

# ABYSS



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# ABYSS MAGAZINE

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### ART CREDITS

Mostly by dead Germans,  
except Rick Pressley on p. 3

# CONJURINGS

Hey, you've probably figured it out by now...ABYSS--like most of the magazines in gaming--isn't meeting its official publication schedule. I could make excuses, I could grovel, I could weep and complain, I could even go down to Paraguay and live with the rest of the Nazi war criminals. I did consider all these options at one time or another, back in the halcyon days when we were one, two even three issues behind. Now that we are almost four issues behind...who cares? Well, you probably do, but in all this time I've gotten used to the schedule problem. This should be the last issue of '84(HA-HAI). This should be the Dec/Jan issue. It isn't. Let's be realistic, we missed three issues...we're not catching up. I'm not going to put together three bogus issues in a period of one month. I'd rather do one good issue dated Spring in general, and try to carry on from there. Want to hear the funniest part? The fact that you even hold this issue in your hands is the GOOD news. The bad news is coming...

Unless a miracle happens(possible, but don't hold your breath), we aren't going to put out another issue until the end of August. I realize that this sucks. I make no excuses(an explanation will follow). What I will promise is that before this year is out we will have at least three more issues, one in August, one in October and one in December. I may be able to do more, but I'm pretty sure that I can do three in the fall. Remember that even though the schedule is behind, you are not losing any issues. Subscriptions are based on issue numbers not the time elapsed. Think of it as stretching out your subscription over a longer period of time. Want to hear the story? Sure you do...

Well, I'm working on my Ph.D. That takes time. Even at the University of Texas they don't hand them out inside bubble-gum packets. Now, this is to your benefit because it means that my work here will be of ever higher quality, of great academic standing, even...sure, you believe that. Next, Ragnarok also publishes other stuff...good stuff. Last year Ragnarok published a piddling little selection, London by Night, Passage to Cathay, some modules...blah, no great effort(though we did get three ORIGINS award nominations). In the past we have averaged one major game release per year. We are one half way through this year and we already have three major new releases, Challenges, Suburban Slasher, and the first of three volumes in the new Ysarth rules. This is more that we've done in any two years taken together. So while you ABYSS readers are suffering, there must be some happy gamers out there who are getting lots of new Ragnarok products. No excuses, just a matter of priorities. Think of it this way. The sooner I get my degree and get these major projects out of the way, the sooner I can settle down and do what's really important...an issue of ABYSS every week...sure, you believe that, don't you.

Why no issues until August? Well, after the thrills of ORIGINS(we will see you there, right?), I'll be off to England to do a little work. It's a double purpose trip, combining dissertation research with negotiations for Ysarth and other products to be published in the UK, where they are doing very well. While I can write and compose in the UK, I can't very well print or mail ABYSS, so I'll store up all sorts of British inspiration to pour out in the fall.

Of course you all want to know about my dissertation--after all, you'll be seeing articles from it here for years. It is on piracy on the English coast during the Hundred Years War and the role of these early pirates in the growth and development of British naval power. Actually it is sort of like a RPG. Buy a ship, attack some annoying little Flemings, take all their goods and money, throw them in the sea, go home, act shocked when they complain, split the loot with King Edward, join the navy for two months as punishment and do the same thing under the British colors. That's the dissertation in a nutshell...yes, everyone in the Middle Ages was a crook.

By the way, this is a good issue, try reading it. I particularly recommend the 'Mythquest' adventure set for 'By the Gods', John Davies bit on death and Lew's look at superhero games(of course DC Heroes arrived today, a bit too late to get in). Next issue will be good too, if it ever shows up. Look for it, it may actually be worth an eternity of waiting.

Look, it's 3:30am...you do want me to finish putting this issue together, don't you. Right, then I'll sign off and wrap it up. Remember, my finger bones are disintegrating for you...

# VIOLENCE JON SCHULLER



From the moment of birth, our existence is defined by violence and pain. Violent incidents are the single largest killer in the world. Violence is in the news. Violence in our lives is something we would rather not face but it is always a looming possibility.

Gaming and the media have the capacity to represent violence or potentially violent situations. This has aroused interest and ire from certain segments of society. Their objections are directed at visual media, especially TV, with great vehemence, but gaming gets significant attention as well. Children must not be allowed to see violence on TV. Children should not be allowed to play with guns. Children should not play violent games. This probably grew out of the '60s, a reaction to the war, death and violence which suffused the media for decades. After seeing an evening body count for over a dozen years it is reasonable to want to keep your children safe from such video violation, be it truth or fiction.

This fear of violence in the media and other entertainment is part of a dangerous fallacy. Taking violence off TV and out of toys and games may seem harmless. Never mind that it guts art and drama. Never mind that it turns prime-time TV into formulaic pap. It protects the kids, right? Their little psyches won't be bruised by seeing people hurt or dying. This is the mind-set which produced 'The A-Team', 'Riptide' and 'Remington Steele', television programs where violence becomes slapstick and the camera always zooms in to show each villain walk away from every car crash. On 'A-Team' automatic weapons can only kick up dust, explosions make people jump, roll and come up running, and a brawl consists of threats and grimaces. The fear of violence has given TV a formula where allowable violence is based on the time of night: one bullet wound per hour after 6, one death per hour after 7, and one controversial social issue per hour after 8. Some TV series buck this trend and deal with issues and 'meaningful' violence, but they are attacked by critics, and kept in place only by the fact that middle America enjoys a dose of violence once in a while.

The problem this censorship leads to has a more potential for horror than any violent game or media bloodbath. Programs like 'A-Team' show car crashes, firefights and explosions. These are things which should be fatal to those involved. Cars kill, guns kill, explosions kill. Yet, even villains on 'A-Team' walk away from fatal situations, saved by the magic of stunts and editing. In the real world people who do these things end up quite stiff. A child believes what he sees on TV. He has no real world experience for comparison. He doesn't know the tricks of the camera. He has not experienced violence first hand. For him 'A-Team' is real and logic indicates that he should be able to take daddy's gun out to the playground. After all, bullets always hit the sand at the feet of the bad-guys. This crude example can be extended rationally. What happens when a generation grows up without GI-Joe, without Mike Hammer, even without the Road Runner? What if we become a society which does not understand violence and its implications? There are two possibilities. We may come to see the world through the 'A-Team', without appropriate fear or understanding of violence, treating death and killing lightly because we do not see how serious they are. Alternatively we will recoil in shock when we meet the violence which is very much a part of real life and become incapable of dealing with the perils which we must overcome to survive. Either course will lead to the disintegration of society.

These are extreme examples. It will not be that easy to bully TV programmers and publishers into following the non-violent formula. Nonetheless, the tendency to run away from reality is growing. Presentations like 'A-Team' which cloaks a fantasy in the garb of reality are the most dangerous threat. Even in so called 'escapist' art (fantasy, horror, SF) violence and death are usually startlingly realistic, however fantastic their setting. We must keep aware of the reality of violence. If we see violence—know what it is. Then we can learn to deal with it when we meet it in our lives. Games, toys and the media are a way to learn from violence without actually experiencing it. If they are taken away we will be left mentally disarmed, lulled into the fantasy that we are secure. When reality finds us, as it inevitably will, we will not be ready to overcome the dangers it presents.

Why is this tirade here in ABYSS? Well, we can already see some groups attacking gaming for the same reasons they have censored violent television. For many people role-playing or boardgaming plays a role similar to that of TV or violent literature. Gaming is an even more immediate way to experience danger and violence without physical harm. It is a way to strengthen the psyche and prepare for parallel situations in the real world, though few gamers will face dangers as great as those overcome by their characters. When a character dies the player begins to understand the potential of violence a little bit more. Through this sort of imaginative exposure we can learn to face danger rationally, with appropriate fear rather than panic or a false sense of invulnerability. Life is not a game, but the situations in games or realistic entertainment can provide learning experience which will help us deal with reality a little more smoothly.

# JAPANESE BESTIARY

VINCENT BURCHETT

## THE JAPANESE BESTIARY

These are the creatures and monsters which figure prominently in Japanese myth, briefly described and detailed, drawn as closely as possible from tradition and original descriptions. In some cases references are made to AD&D related books where similar descriptions appear there.

### Baku

This is a small elephant-like nocturnal ghost that feeds on a person's bad dreams before they become nightmares.

### Gozu-mezu

These are the equivalent of greater devils. There are only two of them. They are both humanoid in body, but one has the head of a horse and the other the head of an ox. They seize the dead as they journey through hell and bring them before Emma-o for judgement. They are not beyond having a bit of fun with their captives before they deliver them.

### Hai-riyo

This is a small dragon-like bird which breathes small amounts of flame. It resembles the concept of the 'Firedrake' in TSR's Fiend Folio in some respects.

### Ho-oo

This is a bisexual version of the phoenix. It is also used as the symbol for good and wise government.

### Kappa

This creature is also known as the tortoise boy. It is an evil river spirit which is half tortoise and half monkey in appearance. It likes to drown swimming children or kill them by luring them to the deep part of a river and turning them inside-out by drawing the internal organs out through the anus. To keep their powers and strength they must keep water in their saucer-shaped heads. Sometimes you can approach them politely, bowing often, in the hope that they will return the bow, thereby spilling the water in their head and being rendered powerless.

### Kawano-kami

This is a common type of river-spirit which protects the river and the area near it. Each river has one of its own.

### Ki-rin

This is not the same as the Ki-rin described by TSR, which is the Ki-rin of Chinese mythology. This one is the Japanese version of the pegasus. It is also the symbol of a popular brand of (rather bitter tasting) beer in Japan.

### Ningyo

This is the equivalent to a mermaid in Japanese lore. It is similar to the version of the nymph presented in TSR's Monster Manual.

### Ogre-magi

TSR's Monster Manual describes these, but I can find no actual source or reference to them. They are probably a somewhat distorted version of the Oni, which fit some of the description.

### Oni

These are evil spirits which take sinners and carry them off to hell in flaming chariots. They also spread disease and steal the souls of the newly dead. They are very ugly, with green or red skin and sometimes have the head of a horse or an ox on a bloated human body. They can also shapechange and become invisible.

### Ryoto-dabi

These are Japanese dragons, rather similar to Chinese dragons in most ways. They are a most potent symbol of the rain-giving powers of the gods (particularly Ryujin) and are also symbols of power, royalty and sovereignty.

### Sanzu-no-baba

This is the 'Old Woman of the River', one of the creatures which the newly dead meet in their journey to hell. She is amazingly similar to the Greek character Charon who poles his boat on the river Styx. If she is given a coin she will not strip you of your clothing and belongings as you pass by her.

### Shikome

These are demons from the Land of Darkness. A group of these once chased Izanagi out of that land.

Shuten-doji

This is a vampiric mountain giant which can regenerate much like the D&D troll. The hero Yorimitsu fought one of these.

Tengu

This is a mischievous monster. They are generally evil in nature and have a conceptual similarity to D&D pixies in most respects.

Earth Spiders

This is a devious type of creature which has shapechanging abilities. It was one of these which slew the hero Yorimitsu. They are similar in appearance and abilities to TSR's umber hulk, but with an extra set of arms.

The Giant Catfish

This creature lives at the greatest depths of the Sea of Japan. Its movements are supposed to be the cause of earthquakes.

The Japanese Unicorn

The concept of the one horned equine occurs in Japan as prominently as in other lands. The Japanese Unicorn is a symbol of strength, health and virginity. It has the appearance of a Chinese Ki-rin, but the similarities stop there, as it is much closer to the traditional Western unicorn in abilities and character.

The Nio

These are the spirits which watch over the entrances to monasteries and drive away evil influences. They are much like ugly, fierce-looking caryatid columns, and fulfill a function similar to the Christian architectural gargoyle.

Yatagarasu

This is a sacred crow associated with the various gods of agriculture. It is said that if these crows are seen in your fields, then the gods are seeing to it that you will have a good crop. Those that worship any of the gods of agriculture are expected to allow the crows to run free in their fields on holy days.

Yomi-kami

These are spirits from hell. They are essentially demons of various types and orientations. They are sometimes seen with the Ama-kami, who are spirits of heaven, fighting over the souls of the dead.

THE ARTIFACTS OF JAPANESE MYTH

Japanese myth, like most other myths has its treasury of magical items and artifacts. Some of these are quite interesting and of great historical and legendary importance. These are described here.

The Three Imperial Treasures

These three items survive even today as the symbols of the power of the emperors power and authority. They were first given to Ninigi by Amaterasu herself. They are:

The Chain of Jewels: This was used to hold the rooster that directed Amaterasu's attention to the Mirror. It should be treated as having entangling and immobilizing powers.

The Mirror: This was used to hold Amaterasu's attention so that the gods could block the entrance to the cave she hid herself in. This should be treated as causing anyone viewing themselves in it to stand transfixed until their view is blocked or they are forcibly distracted (like by an attack).

Kusanagi: This is the famous 'Herb Quelling Sword'. It should be treated as a D&D Sword of Sharpness with some appropriate additional powers.

The Takara Bune

This is the treasure ship which belongs to the Seven Gods of Luck. There are various items on the ship, including rolls of brocade, the keys to the divine treasure house (infinite riches, but try getting to it!), cloves and other spices, and a number of scrolls and books containing knowledge as well as any spell or magic known to the gods. Other items in the ship include: The Hat of Invisibility (operates as a ring of the same name in D&D). The Inexhaustible Purse (operates as all three types of Bucknard's Powerful Purse in D&D). The Robe of Feathers (acts as a pair of Wings of Flying in D&D). The Lucky Rain Hat (those wearing it will never get wet).

Daikoku's Hammer

Not only will this do what Deities and Demigods ascribes to it, but it can also produce any amount of gold that the deity wills.

The Staff of Wisdom

This is carried by Jorojin. It gives the bearer omniscience, and anyone struck by it will gain one point of Wisdom or the equivalent, but only on the first hit. In addition he will learn the answer to a question that is in his mind if he is willingly struck.

The Mirror of Emma-o

This item will recall visually any event in a person's past to help the deity pass judgement on that person.

The Staff of Saruda-hiko

This is a phallus-shaped staff that can induce fertility in any living thing. It can also do fertility related actions, such as making a tree grow or increasing a harvest.

The Comb of Izanagi

When it is tossed, this comb will turn into rich food and then acts as a chime to induce hunger. It can only be used once (obviously).

The Scarf of Serpent Skins

This protects the wearer from all serpents. Another type can also protect against insects as well. Both were once used by Okuninushi.

The Jewels of Fireshade

These two jewels were used by Fireshade, yet another Japanese hero, in his adventures. They can do the following: cast any water related spell at 25th level, summon and control one Water Elemental (up to 12 hit die) once per day, calm stormy seas, and control weather. They will not function if separated, but if they are one will indicate which direction the other is (but not how far away).

# SUPERGAMES?

## LEW BRYSON

This is extremely embarrassing, considering the long and thankless campaign I have waged against reviews in these pages, particularly those penned by Eric Olson (who shall remain nameless). There's hope for him though: at this very moment Eric is enrolled in Intelligence School! Yes, really. God knows what might happen...me doing reviews, Eric with a mind, maybe Dave will learn to proof read...

I've held off on this, waiting for the entries from Mayfair and Palladium, but a deadline is a deadline, so I'm rolling. I've got five 'superhero' role-playing games to do, four from fairly major publishers, and that's just going to have to do. Here we go.

SUPERGAME

DAG Design (by Jay and Aimee Hartlove)

Supergame has the earliest copyright date of these five games, so I thought I'd take it first. It has been 'revised and expanded' since the first edition in 1980. This is a West Coast product; the only place I've seen it was at ORIGINS '84 in Dallas. That's okay, though. The East Coast isn't missing a whole lot. This is not a bad game, mind you, it's just one of those games that you talk your weak-minded munchkin friends into buying so you can pillage it for any worthwhile ideas.

Are there any nuggets to be gleaned here? Aside from the obvious ones of ideas for character abilities/personalities/costumes, yes, there are a few goodies. Supergame has a good approach to armor. They have four types of armor to cover four types of damage: Agony (pain, concussion, etc), Cut/Pierce, Laser Beams/Energy Weapons and 'Exposure', including radiation, cold, heat, electric shock, chemicals, etc. This is better than the simplistic approach in most systems, which have only a basic physical/energy division. But, where is the connection between chemical action, hard radiation and electric shock? "...the momentum imparted to the target from a laser impact and the impact of a comparably destructive bullet are assumed to be the same." So what the hell does the second type of armor do to bullets? Vaporize them so only the impact energy does damage? Look, I may be a librarian, but impact energies I know about, and this does not make it! Armor that stops bullets, swords, fists and so on but transmits the concussion of the strike is fine, that's how it works, but concussion from a laser? Maybe a Concuss-o-rama Ray(TM), yeah, but... On top of this, there is also armor for sonics and falling. But the best/worst are the rules for shields. Dig this: there is no Agony damage from a successfully shield-blocked hit, and "when a shield trained character uses an action to shield himself...from an aimed weapon attack, the block is automatic." AUTOMATIC!! Where did we go wrong, gamers?

The power list is fairly standard, with one big exception, the power of self-transformation. This is such a simple way to handle growth, shrinking, absorption, and all those sticky little things. Perhaps too simple, but I'll get up on that soapbox when I do the Marvel/TSR system.

The game is dragged down by a cumbersome combat system of compared D6 rolls. Why? I firmly believe that a sawed off shotgun is the most simple and deadly efficient close-in weapon man's evil mind has yet come up with. Supergame? It does less damage than a pistol, with little than half the range, and gets no benefits for spread of shot. Besides, someone with a shield can automatically block it with no Agony damage. Come on! Even Arnold the Terminator (Are you Sarah Conner?) got knocked over by a riot gun. Speaking of damage, it's determined by a percentage of maximum. In my book, that's a Pain in the Ass.

Other aspects to consider here include production, art and attitude. Supergame has impressive production standards for a limited distribution game. Glossy heavy stock covers with good, easily readable type are pluses. Unfortunately they are overbalanced by mediocre art, equivocating text, and a disordered scattering of connected information. And the whole attitude is, let's catch a few names of characters here: Dr. Sunlamp, Tornnado, Katana, you get the idea. The game is limited in conception, limited in imagination, and so far limited in success.

There are two supplements, The Heroes of Poseidonis and Reactor. The first is what everybody wants and needs, stats, origins and personalities of someone else's heroes. How tedious. Especially when some of those heroes are absolutely blatant rip-offs (a San Francisco cop named Harry who carries a .44 Mag?). There is also a section on how people got super-powered, which is an excuse of anyone to haul out the 16" 150,000 Watt Contrivo-Ray and make things work 'just because they work'. Reactor is an adventure which takes place on Poseidonis, an island recently (1986) created in the South Pacific. 2.5 pages out of 18 are used to set up four scenarios. Most of the content is villain description and description of a very high-tech fusion/MHD power plant. What is this, a sourcebook? No, no, no. I did not like this, not much at all.

### CHAMPIONS

Hero Games (by George MacDonald & Steve Peterson)

I've already reviewed Champions in these pages; my objections still stand. Only one attack per round, too many damned dice to roll, and off-the-shelf weapons have to be bought with power points. I still like the dual damages, the character generation system and the power advantages and limitations. Production standards are good, although this new revised edition has a little more clutter than the old edition. The new art is good, but I don't really care for the typography; it looks somewhat like mimeograph. Attitude is good for the most part, but the Disadvantages often lead to some outlandish crap when people go looking for points. There is also little consideration of the character's private lives. It is still my preferred system.

Champions II is Hero Games' first supplement to Champions, and while it's been out for some time, I haven't said anything about it. What I have to say is mostly good. Mark Williams' art is improved, the new material from Brandon Welz is also good. The vehicle construction section kept me up for quite a few nights, happily constructing vehicles galore. Especially appreciated are the new skills and powers, which included some which are absolutely necessary. There is a system for setting up headquarters, if you are into that sort of thing (I'm not: I can't draw). The subject of law and order, with society's expectations of superheroes is dealt with briefly as part of a long section on campaign play. Also, something which I found very useful was some set-ups for normals, which gave a good feeling for just how super superheroes are. This one is worth the price.

Champions III is not. It's a great cover, with one of Mark Williams' best pieces to date and the new Hero Games logo, but the inside does not deliver on the promise. First, the typography is confusing. Headings are not distinctive enough, but that's okay, because what they have to say isn't too useful anyway. The 'new' power advantages are picky-assed tinkering like extended range and area, 'sticky' entangle, damage shield, increased knockback—these are things which could (and should) have been left to the players to dope out on their own. The new powers, with the exception of Duplication and Healing, could have been guessed as well.

The combat section is notable for the inclusion of Shockwave, the familiar schtick of slamming the ground to knock someone over. There is finally some attention paid to the character's life outside the superhero identity in the role-playing segments. The Character Development Form in particular asks some good questions which will get your mind going on what your hero likes to eat, listen to, where he vacations, his ethnic background, and so on. The lead article, 'The Evil that Lurks in the Hearts', could serve as a good example to players with two-dimensional characters (and what the hell, there are plenty in comics).

Things that made me puke: the Danger Room—fifteen pages of Random-ola for wad-brains; the bookkeeping sheets in the center (Danger Room Control, Adventure Report, particularly the Agency Action Sheet, essentially a blank sheet with ten words on it. That's value!); and the Character Generator. Another 15 pages of shit! Bloblet the Amazing stretcho-shrink man! The goddamned cartoon didn't even flow well! Hero Games seems to have lost some of its clean edge. They put out this supplement because it was time to put out a supplement. I hope they wait on the next one until they have something worthwhile to print on this many pages.

### VILLAINS & VIGELANTES

FGU (by Jeff Dee and Jack Herman)

I find it tough to get excited about this game. I mean really, V&V? Spare me. What is this thing with V&V, T&T, even ferchrissakes B&B, identification with the aggressor? Anyway, with V&V the whole thing is exacerbated by the way FGU seems to have abandoned the game. Now, I could be way out in left field here, being in the backwaters of civilization here in Paradise, but FGU hasn't done any follow-up on the game, as far as I know. Hell, if they don't like the game, why should I?

I certainly don't like it for either the character generation system or the combat system. You are the character. Imagine, SuperLew! The mind absolutely boggles. I don't know about you, but I find that really limiting (yeah, yeah, I know, Eric, you would find playing me limiting too, ha-ha). Cuts you down to one character, leads to pointless arguments, and



besides, I play games to get around personal limits. As for the combat system--Jesus, I don't know where to start. Semi-random number of phases in a turn that lasts fifteen seconds, initiative based solely on agility (how about intelligence? Which is defined as 'Mental Agility'...) and so damned many cross-indexes you could go nuts just firing a pistol at someone. Speaking of which...A rifle is +4 at all ranges, a pistol is +3, and a shotgun is +2. Shucks, Ah'll charge 'im with muh deer rifle! What the hell, as long as we're making distinctions between 'club' and 'big club' (when does it become 'big'? At a certain point, no doubt...), why not drop in a little note on range and comparative handiness? Ranges, by the way, are given as multiples of a character's Agility. I've got to stop, I could go on for pages on this crap.

This is all a damned shame, because the thought and imagination are good. FGU has nice concepts and goals, and it's too bad that the framework they designed to hang those concepts is so sub-mediocre. They have six pages on government reactions to superpowers, pertinent laws on vigilantism included. There's also a teeny section on merchandising, quite key in these days of Bruce Jenner and Mary Lou Retton. One question, guys; what about insurance? Seriously, there are some good thoughts, but they are held down by the framework. Much like the excellent artwork by Jeff Dee, thought and imagination get lost in the frenzies number shuffle. The same kind of thing happened in the next system...

## SUPERWORLD

Chaosium (by Steve Perrin)

Superworld almost made me cry. Chris Marrinan's art is almost ready for a comic. It's the best in any of these games, including the Marvel/TSR entry. More on that later. Characters and attitudes are good, the best, in fact. I really like their ideas, even though they do haul out the Rapidfire Contrivo-Zap occasionally. The two scenarios are interesting, peppered with little plot twists, and the NPC's are not overpowering or intrusive. They do seem to have a weakness for characters named 'Dr. Something-or-Other', but I can overlook that, it's amusing. So what is the problem with Superworld?

It's the mechanics. All those RuneQuest percentages, and rolling to see if you learned anything from successfully using a skill (so why don't guys just run around firing power blasts at pigeons to raise their chances of hitting bad guys? Why don't they just stand around lifting heavy things, or climbing walls, instead of waiting until they're out on the trail? Makes no sense to me, buddy). Limits, limits, limits! I want to grow, and if they are going to come up with ways to limit my income, my private life, my mental health, I want somewhere for growth to take place.

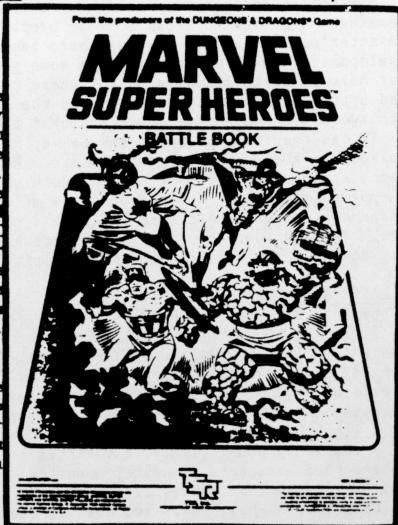
You have to pay hero points (power points, super points, whatever) to have everyday weapons in this system, too. I think this is asinine. Any geek can walk into a gunstore and say "Ze Uzi. Nine Millemetre. Ze long-slide .45 calibre, laser-guidance. Plasma rifle, 40 watt capacity," and what is more, a lot of them have. Now, dammit, if Billy Joe Biff Bob can drive around in a pickup with a rifle and two shotguns in the rack, why can't Super-Dupe carry a .45 in his belt? Take some of the sting out of firearms if you want to, but face facts, they are not superpowers. Make people pay for the skill to use those weapons, not the weapons. That's what I did with one of my characters in Champions. I have gun skills, a lot of them, but I don't carry a gun. There's almost always some idiot who has one that I can take if I feel it's necessary. I fire off the ammo, break the gun, and look for another. I spit on the rules!

Still, there is a wealth of imagination here. Much of Superworld is sound, and if you're a die-hard RQ fan, you can probably even put up with the constant flood of percentages. A pleasant trend was started in their Bad Medicine for Dr. Drugs scenario, where they give stats for both Superworld and Champions. Nice work, guys! Smart, too, more chance of the thing being bought. I liked Dr. Drugs (note that Dr.?) but it's been more than a year since I've seen it, so I won't go on about it. I liked Superworld, it's one of the more adult superhero games on the market. Which brings us neatly to...

## MARVEL SUPER HEROES

TSR (by Jeff Grubb & Steve Winter)

Catchy title, eh? Now, if this were Dave writing, you'd have to duck to keep from being hit by flying shit as he buzzsawed his way through. Me, I'm a little more patient, civilized, a little more willing to dig for the good points. There are some. Character generation, for example. There are the Marvel characters, there are random ones, and 'original heroes'. These are the ones I find (naturally) most intriguing. The rules for setting them up are as follows: "Original heroes are described verbally or in writing by the players. The Judge then assigns their abilities and powers according to the player's description." That's all. Simple, isn't it? TSR never ceases to amaze me. Here, within one of the most patronizing, juvenile-oriented games I've ever seen (mind you, I've never read through Indiana Jones...), they admit to and allow the only truly mature approach to character design for superheroes. You want Thor, you think you can do epic scope, fine, you can do Thor. If you can't handle it, you'll know soon enough.





# MYTHQUEST



## ADVENTURE SCENARIOS FOR 'BY THE GODS'

### INTRODUCTION

Last issue we gave you By the Gods. Now that Challengers is actually out, it may even be meaningful to some of you. The rest have probably figured out some good use for it. What you have here is a little set of adventure scenarios to use with Challengers, By the Gods or anything else you care to fit them to. The characters and creatures described are in BTG/TCT terms, but they are pretty expansive descriptions well suited to conversion to other systems (if your taste is that bad).

Now, for you serious mythologists and serious gamers, don't get too long-faced. These adventures look at the lighter side of mythology. They are not the stuff of epic legend. Also, the scenarios are outlined fairly briefly (so we could fit more in) and there is lots of room for GM innovation and flexibility (look on the good side). We give you the situation, characters and perspective. What you or your players do with it is in your hands. For variety the adventures are from several different backgrounds. For more info we suggest checking the appropriate article in a back issue of ABYSS. Note that most of the characters and creatures have their stats provided in the special section after the scenario descriptions.

### SET-UP

Characters for these scenarios should be the equivalent of major heroes or minor deities or spirits. As the adventures all have different backgrounds, you may wish to set-up a situation where characters can move from one background to another. For example they might be apprentice godlings on vacation, travelling from pantheon to pantheon. You may also wish to put them under the sponsorship of some major deity who is responsible for them and oversees their activities as a sort of mentor.

### THE PURSUIT OF LAMPERA

Zeus is an amorous fellow. One morning he was looking down from the heights of Olympus and happened to notice something in a remote corner of Hellas called Locrisia. There he spied a beautiful nymph sunning herself on a hillside. He looked for her again every day after that, but he never saw her again. After several weeks he became really curious and decided to do something about it. Being Zeus, his intentions towards the nymph are fairly easy to guess. Since he does not like to lower himself to wandering around among men unless absolutely necessary, he will recruit the characters to do his leg work for him. He will give one of them a mirror with which to communicate with him (only if they find the nymph, otherwise he would rather not be bothered), and set them down on the borders of

Locrisia. They are to locate the nymph, inform her of his interest, and then summon him whether she is interested or not.

An important side-plot to note here is that Hera may get wind of this and send interference, as she is very jealous of Zeus' extra-marital interests. She may attempt to subvert one of the characters to sabotage the mission, or she may send nasty monsters after the party, with the exact nature of her attack left up to the GM.

They will be transported to Locrisia directly through the power of Zeus. They will arrive in a rural area and will have to contact the local people and entities to locate the nymph within the specific area which has been indicated. Some of the beings which they may encounter are listed here with the information which they can convey. Locrisia is an area of grassy hills and wooded valleys with a fairly sparse human population. Shepherds: They will probably arrive on a hillside covered with sheep and the ever present young, bemused shepherd. Now shepherds may be genuine curly-haired he-men, but they live with sheep, smell like sheep and tend to think like sheep. The young adonis they find playing his syrinx should be about as capable of giving them directions as a block of wood, though he will go out of his way to be helpful. With luck he may be able to get them to a village (full of shepherds, some of whom may be older, but no wiser) or to the local river, the Khinos.

Centaurs: The woods in the area abound with Strange creatures. As they begin to look around there is a fair chance that they will run into a group of 3 to 5 centaurs. These creatures are likely to be aloof at best and may well be hostile, with a tendency to rob and even kill small groups of humans or the equivalent which they can catch alone. The centaurs, if not hostile will gladly give complex and completely incorrect directions for finding the nymph.

Satyrs: These are wild creatures of the woods. Great friends of the nymph. They are rather careless innocents, sometimes randomly violent. They will gladly lead the characters to the nymph and tell them all about her, but they are her friends, and if they discover that the characters have been sent by Zeus they will lure them out into the deepest woods until they are lost and then abandon them to twisting trails and wild beasts. Alternatively they could lead them to the lair of the Great Beast of Locrisia, though this is a bit too subtle for them.

Khinos: At the river they may be able to contact the river god Khinos, a rather bad tempered old fellow who knows a better than to give up something for nothing. He has had his eye on a young girl from the nearby village of Velios, and if they can convince or bribe the

girl (who turns out to be a mercenary little chit) to become his mate he will tell them where to find the nymph in question. He has knowledge and authority over all the water spirits in the area, including her. The description they have from Zeus is enough for him to identify her, and he doesn't care what they do with her.

The nymph's name is Laphera and she keeps a spring which is in a shallow cave in a hill above a bend in the river. She is unusually beautiful as was indicated by Zeus. Male characters will have to make a JRATS roll to avoid falling under her charm and wanting to keep her out of Zeus' nasty mits and get her into their own. She is charming and innocent, but has no desire to be Zeus' paramour, as those who fill that post have a history of coming to nasty ends at the hands of Hera. She will not want to have anything to do with Zeus willingly, and they will have to confine her there or take her somewhere else until they can arrange of Zeus to be free to come and do his business. If they take her in hand there are two possible problems. The first is that she cannot travel far from her spring for too long, and the second is that Hera will have more time to interfere. At the point when they have found Laphera and are going to grab her, they can contact Zeus sparingly and make their mission a success.

The major problem which they face if they try to coerce her is that in an adjoining cavern dwells the Great Beast of Locrisia, a huge man-eating lion which is gentle only around her and which, like the Satyr's is very loyal to Laphera and will seek to protect her.

If they succeed Zeus will reward them with a gift of Bonus Points to buy more levels of their powers (probably 15-25 BP each). If they fail he will send them on some arduous and odious penance mission.

#### THE STEADING OF JURMUNG

This scenario has a Norse setting. It seems that when Odin was building a new wall around Asgard he hired the Jottun Jurmung and his family to do the construction. Unfortunately, being Odin, he decided not to pay them when the work was completed. On hearing this Jurmung stormed into Asgard and demanded to see Odin. Naturally his request was refused, so on the spot he drew a strange object from his back-pack and proceeded to unfold a large, well fortified, dwarf-made, completely collapsible, pre-fabricated Jottun Hall, which he then set up at the head of the Bifrost bridge, moving in with his family and retainers, announcing that he will be in residence until he is paid. This caused great embarrassment for the Aesir and their guests who now have to walk by his lumpy children, gigantic laundry, raucous dwarven workmen and collection of skulls and thighbones.

This is all far beneath the notice of Odin, who is never in Asgard anyway and could care less if his children are embarrassed. A committee of Aesir nominated Forseti to find someone to deal with the problem and get Jurmung off their front lawn. Unfortunately this must be done without paying him off as Odin has expressly forbidden paying the Jottun and even in his absence they feel it is wise to obey him. Forseti has set Heimdall to watch over the place, looking for a likely moment to send in an elite force to find his weak points and encourage him to leave. To this point he has been less than receptive to open petitions, and it is hoped that if someone were to take something of value to him as a hostage they might gain some leverage. Naturally, when Forseti looks about for an elite force which is at once expendable and cost effective, his eye falls on our happy characters.

There isn't room for fancy stuff like maps here. Just assume that Jurmung's Steading is a huge jumble of rooms and corridors, damned hard to find one's way into or out of. One interesting thing to mention is that it is considerably larger on the inside than the outside, through the agency of magical staffs. It will be told to make their entry at a time when Jurmung has gone down to Midgard to haul up some home-improvement wares. Although he will be gone, members of his family and his staff will be present, and any of these may be encountered while wandering through the building. These and other discoveries are described below. They should come on many if not all of these things.

**Dwarves at Work:** While travelling down a dark corridor they may hear hammering and banging from a fire-lit chamber ahead of them. On entering it they will discover it to be a forge where a half dozen swarthy dwarves are busily at work. Should they discover interlopers they will throw red-hot ingots and attack them with red-hot hammers. They will do what they can to kill, chase off or apprehend the invaders. They are working on repairing a chain.

**Ulgrim:** They may stumble into a large, dark stone chamber deep in the bowels of the building where they can encounter Ulgrim, Jurmung's pet wolf, a monstrous beast who has broken one of two hind-leg chains and the frenzy caused by seeing people in his lair will be enough to break the other so that he can run wild through the characters, killing, maiming and eventually dining, before moving out into the surrounding area.

**Jorya:** They may come into a well-lit room filled with tapestries, in which a beautiful, well dressed girl who introduces herself as Jorya will be doing embroidery. She seems like a nice, normal human girl, but is in fact Jurmung's only daughter. She is unusually strong, and will resist if an effort is made to take her away, stabbing with her needles, etc. If she screams it will bring in her grandmother Ulyni, a horrible old monster who will attack those who are molesting her. She is the one thing Jurmung values highly, so she would be worth taking.

**The Treasure Room:** Jurmung has a treasure room, hidden just off his dining room, which the characters can probably discover fairly easily. It has a great pile of gems and coin, which are pretty meaningless to Jurmung and the characters. It also has three unusual items, the Horn of Aegir, the Unfinished Sword and the Ring of Aurnir. These are items of magical power which might be useful to the characters, but are of little value to Jurmung, save as things which are his and not to be given to others. The Horn of Aegir can summon a limited amount of any form of beverage or liquid which has been poured in it in the past. The Unfinished Sword is a rather cheap looking weapon which is unhandy in combat, but when it hits the damage which it does cannot be healed or regenerated by any normal or supernatural means. The Ring of Aurnir is an arm-ring which, when twisted allows the wearer to become immaterial, capable of passing through objects and unable to manipulate matter. There is a 10% chance that the ring will fall on each use, but the user will not know, and it may fall while they are inside another object, with horrible, even fatal results.

**The Sons of Jurmung:** These are three young, rather playful Jottuns who would like nothing better than to play a little game of soccer with puny godlings, kicking them around and causing them all manner of pain and injury. They are somewhat hyperactive and very large and run around through the building causing all manner of destruction.

**Jurmung's Return:** If they take a long time wandering about in the building there is a chance that Jurmung may return. He will be understandably angry and take violent and permanent action, something like picking them up and throwing them all the way to Midgard. He will be particularly angry if they have abused or kidnapped his daughter.

If they are able to get Jorya (they do not know she exists) out of the house and to a safe place they will have the leverage then need. Nothing else they can do or take is likely to have much impact on Jurmung, except to make him angry. Alternatively, if they can make friends with Jorya, she can probably convince her father to make some sort of a reasonable deal and go home.

As with the previous adventure, the characters should be rewarded for success with a few more points to expand their powers, say 15-25, though if they fail some horrible mission, like spending a week naked in Nifflheim, should be arranged.

#### POWER OF GWIONACH

This is a fairly simple scenario set in the world of Cymric myth. It seems that Gwionach, one of the grandsons of the god Math has become 'confused', and wandered off into the woods, where he is presenting a danger to the public wealth. Unfortunately, when he went he took with him Math's magic wand, a powerful item which cannot be left in the hands of an



apparant madman. The mission for the characters, as handed out by Gwydion or another appropriate mid-level god, is to go out, find Gwionach, neutralize him (preferably non-fatally), take the wand from him and then administer the assigned punishment by using the wand on him. They will also have to take the wand and use it to return his victims to normal form. They will be told that the wand has the power of turning people into animals and that those animals are usually unhappy afterwards. Gwionach may also have his own magical skills and powers. So, they set out, entering the everpresent wilderness, with a series of possible encounters ensuing.

**Frenzied Animals:** On entering the woods they will run into all sorts of frenzied, even stampered animals, including boar, deer, rabbits and various birds. These animals may hinder their travel and even do minor damage, but they can follow back along their trail to the small village which Gwionach has just left, and from there they should be able to track Gwionach. The village will be empty, except perhaps for a few ducks and chickens. The frenzied animals are, of course, the villagers.

**Twrch Twyd:** As they get closer to where Gwionach is (on a hill above the village), they will run into some of his nastire creations which will fight to defend him. The first they will meet is a small herd of the Twrch Twyd, who are essentially demon boars, who

will attack in a group. There will be 8-12 of them.

**Hwychwyr:** When they are very close to Gwionach they will meet up with the Hwychwyr, or boar-men who he has created to be his personal guard. They are giant porcine humanoids who will guard him resolutely. There will be two patrols of three and three more guarding Gwionach at all times.

**Finding Gwionach:** They will find Gwionach on a hillside above the village, musing on his inspiration. His Hwychwyr will have several prisoners who he is going to use the Wand of Math on. When new people show up they will grab his attention. He will send his guards into combat and while they engage the characters he will attempt to get in with the wand and turn the characters into appropriate animal types. Note that in addition to changing the form of people to those of animals the wand can also inspire animals with fear and drive them off. The characters will need to get the wand and use it on Gwionach (they can pick the animal form), and then go off and reverse the changes wrought on as many animals as possible.

If they succeed in this fairly simple mission they will be rewarded with Bonus Points to increase their powers and skills, somewhere on the order of 12-18 BP. If they fail Math will do something horrible and magical to them, though it will probably be temporary.

#### CREATURES & POES

Various people and creatures are described here. They are in standard TCT terms, but powers and skills are drawn from TCT, **Challengers** and **BTG**. Note that ARs and DRs listed are for those attacks listed separately, and that damages noted are not modified for AFR. Numbers in parenthesis after skills and powers are mostly skill levels, except where noted.

##### CENTAUR

AP:54	HAR:25	Powers: Bow Attack(1D8)	First Aid(10)
FP:80	MAR:45	Club Attack(1D6)	Conning(10)
HP:75	HDR:20	Hunting(20)	Intrigue(12)
HT:7'	MDR:25	Gambling(10)	Mathematics(10)
RP:20	AFR:20	Philosophy(15)	History(10)

Centaur's have the lower body of a horse and the upper body of a powerfully built man or well endowed woman. They are fully as intelligent as men, often well educated, but rather temperamental and hostile towards other races. They are amazing archers and good teachers, but they have a tendency to be a bit selfish and dishonest. They live in tribal villages, apart from other races, but trade and interact with human communities near them.

##### SATYR

AP:64	HAR:30	Powers: Hand Attack(1D4)	Wild Beast Affinity(10)
FP:60	MAR:20	Club Attack(1D6)	Wilderness Entity Affinity(8)
HP:30	HDR:35	Kick Attack(1D8)	Luck(10)
HT:5'	MDR:35	Woodland Survival(10)	Jinx(10)
RP:20	AFR:15	Sympathetic Magic(5)	Silent Movement(10)

Satyr's are wild woodland creatures, with the upper body of a man and the lower body of a goat, though they walk on two legs. They are foolish creatures, but can be very temperamental in their old age. They live in chaotic tribes and spend most of their time seeking self-gratification. They form strong attachments to each other and to others, and tend to be very emotional, though crises and problems are quickly forgotten in pursuit of more fun. They are all male, obsessed with sex, and can breed with a variety of species.

##### KHINOS

AP:50	HAR:50	Powers: Hand Attack(1D6)	Regeneration(5)
FP:60	MAR:35	Water Blast(1D20)	Liquid Creation(10)
HP:150	HDR:30	Immateriality(10)	Liquid Transmutation(10)
HT:3'	MDR:30	Awe(10)	Form Alteration(10)
RP:50	AFR:30	Deathlessness(10)	All Ocean Affinities(10)

Khinos is an old and rather crotchety river spirit. His powers are typical for his type of demi-deity, but they are rather neglected. He has a temper and doesn't get along well with others, but may help them if it is to his benefit. He can manifest in different forms, but will usually appear as an old man with weeds and little fish in his beard.

DWARVES

AP:50 HAR:35 Powers:Heat Protection(15) Metalworking(20)  
 FP:45 MAR:20 Club Attack(1D12) Mechanical(10)  
 HP:40 HDR:30 Thrown Ingot(1D8) Construction(15)  
 HT:4' MDR:30 Microvision(10) Repair(10)  
 RP:20 AFR:15 Earth Affinities(15) Power Dampening(10)

These are hairy little buggers who live under the earth in a variety of races and tribes. They make their living by working metals and mining, and have proven of value to the gods now and again. The balance this off they are hostile, sarcastic and often distinctly unfriendly to gods and men, with a love of mischief and showing how superior they are to others.

ULGRIM

AP:70 HAR:50 Powers:Bite Attack(1D20)  
 FP:60 MAR:0 Paw Attack(1D10)  
 HP:120 HDR:30 Armor(10/10/10)  
 LN:8' MDR:25 Regeneration(10)  
 RP:20 AFR:30 Awe(10)

Ulgrim is a great wolf, of the huge variety raised and trained like war dogs by the Jottun. He is hungry and vicious and would like nothing better than a good meal of godlet flesh. He is also somewhat more intelligent than the average beast, and so may be able to get himself into a good position before making an attack.

ULYNI

AP:60 HAR:35 Powers:Scratch Attack(1D12) Form Alteration(10)  
 FP:60 MAR:25 Bite Attack(1D6) Silent Movement(10)  
 HP:60 HDR:30 Kick Attack(1D8) Sympathetic Magic(10)  
 HT:7' MDR:30 Regeneration(5) Relative Magic(10)  
 RP:30 AFR:30 Deathlessness(10) Contagious Magic(10)

Ulyni is a nasty old giantess of the classification sometimes called Jarvanids. She is a sorceress and shamaness, rather nasty and vicious, more than willing to use magic and force to protect her precious granddaughter. She has quite a temper and will hunt down and destroy those who offend her. Her granddaughter is younger, but has similar powers.

SONS OF JURMUNG

AP:70 HAR:30 Powers:Hand Attack(1D6) Jinx(10)  
 FP:60 MAR:25 Club Attack(1D10) Armor(3/3/3)  
 HP:100 HDR:30 Silent Movement(10) Form Alteration(3)  
 HT:8' MDR:30 Kick Attack(10)  
 RP:20 AFR:25 Regeneration(5)

These are young, hyperactive Jottun. Like their father they are of the Uttgard tribes, thus, earth element associated, large, knobby and rather brutish. They like to have simple sadistic fun, just like other children and will be overjoyed to find some little people to kick around. There are three of them of indeterminate age.

JURMUNG

AP:60 HAR:60 Powers:Sword Attack(2D12) Regeneration(10)  
 FP:75 MAR:35 Thrown Spear(1D20) Armor(5/5/5)  
 HP:200 HDR:30 Construction(20) Form Alteration(5)  
 HT:12' MDR:30 Geology(2) Deathlessness(10)  
 RP:50 AFR:40 Intimidation(20) Earth Affinity(10)

Jurmung is a mature and rather temperamental and obstinate Uttgard Jottun with powers related to the earth. He is a skilled builder and rather proud, and has a justifiable axe to grind with the Aesir. He is very protective of his daughter and sort of likes his sons who are chips off the old block. If his home is violated he will take revenge, one way or another, and he is rather formidable in battle.

TWRCH TRWYD

AP:60 HAR:40 Powers:Charge Attack(3D20) Regeneration(10)  
 FP:45 MAR:0 Tusk Attack(1D20)  
 HP:100 HDR:30 Trample Attack(2D12)  
 LN:6' MDR:25 Spine Attack(1D20)  
 RP:30 AFR:25 Armor(6/6/6)

This is a breed of supernatural black boar with long spines on their backs. They move with unusual speed, charging and trampling. In addition, they like to cut with their spines or roll over and spear victims on the ground, and their spines bear a goey poison which causes a deep sleep if a 3CON% roll is failed, and does 1D10 overall per CR for 1D20 CR after the wound is made.

HWCHWYR

AP:50 HAR:45 Powers:Sword Attack(1D12) Survival(10)  
 FP:50 MAR:20 Tusk Attack(1D10) Regeneration(5)  
 HP:120 HDR:30 Grapple Attack(1D20) Torture(10)  
 HT:7' MDR:30 Observe(10)  
 RP:25 AFR:30 Armor(3/3/3) Intimidation(10)  
 Power Shield(15)

These are large, nasty humanoid, men with the skins and heads of boars, covered with spines and bearing swords. They are of low human intelligence, rather bestial, but capable of following orders and too stupid not to be loyal. They are sadistic and violent. They like to make their victims suffer before finishing them off. They have forgotten that they were once men.

GWIONACH

AP:80 HAR:35 Powers:Sword Attack(1D8) Summon(10)  
 FP:90 MAR:50 Air Affinity(10) Power Shield(15)  
 HP:50 HDR:30 Otherworld Affin(10) Vision(10)  
 HT:6' MDR:40 Demonic Affinity(10)  
 RP:40 AFR:20 Control/Command(10) Image Projection(10)  
 Form Alteration(10)

Gwionach is a mage/godling, with a full range of mid-level powers and magical skills. Those listed here are just a sampling. He should have a variety of others available to him as well. Unfortunately, he is raving mad, homicidal and sadistically twisted. He also has the Wand of Math, which augments all his supernatural powers by 20% and allows him to change others into animal forms of his choice, if he can hit them with the wand. He can also use it to direct and control his spells. In conflict he will summon aid of all sorts and use a variety of elemental missiles and spells, or employ the wand directly. He is still of the family of Math, and so should not be killed by those who are wise.

Other things I liked? Well, judging from the volume of Marvel comics sold, Marvel superheroes are pretty damned popular. I like 7em. Some of them, that is; I find Daredevil to be a totally humorless SOB. Anyway, the point is, it is easy to judge how super your hero is against the provided stats of the Marvel heroes. And if you want to play in the Marvel Universe, it's all there. Me, I see no need to. What the hell would they want with more questionably good guys?

I like their concept of Karma, which is the way Marvel/TSR took care of 'fudge points'. These are those points you use to boost that die roll or save your ass, very useful if you have them, damnably frustrating when you don't. Me, I have a talent for blowing die rolls. The way the system uses them eats these points like candy, so you must have a system for distributing them almost as freely. This is the part I don't like. You get karma for going on a date, for signing autographs, spending time with your family, and stopping a global conspiracy. Natch. You lose karma for being late for a date, calling in sick, skipping practice ("Gee, coach..."), and killing someone. There seems to be a slight problem of the sublime vs. the ridiculous here. Also, I am not in the least impressed by a player who says "MeteorMan is going to take his wife and two kids on a vacation to beautiful New Orleans." Whoa, tough guy! That must have taken about five seconds to come up with, especially with those karma points dangling in front of you... I don't want things handed to me, I want to earn them. If I've got to take the wife and kids on vacation, I want to play some of it. Besides, things never work out as planned in comics. Never. So you run a loner character. Why should you be penalized for that? Maybe the character is a loner for a damned good reason, a just reason. Well, enough, you get the idea.

There's something I'm of two minds on, and that's the simplicity. It is a wonderfully simple combat system, and works fairly well. Likewise with performing spectacular feats, and building things, to a degree. But it's so...generic! A handgun, any handgun, always does ten points of damage. Your 'Excellent' force blast always does twenty points. I find that dull. The roll to hit does not take the defender into account unless the defender is using his entire action to dodge. Some people just don't translate: how can TSR do the Beaubier twins of Alph Flight if there is no real ability of super-speed in this system? The system is viciously limited in this respect. Things have been pared down too much, and in some cases this actually results in things becoming more complex.

I positively hated some things. Like a lot of the art, and almost all of the art in the scenarios. What the hell is this, TSR can't get decent art from Marvel? It's competent, I guess, but there ain't none of it inspiring. All the scenarios/adventures/accessories I have seen (eight of them) are complete shit, with the partial exceptions of the Adventure Fold-up Figures (mainly because I hate miniatures) and Avengers Assembled. The figures, though, came with a sticker on the back cover which I just had to peel off, investigative reporter that I am. I learned that TSR backed off on supplying a sheet of 56 die-cut counters for vehicles and weapons, and was covering this up (literally)—but still charging the same price. This is stupid. If there's a group of people out there who are going to peel off a sticker like this, it's gamers. We can smell a scam. Maybe not. There's a lot of boxed sets that get sold... Anyway, the only other thing I'll say about any and all Marvel/TSR accessories is this: Big Suck. Overall they just don't cut it.

Production standards? Very good, which is exactly what one expects from TSR by now. The art I already covered, but I'll say it again; mediocre. That leaves only attitude. The rules are fun to read, with little touches of personality from the various Marvel-ites who narrate the rules. But the game is definitely aimed at a lower age than I feel comfortable with. Every drawing of people playing the game has sub-teens running things. And so it should be, if they're playing any of the printed adventures. The saving quality here, thank god, is that this game, as any game should, is flexible enough to allow real role-playing despite flaws in the rules.

# RuneQuest

## REINCARNATED

DAVID NALLE

RuneQuest has its place in gaming history as the first major alternative to Dungeons & Dragons. It drew away a small but fanatically loyal group of gamers who were ready for something a little more advanced than D&D. New games are published all the time, each purporting to be a major mechanical or conceptual step beyond its predecessors, and each building on the ideas and techniques of earlier efforts. RuneQuest was a step beyond D&D, and RuneQuest in playability, realism and attitude. After a surprisingly long time Chaosium has finally realized that RQ is no longer the state of the art (despite vehement partisanship in some quarters). They have produced a new RuneQuest (RQ 3), which should be as far beyond the current state of the art as the original RuneQuest was beyond D&D. Perhaps the fact that Chaosium seems to have washed their hands of this new system and fobbed it off on Avalon Hill gives a hint of what the 'new' RuneQuest really is.

I wish there were room here to do a page by page breakdown of the good and bad qualities of RuneQuest 3, but a look at the larger picture will have to suffice. While the 'Deluxe Edition' has more books, more pages, more text and more accessories than any previous edition of RuneQuest, it is not all that new or innovative. This is still RuneQuest. The game hasn't really changed that much, and no number of repetitions and confusing examples will make an out of date system any more progressive. This may please old players, but it will do very little to break into a market filled with innovative and unusual systems.

The 'Deluxe Edition' contains quite a selection of material, all nicely boxed in a full-size 8.5x11 format. On the whole the interior appearance is quite good, though the production seems somewhat shoddier than previous Chaosium standards. The book covers nice graphics, but the interior layouts are often clumsy and uneven. In many places lines are not even straight and pages are crooked. There are five main books, a map of Europe (impressively ugly), a table abstract and a 'Player Notes' aid. All told there are almost 300 pages of text, all with nice, readable print. The five books are: 'Players Book', 'Magic Book', 'Gamemasters Book', 'Creatures Book' and 'Introduction to Glorantha Book'. One thing other reviewers have stressed is the enormous price of \$40 for the 'Deluxe Edition'. While \$40 is a large amount of money, it is more than reasonable for the amount of material provided, especially if that material is of interest to you.

There are plenty of good things to note about this new edition. Perhaps the most laudable change is the effort which has been made to separate the game system from the world of Glorantha. In the original system Glorantha was an attraction for those players who did not have the time or imagination to develop their own world, but its stifling rigidity also discouraged players who did not want to play a game so closely linked to a world which did not suit their playing style. In this edition Glorantha is presented separately from the rest of the game and a generic 'Fantasy Europe' background is also provided. This frees the mechanics from some of the old restrictions, though the magic system is still dragged down by Glorantha-based structuring which, with most other potential settings. Another good point is the extensiveness of the rules. Everything is expanded on and fully explained. Nothing is left to chance. If you could conceivably need to know it, it is here somewhere, and each book has an extensive table of contents so you can find whatever you need. Mechanically it has the same benefits that original RuneQuest had. There is a simple hit location system, an optional characteristic point distribution system, a complete skill system (somewhat expanded over the original), direct skill advancement rather than character levelling, a realistic and imaginative (if somewhat limiting) magic system, a rather nice use of variant rules and a great amount of information for playing and running the system, including a nice guide for the gamemaster and a well detailed scenario. The 'Deluxe Edition' cost \$40, but if you liked old RuneQuest it is worth the price on sheer volume of material provided.

All this is nothing new. Each of these features was either part of the old RuneQuest system or a logical outgrowth of it. There is nothing here which is revolutionary or innovative. RuneQuest 3 bears the same relationship to RuneQuest that Advanced Dungeons & Dragons bears to the original D&D. It is a more complete and more complex system but not one which is better, though it is more condensing and aimed at a less mature audience. The problems with the system abound, both old flaws which have been perpetuated and new problems or attitudes which go against the strengths of the parent system. These faults are both mechanical and conceptual, and some may merely be a matter of taste. Perhaps the highlights will serve to illustrate this point.

On the conceptual level the problems are obvious from the start of the first book. When a game has to explain what dice are (with pictures) it is easy to guess at its target audience. I was offended by the tone of the first dozen pages of the 'Players Book' which seemed to be written for 'the younger crowd'. For the most part this tone drops out, though it carries on in the silly and often unnecessary examples. As part of this problem the idea of role-playing seems to have vanished, to be replaced by an emphasis on combat and flashy skill use to 'one-up' the opposition, placing the characters and the world in adversarial roles, something which will lead to a very brief and annoying campaign.

Starting on specifics in the first and longest book, we come immediately to a glaring addition to the rules, the system of rolling 'Character Occupations'. One of the big points for which RuneQuest used to be praised was the freedom a player had in character diversity and skills, so now they destroy that by adding professions and social groupings which dictate what you can and cannot do. Now this, in itself, is not as offensive to me as it must be to traditional Roges. What really offends me is that you roll for occupation, with no control over the background or interests of your character. This seems to work against imagination and the creative aspects of role-playing. All this is in the set-up section. The only other part of this that bothers me is their use of modifiers and their justifications, which seem at once clumsy and self-explanatory. From there they move on to the actual game system. Here old problems crop up again. When I first read through the rules I pencilled in the word 'insane' next to the section on Skill Experience rolls. This is a problem carried over from the original system. Advancement in skill and ability is based solely on a roll made against the character's percentage and if he beats the percentage the skill increases. It is nice that this gives a curve to the rate of advancement, but whether a roll can be made is based entirely on GM discretion with very few guidelines, and it also introduces a huge element of luck which could cause a character using a skill over and over to never advance while one being used only a few times might advance rapidly. This is, in effect, turning the dice into gods. There are also two specific problems in this section. First, "an experience roll for a particular skill is made only once an adventure, no matter how many times the skill is successfully tried." This means that a person who constantly practices at something will learn no more than someone who tries it once and gets lucky and that a person who fails will learn nothing. It is said that we learn from our mistakes, but the mechanics and RuneQuest itself clearly deny this again and again. Second, experience checks are only allowed for stressful situations, or as the example indicates "taking an hour to pick a lock is not a stressful situation--but doing it in one melee round as the rolls approach is a stressful situation, and deserves a check." Obviously using a skill when you have time to be aware of what you're doing is not nearly so meaningful as using a skill haphazardly and succeeding by sheer luck. This is just plain ridiculous. As with the old system there are arbitrary top limits to how good you can become with a skill, only now they are variable rather than all topping out at 100%. Just a few pages later in the same book credulity gets stretched even further with the system for increasing characteristics, which basically guarantees that after a set number of adventures and a certain amount of time every character's characteristics will begin to increase by random leaps and bounds. I must commend them on putting in a system of character bloating which will destroy campaigns after a year or so of hard work, something which should really appeal to the munchkins who find AD&D too limiting for their 1000th level characters. Moving on, combat retains the old, unwieldy separate roll system for attack versus defense (dodge or parry), so that the attack takes no account of the defensive posture of the target, but he may make a separate roll to counter the attack. In this section it is interesting to note that there is no skill differentiation between attack and defense with a weapon, so that even if you wanted to orient your skill solely towards self-preservation you would still have to carry the weight of offensive skill. To go to further heights of ridiculousness, you cannot learn separate carrying and attacking weapons at the same time, but must study them separately. Sure, I'll go to school just to learn to use a shield. Using it is exactly the same with or without a weapon in my other hand. There seems to be no grasp here of balance or the problems and special training required to use both hands for different functions in combat. The armor system is unnecessarily complex and weapon descriptions are misleading and incomplete, though there are some nice sketches. What really hurts the combat rules is that they are not a system, merely a jumble of standard situations and exceptions, something which opens plenty of small loopholes. Combat would work better if there were a single unifying framework of mechanics which it operated under. The first book winds up with a brief skill section which is very heavily oriented towards 'adventuring' skills, presumably on the assumption that no one would want to play a character who did anything other than bash people with weapons or pick their pockets.

The second book covers magic. The system presented is sort of generic, with three basic approaches to magic presented in extremely simple terms, a very limited number of spells and types of spells, but some interesting ideas and a generally workable basic concept, though it is by no means as sophisticated or developed as experienced players might wish. One particularly pleasing aspect is the organization and classification of spells, which is simple, functional and very helpful. What is not pleasing is the memorization system for spells. It would be nice if, rather than giving spells out like candy mages were able to learn them like skills, but I guess you use a different part of the brain to learn patterns of magic than you do to learn patterns of steel. What comes very clear is that this is only a partial magic system, emphasizing very strongly the ritual/spirit aspects of magic, downplaying more practical and primitive conjuring. This is a great orientation as far as I am concerned, but does detract from the generic nature of the system, and may not appeal to the younger players the designers seem to be trying to attract.

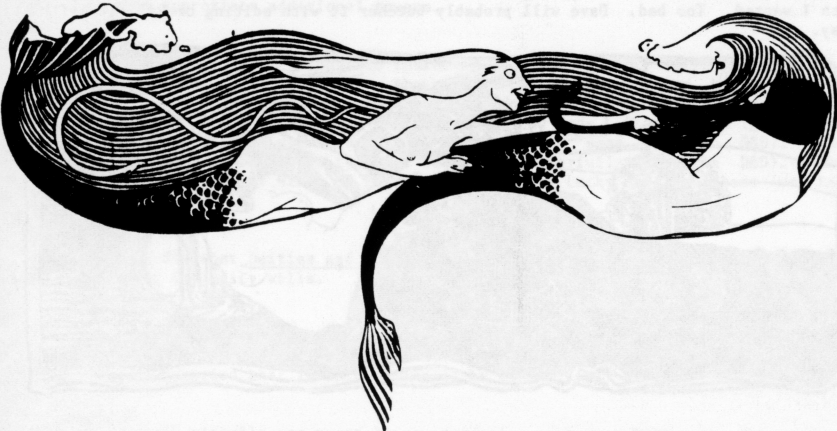
The third book is for the gamemaster, and it is an excellent aid for the novice. It doesn't reshuffle the mechanics as some other systems do. Instead it gives a very basic run-down of campaign creation, some nice notes on economics and ideas for running a campaign. This is all presented in rather condescending tones, but the ideas are sound. What is missing here is information on ecology, geology, weather and the hard framework on which a world works. It would have been nice to see as much information on worlds as on campaigns. What really detracts from this book is the predominance of random encounter (and treasure) tables of every type and description, presumably on the assumption that most GMs are too stupid to design an interesting structured scenario or that most players would be happier with playing in adventures which are a meaningless series of unconnected events, although this sort of thing is specifically advised against in the general discussion. 'The Money Tree', the scenario provided, is particularly disappointing, as it is a standard 'go on quest, kill monster, get treasure' type adventure with nothing to encourage role-playing or imagination on the part of the players. This book is a balance of good and bad elements which seems like the work of more than one person and incomplete at that.

The fourth book covers creatures. It is the Monster Manual of RuneQuest. I'll say this much; unlike the AD&D equivalent the mythological and natural creatures are fairly close to being correct (with a few glaring exceptions). There isn't much more to say. Some of the art is nice. Some of the creatures deserve more space.

The fifth book fills things out with a Glorantha background. I'm no fan of Glorantha, but I always thought there was more to it than this (there is, of course). I can only assume that this sketch is in lieu of a Gloranthan sourcebook which will appear at some later date. If they are going to do Glorantha they should do it in the detail it deserves as one of the oldest and most complete more or less original role-playing worlds.

Of course there remain the map and play aids, but these are frosting on the cake. There are character sheets, play examples, tables, charts and visual aids. These all help justify the price, but are of secondary interest.

Don't make the mistake of thinking that RuneQuest 3 is a new game in which the good qualities of the old RuneQuest are preserved and updated to compete with contemporary systems. Take it for what it is, a touched up version of a classic game with as many bad changes as good changes and plenty of the old problems still intact. RuneQuest 3 is verbose and condescending, mechanically out of date and seems to have given up on character-development and role-playing in favor of hack and slash power gaming. Nonetheless, it is a relatively playable system, makes some sense in its own terms, and is neither as unrealistic nor as contradictory as Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. This new edition should please old RQers and may subvert a few munchkins, but if you have already outgrown AD&D or original RQ there is probably very little here for you.



# CROSS MY PALM...

## ERIC OLSON

Dave is always looking for short, obnoxious and often pointless articles to fill those annoying little leftover spaces which occur when laying out an issue. Either that or we get some horrendous artwork toward the end of an article or sections where there seems to be a lot of space between the words. This article is just the sort to fill up those little spaces and protect you from that fate worse than death. Besides, coming from an Ysgarth campaign where everyone has their hand out(I think they are born that way), I feel that it is high time we did away with those money-grubbers and their usurious fees. I also promised Lew that I would hold down the number of charts and tables, so this system is going to be very basic.

First off, can a given person be bribed. The easiest way to determine this is to provide a percentage multiplier to be determined by the deed in question. If the briber seeks very minor, basic information, or wants someone to overlook a petty crime, the multiplier should be 1 to 4%. If you're talking major crime(multiple homicide, stealing the crown jewels, blowing up a royal palace) the multiplier should range higher, from about 6 to 10%. Now, you'll want to know what to multiply that value with. Easy, use Judgement, Wisdom or the equivalent stat which indicates discretionary ability for the NPC. This should indicate just how gullible the guy you are trying to bribe is. The resulting value is the percentage chance that he will not accept the bribe. The lower his judgemental stat, the more likely he is to take a bribe. A good further modification is to add his social rank to his judgment, using a 1 to 10 scale, with 1 being scum of the earth and 10 being royalty. For example, take your basic town guard(social rank 4) and a petty theft(multiplier of 2%) plus an average judgement of around 10, there is a 24% chance that he will not accept the bribe and will arrest you on two counts, theft and bribery.

Now, assuming the guard is smart and has taken the bribe, just how much is appropriate to give him(we don't want to seem common). In our campaign you can just assume he is going to take 95% of your haul and you can just fork it over. If you don't the lowly guard turns out to be the mayor's long lost brother and you're better off dead anyway. Once again, there is an easy and understandable way to work this out(moneywise). Multiply together the guard's social rank, judgment and the seriousness percentage of the offense(on a 1-10 scale). Say this time you killed someone in a more or less fair fight and don't want to be hassled by the law. Calling this a type 6 offense, the bribe should be  $10 \times 4 \times 6$  for your standard guard, totalling 240 Coin of the Realm. If this seems low to you, take into account that this is probably more than he earns in a few months. If your game has an inflated economy, adjust the figure appropriately. Gold was very scarce historically, and if this figure seems low(it is way too high for my campaign), maybe you should switch to a silver standard. If a bribe is offered which is too low for the crime the percentage chance of the guard not accepting should be increased by twice the percentage which the actual amount is below the expected amount, so paying only 200 in the last example would add 17% to the guard's chance of not accepting.

All meager attempts at levity aside, this can form a logical basis for determining when and how to bribe a person. Nonetheless, this basically comes down to GM discretion, and careful consideration of the factors makes all the difference. Remember that however you run bribery, and it is an important tool in most campaigns, there are three factors to consider. These are the seriousness of the offense, the station/status/job of the bribed individual, and his judgemental/decision making ability. Remember that there are the occasional rats who will take bribes and turn people in anyway, and figures should be juggled for other factors and complex situations. These are just guidelines. Well, this article has exceeded the limited length I wanted. Too bad. Dave will probably butcher it with editing or kill it with typos anyway.





# echoes

FROM THE ABYSS

Dear Fellas,

Sorry I've been delinquent. Maybe you aren't, but...truth is I've been too busy to write, as I am currently unemployed. This may sound odd, but it actually takes a lot of time looking for work and getting drunk so you don't notice being out of a job, not to mention reading, sniffing for chicks and picking up a few bucks unloading trucks. So much for any rep I had. I'll get around to my work for ABYSS. I have a couple of bits in the works. Oh hell, that's crap, I don't have any such plans. I'm just going to sleep, drink and chase tails, so ABYSS can bugger off! Gaming's for queer's and leechs anyway...

Yr. X. Ed. Lew  
Paradise, PA

Dear David,

I'm writing primarily to thank you for the two issues of ABYSS I have received from RE in the past year or so. These two issues (#s 23 and 27) proved to be very interesting reading and, overall, the best advertising for your magazine which I have encountered. Since you were kind enough to send me these sample copies, the least I can do is offer some feedback on the magazine.

I must admit that, as I finished reading #23 for the first time, it left a bad taste in my mouth. I really wasn't sure why, but I was not entirely pleased with the publication. It was not until later that I realized that the one item which had cast a bad light on the issue was the piece by "Mont Munchkin". I suppose that I was just generally disturbed by seeing what promised to be a superior publication reduce itself to such a dubious attempt at humor. Please don't mistake me; I have absolutely no objection to seeing humor in ABYSS or any other gaming publication. Indeed, I feel that this is one of the more enjoyable aspects of the hobby. However, I found #23's "You Asked For It" only slightly amusing, a little offensive, and most painful old hat. I hope you will agree that TSR jokes, cheap or otherwise, are hardly the 'cutting edge' of the gaming hobby, and that berating another company or level of participation will do nothing to better one's own.

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

I was most pleased to observe that #27, which I received fairly recently, served to strengthen this view of your magazine. Once again the articles were of generally high quality and of a level of material which I find most useful. Most notable, in my opinion, were J. Schuller's "For Queen and

Country" and J. Davies "Worlds of Clark Ashton Smith". I was also glad to see "Echoes from the Abyss", which I hope will continue as a regular feature. Such a forum can only help a worthwhile magazine grow.

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

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

So, then, I thank you again for the opportunity to enjoy what gives every indication of being a publication well worth my interest. I should be subscribing in the near future.

Matthew F. Porter  
Franklin Square, NY

Dear Dave,

This letter contains some comments on articles which have appeared in ABYSS lately.

"Gods and Myths of Japan": pretty good, but how about articles on Japanese culture and religious practices.

"Tact and Tactics": very good. I would like to see more on *Middle Passage*.

"By the Gods": this would have been better if it had not been tied to *Challengers*.

"In the Speculum": stop reviewing fiction, because tastes are too varied to make it worthwhile. The reviews of games, adventures and magazines are well done. Try to review some historical or SF games.

"Echoes from the Abyss": Drop it...

In general, I would like to see more articles on Arabic, Celtic and Germanic cultures and mythology, near future science fiction and *Call of Cthulhu*. By the way, drop the old xeroxed art. It looks like crap.

Bryan Blackwell  
Enterprise, AL

Dear ABYSS Readers and Staff,

Has there ever been any attempt to form a non-profit organization for the defense of FRD games and gamers? We've taken a lot of flak, especially TSR, from the press, various religious groups, and grief-stricken parents. Shouldn't we have some sort of league of concerned gamers and gamecompanies so that we can present a unified front in this battle?

Our minister (who is a regular member of our AD&D group) asked for our help in preparing a sermon on the virtues of D&D a few years ago and it was taken well by our congregation. We demonstrated how the game was played and how you learn a lot by making moral decisions during play. If we could do this sort of thing on a national scale, with large groups of gamers (who aren't concerned for profit and therefore have nothing to lose), perhaps we could convince some people.

My friends and I have tried twice to start a gaming club at our local public library branch, and both times the idea was turned down because of the objections of 'concerned parents'. Wouldn't it be grand if, instead of opposing our efforts, parents encouraged them? Think about this and spread the word to anyone you know who might be interested.

Robert Karcher  
Chicago, IL

Mr. Nalle,

I don't understand why you have slowly destroyed the quality of ABYSS. At one time it was a fine magazine, with interesting articles and plenty of background material. It had few attacks on the gaming industry (aspects of it anyway) and even those few complaints were well put and, in my opinion, somewhat justified. And then something changed. I'm not sure exactly where this decline began, but it would have to be somewhere around issue 20 or so. The articles started to become a lot alike in structure and content. The writers would rarely come up with a new or interesting thought. In your source articles, though still well researched, I felt a decline in the material that could actually be used in a FRPG campaign and more emphasis on the details and relationships which could link one thing to another, as if you were trying to put all the articles into a historical context. I refer specifically to the pantheon articles. Although it was true that many pantheons and deities were shared among the Celtic and other European peoples, I felt that there was too much emphasis on this and not enough on actual campaign material.

Another problem that has grown to mammoth proportions in ABYSS is the persistent series of attacks on the larger companies in the gaming industry (particularly TSR). Sure TSR isn't the best at producing innovative products. What they do produce is still of a consistently high quality for the systems they have put out. AD&D is not a new and unique system because it is very difficult to just up and revise something of that scale. It is, however, a very playable system and many people like it and other TSR products. Now, you are entitled to your opinions on TSR and their products, but must you continually ram them down your readers' throats in the guise of articles like 'The Octopus' (#19) or 'The Death of Gaming' (#25), and the many references to how 'bad' TSR products are in various other articles. Now, I realize that the articles mentioned are from 'Berserkergang', an editorial column, but almost every 'Berserkergang' has an anti-TSR feeling. Leave it alone for once, I've had enough of it.

My final complaint, and I'm sure you're tired of them and I thank you for reading this letter (I assume you are) is that it has become

a house organ for Ragnarok Enterprises, almost as blatant as others, such as DRAGON. Actually, I might say even more blatant. Almost every adventure that has been in the center insert has been done for your systems with some AD&D or CoC stats 'tossed' in. Many of your articles are for modifying Ysgaroth or TCT with an occasional other system (Arduin, CoC) mentioned in a rare article. Conjurings rarely goes by without a plug of some sort. And the height of arrogance was the readers' poll in #26. No doubt it was carefully counted, but I would hardly call it a fair poll of gamers in general. Your method of adjusting the percentages for the number who answered was interesting to say the least. I also noticed that Ragnarok products were the only ones that consistently rated over 80% in the RAT column.

Well, I thank you for reading this rather verbose letter. I am sorry that your magazine has not continued to live up to my early expectations and I hope that it may change in the future. Though I will no longer be buying ABYSS I will look at future issues and hope to see an improvement.

David Halberstam  
Melbourne, FL

Dear ABYSS Editors,

So what's going on with ABYSS? The issues are arriving more and more slowly and the print is getting smaller and smaller. #32 looked pretty good, except for the diminishing print. The art was excellent, particularly the illos by Peter Chen and some of the old art (especially under 'Conjurings'). 'In the Speculum' is a real gem, the only review column I've seen which gives a straight look at what's new and good in gaming, with a surprising lack of bias towards Ragnarok Enterprises products (I've noticed you never review them), though you might run a few less articles on TCT (a third of the issue? Sheesh!). It is nice to see some reviews which don't just suck up to products because they are pretty, but look at content and value instead. I also have to say that Japanese gods are getting awfully dull. The glossy paper for the covers is nice and 'The Forest and the Deep' was great. Keep up the good work.

Tom Moskowitz  
York, PA



# RAG FILE

We may not have been working on ABYSS, but we have been working. Thus, there is lots of news about new products, things we hope you'll check out and put to the use we intended them for.

## YSGARTH IS HERE!!!

Really, trust me. After a gargantuan effort the first volume of the New Ysgarth System is actually in print. It cost us a lot of money and a lot of time. This means you should buy it and justify what we've been through. The first book is subtitled 'Rolecraft'. It covers character creation, skills and combat. It is complete in itself, compatible with the old system, and—would you believe it—completely NEW! The mechanics are totally redone. There are many more skills. Combat is simpler and more realistic. The format is fancier (8.5x11, color glossy cover, etc.). You won't go wrong. Where else can you get a game that has 57 playtesters listed? Hell, its even got a character sheet, a combat table extract and an index. Buy it now. Don't hesitate, only \$5.95 (a special offer).

Coming this fall is the second of the three books in the new Ysgarth. This will be 'Spellcraft', covering magic and religion, including complete rules and spells, as well as cults and guilds in detail. It will be the most complete and realistic magic system you have ever seen. Coming early next year is the third and final book which will complete Ysgarth. It is sub-titled 'Worldcraft', and will cover world set-up and design with a selection of adventure scenarios and background information from the world of Ysgarth. If the first book isn't enough for you, you can order the whole set for \$15 and we will send book one immediately and follow it up with each of the other books as they are released. Our slogan...Ysgarth—A revolution in role-playing.

## CHALLENGERS RULES!

As some have probably realized by now, Challengers is out, and it is shaking things up in the world of superhero gaming. It is a compact, simple superhero game system based on ICI. It comes in two books. Book one has the complete rules, with character creation, set-up, combat, power use rules and a special list of over 100 superhero powers. Book two presents the background of the original Challengers campaign. It is the most detailed superhero background on the market today, with a full history covering forty years in detail, six fully developed adventures and over 30 background characters described and illustrated. The best part may be the price, because you can get your copy sent out right now for only \$8.95. Our slogan—Be the hero you want to be, with Challengers!!

## ADVENTURES GALORE

We've been publishing adventure modules for years. It is time for you to get in on it. Yes, we know, modules are for morons, and generally this is true. However, these modules are the exception, because some idiot made the mistake of designing them for role-players instead of munchkins. This is a problem since we sell most of them through our ads in DRAGON, but means that they are actually worthwhile for the type of people who read ABYSS.

We currently have 20 in print. The most recent are Citadel of Zushran (nominated as best role-playing module at ORIGINS), Dark Waters (an urban fantasy horror tale set in Ysgarth), and Hills of Binazmia (middle eastern espionage adventure). Coming soon are Challenge of the Toymaker and Rivermasters of Arania. Each adventure is only \$3 (a hell of a value), and you can get any 4 for \$7. Modules are for morons, but these modules are for YOU!



<This section you read>

### FEEDBACK RESULTS FOR #31

Article	Rating	Change
Conjurings	83	+1
Forest & Deep	77	--
Draw	97	--
Gods of Japan 2	82	-13
Plug Page	85	--
Beggary	80	--
Echoes...	83	+2
In the Speculum	90	-7
Peter Chen	85	+1
Rick Pressley	78	-6
Them Dead Dudes	89	-6
Overall	85	+1

<This is the section you clip and send back to us—OO IT!>

### RAGNAROK ENTERPRISES ORDER FORM

#	Item	Price	Total
	ABYSS(6)	10.00	
	ABYSS(13)	18.00	
	London by Night	6.95	
	Challengers	8.95	
	Guns at Noon	4.00	
	Ysgarth(Bk 1)	5.95	
	Ysgarth Reserved	15.00	
	Citadel of Zushran	3.00	
	Dark Waters	3.00	
	Hills of Binazmia	3.00	
	Rivermasters	3.00	
	Chal of Toymaker	3.00	
	TOTALS		

### YOUR FEEDBACK ON #32

Rate these items on a scale from 1 (awful) to 100 (great)

Conjurings	_____
Violence	_____
Japanese Bestiary	_____
Supergames?	_____
MythQuest	_____
RuneQuest Reincarnated	_____
Cross my Palm	_____
Echoes from the Abyss	_____
Rag File	_____

Rick Pressley  
The Dead Folks

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_



**GRAMIES**

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