literally hundreds of magic items, sometimes as many as 30 per character. Think about it. In most heroic fantasy tales there may be one or two such items, and there are rare and fabulous prizes. This magic item proliferation arises from a desire for increased power among players, and a fascination for unique and unusual effects in the GM. While it is not realistic, the practice is not totally meritless, as it does add novelty when handled properly.

Whatever the number of magic items in a campaign, it is the nature and style of the items more than the number which can make a shambles of the campaign. In AD&D and other systems there are tables for rolling the powers of an item randomly. This is the type of idiosyncrasy which can destroy the integrity of a campaign. While too many items will make a campaign over-powered, it is possible that items which are internally consistent, not born of die rolls, have a far less damaging effect.

This may seem extreme, but I have seen repeatedly that players just cannot respect magic items which have no reason for existing. A serious player thinks less of his GM and himself if he is carrying around a +3/+3 sword which controls snakes, creates light, shoots fireballs, and raises the dead. This is not a magic item. It is more like a catalogue. A sword which has related and complementary powers would be more believable. If you don't take the time to make magic items realistic your players may decide not to bother to make their characters realistic either.

The start towards creating believable magic items is to determine the origin and function of the item. If you have these two aspects in mind you can use them as a guide for the powers of the item. For example, you might choose 'light' as your theme, and create a shield, shall we say, with such light related powers as blinding light or a reflective effect. It could even be on charges generated by exposure to the sun. Almost any word or concept can be used as the core idea of an item, and powers can be developed out of this core.

The origin of a magic item is just as important. Who would make the item and why? There are a variety of reasons for creating items, but they can be divided into two groups, between artifacts and more mundane items. Artifacts come from sources beyond normal human ken, and beyond the powers of regular magic. Good ideas for artifacts include giving them a curse or a mission which is appropriate to their nature and to the power source from which they come. More mundane items are of human origin, so it makes sense to give them functional powers which are closely related, but at the same time limit them by charges and the like because of the lesser power of their creator. It should be easy to employ a bit of imagination and make your items well detailed and internally consistent if you think about them a bit.

Putting random or unrelated powers in a magic item is ridiculous. Nature may be random, but the works of magic are made by men. They are made for clear purposes and within the limitations of their makers. They are functional tools and should be designed for realistic use. A few well-made items will be better for a campaign than a jumble of illogical toys.

VIRTUE & VICE(#17) Dave Nalle

One problem which faces many GMs is that of giving lively personality to the non-player characters of a fantasy world. It is easy for a player to make his few characters well rounded and believable, but the GM has to deal quickly with hundreds of characters, each of whom is theoretically just as real as any player's character. Unfortunately, no GM has the time to work every encounter, create or NPC out completely. For encounters and incidents to be fun the NPCs really have to have personalities, but giving them more than rudimentary, knee-jerk responses is difficult even for the most industrious GM.

Fantasy campaigns come from the tradition of fantasy literature, and the answer to this problem can be found in the sources of that literature. Modern literature can give some ideas for characterization, but the best source for what can be called 'stock characterization' are the works of Shakespeare, Chaucer and other English masters. These early writers used an understanding of basic human nature and some common personality patterns to isolate the principles and elements to create a character with only a few key ideas. Such characters are part of the background in everyone's mind, and all you need is the right triggers to bring them out. With this technique and a few aids you can define an NPC in a few words and let the complex connotations in the player's mind do your work for you.

An easy way to do this is through the use of archetypes, especially the Virtues and Vices. In the Middle Ages and Renaissance a person's character was seen as composed of virtues and vices of different intensities. This system can work well in a fantasy campaign as well. Specific virtues or vices in a character are significant in their intensity or absence, and are divided into 7 areas of virtue and seven areas of vice.

There are seven vices. They are: pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice and sloth. Each person possesses these to greater or lesser degrees, with a low rating indicating the opposite of that vice, such as humility as the absence of pride. Most characters should be at the balancing point. A good way to represent this is to rate each vice on a 1-9 scale, with 5 as balance, values over 5 showing intensity and numbers below 5 showing the opposite quality. For example, a character rated 6 for pride would be slightly prideful, while one rated 2 for lust would be quite chaste. All 7 should be given ratings on a fully developed character, and the interaction of them and the 7 virtues should create a nice sketch of a personality.

There are also 7 virtues. They are: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance. They also have opposites and a 1-9 scale can be used to represent them.

Thus, by defining these basic, general traits you can have a personality, even in numerical terms. To simplify the system you can just pick the highest and lowest vices and the highest and lowest virtues and mention them and their intensity in either direction as representative of the character, though that is a bit more sketchy. No one is totally normal, so characters with straight 5s would be unusual.

This system partakes of the nature of an alignment system, but goes beyond the limits of most such systems and rather than dealing in abstracts, illuminates more important specifics. It gives a much better idea of what a character is like than you can get with a traditional polar alignment system. For quick definition, you can use one letter abbreviations for the virtues and vices and plus or minus indicators, such as P-E-G+/F-H-I-, to indicate a gluttonous and hopeful character with low pride, envy, faith and temperance.

This is a really flexible system, and you can go almost anywhere with it with minor modifications and changes appropriate to your campaign. Of course, there will always be instances where important NPCs should be fully described, but this can simplify a lot of quick and rough situations.

TRIVIA

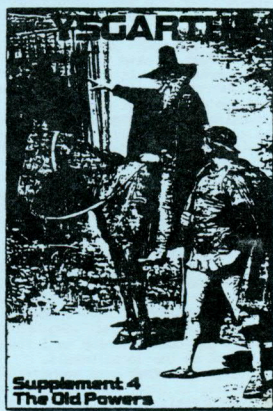
To round out our look back, how about a little trivia, some interesting if pointless facts on our past and activities.

All told quite a few people have written almost a million words for *Abyss*. By far the most prolific is David Nalle with over 130,000 words starting in issue #1. Second is Lew Bryson with about 35,000 words, mostly fiction. Third is Jon Schuller with 26,000 words. Ten writers have written about two thirds of the material in *Abyss*, and they are in addition to the previous three: Carl Jones, John Davies, Eric Olson, Ron Pehr, Tom Curtin, David Margrave and Rick Shaw. Since the time that we've been running feedback sections, the highest rated type of article have been 'Backgrounding' articles with 6 number ones, the second highest rated have been articles on religion with 5 number ones and the third highest have been 'Berserkergang' editorials with 4 top ratings. The writer with the most number one ratings is David Nalle(7), followed by Jon Schuller and Carl Jones(3 each). The five highest rated issues overall are 22(89), 28(88), 24(86), 27(84) and 23(84). The longest running series of articles is 'In the Speculum', which has been in all but one issue since its start in #13(15 issues). It is followed closely by the 'Mini-Adventure' series which got an early start in #3 and has been in 13 issues since then, with Dave Nalle and Jan Mierik ruling this area with 4 adventures each. It is tied with the series of articles on religion which began in #13 and has been dominated by David Nalle who authored all but three articles. Third Place is a tie between the 'Berserkergang' series with 8 articles since #13(dominated by Jon Schuller and David Nalle), and Lew Bryson's 'Off Polarion' series which has had 8 sections from #5/6 to #19. The largest amount of fiction has been written by Lew Bryson, who in addition to his 'Off Polarion' series with 8 sections also has 3 sections of 'Mission of Intemperance' in print, with more to come. Without question, 'Guess What's Coming to Dinner' is the worst series of articles we've ever published, garnering ratings in the 20s and 30s, despite the fact that munchkins are always clamoring for more monsters.

So far *Abyss* has been a wonderful source for useless statistics, and with any luck, the next thirty issues will be even more trivial. Stick with us and keep your score card ready.



ADVENTURE UNLIMITED

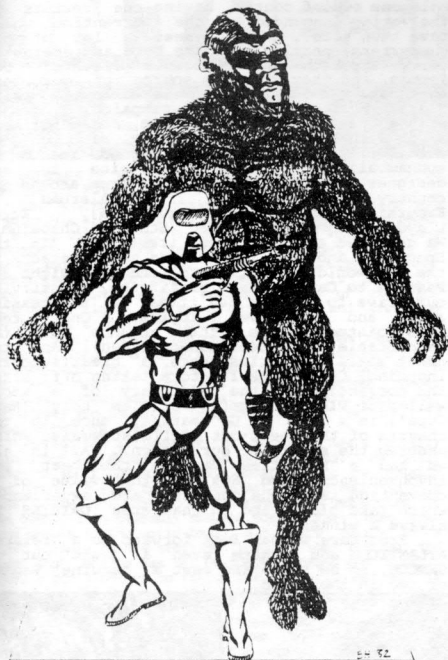


Supplement 4
The Old Powers

If you're looking for role-playing adventures to run with either AD&D or Ysgarth, we have the answer. We've got a back library of some 15 adventures in print, all available at the very reasonable price of \$2 including postage. Just out are two new adventures, *The Hills of Biazula* (intrigue and rebellion in the wilds of Jahnam) and *Street Shadows* (An introductory urban adventure set in Ysgarth). Soon to be released are *Citadel of Zushran* (high power quest in the world of Uttgart), *Rivermasters of Arania* (a dangerous mission in enemy territory), and *Dark Waters* (murder and magic on the docks of Ptolemais). All are available at \$2 including postage and upcoming items can be advance ordered. You can also order 4 adventures for only \$7 and save a dollar.

YSGARTH ROLLS ON

Ysgarth continues to fill its role as the leader in gaming innovation and playability. The revised second edition is still available at \$13.95 including postage, providing the best systems and ideas for fantasy role-playing with an emphasis on character development, background and realism. In addition to the three supplements already out, we now have available supplement #4, *The Old Powers*, which provides a selection of background material with an emphasis on demons and undead, plus a scenario and new magic system variants. Supplements are \$3 each.



In a manly kind of way John Bashaw, Lew Bryson and myself piled into a specially rented Ragmobile (a burgundy '84 Reliant K station wagon), loaded it up with all sorts of wonderful Ragnarok products (including some nice bug-catchers on the roof), and headed south and west from DC on I66-81-40-30-35 to Dallas. That's 1400 miles, and we left late Wednesday afternoon, burning up the miles to arrive in Dallas about 24 hours later on Thursday evening. Our journey was guarded by the presence of **The Black Thing**, and the fact that Lew did most of the driving (a natural choice, as he has had five more accidents in the last few years than John and I put together, so we thought his experience would carry us through, especially considering how well he flipped his jeep at **ORIGINS** last year). We arrived at the site, unloading with just haste, and went in search of our hotel through Dallas' labyrinthine multi-level highway system. When we got to the Golliday Inn (first class all the way), we discovered that our rooms which were reserved only 10 months before had one bed for one person rather than the four person accommodations we had arranged and been promised, so it was drop dead to the lispng hotel manager and down I35 to Howard Johnson's, about 2 miles closer to the convention, the same price, and able to meet our needs. Despite the disreputable appearance of the part of Dallas we were in there were no bloodstains anywhere in sight, but we did manage to find a great Spanish American radio station with a new outlook on completely random omni-lingual programming (the DJ actually changed languages 3 or 4 times in one sentence). People started drifting in that night and the next morning, until we had added to our number Howard Alt, Ian Hense, Mark Killough, David Feaster, Cliff Hall, Greg MacRae and eventually the reluctant Rick Bueker (who we had to bully into flying in from Houston).

The dealer room opened on Friday morning, and we were ready, with our flashy new display, well exposed in what was probably our best booth position to date. Our preparation was fairly good, with most of the new items we'd been planning ready to go. New releases included Ysgarth Adventure #5, **Street Shadows**, **London by Night** and **Passage to Cathay**. Sales the first day were about as expected, a

15 moderate Friday with a lot of people looking and mostly old customers buying (TCT players picking up **Triad** or **London by Night**, **Middle Passage** fans slaving over **Passage to Cathay**, and Ysgarthers buying a variety of items). Our new boxed editions attracted some favorable attention, especially from retailers and distributors who were at the convention scouting around. Now, usually at a convention sales on Saturday are double or triple those for Friday, and on Sunday they are somewhere between the other two days. Overall sales increase or decrease depending on your supporting events and publicity. We were doing it all, holding smash events, interesting demos, and distributing flyers, yet sales on Saturday were lower than on Friday, and on Sunday they only picked up a little. Had it not been for store and distributor sales we might not have done at all well, and there were some small one-item companies there who looked about ready to die. Our sales were steady across the board, and it was only because of the variety we offer that we did at all well. It was the worst dealer room I've seen at a national convention to date, even worse than at Detroit. There is one central reason for this...mismanagement. Conventions in Texas are generally bad for some very specific reasons which we (The UT University Adventure Gaming Society/UTHERCON and Ragnarok) had been telling the DFW Gamemasters (who ran the con) about repeatedly for the past year. Texas conventions generally have space problems. There is too much of it. Everything is spread out too much and its too hot to move around. Together with a number of other gamers and company reps I made two requests of the DFW Gamemasters well before **ORIGINS**. These were that all major tournament events be in the same building as the dealer room and that all demos be scheduled into their own rooms at specific times, and be listed for ticketing in the pre-registration info. These are the two practices which can make or break a dealer room and the general atmosphere of the convention, and the reason why Texas conventions are so dead. Needless to say, both of these suggestions were overlooked. The tournaments were in hotels about 3 to 4 miles away from the dealer room and all of the demos were lumped together on tables at one end of the hall with no publicity to speak of. As a result, no one could find the demos or knew what was available and most of the convention attendees only passed through the building which housed the dealer room once. The unofficial consensus estimate of the total attendance was 1600-1900, while it seemed like the same 50 or 100 people went through the dealer room over and over, with few new faces showing up. It is annoying to be ignored, especially when it costs you money and your cassandric predictions are proven right.

I suppose that the bright spot of the convention was the events, though there were scheduling problems and a number of tickets were lost. Our seminars went very well, though attendance was about 60% of what it has been at past **ORIGINS**. Our audiences were particularly pleased with our seminars on 'Character Role Playing', 'World Design' and our newest item 'Games into Print'. An interesting note here is that there was a core of about 20 persons who attended all of these events, and only about half the people at each one were new faces. The crowning blow of mismanagement in this area was that contrary to practical and reasonable policy and practice from more successful conventions (especially on the east coast) we were paid only for the tickets which we collected, not for tickets bought, so that as less than half of those who signed up actually showed, the convention management pocketed about \$400 which we had earned by our publicity and reputation. The fact that we needed to collect tickets was buried in a pre-convention flyer, and though we collected tickets out of habit, other groups didn't bother on the assumption that payment would be made on a more reasonable basis, so they lost a good bit of time, effort and money. Overall I understand that in most cases tournaments and other events satisfied the players, but a little effort and organization could have made a lot of people happier, as disgruntled event

runners may not run such nice events at such reasonable prices in the future.

It may sound like I'm griping (and I am within limits), but we reached our minimum profit figure, and that's enough to keep me happy most of the time. What annoys me is bungling, and much though I enjoyed ORIGINS, it was a festival of bungling in several areas, lowering a potentially good event to coordinated mediocrity. I don't like to lay blame around liberally, but it rests firmly on the shoulders of two groups. The first is GAMA (The Game Manufacturer's Association, which controls ORIGINS) which has been illogical, impractical and a bit vain in attempting to move ORIGINS around the country to keep a 'national' flavor. The convention has always done better in attendance and other areas on the east coast, and why do we insist on moving it elsewhere only because of an apparent fear of TSR and GENCON. It seems childish and almost suicidal. The second group is the DFW Gamemasters, and while they are a nice, helpful and professional bunch of guys, they just weren't up to it as an organization. No individuals are at fault here, but a good bit of the fault lies in their general area. DFW put on a good show of professionalism, with matching shirts, lots of tax-deductible touring to other conventions and a bold pursuit of free publicity, but once the convention hit the boards things fell apart. A professional attitude is not enough if you are under staffed (as they clearly were), and though they put on a good show of being helpful and serious about running a good con, their scheduling and logistics errors showed considerable carelessness and some convention policies made them look rather shoddy. It is little wonder considering the controversy and accusations which have surrounded their regular convention DALLCON. This year DFW tried to do ORIGINS in an ambitious way, but they just didn't have the ability or devotion to do it justice. Little practical things showed how ill prepared they were. For example, the program book was more or less randomly assembled and they had to do a separate book of ads, rather than including them with the event listings. Who wants a book of just ads, and who wants to advertise in a program book which has no events or programs listed in it? Or in another area, it just isn't bright to schedule a 2 or 3 thousand person convention in a town which is already housing a huge 10000 person plus convention like the American Library Association which was using the Dallas Convention Center that weekend. This puts the smaller convention into inadequate facilities and lowers the availability of hotel rooms and other services. Planning, preparedness and practicality are the keys to running a good convention, and this year ORIGINS just didn't have it. In the long run all the blame hangs on GAMA, of course, for approving Dallas and DFW, and not policing the convention preparations and setting clear and indisputable requirements in important areas. No more bitching, no more complaints. Next year we'll be back on the east coast. Let's do it right in '85 and keep doing it right from then on.

There were plenty of good moments on a personal level. Sure To Challenge Tomorrow lost out in the ORIGINS AWARDS to James Bond 007 and Abyss lost out for the 2nd time in a row to the Journal of 20th Century Wargaming, but we're small, and it is some achievement to just get nominated in that kind of company and

hold our own (of course, having the results of the voting announced at the convention would have been nice). We did meet a lot of old supporters, particularly the bold and energetic Jerry Epperson and the ever faithful Jon Shuman, and they were the source of our best business. In addition we were able to bring players from early Ysgarth campaigns together with my new players from Austin, and experiment a bit with the new combat system, although our actual playing sessions seemed dominated by somnambulists. It was also nice to see designer and publisher comrades from around the country like Lee Gold (Alarums & Excursions/Lands of Adventure), Kerry Lloyd (Gamelords) and Greg Stafford (Chaosium). We gathered a lot of new items for 'In the Speculum, and John Bashaw made good contacts in the PBM world. Reaction to London by Night and Passage to Cathay was gratifying, justifying our drive to produce new items in progressive areas and on novel topics. One great disappointment was the absence of the redoubtable Eric Olson (Mondo Ragman), and two great small victories were a great (euphoria inducing) Chinese meal before taking off after the convention and the discovery of a whole wallop of Black Things (as well as holy 'Hawg Chaps') in a Stop & Go market, much to the chagrin of the check-out girl (discoveries which assured the safety of our return). All in all we had a fun time despite the heat and inconveniences, and 80% of the value of a convention is in the contacts and experiences which take place, and in that area ORIGINS is always a winner.

From here we can look forward to a relaxed ATLANTICON and perhaps even a jaunt out to GENCON, so be there and meet a genuine Ragman or two in the flesh.



GET IT IN A BOX

We've got all these wonderful new boxes, and we'll sell you anything in them. They've got pretty covers and protect the games. The following items are available in boxes: Ysgarth (\$21 including postage, rules, three supplements and record sheets), To Challenge Tomorrow (\$11 including Triad, and soon to be available at a higher price with London by Night as well), Middle Passage (\$5 with extra record sheets and counters), Adventure Packs (\$7 each, featuring 4 adventures in sequence, either #2-Ysgarth Adventures 1-4, #3-Utgart Adventures 1-4, #1-Jahannam Adventures 1-4, or #4-Jahannam Adventures 5-8). All prices include postage and orders can be made with the form in this issue. In general, if you want something in a box, specify what you want boxed and add a dollar to the price.

IN THE SPECULUM

BOOKS

THE PRISONER OF BLACKWOOD CASTLE

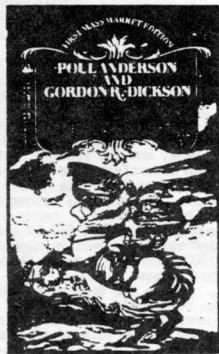
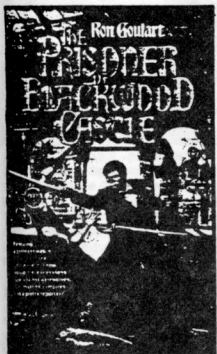
Ron Goulart (Avon)

Ron Goulart has brought his polished if a bit predictable style to a new setting, but though this novel is set in the mythical Victorian Europe of Ruritania and Graustark, it retains the traditional Goulart flavor of mayhem and mechanical men. Like most of Goulart's recent work this is a short and silly novel, but it is a bit more interesting than his endless stream of slapstick Science Fiction, and makes for light and diverting reading for a couple of hours.

The story concerns the forthright American detective Harry Challenge and his efforts to right situations which are very much awry in the Balkan kingdom of Orlandia. It has everything a story set in this period needs, vampires, werewolves, intrigue, love interest, magicians, hypnotists and Goulart's favorite, robots, or in this case, clockwork automata.

Goulart has a lively writing style and has a facility with stock character types and twisted plots. He still tends to stuff too much into a novel and sip by details and ideas I'd like to see explored, but for once, in this novel I was left wanting more, rather than being glad it was over. I've probably endured more Goulart than most sane people in the world today, and there really is a clear formula to his stories, and it has reached the point that once he has set up the background and plot I usually don't bother to finish the novel to see how it came out. *The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle* has the same basic plot and elements as his SF novels, but it was different enough to still be a good read.

Goulart is always funny, and liberally sprinkles silly scenes and gags through his novels, whatever their nature, and if you aren't looking for deep meaning or heights of literary excellence, *The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle* is fun, light reading. (David Nalle)



HOKA

Paul Anderson & Gordon R. Dickson (Tor)

This collection of short stories is a sequel to Anderson and Dickson's previous work *Earthman's Burden*. It follows in the same vein, chronicling the bizarre activities of various groups of Hokas, the unusually imaginative and culturally impressionable race from the planet Toka. In this case all of the stories take place in a clear time frame and are united by the presence of Alexander Jones, minister plenipotentiary to Toka from the Interbeing League.

Stories in this collection bring out some more background and information on the Hokas, and are neatly illustrated by a number of good artists, including Phil Foglio. The stories are all quite humorous, reminiscent of Keith Laumer's Retief stories in style, though of somewhat more limited scope. Several of the stories appeared previously in *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION*. All of the stories are well written and fun to read, but 'Joy in Mudville' and 'The Napoleon Crime' are particularly good. The former deals with a bizarre inter-species baseball game, and the later presents an interesting look at the Hoka replay of the Napoleonic wars. The whole idea is

sort of like a romp through an entire world of rabid full-time role-players.

These are not groundbreaking or uplifting stories, but they are fun and constantly diverting, and original in their content and humor. I can definitely recommend Hoka to those who like light Science Fiction. (DFN)

MAGAZINES

FLAGSHIP

FBI POB 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252
APP:8, CON:7, VAL:4, PER:7, OVE:7

FLAGSHIP is one of the two new professional magazines devoted to Play by Mail (PBM) games and gaming. The other, *PBM UNIVERSAL*, has yet to put out its first issue. As far as I've been able to determine, this is the first non-houseorgan magazine of its type. The current issue is 34 pages of text with so-so art, in an 8 by 12 format, in black and white and typeset, with excellent printing and production. Subscriptions are \$11 for four issues or \$3 each, a bit steep, since about 9 pages are advertising.

FLAGSHIP is divided into four main sections. 'Explorers Findings' contains game reviews, the length seems to vary with the complexity of the game (1000-5000 words). These reviews seem to be intelligent and fair, giving both good and bad points, some offering hints to beginning players. 'Professional Secrets' contains hints, strategy and advice on how to play in various PBMs. This section is a little more biased than the reviews, and is mostly slanted to how the author thinks a given game should be played. It does contain some helpful items and synopses of rules. 'Ghost in the Machine' is the one truly unique section, and contains articles written by PBM game designers on how to design, develop and run your own game. The last section is mostly made up of articles and fiction written by PBMs or based on PBM games.

In the back of each issue is a section called 'The Spokesmen Speak', which contains press releases from various PBM companies. Also in each issue is a list of PBM companies, their addresses, and some examples of turn fees/set-up costs. There is also a combined section of classified ads and question and answer called 'The Mighty Pen'.

I recommend FLAGSHIP, but then I'm an avid PBMer as well as a (hopefully soon) game designer. If you are interested in PBM games, buy an issue to get an idea of what goes on. (John Bashaw)



MISER'S HORDE

22 Hall La. Upminster Essex, UK RM14 1AF
APP:4, CON:5, VAL:7, PER:6, OVE:6

This is an up and coming British magazine which came across my desk a while back, and shows some promise, and I hear that it has been improving since #4 which I currently have. It is 50p, or about \$1 all things considered, per issue. It is edited by John McKeown, who seems to have a strong controlling hand.

MISER'S HORDE is presented in a style which follows that of the most successful (self-destructive) British zines **DRAGONLORDS** and **BEHOLDER**. It has a strong orientation towards **AD&D**, **Runequest** and **Traveller**, and presents balanced and sensible material, including well put together modules and variants. There are the obligatory letters columns, miniatures section and fanzine review column, plus news features and a fair number of editorial asides. This issue has a particularly interesting solo **AD&D** adventure based on a story by Enid Blyton. The mood of **MISER'S HORDE** is fairly relaxed and engaging, though it is not as raucous or humorous as **DRAGONLORDS**. The art and appearance are not great, but the reproduction and presentation are fairly good.

MISER'S HORDE looks like a nice small magazine with a future, perhaps with the potential to grow and develop to fill the void which has opened up at the top of the extremely active British zine world. Worth checking out. Watch these pages for an update. (DFN)

**ADVENTURER'S CLUB**

Hero Games, 92A 21st Ave, San Mateo, CA 94402
APP:7, CON:5, VAL:5, PER:6, OVE:5

The one overriding observation to make up front about **ADVENTURER'S CLUB** is that it is aimed at a limited and specific audience, and is very clearly a house organ, though not necessarily in a negative sense. This is the magazine of **Champions** and **Hero Games**, and has to be considered as such. It runs about 50 pages in digest size at \$2.50 a copy or \$10 for 4 issues (no savings). This fairly low price is a bit deceptive, as space is not used very well, and there is a lot of plugging of Hero Games products, even beyond the news level which would be of interest to their fans. The art is uneven, but averages fairly good, and the overall layout and appearance are nice.

I have issue #3 on hand, and I believe it is the latest issue, the first for this year, though there should be another one coming out just about now. This issue has a range of articles on **Champions** and **Espionage** related topics. They are universally well done, and certainly useful. As a sometime **Champions** player I found them interesting, if not inspiring. There is a letter column, an informal editorial from Steve Peterson, a scenario for **Champions** (Some gripes here. The idea is good, it's not just smash and bash, but it is awfully dependant on having all sorts of other **Champions** aids), and a lot of articles on character creation, character use, and character development. There are also two reviews, which show a little bias and some unwillingness to look at alternative game systems objectively. Overall the articles are good, but there is a serious lack of variety, not just in subject matter, but in the area of the games being considered. An article on scenario or campaign design or something generally applicable to a variety of superhero games might be nice and improve the breadth of appeal of the magazine.

ADVENTURER'S CLUB is a good, if a bit limited magazine for **Champions** players, but even for players of other superhero games it is rather one sided. It also gets a little annoying to have the editors/publishers thumping their drum so much in the articles and ad/information pages. It makes it all sound a little insincere. Other magazines, even **DRAGON** try to give some variety of coverage. I don't think **AC** need branch out to cover all of **RPing**, but a general superhero emphasis might be a good idea. For **Champions** (and maybe **Espionage**) players I'd say go for it, but it really isn't for anyone else, however well done it may be. (DFN)

**NUTS & BOLTS OF GAMING**

3753 W. 80th Pl., Chicago, IL 60652
APP:6, CON:5, VAL:3, PER:7, OVE:4

N&B started out as a **PBM** game magazine, and has decided to branch out and try to cover more area. It has been around for a while, shutting down for a while in '82, and now back with some vengeance and an eye on the bigger markets. It is visually appealing, though the art is of variable quality. They pack a lot of material into a page, and the reduced text is readable. There is a bit much advertising and the format is somewhat haphazard, but editor Rich Buda keeps things moving along fairly well. The price is rather steep at \$2.25 for 32 pages with a fairly heavy advertising content, and subscriptions are \$10.20 per year, some savings. One interesting aspect is that they limit all articles to 1500 words or less, so there is a good bit of variety in each issue.

There are several notable regular features, including an editorial, letters page, home video game column, news, games page, and classified ads. Some articles in the issue I have at hand include an interview with Steve Gray of **Empire Games**, a look at the **Star Trek PBM**, silly fiction, and a couple of commentary articles on the state of **PBM** gaming. It is important to note that although they are trying to change their orientation, **N&B** is still almost exclusively devoted to **PBM** games, so the appeal is naturally limited. The main problem here is the haphazard presentation and randomness of selection and arrangement of articles. There also seems to be less variety than their could be, and fewer topics and games covered than one might like.

N&B shows promise, and has some interesting items, but on looking back over it, there's really less concrete and repeatedly useful material than I would like to see. It is worth checking out, though, and certainly of interest especially to **PBMers**. (Jon Schuller)

DRAGONLORDS DRAGS OFF INTO THE DARKNESS

Bad news in the world of Britzines. **DRAGONLORDS** has stopped publication as of #21 (yes, that is the cover of #22, but you can't have one, it's a limited edition issue). The reasons for this are varied, but it comes from Ian Marsh wanting to have more time to himself (something I sympathize with) and Mike Lewis' desire to carry on his quest for glory in **WHITE DWARF** and other bigtime markets. Perhaps with a little luck we can attract some of the **DL** regulars to **ABYSS**, and the spirit

will live on. What will happen to those who were getting D through us is unclear, but a solution will be reached soon. We're hoping to get another first-class Britzine to replace it, and you'll be kept informed. Bear with us, and write for updates if you want, but look for news in these pages. I regret the departure of D, as it was a unique 'zine, and did some things which I wished we could do more with more success in ABYSS. We will mourn for DRAGONLORDS, but I think its spirit has moved into a dark niche between my desk and the pile of trash paper behind it, and is hissing insane dictation when my mind wanders. Best of luck to Ian, Mike Marc and the rest whatever they may move on to. (DFN)



GAMES & AIDS

PALLADIUM BOOKS

5669 Casper Ave, Detroit, MI 48210

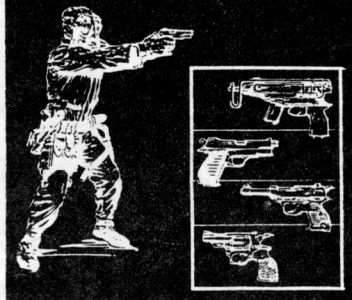
Although Palladium has been expanding their line into new areas with somewhat dubious success, they are continuing to publish their excellent series of factual and informational aids. Two new releases in this series are *Contemporary Weapons and Weapons & Castles of the Orient*, both of which are useful as resources, and while they could be invaluable in certain types of role-playing, they are interesting in and of themselves for the wealth of information which they contain. Each book is about 50 pages and sells at \$4.95.

Contemporary Weapons is an overview of hand-arms available for use in modern combat, covering arms primarily from the later half of the 20th century. There is less than a page of text, and the remainder of the book consists solely of listings of weapons, cartridges and accessories, with functional line drawings and brief descriptions, including all of the vital statistics, such as calibre, muzzle velocity, feed, weight, barrel length, and approximate effective range. There are also simple rules for determining penetration and tissue damage, including a critical hit system. What is lacking in these brief mechanics is any real analysis of trauma, but the systems are really secondary to the resource material, and it is clearly set-up to provide information to be adapted to any system or campaign. There is also a nice basic explanation of how different types of weapons work and their functional characteristics. There are a few omissions, but that is to be expected, and you'll find all of your favorites here. The choice of line drawings as illog was wise, and is far superior to photographs. What would have been nice to see here was a more practical listing of information. Instead of listing the weapons one at a time with a text-like description, it might have been nice to have a cross indexed chart of each type of weapon listing each weapon and its characteristics for easy reference, or even both

The Palladium Book Of

CONTEMPORARY WEAPONS

compiled by
Maryann Donald



types of listing. This would make the material a bit more accessible. Organization by nation may also be a bit confusing, and might be helped by an index. The material here is excellent, useful and applicable to most games with logical mechanical adjustment, but the presentation could be a bit clearer and more accessibly organized, and some notes on earlier period hand arms would not have taken too much space and could have added some depth. Two specific gripes have to be made. I would have liked to see what the original release dates of the weapons were, and what their selling prices are, and perhaps a note on general availability. If I'm running a WWII campaign, I certainly don't want everyone thinking they can buy Uzis, and certainly the availability of arms from one country may be limited in another. Certainly worth checking out for modern period role-players.

Weapons & Castles of the Orient is a sort of sequel to *Weapons & Armor*, one of their earliest releases. This aid explores the hardware of warfare in the orient, from the smallest hand arms to the largest fortress. While I'm no expert on the area, it seems well researched and worked out. The presentation is somewhat haphazard, with fortifications broken down by region, but weapons lumped together by similarities, though their national origin is mentioned. All the vital specifics and illustrations ranging from awful to excellent are given. Some of the castle diagrams are particularly good, while some of the weapon drawings are a bit childish. The type is dense but readable, but there seems to be a lot of space wasted. My only substantial argument is with the stats which are given for the weapons beyond the physical stats. The weapon mechanics is the same which they have used previously, and is somehow both complex and overly general. In that there are more derived, comparative abstracts provided than I really need, and it is a bit hard to tell where they draw the line between very similar weapons (or why), and it is hard to tell just how to apply the stats given. However, the information is first rate, and certainly usable even if you don't bother to wrestle with the mechanics. The armor section is a bit overcomplicated, and the castle section has just what you need, clear comprehensible drawings of lots of castles and features, though I do wish there had been more. This will be of use to those just getting into an oriental setting, but may be old news to those rabid orientalists I know are out there. For the rest of us the appeal is limited, but it might be worth looking into. (CJ)

THEATRE OF THE MIND ENTERPRISES

POB 319 Kirkwood, NJ 08043

TOME has two new items out which I think we'll start calling 'adventure anthologies'. This may be a brief review, as *Whispers from the Abyss* and *Glozel east*. *Authenticus* follow TOME's traditional pattern of quality. Both of these are designed for Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu system, but because they are collections of well developed scenarios they are easy to adapt to any versatile system.

Whispers from the Abyss contains three adventures, 'On the Wings of Madness', 'De Schip Zonder Schaduw' and



'Whispers from the Abyss'. The production quality is good, if not flashy, though there is some space wasted in the typesetting and layout, and the fact that the three adventures are written in different and distinct styles is rather disconcerting. 'On the Wings of Madness' uses one of my favorite historical NPCs (E. A. Wallis Budge) to launch the adventure, which is a fairly loosely organized quest after an Egyptian artifact, involving a trans-continental zeppelin ride. 'De Schip Conder Schaduw' is in the somewhat harder to deal with traditional TOME style of following a form similar to a play-scenario, combining ancient artifacts with zeppelins and the flying Dutchman, for an interesting if rather rigid mix. 'Whispers from the Abyss' also follows the traditional scenario format. It is the most traditional of the lot, being based out of Miskatonic University, and dealing with matters American, particularly the lost colony of Roanoke. All three of these adventures are rather well done, but because of the way they are set up they are a bit rigid and hard to adapt or switch around, though this could have been prevented with a little more development. On the whole this collection is easy to recommend, though the \$10 price tag is a little hard to swallow for something only about twice the length of an issue of ABYSS, but that is the way prices are going these days.

Glozel est Authentique has only two adventures and is a little bit shorter. Both adventures partake of the traditional Call of Cthulhu mythology, but with some variations in setting and material. The layout and design are a bit better than previous work, with a nice visual appeal overall, particularly the illustrations by Joseph O'Neill, which are a rather nice addition to the package. Both adventures are done in the play-scenario format, and share the bond of being set in foreign countries, as might have been clear from the title. 'Glozel est Authentique' is an investigation of an ancient civilization in southern France. It is well organized and quite complete, though they try to tie together an awful lot of threads, and the Cthulhian elements almost seem tacked on as an afterthought. The second adventure is 'Secrets of the Kremlin'. It explores the connections between Bolshevism and strange ancient cults, with Stalin keeping an ancient alien demi-demon prisoner in the Kremlin. It is a rather novel and imaginative situation, and a bit more challenging than 'Glozel est Authentique'. On the whole these two adventures are nicely developed and worth looking into if you want to spice up a Call of Cthulhu campaign with something more unusual. (DFN)

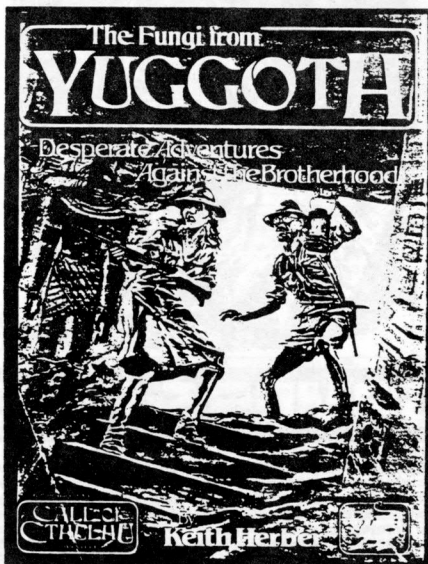
THE FUNGI FROM YUGGOTH
Chaosium, POB 6302, Albany, CA 94706

Here we see another approach to writing adventures for Call of Cthulhu. While TOME takes the approach of presenting collections of short stories, in this aid, Keith Herber has gone more the route of a novel with

chapters, or something inbetween a novel and a collection of related stories.

The adventures in this collection revolve around investigating the activities of a secret organization called The Brotherhood of the Beast. Conveniently, this investigation takes the characters into a wide variety of settings and situations, all fairly well presented and developed. All told there are 8 situations, and a couple of optional adjustments and additions. The organization and presentation is excellent, and the art is rather nice as well. Settings range from Transylvania to San Francisco to Peru, and a variety of loosely connected leads and trails are available to follow. Each of the units in the collection is fairly well contained, and enough material is given for a full session of play. While most of the material is not exactly inspirational, it is all solid and playable, though sometimes a bit derivative of old movies and familiar stories. The only real problem is not a valid criticism, namely that some parts are awfully dependent on Call of Cthulhu alone, making adaption to other more flexible systems a bit of an effort, perhaps limiting some of the appeal of the scenarios.

This is good fare for active Call of Cthulhu players, skillfully and playably presented. It isn't exciting or all that new, but The Fungi from Yuggoth will provide a good bit of varied play in a style which is familiar but done well enough not to be boring. (DFN)

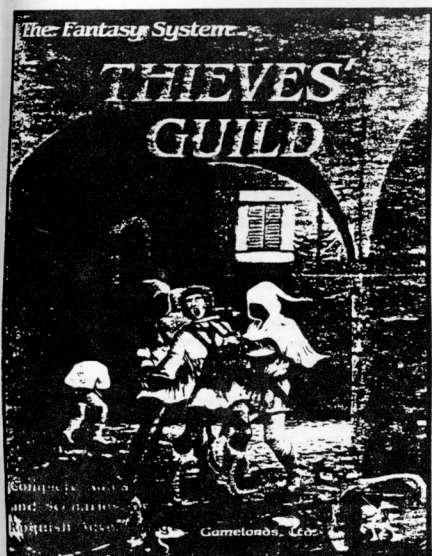


GAMELORDS LTD

18616 Grosbeak Ter., Gaithersburg, MD 20879

There are a few interesting newish items from Gamelords which we haven't gotten a chance to look at yet, including their role-playing rules and two new adventures designed for thief type characters.

First, while The Fantasy System is billed as 'Complete rules for roguish adventuring', one thing which it clearly is not is a complete and fully developed role playing game. What it is in essence is a codification of the social and character system and thieving system which has been developing through the 'Thieves' Guild series. In addition to the absence of any rules on religion or magic (though I understand a system is in the works), I have to make one criticism up front. This is possibly the single worst organized game system from an otherwise organized company which I have ever seen. It seems almost as if they were trying to design several rule systems at the same time, cobbled them together, threw in a few oddities they had lying around, and then decided to market it as a game. The Fantasy System is essentially divided into two parts, seemingly only coincidentally related. The first is an excellent set of rules for running thieves in the Thieves' Guild setting, collecting and explaining a lot of good ideas, in a system which may not be to my tastes, but is detailed and fairly compatible with D&D derived systems, and certainly explains a lot of what is in their other publications. One problem with this book is that the last part of it



Loubet. It covers two types of outdoor pursuit adventures, specifically Armed Robbery and Abduction/Escape, two excellent general types of rough and tumble adventuring for multi-function rogues. Again, we're looking at detailed background and rough-sketch scenarios and encounters, essentially better suited for the experienced and flexible GM rather than the novice. There is more structure here than in *Lair of the Freebooters*, with several core scenarios and loosely related side tracks. The one problem with this aid is that it is very much part of the series, and unless you have some of the predecessors, some of the general background will be missing, as these adventures continue situations and set-ups from the earlier issues in the series. In general I'd recommend the whole series for those interested in more imaginative concepts of thieving, and *Escape from the Ashwood Mines* shows how the authors are becoming increasingly proficient and skilled. (JS)

HEARTS & MINDS

RPGL, POB 485, Lincoln, AR 72744

This is a new module for use with *Recon*, but the format is very open-ended and it could really be used with any modern period role-playing system. It fits the standard *Recon* background in the Vietnam War, and explores the challenge of winning over the support and aid of a local population. It is essentially a mini-campaign for a specially designed Special Forces team and while the topic and background are a bit sensitive, even today, the attitude towards the natives and the role of the characters is both realistic and sympathetic, and the emphasis (hard though it may be to believe) is on interaction and attitude rather than combat and conflict. *Hearts & Minds* gives a nice image of the human side of the war, and a feel for the place and people. The production is a bit rough, but all the information is there for several interesting sessions. *Hearts & Minds* may not be for everyone, but it is a nice, well developed scenario and a fairly good buy at \$3.50. (DFN)

PBM

CAPITOL

Adventures by Mail, POB 436, Cohoes, NY 12047

What? Another one from ABM, readers may be heard to mumble. That's right, boys and girls. But, since this is the only other game ABM is running, it's also the last one for a good while. CAPITOL is a science-fiction space game, in which players struggle against each other to control the most worlds and win. Simple and boring, right? Wrong, CAPITOL has an uncommonly large number of innovations incorporated into the system. First, there are twelve races composed of eight players. All the players who make up a race must work together, or at least stay out of each others way. You cannot attack another member of your race, and any bases of the same race can resupply a ship of that race, and in combat all ships of a race fight together.

Each race has an emperor and a capitol world which is the largest base and where the emperor player starts. The emperor is moved around on ships and can capture worlds with bases on them (regardless of who owns them), gaining experience making it easier for him to capture other bases.

Combat is automatic when your ships and those of another race meet. You cannot ally another race, but non-aggression pacts (by staying out of each others way) are not uncommon. To facilitate this, whenever one of your ships is over an enemy world, his name and address are included in your turn results. Movement is by a system of 'jumps', direct from world to world without bothering with the space between.

At some point in the game (around turn 18 or so) the advanced stage rules come into effect, increasing the speed of your ships and allowing you to build 'stargates' which link worlds as if they were right next to each other.

Each month is divided into three periods, the first through the tenth are one period, the eleventh to twentieth the second, and the remainder the third. Each player may submit one turn in each period. Turns are processed as they come in and your turn result is only a snapshot of your empire at the time your turn was processed.

Turn fees are quite reasonable at only \$2.50. Set up is only \$5. I find CAPITOL enjoyable and recommend it highly. (John Bashaw)

containing sample adventure scenarios seems not to have been bound into the book, perhaps deliberately (to keep the information out of the hands of the players), but it is a bit confusing. It looks as if after doing this book as a supporting aid for *Thieves' Guild* players they then decided, let's do a little quick work and pass this off as a role playing system, not just an expansion aid for thieves, so they threw in a small book called *Basic Character Creation*. This is a curious little book with information on races, background and character creation, including a skill system which three readings have failed to make clear to me, seemingly based on a combination of random and selected elements, with a rather rigid and arbitrary result. An afterword in this booklet mentions *The Naked Sword* and *Paths of Sorcery*, presumably the combat and magic systems which would make this a complete game, but are significant by their absence. In many ways this reminds me of some of the backward production done with *Arduin Grimoire* and the *Arduin Adventure*, which also issued incomplete products with strong elements and lost interest as a result, and we have yet to see *Arduin, Bloody Arduin*. The *Fantasy System* as it stands is not complete and seems hastily jumbled together. However, the thieving system is fairly good. They really should have released their thieving system as a supporting aid for their adventures, and then included it in a complete RPG when they had all of the parts together and could make a clear and coherent presentation. On the whole their system as it is developing is not all that innovative, and if it is to succeed, it will need to at least either be complete to make up for its lack of progressive systems or be presented as aids for use with other D&D type games. For \$15 or you can find more complete and challenging games. When *The Fantasy System* is complete and begins to live up to its possibilities I'll try to do a comprehensive analysis.

Lair of the Freebooters is an adventure in the *Haven* series of adventures. This is the area in which *Gamelords* has always excelled, and this is a rather well put together aid, giving the background of a region inhabited by pirates, and providing a selection of scenario set-ups and encounters to be used in the background. The way this is designed, those conditioned to TSR modules will be confused and disoriented, but it is really a better type of design, allowing a lot of latitude and flexible options for the GM, however, it requires initiative and imagination on his part, and willingness to make the background come alive. With few adjustments *Lair of the Freebooters* can be run with any D&D based system, and with little difficulty the background material can be fitted into most traditional campaigns. While the topic is not that new or exciting, the presentation and development are nice, and I can easily recommend it to players who have outgrown TSR's standard fare but are still playing D&D or a variant.

Escape from the Ashwood Mines is the latest in the *Thieves Guild* adventure series (#9), and features the best cover art I've seen so far from *Gamelords*, by Denis

THE WORLDS OF TANITH LEE

JOHN R. DAVIES

In this series we've looked at a lot of male fantasy and SF writers, but we've pretty much overlooked significant contributions from accomplished women in different areas of fantastic literature. Few women writing fantasy or SF today are as prolific or as skilled as Tanith Lee, and it is safe to say that none have matched her consistency of style and excellence. As the era of women writers like Andre Norton and Leigh Brackett who followed the style of the men around them draws to a close, a new generation of women writers is coming to the fore. While some follow distinctly masculine styles like their predecessors, there is a disturbing new breed who debase their writing as a discordant clarion for not just women's issues, but a vehemently anti-male and essentially anti-social, even anti-human rhetoric of hate. Such female equivalents of the reprehensible John Norman (*Gor* series) like Elizabeth Lynn and Jessica Amanda Salmonson have given many readers an unreasoning distaste for women writers of their generation, many of whom are outstanding if judged on their own merits. Tanith Lee has achieved an ideal balance between a feminist perspective and good storytelling. Lee manages to treat sexual and social matters in a mature, original and egalitarian way, without a need to single out any group for degradation or scorn.

Lee has been quite prolific in both Science Fiction and Fantasy, though I'm afraid some of her early works are not as good as later novels. She works in a full range of settings and styles, producing both novels and shorter work, and even doing unusual illustrations for some of her own stories. Her books can be broken down into several groups, by series and by those of related topics or types. Lee's work is distinguished by a mood which is often very strange, sometimes disturbing and sometimes quite moving. She makes interesting use of elements from archetypal mythology, and has a genius for retelling ancient stories in ways which are new and strange.

Lee's first adult fantasy novel was *The Birthgrave*, a rather grim and traditional epic fantasy which features some of her favorite character types, and is fairly well oriented towards action, with background almost secondary. The tale is told in the first person by an unnamed heroine, who goes through a number of brutal travails and situations. It is an unusual novel, but a bit murky in many ways. It was the start of a series of books which include *Vazkor, son of Vazkor*, *The Stormlord*, *Quest for the White Witch* and the latest *Anackire*. While the series started out in a traditional fantasy vein, as Lee's style and skill developed it became more influenced by her interests in Indian myth and the stories became more and more developed, expanding the role of supernatural powers and gods, and building on the dark vision of a world ruled by treachery, brutality and all manner of odd lusts. Her use of incest and homosexuality may be a little strong for some, but does lots to strengthen the mood of the series. The later books are also considerably better than the earlier ones.

Her other major fantasy series consists of *Night's Master*, *Death's Master* and *Delusion's Master*. These are interesting and rather ornate stories, somewhat loosely plotted, set in a world where certain principles are embodied and can take human form, and where all sorts of magics and spirits travel through the world. The ideas presented are fascinating, but they may be a bit annoying to readers looking for firm plot and lots of action. Much of the narrative is reflective and introspective, but for my money this is her best fantasy series. Another book which is not of the series but goes well with it is *Volkhavaar*, a brief fantasy of religion, gods and intrigue which is fairly short and one of her most generally readable works.

SF is also in Lee's repertoire, but though these stories are set in the future, her emphasis is social and personal rather than technological, so they are essentially not tied down to the realm of Science Fiction, perhaps more Science Fantasy, and they share common themes with her better fantasy novels. Her most interesting novels in



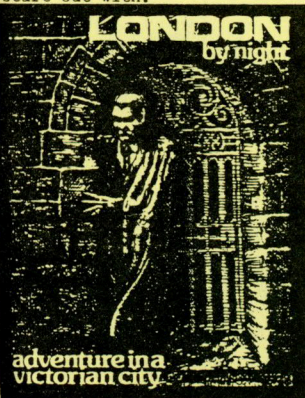
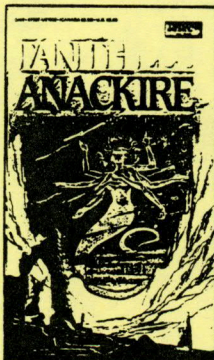
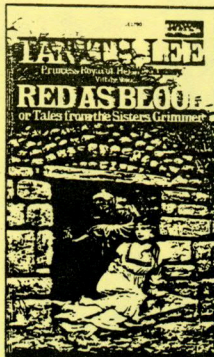
SF settings are probably an unusual vampire novel called *Sabella*, and a social satire called *The Silver Metal Lover*. She also has several other novels which share a similar background and form a series, including *Don't Bite the Sun*, *Drinking Sapphire Wine*, *The Electric Forest* and *Day by Night*.

Lee also has a very good selection of books which retell old stories or take old ideas from classic myth and legend and change or revise them. These include the excellent *Sung in Shadow* retelling the tale of Romeo and Juliet, *Tamastara* fine short stories of Indian Myth, *Red as Blood* sort of mother goose stories for the ghoulish, *Kill the Dead* a tale of a ghost exterminator, and *Lycanthia* an intriguing tale of werewolves. Most of these books and stories are set in alternative versions of historical periods, where little facts and backgrounds are changed a bit, but the atmosphere is parallel, with powerful forces of magic added. All her books of this type are excellent, though *Kill the Dead* seems a bit incomplete.

Tanith Lee is an outstandingly fine writer, but her writing is not for everyone. Her work is very philosophically and atmospherically oriented, and examines themes which may not appeal to many readers, usually having to do with interpersonal relationships, commitment and the fringe areas of madness and self-delusion. Her style is brilliant and getting better all the time, but she has a dark and depressing vision at times and doesn't pack each story with action and adventure. Finally, the content of many stories is mature in nature, both in concept and in specific content, often dealing with erotic and sexually variant topics which I've found deters some readers. Lee's work is not for every reader, but she creates excellent and imaginative examples of 'Dark Fantasy', mixing elements of horror, fantasy and mythology with remarkable success.

PUBLICATION NOTE

All of Lee's major works are published by DAW, and as all have been put out in the last ten years and she is fairly popular, a little searching should find many of these. Some are a little harder to find if they are recently out of print and not in reprint. A good portion of her short story work can be found in magazines, anthologies and small presses, such as *Dragontales* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. With almost two dozen works in print, you should be able to find something to start out with.



TCT EXPANDS

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. Just out is *London by Night*(Adventure in Victorian London:\$6.95), our most extensive expansion to date, with loads of maps, facts and scenarios, which has already been quite a hit. Planned for Fall release is *Challengers*(The ultimate in superhero adventure:\$4.00), with plenty of background characters and scenarios, as well as rule expansions. For winter 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 and postage is included. Background and scenario material is emphasized and all are easily adaptable to other games and variants.

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Conjurings	89	--
Undeath	78	--
Surviving MP	91	+4
Echoes	85	-3
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Quest for Bogan	80	+1
In the Speculum	88	--
Jaquere!	96	--
John L. Sites	88	--
Rick Pr.	88	-6
Larry Realsky	82	--
Alan J. Summa	92	--
Cover/Titles	95	-2
Overall	87	-1

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