

ABYSS 34



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CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Conjurings.....	Dave Nalle	2
Gods of the Slave Coast...	Dave Nalle	3
In the Speculum.....		9
The End of Dreams.....	A. Sadel	13
Behind the Wheel.....	Carl Jones	15
Unto the Gates of Death..	John Davies	16
Feedback/Order Form.....		19

ARTISTS

All art this issue by dead Germans



CONJURINGS

Surprise! Beyond your wildest hopes and dreams, we have actually completed another issue of ABYSS. Believe me, this happened far faster than you might have any reason to expect.

You see, before I actually lay out an issue of ABYSS it is hard to tell just how much space the articles slotted for that issue will take up. So, when I was laying out #33 I made a startling discovery. We had about 12 more pages of text than would fit in the number of pages slotted for that issue. Well, 12 pages is more than half way to another issue, and there were a few more articles waiting loyally on deck. The only answer to this embarrassment of riches was an instant issue. Thus, you hold in your hands #34.

By the time you get this ORIGINS will be over and we will have discovered what came of it all. As some of you may know, we snatched up 3 award nominations at ORIGINS this year. Passage to Cathay was nominated as 'Best Pre-Twentieth Century Boardgame', ABYSS was nominated as 'Best Small Magazine' and Citadel of Zushran was nominated as 'Best role-Playing Adventure'. For the first time the competition looks potentially beatable, especially for ABYSS and Passage to Cathay. This is the first year in a while that JOURNAL OF 20th CENTURY WARGAMING was not put up against ABYSS, and this is the first year that there is no lonely wargaming magazine to suck off votes from the variety of RPing magazines. PTC faces mixed opposition, a grab bag of obscure games against which it stands a fair chance. Citadel of Zushran is in one of the toughest categories, so I can't hold out too much hope for it. This is the first time we've gotten a nomination in two of these categories (ABYSS makes it every year) and that is achievement enough for now. Actually, I hope that someday we will be able to buy (oops, I mean win) one of these awards, but to do that we need to sell more copies and get more exposure, something I'm always desperately working on.

On a personal note, I'll be in England from mid-July to late August, so don't expect most orders to be filled with amazing speed, though some will be processed by loyal assistants. If you're in the UK or know anyone there, tell them to look me up, which they can do c/o the Institute for Historical Research at London University. I'll be researching like mad in London and Norwich, and should be in contact with Games Workshop (we have to get some reviews in WHITE DWARF) and Eadevium Games (we need to set up licensing so that Ysgarth can get printed over there to keep the price down).

Well, not much more to say. This issue looks promising from here. I particularly recommend the African Gods bit and the new vehicle system for To Challenge Tomorrow. Use the feedback form, let us know what you think. Hey, you can even write us letters, by god.

Look forward to next issue. It will have my own report on British gaming, reviews of British products, an ORIGINS report and hopefully some interesting new features.

I can't ramble on much longer when I don't really have much to say, so I'll sign off and leave you to read and enjoy this issue. Keep in touch.

GODS OF THE SLAVE COAST

DAVE NALLE

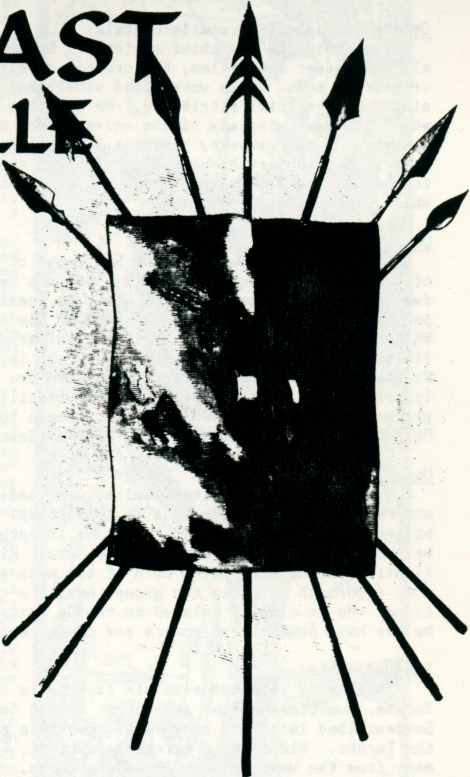
INTRODUCTION

Africa is a continent of mystery. Certainly it is a mystery to both mythologers and gamers. How such a huge area and its many peoples could have been pretty much overlooked is beyond me (no, Egyptians don't count). Africa presents a rich potential background in all areas, particularly religion and myth. While the popular pantheons of Europe are safely dead, the myths of Africa are still part of a living religious tradition, which may make them a little too real for some to deal with.

This is the first of several articles on the myths and beliefs of Africa. Some of the major West African pantheons are covered here, with a geographical focus on the areas which are now Benin, Togo, and Nigeria. These nations are part of territory which was under the influence of the Kingdoms of Abomey and Dahomeyn during their height in the 18th century. We will look at the Dahomeyan tribes and their powerful neighbors to the east and try to recreate their pantheons as they must have existed during this great civilization when contact with Arab, French and Portuguese traders was in its infancy and Islam and Christianity had not yet altered traditional myths and practices. This is the region which has given rise to much of the folklore Blacks in the Americas. As a result it has recieved more attention than other parts of the continent. This makes this region which was called the

'Slave Coast' the easiest place to start, as comparable sources are not available for many other fascinating tribes, from the Bantu to the Zulu. The two major tribes of this area are the Fon of Abomey and the Yoruba of the Niger valley to their east. Along with these we will look at three minor groups, the Ibo, Ewe and Gwa who share the same general territory.

This is supposed to be an overview of religion and myth, focused on the gods as personalities and characters. The discussion will be fairly heavy on myth and description and maybe a bit light on general theory and comparison. This is intended to be a series of three articles, so other tribes and pantheons can be covered in the second piece and peripheral elements like magic, ritual, cults and superstitions can be held off for the final segment.



GODS OF THE YORUBA

The Yoruba were the great enemies of the Kingdom of Dahomey or Abomey. They are found mostly in the valley of the River Niger in what are now Nigeria, Benin and Togo, the area which was once called 'the slave coast'. They formed into powerful kingdoms and alliance against their neighbors and were active in the slave trade. They had a reputation for being extremely warlike, particularly the Mazangu who were the female shock troopers of the tribal leaders. The Yoruba have a number of sub divisions, and form a sort of a linguistically united over-tribe. They are fiercely independent and have a strong cultural identity.

Yoruba mythology is probably the best defined system we will deal with, having a large selection of deities with clearly defined powers and organized traditions, cults and priesthoods. Keep in mind that there are some gods who are shared by more than one group, so in this and other sections you may see cross-references to similar or shared deities of other myth groups.

Olorun(Olodumare/Oduduwa)

This is the supreme god of the Yoruba pantheon. He can be male or female. He created all things, and is the king of the heavens. As a woman he had seven children of whom Orishala is the oldest. His being is said to cover the earth and he has many different titles. He is essentially a sky god, but also a judge of the dead, who recount their lives to him after his death at which point he determines their fate(paradise, reincarnation, punishment, etc). He dresses all in white and is perfectly formed. The sky is said to be his face. He has no temples or priests, and is never directly contacted or worshipped. He is an entirely remote

figure who does not become involved in earthly matters at all. He does all his work through intermediaries. In fact, when he created man all he did was provide the spirits, which are the eternal portion of man, while his chief assistant, Orishala, actually made the earth and the human body. Most of the other gods work for him in one way or another, covering specialized areas, and it is to them, not Olorun, that men pray.

Orishala (Orishanla/Orunmila/Obatala)

This deity is the chief assistant, intermediary and messenger of Olorun. He is lord of all the lesser divinities, the creator of all living things in the physical world, and the creator of men. He is worshipped widely and sometimes confused with Olorun himself, having similar superficial attributes. He owns the Bag of Existence (actually a snail shell) from which the raw materials of the universe are drawn. He is sometimes associated with Eshu as a messenger and trickster, having a little fun with his creations. He is sometimes worshipped as a goddess under the name Alashofun, though this is sometimes the name of his mate instead. Like Olorun he dresses in white, sometimes going by the title Obatala or 'King in White Clothing'.

Olokun

Olokun is the 'Owner of the Sea', one of the most important deities of this group, as many of the Yoruba are coast dwellers. He is a destructive deity with storm-related powers. He dwells in an underwater palace where he feasts with his wives and courtiers who are part man, part fish. Not all worshippers agree on his sex, so he is sometimes represented as female. While his worship is greatest in coastal areas, his main temple is in the land-bound city of Ife (not to be confused with Ife-Ife). He is also associated with some of the larger rivers. He sometimes takes human sacrifices, who are thrown into the sea. On the rivers he is served by priestesses, and is the bringer of fertility to the flood plains. In general he is the protector of fishermen and farmers, though the storm can be the expression of his displeasure. He is more or less equivalent to the Fon deity Hu (discussed later).

Ogun

Ogun is the god of iron, smiths, war and hunting. He is one of the most widely worshiped and best detailed of the gods in this group. His sacred city is Ife-Ife, which is near the hilltop where he is said to live. He is rather anti-social, dresses in palm bark, is disliked by the other gods, and bears an iron axe. His major activities are hunting, smithing and fighting, so he appeals to much of the male population. He is probably the third or fourth most important deity in the group, having a total of six temples in the major city of Ibadan alone. He is closely related to the Ga deity Gua who is described later, and in some regions he may have some of the powers and characteristics of Gua.

Shango (Jakuta)

This deity is about equal in importance to Ogun. He is the storm and thunder god of the Yoruba, sometimes called Jakuta or 'he who hurls stones'. He is similar to the Fon deity So (described later) in many ways. One tale says that he originated as Oyo, the fourth king of the Yoruba. His cult is extremely ancient, with four sacred days. The priests bear holy axes made from the wood of the Oshe-shango tree. He bears some striking similarities to both Odin and Christ. His myth presents him as a tyrannical mage-king who was a great doctor and could breathe fire. He was betrayed by his advisors when calling lightning down on his enemies, so that it struck his palace, killing all his wives and children. After this he hung himself from the Oshe-shango tree at a place called Koso or 'place where the king did not hang'. This strange name arises from the myth maintained by the priests of his main temple at Koso that the chain he hanged himself from was actually connected to heaven and that he either climbed up it or was pulled up by the gods, thereby attaining godhood and taking his place as the storm god. He has a sacred ram whose bellow is the thunder, and bears an axe which he throws and is the lightning. He is a harsh and temperamental deity, worshipped for his destructive, healing and magical powers. He has a number of wives, mostly minor river goddesses, particularly Oyo, Oshun and Ovia. His priests are called Mogbo and the sect is large and he is very popular. They seem to have a hard time explaining to the people how Shango died and was reborn into heaven, and are very insistent that his hanging was more figurative than literal.

Ifa

Ifa is a demi-deity of sorts. He is said to have been the earthly incarnation of Orishala. He set up his headquarters at Ife-Ife. He was a great divine, prophet and doctor. Many came to him for advice and he was credited with knowing all languages. After his death he ascended to heaven and became the messenger who delivers knowledge of prophecies, divination and oracular predictions. One of his major shrines is the oracle at Aro in Nigeria, which dictated many local policies in the 19th century and was known by Europeans as the 'Long Juju'. Diviners are generally called Babalawo and gain their knowledge from Ifa.

Orisha Oko

This is the farm goddess of the Yoruba. She is symbolized by the Ibeji, statues of twins and depicted in the traditional exaggerated earth-mother style. Her cult is characterized by the international tradition of symbolic group sex in the fields prior to the planting, as well as by sexually suggestive dancing at festivals.

Shopona

Shopona is the god of smallpox, not a particularly charming concept, but a useful deity. He has his own sacred day and is greatly feared. He protects fertility, but is said to fire arrows at people which cause pain and illness. He is often called the 'Hot Earth' or 'King of the Earth', and is thought to live beneath the ground. His shrines are placed outside the entrances to villages to scare away evil spirits.

Yemoja

A relatively minor mother deity, the mother of rivers, associated with fertility, childbearing and rivers. She is served by priests who live in the branches of trees near a river, where they accept offerings in order to bring fish.

Oloso

Another minor goddess. Her job is to guard and protect lagoons and those who fish in them.

Da (Damballah/Daboa/Dangbe)

Da is the deity of the snake, specifically the python, and the Daboa is his sacred animal. He has a large cult following because of the symbolic importance of the snake in Yoruba belief. The snake is the symbol of magic and power, as well as fertility and the male organ. He is said to circle the earth 7000 times, 3500 above the ground and 3500 below, though all of these coils are invisible. His power suffuses all things, and the rainbow is the visible part of one of his coils. He holds the world up and was the mount of Orishala when the world was being created. The double rainbow is used as his symbol. The snake is the ideal of the essence of life and movement, linking all life with its coils. In many areas his cult is considered to be immoral, and even to practice evil magic and shapechanging.

Obalufon

The god of peace. His main temple is in the city of Agodi.

Imole

The god of the soil, a male counterpart to Orisha Oko.

Erinle

The elephant god, protector of elephant hunters, rivers where elephants bathe and elephants themselves. Said to be the spirit of an elephant hunter who drowned while tracking elephants in a river.

Eshu

This is the deity of mischief and evil. He is the main messenger for all the gods. His character is very diverse, ranging from sheer evil to fertility and a father protector role. To cover this he has 200 different names, also used for variety in types of curses. He loves to sow discord, cause jealousy and envy. To this end he often walks among men and impersonates them. He is violent and unpredictable and also works as the avenger of the gods to punish transgressors. He is represented as a man with an immense phallus, representing his function as a fertility god. He drives men to evil, but can also protect from evil. He is frequently called on in curses to direct his evil forces at others. He is the only god on whom a mortal can look and live. His worship includes sexual dances and sacrifices of goats and birds. He does not take human sacrifices, reserving that right personally. As will be seen later he is rather similar to the Fon deity Legba.

Oya

This goddess is a horrible, bearded woman, the spirit of the River Niger. She is also the power of destructive wind and the tornado. She is the chief wife of Shango. No one can look on her face and survive.

Other Gods and Spirits

The Yoruba are not as magic or cult oriented as some of the other groups discussed here, but they have a strong belief in spirits and demons. Their beliefs are essentially animistic, with everything having a spirit (orisha) and identity of some sort, from tools, to furniture, to trees, to rivers, to entire regions. Most of these spirits are neutral and passive in their orientation. In addition, there are spirits who are loose on the earth or capable of visiting it. Some of these are favorable, some are hostile and some are neutral. These include supernatural spirits and some of the spirits of the dead. The result of this is that there is some fear of these spirits and some attempt to make use of them. Ancestral spirits watch over people and sometimes protect or punish them depending on how they behave. They are sacrificed to regularly, and often under the direction of a god. Evil spirits seek to work mischief and can possess animals or people, or even unborn babies. Sacrifices are often made or special protections established to drive them away. Some people, sometimes called witches, meet in secret to worship evil spirits. Other groups exist to discover these witches and punish them. Most of these practices and beliefs are shared throughout the region. One practice unique to the Yoruba is Shigidi, the summoning of demons through the use of magical images and sacrifices through which their actions are directed to bring harm to enemies. Other forms of image magic are common all over, but the use of images of evil spirits as a compelling tool is a unique vice of Yoruba witches. Other unusual practices like the Egungun death cult and the Zangbeto cult will be dealt with in the third article.

GODS OF THE FON

The Fon were the dominant population of the Kingdom of Abomey which was the core of the Dahomeyan Empire, the expansionist power of this area in the 17th and 18th centuries. Their main foes were the Yoruba to the east and the Ashanti to the West. Their myths are organized and coherent. Though not as expansive as those found among the Yoruba, they form a sensible and coherent system.

Nana Buluku(Nana Buku/Bruku)

This is the primal mother of the Fon pantheon, the mother of Mawu and Lisa, the primal twins. She is a sky goddess, overseeing all and giving information to diviners. She speaks to the people by possessing her priestesses who usually go almost naked. Her name is used in blessing and cursing and she gives out annoying quests and penance to worshipers. Her orders are enforced by the threat of plagues of locusts. Her priests are trained in special convents, the largest being at Dassa Zoume. Her largest temples are in the towns of Doume and Bante. Her worship is characterized by the beating of drums and sacrifices made on an altar which is a living baobab tree with blood-soaked bark.



Mawu

Mawu is the female of the two primal twins, the children of Nana Buluku. She is the goddess of the moon and the creator of the world. She mated with her brother Lisa to produce 7 pairs of twin children who became the gods of the elements, including iron, earth, sky and thunder. She shares linked thoughts with her brother/mate. Note that in some areas Mawu and Lisa may have opposite sexes.

Lisa

Lisa is the male of the two primal twin children of Nana Buluku. He is the god of the sun, war and iron. He bears an iron sword which is said to be the god Gu or Ogun(see Yoruba Gods). This sword is worshipped as a god. He wears all white, as do his priests. Albinos are sacrificed to him as are albino animals. His altar is always kept clean of blood or oil. His symbol is the chameleon, his messenger, which is painted on the wall of his temple. The time of sunset and the western sky are particularly holy to him. Both Mawu and Lisa are worshipped by the Ewe and Ga as well. It should be noted that in some areas their sexes may be reversed.

Hu

This is the Fon equivalent of Olokun(Yoruba). He is characterized by the practice of human sacrifice in which two virgins are sent into the deep to be his brides. The high priest takes a trip to his underwater realm for seven days each year to get the god's instructions. Other than this he is fairly similar in attributes and practices to Olokun. He has a daughter named Avleketete who is also a popular deity.

Fa

This is the deity of divination, very important in Fon myth. He has 16 eyes to represent the 16 divinatory palm nuts. He lives in a palm tree in the sky and watches over the world. He also holds the 16 keys to the door of the future, which he will open for oracles who pick the proper key and behave themselves well in his presence. He is also the god of the secret art of writing and the sponsor of a divinatory cult which tells the future by using the fa or 'secret name' which the god gives each boy when he achieves manhood, as the symbol of his identity.

Legba

Legba is the Fon equivalent of Eshu(Yoruba). He started out as a messenger and intermediary for the gods and became a god of evil. He found himself being called on to do their dirty work and became hated, so he decided to do his best to live up to his reputation. He causes mischief and patronizes thieves. He takes accounts of the events in the world to Mawu and Lisa, who are his parents. He has no priests, and is greatly feared, but he is also thought to avert sickness, so shrines are built outside of villages and informal offerings are made there. In other general characteristics he is similar to Eshu.

Buku Olokpa

This is the god who sanctifies the stake used to impale convicted witches.

Buku Aja

The god of trade and the market among the Fon and other Dahomeyan tribes.

Buku Katakú

The god of seizures, possession by spirits and madness.

Nana Jakpa

An oracular goddess who speaks through fools. Her followers are beggars who wander around naked speaking in tongues.

Other Gods and Spirits

General Fon practices follow the pattern of the Yoruba. What should be noted, however is that they share several gods with other groups, particularly Gu/Ogun, Ifa and Da who are found among the Ga and Yoruba, as well as So, Mawu and Lisa who are also important to the Ewe. One interesting added detail is that the Fon and Ewe word for a god or spirit is Vodu(Vodu), from which the American term Voodoo is taken. The Fon practice of Vodu is a form of informal spirit worship which is a widespread element of many religions and cults. Cults and secret societies will be covered later in more detail.

GODS OF THE IBO

The Ibo have had considerable contact with other tribes of this area, though they live somewhat to the south and east in Cameroon. Their mythology shares a number of elements with neighboring mythologies, though it has its own distinct flavor.

Chukwu(Chuku)

This is the chief or father god of the Ibo. He is a general paternal creator deity. He is also known to avert illness and to give prophetic visions to his worshipers. He is worshipped at a famous oracle called the Aro Chuku and is served by priests called Umu-Chuku or 'sons of god'. He is a rather frequent recipient of human sacrifices, but his importance is limited.

Ale(Ala/Ane)

This is the Ibo earth goddess, a powerful deity, the ruler of men and the protector of the harvest. She is also a goddess of death who receives their spirits. In her role as a fertility goddess she is particularly concerned with marriage and birth. She is the arbiter of moral law and watches over oaths. She has shrines everywhere and is consulted before any community decisions. Her temples are usually trees with pots to hold offerings. Sacrifices are usually produce or first born animals. Newlyweds live in houses consecrated to her which are called Mbari. They are abandoned after a child is born. She also has her own cult, separate from her priesthood, called the Ikuru, which celebrates with drums and dancing. She is a goddess of many facets, and is depicted as having a child on her knee and a sword in her hand as the judge of birth and death. She is probably the single most important deity of the Ibo.

Anyanwu(Igwe)

This is probably one of the most important Ibo gods. He is the god of the sun and bright sky and conveys sacrifices to Chuku who lives beyond the sky. He also transports souls to heaven for Ale and is considered the spirit of good fortune. Common offerings to him are white birds, kola nuts and wine.

Amadi-Oha(Kamalo/Amadhe Onhia)

The god of thunder. He brings fertility and punishes workers of evil magic, striking them down with lightning. He also functions as the avenger of the gods and the preserver of traditions and customs, so that he punishes those who go against the social order.

Chi

Chi is an obscure goddess who is the spirit of the earth, though the name is also used as a general Ibo word for spirit. Her name prompts speculation on connections to the mystic concept of Chi found in the orient.

Ndichie(Ndi-Oke)

These are powerful ancestral spirits who work as guardians, embodied in pillars in or around a home or other place to watch over and protect it.

Other Gods and Spirits

There are few other remarkable aspects to note. The Ibo follow patterns already noted, and on the whole they are probably have the least developed of these mythologies. They do share some gods of other groups, particularly Olokun(Yoruba). As with other groups where the actual pantheon is a bit weak, ancestor and spirit worship are unusually strong to fill the gap.

GODS OF THE EWE

The Ewe are spread all along the 'slave coast' and their mythology overlaps considerably with others of the region. They present some interesting original deities which should be looked at. They share a particularly large number of deities with the Fon and Yoruba as is indicated later.

Dada Segbo

The sky god, a general father/creator god, often mated with Aye, not as important as most of the younger generation of deities.

Aye

The Ewe earth god, generally worshipped at Iroko trees(also used by many other cults). As with Dada Segbo she has declined in significance with the adoption of gods like Mawu and Lisa.

So (Hevioso)

The thunder god of the Ewe, one of their most important deities, somewhat similar to Shango(Yoruba). He originates in the city of Hevie and is linked to their python cult, combining aspects of that tradition with the power of the storm. He is known to strike down the proud and to destroy the meetings of witches at night. Those who are struck by lightning and live are thought to be chosen by the god and as a result are feared and cast out of society. He is depicted as a red ram with lightning coming from his mouth, carrying two axes of lightning. He also comes to earth in the form of lightning to drag off those who have earned his wrath. He is an angry god, but also brings fertility in the rains which follow his violent attacks. The ram is sacred to him and not eaten. His followers carry symbolic ram-headed axes.

Li

The Ewe snake spirit, worshipped by the python cult which is very strong in this group. Essentially the same as Da(Yoruba).

Sapata

The god of smallpox, similar to Shopona(Yoruba). He is the foe of Dada Segbo and is called the 'King of Pearls'. His sacred day is Thursday and he is very popular. His shrines are low mounds soaked in sacrificial blood and oil with an ironstone altar, placed just outside of villages to scare away disease. Followers shave the right side of their heads and wear parrot feathers and wire earrings. The priests are well liked, as they make a fair effort to stop the spread of diseases, particularly Leprosy, Smallpox and Tuberculosis. They dispose of corpses and maintain colonies in the wilds for the sick.

Other Gods and Spirits

It is very important to note that the deities already discussed here are only those which are unique to the Ewe. Mawu and Lisa are as much Ewe gods as they are Fon gods, and are the chief gods of this group as well. Ogun(Yoruba) is also extremely important, of a rank with So.

GUA AND THE GA

The Ga are a smaller group within this area and they have a somewhat different orientation in that they are more or less a people of one god. Although they recognize and respect other gods, they are essentially the people of Gua, who is their equivalent of Ogun(Yoruba).

Gua is a smith and thunder god. His priests are smiths and his temples are always forges, either in town or in the woods at the foot of a silk-cotton tree. Chisel shaped stones are kept as sacred 'god's hoes'. He is also a war god and warriors leave the skulls of their victims at his shrine. Oaths are made by him on metal objects and his wrath is greatly feared. He is symbolized by pieces of iron and the skull of a dog, often posted outside the house of a blacksmith. Dogs are common sacrifices. He is also associated with agriculture, hunting and farm implements and has an annual festival which lasts for several weeks. He brought the knowledge of metal working to man and is called on before every hunt or whenever working metal. Although he is the chief god for the Ga, he would rather hunt on his own with his pack of 24 supernatural dogs than actually administer the universe. Human transgressors are one of his favorite quarries. Speculation on the similarity of his names Gua/Gu/Ogun to the Celtic deities Govannon(smith) and Gwyn(hunter) could be a quick route to madness.

CONCLUSION

These are the gods of a fairly small part of a very large continent. They are still worshipped in an area which is shared with Christians and Moslems, but I have tried to present them in their traditional forms. Of all the areas in Africa this one may be the least infected by foreign religion, though the elements are clear to see, as there has been European and eastern contact since before the Roman Empire.

Of the pantheons of Africa these are the most interwoven and best developed, shared by peoples living within an area which is about the size of Europe. There is some overlap here with western neighbors who will be treated in the second article(Ashanti, Fante) and some minor groups have been omitted(Nupe, Ibibio). Nonetheless, this forms a complete pantheon for a collection of related tribes which made up one of the most advanced civilizations in Africa(peaking in the 18th century). Note that despite shared religious elements and geography, there was constant war between powerful groups within the region, particularly between the Fon who ruled in Abomey(the core of what is sometimes called the Dahomeyan Empire) and the powerful Yoruba tribes of the Niger valley. Africa is new ground to most gamers, and could be a useful background or addition to fill out the periphery of any campaign.

BOOKS TO CONSULT

African Mythology, G. Parrinder
West African Religion, G. Parrinder
Some Nigerian Fertility Cults, P. Talbot
The Lower Niger and Its Tribes, A. Leonard
The Trickster in West Africa, R. Pelton
Religion in an African City, G. Parrinder
African Traditional Religion, E. B. Odowu
Religion and Myth, J. MacDonald
Imaro, C. R. Saunders
The Quest for Cush, C. R. Saunders
(last two are fantasy novels with a great feel for the setting)

IN THE SPECULUM BOOKS

TRUMPS OF DOOM

Roger Zelazny (Arbor) HB:\$14.95

Just when you thought the Amber series was over, it is heralded anew with *Trumps of Doom*. This is the first in what is to be a second Amber series, starring Corwin's son Merlin as an Amberite on earth who gets drawn into conflict with a mysterious antagonist who tries to kill him on the same day every year.

There is lots of action. The plot is fast moving and the characters are likeable if not too deep. Merlin follows a series of adventures trying to discover who his enemy is. There are impressive special effects (as it were), and a suitably annoying cliffhanger ending. Zelazny's writing is in fine form despite his declining prolificity. For the Zelazny fan or any fantasy buff *Trumps of Doom* is an enjoyable read, easily up to the level of the earlier books in the first Amber series, though perhaps not up to *Nine Princes in Amber* itself.

What detracts here is that this is just a formula novel, the first in yet another series, setting up future novels and momentarily diverting. Zelazny used to be a great writer. I have told friends to read *This Immortal* or *Creatures of Light and Darkness* if they are going to read only one SF or Fantasy book in their lives. These books arouse emotion, intellect and imagination. They are books to be taken down and read over and over, pushed on friends, quoted and referred to for comparison in a review. *Trumps of Doom* is a throwaway. It should have been published in paperback right off, because it belongs on the supermarket shelf. Don't be misled. This is not a bad book, as much as could be expected from an author with less to live up to. You should read it (in paperback). Just don't say I led you to expect the greatness which seems to have escaped Zelazny for the last 5 or 6 years.



DARKWORLD DETECTIVE

J. Michael Reaves (Bantam) PB:\$2.50

Michael Reaves is a new writer. He doesn't have anything to live up to. When he writes a potboiler I'm all cheers and smiles. That's good, because *Darkworld Detective* is a genre-limited potboiler which, by its very nature transcends its medium and genre. This is an unlikely book, a Science Fiction/Fantasy/Detective/Horror/Mystery novel. This ambitious combination comes off surprisingly well.

Kamus of Kadizar is a humanoid or human-descended alien from Ja-Lur, a world partially connected to the Dark Dimension from which magic and the supernatural emanate. In this world both magic and technology function sporadically at the whim of a superbeing called the Darklord. To make things more interesting, Kamus had some education on Earth as part of an exchange program, and rather than learning new manufacturing techniques or seeing the sights, he read a few too many detective novels, so when he comes home to his strange world he decides to set up the first hometown detective agency. In addition, he is half human and half darkling, so he has limited magical

powers. With a background like that a lot is possible. There follow a series of amusing, fast-paced adventures which lead up towards a slightly predictable but pleasing conclusion, with enough opening to sneak in a sequel.

What detracts from the book is that it was clearly written as a series of several long short stories, and the flow between these episodes is not always smooth. This is all part of Reaves' general inexperience, which results in a few other awkward places and situations and a bit of a feeling that he has bit off more than he can chew here and there.

Despite some technical flaws this is an interesting combination of familiar elements which achieves a pleasantly original result. I recommend *Darkworld Detective* heartily. It is deft, innovative fantasy by a newish writer who shows a fair amount of promise.

MAGAZINES

INTERZONE

124 Osborn Rd. Brighton, UK BN1 7LU
APP:6, CON:6, VAL:6, PER:5, OVE:6

INTERZONE is supposed to be the hottest thing in British SF, a mid-sized magazine which expresses the current cutting edge. The issue at hand (#10) is 52 slick, typeset pages in an off-size 7.75x11.5 format. It is published quarterly at \$2.50 per copy. The layout and typesetting are excellent, but the art sacrifices appearance for innovation, consisting mostly of mixed-media collages of sketches and photographs which are, let's be honest, just plain ugly.

The actual content is rather more respectable once you get past the annoying illustrations. The star pieces are short stories by Gene Wolfe and Scott Bradfield, but all the fiction is good and there are nice review and letter sections. The leadoff story was a rather annoying John Lennon story of the kind which has been so oppressive lately, and seems to be the main topic of those who cling to the 'New Wave' which became an undertow about 5 years ago. On the whole the writing is good, with a nice blend of fantasy, horror and social SF.

On the whole I'd recommend INTERZONE. It is a little uneven and a little pretentious, but it seems to have a fairly constant level of quality, though it has some work to do to match the quality of content found in less talked about British magazines like *FANTASY TALES* and *FANTASY MACABRE*.

\$2.50

interzone/10

NEW STORIES BY SCOTT BRADFIELD, RACHEL POLLACK AND GENE WOLFE
PLUS JOHN'S RETURN TO LIVERPOOL



AND MORE

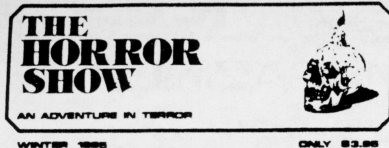
THE HORROR SHOW

Phantasm Press, SR 1, Box 151-T, Oak Run, CA 96069
APP:6, CON:5, VAL:3, PER:7, OVE:5

This is an obscure US horror magazine which found its way to me quite by accident. Some aspects of it turned out to be quite a pleasant surprise. The current issue is 52 8.5x11 pages with a slick cover. The art is excellent or at least fair. The layout is mediocre but shows effort. The type used is OCR, a style which may be familiar to some as a whole new meaning of the word hideous. The production shows a sense of humor and a clear origin in the fan-press.

The writers in this issue will be unfamiliar to most, but they are of a consistent quality. The best pieces are probably those by Douglas Archer and Steve Rasic Tom, with nice offerings from Michael McGee and Kevin Anderson as well. There is a lot here, but many of the stories are annoyingly short, and features like an interview with Ray Bradbury do very little for me. On the whole HORROR SHOW is a nice effort which shows potential. If the stories were of a slightly higher level of quality (they are just short of being really good) and if the production were a bit less fannish this could be a nice, viable product. As it is, it will probably follow the many others which please a small group of readers and fail to find the wide audience they need to survive.

I think I can suggest you check out HORROR SHOW, particularly if horror is your preferred form of reading. Hunt down an issue and see what you get out of it.



GAMES

JAMES BOND 007
Victory Games

"Bond, James Bond." The movies have been exciting audiences for almost twenty years now. Many people have watched the dashing British agent and his exploits and may have wished that they too led this life of danger and excitement. Though there are only a limited number of slots open in the '00' division, it is still possible to be a dashing agent in Victory Games' surprisingly enjoyable James Bond 007 role-playing game.

At first glance, I expected just one more entry in the ever growing body of theme based role-playing systems, with a good idea but hackneyed mechanics. I was very pleasantly surprised. James Bond 007 is a very well thought out game, with a workable system for character development and combat. Combat, an essential part of any secret agent role-playing game, is quite well handled, relying both on the skills and intelligence of the player and the physical attributes of the character. There is only one aspect of the mechanical systems which I find unsettling. A unit called an 'ease factor' is used as a divisor to determine the chance of success of a given action. The lower the 'ease factor' the more difficult it is to complete the task. Both GM and player 'bid' to see who is willing to put the most effort in their action or take the greatest risk. The one who bids the lowest 'ease factor' wins the bidding. It is possible to bid as low as 1/2 an 'ease factor', thus going into the action with total reckless abandon. Although it is a good idea to take into account the speed and daring a character is willing to employ in a situation, stopping to bid in the middle of the action slows things up and lessens excitement, and the system may encourage a little too much recklessness.

I thought at first that the small selection of skills would cause some problems. With only 24 skills, it would seem that characters would be awfully limited in their options. In play this isn't really a problem at all. The topic and situations limit the need for variety, and the skills which are provided are broad enough to encompass a variety of applications. For example, Science covers a number of different sorts of science. I found that there was some sort of skill to cover almost any action I would want to perform. More

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007

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The Complete
BASIC GAME
Including an
Introductory
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VICTORY GAMES, INC.
New York, NY 10021

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skills would certainly add some variety to the game, but they are not necessary. One example which really ought to be added is some sort of language or linguistics skill. The ability to speak other languages is almost essential to a serious agent.

The basic game book is well written and laid out. Sections are easy to find and are presented with logical organization. One of the best things about the system is its extensive use of examples. This is very useful in visualizing the game in play.

On the whole, James Bond 007 is a very good game. It is well thought out and the rules are comprehensive (almost exhaustingly so). The research into the NPCs is very detailed. Someone clearly re-read all of Ian Fleming's work to make sure the information was clear and accurate. The 'Allies and Enemies' section alone is almost worth the price of the game. If you enjoy the gadgets and glamour that is James Bond, this game is definitely for you. (Ian Hense)

YOU ONLY LIVE TWICE
Victory Games

I will start off by ignoring the obvious question of why Victory Games exists. I'll just let that hang. The matter at hand is an adventure module for James Bond 007, the highest budget RPG ever published, I suspect. You Only Live Twice comes boxed, with a gamemaster's book, a packet of visual aids and a fold out map. The production quality is outstanding, the appearance, art and graphics are excellent. The writing style is clear and the scenario is eminently comprehensible.

This is a good, clear, organized adventure. There are lots of opportunities for action, a good selection of fully described non-player characters, and enough variation in the set-up that the GM can change things to put in a few surprises and can add or modify details to suit his interests. The scenario follows quite close to the movie and is provided in exhaustive detail. If the players are not familiar with the movie it will run beautifully as it stands, but if they are there are some simple suggestions for changes which will keep it viable. Perhaps the thing which impressed me most were the visual aids. Color pictures of sites and equipment are far beyond what you get in the average adventure. The way this is set-up anyone can run it and players will be completely immersed in the scenario.

Are there problems? Yes, but they may not matter to all players. Despite the detail, the scenario is very limited. This is a problem inherent in the game and it may alienate some players. There are not too many opportunities for wild inspiration or deviance from the suggested course of action. The other problem is packaging. Yes, this is a beautiful production job. I cannot fault that. However, that makes the price about \$7 for an adventure module which will run fairly quickly and then be pretty much useless. You Only Live Twice could have been trimmed to the essentials. In a nice single booklet at a price appropriate to the scope of the material. Despite the quality of the material, it may be hard to get \$7 worth of play out of this adventure.

The conclusion? This is one of the finest scenario productions I have ever seen, both for presentation and content. If you play James Bond 007 it is a must buy. It seems increasingly clear that James Bond 007 is not the kind of game which is suited to ongoing

compains (the topic is just too limited). So if you play occasionally this is exactly what you need, an excellent scenario which will make the few hours you spend on the game as memorable as possible. (Jon Schuller)



THE LOST GRIMOIRE
Dragon Tree Press

When they were first released in the '70s the three books of the Arduin Grimoire revolutionized the Dungeons & Dragons dominated role-playing world. Arduin was the first system to present a viable alternative to D&D which preserved many of the good ideas while developing something more interesting out of the mechanics. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of Arduin for me was the world background which it provided, a high-entropic world of demons and godlike characters with few limits. The world of Arduin was the first published role-playing background which gave a feeling of being truly alive and vibrant. Arduin was something more than a jumble of dungeons, encounters and magic.

This new 'fourth' Arduin volume is in 8.5x5.5 format, with 100 pages and dense type. The cover is on heavy stock and the art is uniformly good. At \$9.95 it is a pretty fair buy.

The original grimoires were a hodge-podge of rule modifications, advice, background, monsters and magic items. To some degree this new volume carries on that tradition, though the emphasis is on new magic and background. In many ways it is like a collection of Arduin related articles. Some of the most interesting parts are the discussions of world and adventure creation, the magical fumble system, magical weapons, races, spells and monsters. My personal favorites are the top potions, lotions and magical foods. Also of some interest are the trap section (limited but unusual) and the section on the months and time-scale of Arduin. Most of the content can stand alone much better than earlier Arduin material and really isn't restricted to use with any system. This is the first expression of David Hargrave's unique imagination to appear in some while, and it is a pleasant diversion, not to mention pretty funny in places.

There are a few annoying aspects to this new volume. It is plagued with apologies (seemingly to the Moral Majority) for the content of the material and rabid disclaimers that "there have never been and never will be any 'Demonic' or 'Anti-Christian' forces behind FRP gaming". I think that those who read this will have already outgrown this self-conscious paranoia, but it seems to have special meaning to David Hargrave who spends a depressingly large amount of space apologizing and beating the drum of imaginative freedom. While I agree with him I don't think this is the place for it or that it adds anything to the booklet. These things would be better suited to ABYSS or another magazine.

The publishing history of The Lost Grimoire is of some interest. It seems to be left over material from Arduin which did not make it into earlier publications. It is also notable that it is being published by Dragon Tree Press, not Grimoire Games which is the official Arduin outlet. Hargrave also mentions in his dedication that Grimoire Games is still waiting to publish Arduin, Bloody Arduin (the completed Arduin system) for lack of funds. I hope that somehow those funds will be raised, because Arduin is fading from the memory of gamers and the field is progressing so fast that its time may pass it by. We need worlds like Arduin which are suffused by dreams and imagination, and without it the world of role-playing will be a little bleaker.

Do you want to buy The Lost Grimoire? Probably. It is not quite as thrilling as its three predecessors, but it is more smoothly produced and more universally useful. Even if you don't want to use the outrageous and original ideas it offers it is a worthwhile read just to get a glimpse of one of the first and greatest role-playing campaign worlds. Let us hope that The Lost Grimoire will not be the last grimoire!

TRAIL OF TSATHOGUA
Chaosium, Inc.

Another Call of Cthulhu aid, well produced in a compact 8.5x11 booklet with some 68 pages. Designed by Keith Herber, with excellent illustrations from Steve Purcell.

There is a limit to how much I can say about this scenario. The title and a few other items are borrowed from Clark Ashton Smith. The contents are straight Call of Cthulhu formula. Ancient curses, a mixture of familiar and obscure locations, lost races, jumbled mythology, temples, haunted houses and unknown terror—all the standard fare of this system. It is all pulled together well here into what is almost the archetypical scenario. Together this forms a single adventure, conveniently broken down into three manageable parts which have hidden connections but can be run separately.

What more is there to say? Trail of Tsathogua is well written. It mangles and misapplies Celtic and Cthulhian myths with cheerful abandon. It has a nice balance of light and grim moments. It is an enjoyable, involved scenario and will be fun for most Call of Cthulhu devotees.

It should not be forgotten that it is also pap. Change a few names and situations and this could easily be any other Call of Cthulhu adventure. The more of them I see the more they look the same. It has all the scary elements, all the nameless, shuddering horrors, but it is no longer new and it makes this scenario look an awful lot like formulaic hack work.

Should you buy Trail of Tsathogua? Sure, why not? The art is great. The scenario is detailed, if predictable. If you play Call of Cthulhu frequently it might be a worthwhile investment, but don't expect anything new and exciting. (J. R. Davies)



US VICE

Totten-Reynolds Games

This is a new game which may or may not actually be on the market. I picked it up at DALLASCAN where it premiered. It is a nice little production in an 8.5x5.5 format, consisting of a GM folder/shield, which holds a 20 page rule book. The production quality is pretty good for a new company. The game has already acquired a little history, centered around the \$15 selling price. It seems that in producing a promotional edition the novice publishers were outrageously ripped off by their printer, paying over \$1000 for 100 copies, a price for which a reputable printer should have given them 10 to 15 times that many copies. At DALLASCAN they showed Lou Zocchi the game and the price and he scoffed at them rather unsympathetically. For once he was dead right (though it was a bit condescending to give them a copy of his own guide to publishing games). At \$15 US Vice would still be over-priced if it were the best 20 page game

ever written. Realistically, the way it is presented and packaged US Vice should sell for between \$3 and \$5. Let's ignore all this, assume it will be redone at a believable price, and review US Vice.

I like to support small game companies. I really do, but I won't degrade myself to do it. Taken by one standard or from any perspective (except perhaps that of the designer himself) this is a very, very bad game.

The typesetting is attractive. The topic is moderately interesting (characters are the equivalent of national vice-cops tracking down criminals). The introduction is fairly comprehensible. The designer (who shall remain nameless) probably wanted to design a good game. That is all the good that can be said for US Vice.

To start out the art is awful. Drawings and diagrams are all extremely amateurish and poorly reproduced. The game starts to get confusing on the second page of text where attributes are described. They seem to have picked five characteristics for no particular reason and decided that these are what define a character. Three of these, Intelligence, Physical Fitness and Coordination, seem viable. The other two, Con-Technique and Deduction, would work better as skills or as part of how the character is played. All stats are rolled on 10100, so there is huge room for variation and no room for imagination. Each character has a life-force (read HP) based on his Physical Fitness. This is an enormous number which determines how much damage he can take. It is matched by equally enormous numbers for the damage done by weapons. All of these stats could be divided by 10 or even 100 and work just as well. Someone working on the game has heard of skills, so a system is presented to roll randomly for the number of skills a character has and how good he is with them, though he gets to choose what they are. Of course, skills only include combat and mission-related skills (driving, scuba-diving, etc.). What makes the skill system even more ridiculous is that after rolling for how good you are with a skill you can never improve it, though you can learn new skills. So if you pick Impersonation as your major skill and roll a low rating in it you will have to completely re-think your character (not that the game will have urged you to think very hard). Combat is the core of the game, but since it is never actually explained in the rules it is a real challenge to the players. The GM screen and a play example give some tables and hints, so I can give a basic run-down.

You roll to hit as a skill roll (low roll is good). Then you roll location on the body (again, low is good). There is no concept of defense armor (except bullet proof vests, and they don't understand how they work anyway), cover or aiming. The weapon then does damage in that area, or more precisely, he takes damage from his total life force and a roll is made on the vital area chart, a straight roll with no apparent relationship to damage, so that there is an automatic 25% chance of killing a character with any weapon in the head or torso. As far as damage, there is no idea of stun or knock-back, the relative damage of different weapons is totally silly (they don't understand why automatic weapons don't need heavy rounds), and the rates of fire are totally off. An assault rifle (you know, those big things which fire about a dozen rounds per second) fires only 3 rounds per 'Round' (some unspecified period of time); while a shotgun or revolver fires once per 'Round' and an automatic pistol can fire twice. This is just wrong. I could write an article longer than the rules on the mistakes here. US Vice would be a simple game if it were organized and not randomly thrown together. It might be a marginally playable game if the rules were complete. As it stands, the rules make no sense, and what sense I can get from them indicates that they are incomplete, unplayable and have very little potential to be interesting.

US Vice may become a classic of bad game design. It was hastily slapped together by people who neither have any idea what they are doing nor even basic common sense. There is nothing wrong with amateur publishing. Some of the best products in gaming are produced by small companies. I suppose anyone has the right to waste their money trying to enter the game market. Yet, it makes me mad to see someone throwing money away on an effort like this and it is an insult that they think I would buy their product. I feel sorry for the mistakes made by the publishers of US Vice, but ignorance and incompetence bring their own punishment. If US Vice should come to be marketed seriously (very unlikely) do not buy it under any circumstances. (Dave Nalle)

PROPAGANDA

DARK DUNGEONS

Chick Publications
POB 662, Chino, CA 91710

I finally have concrete evidence that I have been a success in gaming. Some wonderful anonymous Christian in California has sent me a copy of Jack T. Chick's latest cartoon opus, *Dark Dungeons*. This handy 2.75x4.4 inch booklet has 24 pages of rather skillful cartoon work depicting a truly edifying tale.

Dark Dungeons tells of little Debbie's descent into Satanism through the corrupting medium of *Dungeons & Dragons*. It's a story I've seen a hundred times in real life, and I'm sure it is equally familiar to you. Debbie and her friend Marcie play D&D with Ms. Frost, Marcie's thief Black Leaf dies (after some hysterics), but Debbie's cleric Elfstar is raised to eighth level. Marcie gets to go home and hang herself, but as Ms. Frost says it's time for Debbie to "learn how to really cast spells". Well, there it is, "the intense occult training through D&D qualifies Debbie to enter a witches coven as a priestess." Certainly that's what happened for me when I got a character to eighth level. Well, Debbie is overjoyed. Now she has real power. She uses her "mind-bondage" spell on her father and low and behold he buys her \$200 worth of D&D supplies. But Debbie's happy world as a witch is thrown into turmoil when she learns that Marcie has done herself in (the picture of her feet hanging above a table of miniatures is a classic). Certainly we can all agree with Ms. Frost when she reassured Debbie that her "spiritual growth through the game is more important than some lousy loser's life." Then some fellow named Mike, who looks like the high-school track star clears things up for her by pointing out that "Jesus is the only answer." But you could have guessed that, couldn't you? He takes her to a meeting where she learns that she has been "trapped in a dungeon of bondage." She buys the line and we get to see the "spirits of the occult" chased out of little Debbie, who then announces that she wants Jesus to be in charge of everything...not that lousy D&D manual. Then they have a big bonfire and burn all the miniatures and D&D books. What a convincing story. It changed my life.



Some fallacies here are particularly striking, though they do nothing to detract. The author clearly has a good understanding of D&D, or at least has read some material on it, because he has the villainous Ms. Frost talking about Debbie's "spiritual growth through the game" and her having the "personality" to learn the truths behind it. He knows a lot less about witchcraft or any respectable form of Christianity for that matter. The witch coven which is presented is straight out of Margaret Murray. He condemns C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien who were both devout Christians (seemingly because their books are found in occult bookstores...some of which I've noticed carrying the Bible as well). Finally he has his preacher character practicing the only magic actually presented in the book, casting out spirits and using contagious magic to "bind the demonic forces in this filth of Satan" before burning the D&D equipment.

I really have to recommend this little book. Of the large selection available from Chick publications this is the best I've seen to date. The art is excellent. Chick really knows how to draw evil facial expressions, especially that familiar one where the character looks more like a pig than a person. The story is predictable but good for quite a few laughs anyway. As these things go *Dark Dungeons* is relatively subtle and well crafted. It is aimed at a rather immature or ill-educated audience, and I suspect it is intended to convince the community in general rather than D&D players or their families. I can see how it might be effective with those who operate on a non-rational level (like school board members). For \$5 you can get a sample assortment and a price list. I believe this specific booklet is only \$1. You can't go wrong. Every gamer should own a copy.



THE END OF DREAMS

Mazyrik looked over the rocky gulf of the Liguorian Sea. Rough waters stretched from the cliff at his feet to alien waters beyond the horizon. He lifted pale eyes skyward and leapt.

He had come to Malecroix by night. Moonlight was easier for travel and sunlight safer for sleep. The light of day kept away nightmares which had pursued him for years. The houses of the town huddled close, caught between the forest and the sea. A stray cur trailed him snarling for the length of a few houses, but a glare from the traveller sent it whimpering under a bush. The hostel was shuttered, doors bolted fast. Decorum yielded to weariness. He curled in the doorway, bundled in his cloak, waiting for morning.

Sunrise sharpened shadows in the street. Bolts were shot, shutters thrown wide, the town woke to life. Mazyrik was up with the first light. A triple rap with his staff brought the groggy hosteler to the door. The traveler pushed into the dark room and dropped on a bench. He spun a gold lion across the table.

"Bread, cheese, a bowl of wine. If you have a room, make it up for the night. I'll pay to sleep alone. If I stay longer there'll be more. If not, a Lion should buy board, bed and privacy for at least a day."

The accent was foreign and the stranger's clothes were worn, but in a backwater like Malecroix the king's gold cried out for attention. A wine stained hand scooped the coin into a fold in the host's robe. He shuffled off to rouse a wench in the kitchen and stoke up the fire.

Sharing a roof with commoners had long become familiar to Mazyrik. The contact and experience was worth the risk of normal hours of waking, sleeping and dreaming. He went out that afternoon, observing the village and people while they sized him up as well. He walked narrow lanes, passed truck gardens and a few score mud-brick cottages. Beyond the common fields Mazyrik went among ancient oaks on the edge of a great forest. He could feel the presence of little creatures living in the branches and under the rough scrub. As daylight faded he reached the end of his walk, far south of the village at the sheer cliffs above the rough waters of the Liguorian sea.

He returned just after dusk. Vendors were closing their stalls as tradesmen drew tight shutters over shop windows. A fire burnt in the center of the square. Mazyrik sat on a mounting block by the fire, surveying the folk who eyed him back with open curiosity. He leaned back, enjoying their attention and daring them to come forward.

News travelled slowly, and the rare strangers who came to Malecroix were the only contact between the village and the rest of the world, save for grotesquely distorted rumors

A. Sadel

passed from farm to farm or picked up at the weekly market in Vyonnes. At last a grey-beard spoke out from the crowd around the fire. His cross arms were marked by scars won with St. Louis at Tunis.

"Welcome. Where you from, stranger? We're off the old roads here and we'd welcome news or tales." He spoke as if it were an oft repeated formula to invoke mystic knowledge.

"Call me Mazyrik. Some years on the road aside, I am from Moesia, a small place you likely don't know. I have a few tales if you've the time to listen."

He told the things he had heard and seen in journeys through France, Tuscany and the remnants of the Empire. He even brought out old stories of the crusades which he had learned many years before from tutor who had claimed to have seen the far Orient and survived the fall of Acre.

When Mazyrik grew parched, his host's teenaged daughter ran home for a bowl of the dark local wine. She sat by his knee as he spoke. Her wide-eyes, like those of most of the women, were fixed on the dark stranger.

Bread and cheese were brought out and a pullet was set to roast on the fire. The girl brought Mazyrik a joint of cold lamb as well. He continued to speak over hushed comments, the slosh of wine and the crack of bones. By the time the moon was over the church roof Mazyrik faced a field of ruddy-faced yawns and his voice was growing thin.

He raised his hands. "That'll do for now. I've had little enough sleep the last few days and we can talk again, as I'll be here for at least a few days. Good night." He stood, bowed slightly, and walked briskly across to the hostel. The crowd broke up behind him, lighting the way to their beds with brands from the fire.

Mazyrik unrolled his pack and spread his gear on the bed. As he undressed there was a light knock at the door.

"Yes, come in." It was his host's daughter.

"I've come to check the room and warm the bed, sir." She blushed and held out a brass pan on a long handle. "I've coals from the fire." She turned the blankets down, inserted the pan and covered it. She slowly slid it around inside the covers.

Mazyrik shook out his cloak and folded it over the back of a chair. "What's your name?"

"Clarisse, after my grand-mother." "A fair name, fair maid." Her light skin blushed easily. She pulled out the warmer and set it by the door.

"Thank you, Clarisse. I had not looked for such regal service. I'll be sleeping late, but I'll see you in the afternoon." Mazyrik took off his shirt and folded it on the cane seat of the chair. He looked up to see the girl still there, trying not to gape at the long, pale scars which banded the pale skin of his back. He raised an eyebrow in silent question.

"I like your stories." Her



knuckles were white on the handle of the bed-warmer. "Are they all true."

"Well, don't tell, but every story teller makes what he can of the truth. Still, they weren't false."

"I think they were wonderful." She made a deep examination of the floor boards and ran her hand thoughtfully down the handle.

"Well then, I'll tell you a special tale tomorrow, but it is late now..."

"She seemed to shudder, her eyes still downcast. "I don't have to go," she stammered out, "Father thinks I'm in bed already. He'd never know where I had been if I were at my chores already when he woke up."

"Clarisse," Mazyrik rubbed his eyes. "How old are you?"

"Sixteen." She looked up.

"Really? I'm not some Italian cardinal. We're more conservative in Moesia. I don't think it is so different here." She seemed on the brink of the tears. "Not that I'm not tempted, but I can't, not under your father's roof. If you were a bit older, or I younger in different circumstances...I'm sorry."

Tears rolled down her cheeks in silence and she clenched her fists. A strange look came into her eyes, a look Mazyrik had seen before. She stepped up to him, rose on her toes and kissed his cheek. She left with a smile and tearless eyes. Mazyrik's cheek burned and he thought he heard sobbing in the hall.

He looked after her, unsettled. Women and girls had come to him before. Some he turned away for a number of reasons, a very few he welcomed. He had handled the girl poorly. It might have been a kindness to accept her offer and give something better than the rough fumbles of local swains in return. Her reaction had been strange, and whatever was going on inside, the girl was not through. He hoped it would not lead to trouble, but then giving in could have meant even worse trouble if he were careless.

He slid between blankets which had already cooled and snuffed the candle. He lay uneasy, and when sleep came it was troubled. Dreams had pursued him from Moesia, finding him in strange towns and beds. He had gone for days, even a week once, resting peacefully, but the dreams always found him with time.

The dreams brought him to earth that night. It began with flaming eyes, eyes which stared into the darkness of his soul, eyes he knew from years before when they had reflected in the wine at his birthday.

No one spoke of his mother in his father's house. There were no portraits, no grave, only a sealed bedroom and three old men who flinched at shadows: his father, his uncle Andreas, and Father Dominic, the priest from the village. He did not believe the tales the village boys told about the evil baroness and left behind his curiosity as he began to learn the secrets of philosophy and the sword. He had never seen or known her and he came to assume she was dead.

Her kind is not given to forgetting, though a score of years had passed. She came to his birthday. He was one score and one and the village was celebrating. Her entrance was high drama. Torches wereoked out in the feasting hall, stone walls shook, wine soured on the lips. An aurora filled the hall and with a crack of thunder she stood over the old Baron and threw back with a laugh like a sulphur spring. Her beautiful face twisted into a demonic mask. Her gaze lingered a bit longer on her son. A hungry-seeming smile played on her lips. She was all that is human and sensual, with something unearthly, more than carnal behind it. Her naked skin seemed to glow with energy and her black hair stood out straight around her face. Mazyrik sat dumb, transfixed.

"Come, my son." She called to him, not as a mother, but as a woman. He rose and she reached down to lift him up, her face lowered to his in a lingering kiss. Rough hands pulled him back, old man's hands. His father, eyes glazed, stepped forward with his long sword. Her lips drew back over long, sharp teeth, with a hiss like steam from a tempering blade. She leapt, her hands curling like claws. The sword swung once, a powerful blow to her shapely breast. She fell on the old man, tearing and biting. Energy flared around them, setting fire to tables, drapes and people. Many died as the old timbers of the hall fell in the fire which quickly consumed the building.

No trace of Mazyrik's parents were found in the ruins, but his father's old sword still travelled with him and his mother lived on in his dreams. First came the eyes, bright lamps of lust and vengeance. Then he stood with her on a vast and featureless plain. She stood naked and alluring and he reached out for her, not to love but to slay. She bared her neck to his choking grasp, laughing as he tried vainly to crush her throat. She drew him close, fitting her body to his, biting gently at his throat. His vision swam. She drew his head down and he bit at her throat, tasting blood, drinking deeply. As their blood mingled his will drained away and their bodies became one body, ruled by her mind. They fell to the ground and she fed again, in passion and blood, seeming close to surfeit, yet on and on, unsatisfied.

Mazyrik awoke sweating, aching, clutching the roiled blankets in both hands. He dressed hastily and walked out in the dark towards the cliffs, the exertion draining off some of the mad energy he seemed to build up in these nocturnal sessions. He hopped from rock to rock, safe with the balance of a cat and the eyes of an owl.

The dream was not unbearable in itself, but he shrank from its implications as it came to him again and again. It was part of the war in his soul, half of his dual inheritance. He was raised in the church, true to his god and the teachings of his father. Yet, there was a power and a craving in him, a gift of his mother which his reason commanded him to deny. He had abilities beyond other men, but paid for them with his unholy hungers. He was torn by the urging to use his powers for good and the knowledge that evil can only beget evil. He had to control instincts which his blood and flesh shouted were natural and his intellect told him he must deny. He found himself in constant flight, pursued by dreams and memories.

He returned to the village well after dawn, in control, but still troubled. Clarisse served his meal, lingering by him with each dish, an intriguing scent following her. She seemed a different girl, smiling without a trace of tears. She moved with a determined sway, a smile coming unconsciously to her lips as she watched Mazyrik eat.

It was time to move on, sooner than Mazyrik had hoped. That afternoon he made arrangements to travel with some shepherds to Vyones the next morning. This gave him some assurance of protection from the highwaymen reported in the woods. Until the Count did something about the forest roads the safety of numbers seemed wise.



This evening there was an even larger crowd in the square. Many farmers had stayed on after the market. Clarisse was there again, nearby to serve his needs. He told of his adventures in Italy to lighten his mood. He told tales of the foolishness of Florentine bankers, Venetian plotting and the immorality of the Papal court. The crowd was jovial, but he insisted on stopping earlier, pleading his dawn departure the next day. They toasted his journey and he toasted their hospitality.

In the hall outside his room he passed Clarisse. She smiled and bid him goodnight. He was relieved to see that she seemed to have recovered from her infatuation without noticeable harm.

He dreaded another night of dreaming and lay awake for over an hour, staring at the ceiling and listening to the villagers who were still drinking and singing in the square. When he fell asleep no dreams came, though his sleep was fitful. A draft stirred him sometime after midnight, but it passed quickly, then he was in the dream, dropped like a heretic in the strappado. There were no preliminaries. The succubus was on him. The struggle of lusts was repeated, more vivid than ever, the blood warmer and saltier, the flesh more yielding, the pleasure greater, the fear less, and the end more peaceful. When the dream ended he slept deeply.

For the first time in days Mazyrik woke naturally with the dawn. He felt strong and refreshed, charged with almost superhuman energy.

He rolled over to get up. The reality and reassurance of the morning sunlight revealed horror. Clarisse lay still and naked at his side. Her lips were red against pale white flesh, curved in an innocent smile of pleasure. Her throat and loins were blotted with blood and the sheets were soaked a deep red.

Mazyrik bolted from the bed. With shaking hands he pulled the blanket up to cover the child's body. He burst from the room, down the stairs and out of the hostel. The shepherds stared in mute astonishment at the wild-eyed vision who flew by them naked and bloodstained. He ran faster than a post-horse, out of the village, across fields and hills, shredding his legs on rocks and brambles. He fled until he found the cliff where he could shed his mother's gift and find an end to his dreams.

Mazyrik returned to an awareness of cold stone and wracking pain. The moon shone over the cliff three-hundred feet above. No one had bothered to risk the climb to retrieve the body of a suicide and murderer. Broken limbs slowly pulled his shredded flesh across the jagged stone. In the shelter of a shallow cave he could already feel wounds clothing and bones knitting. His mother's laughter echoed in the crash of waves and the cries of gulls.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

CARL JONES

When playing *To Challenge Tomorrow* or other modern period role-playing systems players often find their characters involved in life or death chase or combat situations where moving ground vehicles play a major role. In the original rules of TCT and in many other systems the methods of handling this leave something to be desired. Solutions can be overly complex, becoming tactical boardgames, or they can be super simplified to get the situations out of the way and move on to more character oriented situations. What is needed is a happy medium, providing enough realism to be believable and enough speed and generalization to be enjoyable and completed reasonably quickly. Given here are some guidelines for vehicle creation and running vehicle combat, intended for TCT, but equally suitable for any game in which land vehicles play an important role.

There are two basic characteristics for land vehicles. These are **Size(SZ)** and **Power(PW)**. These represent the gross physical volume of the vehicle and its potential motive force respectively. In addition there are several secondary stats either determined from these or applied as modifications. Size and Power of the vehicle are determined by the player and then used to work out secondary characteristics as listed below.

Cost(CST) is the first important characteristic to be found for your vehicle. In buying the vehicle cost is based on PW and SZ plus any modifications noted above. SZ costs \$200 per point. PW cost is found with the formula $PW \text{ Squared} \times 50$ per point. Any modification costs are added to that.

Weight(WEI) is of some importance, indicating the total mass of the vehicle. It is equal to $(SZ \times 125) + (PW \times 50)$ plus any indicated modification weights from armor or added equipment.

Top Speed(SPD) is the next important item, indicating the maximum speed at which the vehicle travels with a standard load. This is equal to $(PW \times 170) / SZ$ in miles per hour (mph).

Acceleration(ACC) is also important. It is the rate which the car increases its speed each second approaching top speed. It is equal to $(PW / WEI) \times 1000$.

Turning Radius(TRN) is also useful as a base for determining the difficulty of turning at speed. It is equal to $SZ \times 2.5$.

Carrying Capacity(CAP) is the final key stat. It represents internal space available for cargo or passengers. Vehicles really need to have at least some of this, as each person in the vehicle requires 2 units of CAP. CAP is equal to $SZ - (3 \times \text{Square Root of } PW)$.

One major area where you may want to improve a vehicle is terrain handling. In general a vehicle has a base 50% **Terrain Handling Capability(THC)**. Each 1% added to that causes a reduction of either SPD or CAP by 2%. From which one these reductions are taken and even how or if they are split between the two is up to the designer of the vehicle. By technical classification, vehicles with 50-60% THC are 2-wheel drive vehicles. 60-80% THC are either hover or four wheel drive vehicles, with the former taking reductions in SPD and the latter taking reductions in CAP. Anything over 80% is considered to be an all-terrain vehicle, probably a half-track, with reductions in both CAP and SPD, split evenly. Each point added to THC adds $PW \times \$20$ to the cost of the vehicle. This same percentage increase principle can be applied to increase any secondary stat of the vehicle (usually SPD) by up to 50%, with a percentage reduction of double value on either CAP or SPD.

Another major modification is in the area of armament and defense. Vehicles can be given **Armor(ARM)** and equipped with weapons, represented by **Weapon Mounts(WMU)**. These provide for offensive and defensive combat capacity. Normally vehicles are assumed to have 5 points of comprehensive armor(ARM). Each point of additional armor adds $SZ \times 5$ to WEI. Each point of armor added costs SZ times \$100. The standard armor can also be removed, reducing WEI by 5% per point removed, but this is at a cost of \$1000 per point. Each weapon mount(WMU) (one needed per weapon) adds 100 to WEI and costs \$2000. One WMU will handle any weapon up to 30mm. Multiple value WMUs can be purchased for larger calibres. Missiles, mine layers and most special weapons require 3-5 WMUs, rather than simple multiples based on calibre. In all modifications each WMU takes up 1 point of CAP, including the space taken up by the weapon placed there.

Some typical vehicles will help illustrate this to some degree, as given in the chart below. Some actual production line vehicles are given for comparison, as are some samples(X1-4) which have been specially designed. Note that the luxury factor is not taken into account in determining costs, so some luxury vehicles may be priced a bit low.

UNTO THE GATES OF DEATH

JOHN DAVIES

Click, click, click...Death is prancing;
Death, at midnight, goes a-dancing,
Tapping on a tomb with talon thin,
Click, click, click, goes the grisly violin.

--Jean Lahors



AT THE GATES OF DEATH

No one wants to die. Even in a world of fantasy and pure imagination death inspires fear and holds a dread fascination. Yet, adventure is at its best when it holds some element of danger, and that danger often means the potential for violent and sudden death.

The possibility of death for a role-playing character is a serious concern to many players. If a favorite character dies some players feel angry, depressed or even cheated. I have seen otherwise rational players voluntarily retire characters when they had become so fond of them that they dared not put them in even slight peril. I have seen players stunned into silence and depression after the death of a favorite character no matter how much warning or experience they had.

However distorted, the gaming world is a mirror of real life. In this world death is the punctuation at the end of every life-sentence. Everyone dies and we learn to become resigned to it and make the most of our lives despite its presence. In a fantasy world there are more possibilities to circumvent death, so when it finally catches up with you (as it must even there) its arrival is more sudden and traumatic. When there is the potential to cheat death everyone thinks that they will be the one to beat the odds.

Many GameMasters are not aware of the importance of death in a campaign, nor are they aware of how to handle death so that it enhances the campaign. At the same time many players view role-playing death through a badly flawed lense. There are a number of ways in which players and GMs misunderstand and misuse death and these can cause inhibitions and confusion which may harm an otherwise good campaign.

FACING DEATH

Players fear the death of their characters and often because of their fear the GameMaster (who is trying to make play enjoyable) fears the use of death. But if death is avoided in situations where it is the most logical outcome the campaign loses part of the essential core of reality which supports the more evanescent fantasy. For fantasy to be believable it must have reality and consistency at its heart, and death is usually an important part of that reality. For death to be accepted as part of the campaign the GameMaster will have to do some work to prepare players for its presence.

The GM can do a lot to help players prepare to face death, though nothing is as important as making sure that death, when it comes, has arrived by fair and equitable means. Nonetheless general preparation of the players for the death of characters can be a great help, though a campaign should not become bogged down in morbidity.

Nothing is quite so effective as starting out the campaign with a little talk about death and being prepared for it. If this is delivered straight it will plant a nice sense of fear in the back of players' minds. Another useful practice is to make sure that each player has more than one character. They should be allowed to have as many as they can give personality and devote reasonable interest to. This allows devotion to be distributed and lessened, so that the death of one character is a set-back rather than a total loss. Remember that constant talk of death and danger is meaningless without supporting examples, and if you go on and on about terrible dooms and then don't come through to at least some degree players may actually be disappointed.

The player should be made to understand that death is part of the life of the adventurer and that his actions and decisions will be the main determining

factor in bringing on or averting death. He should also understand that some sort of end is inevitable from the moment he creates his character, with the infinitesimally rare exception in some campaigns. No hope of immortality should be held out to him from the start. He will seek such things out for himself. If the player and character have been well prepared the techniques discussed here may let a good GameMaster convert death into something which may be momentarily painful for the player but a considerable enhancement to his campaign. If death comes in circumstances which seem fair and logical the GM is left with only the more pleasant task of dealing with the aftermath of the dirty deed.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF DEATH

Players should be prepared for death in specific situations as well as the general context of the campaign. The GameMaster has to maintain a delicate balance between the threat of death and the necessary survival of the majority of the characters in a campaign.

The GM should neither throw death around wildly nor should he keep it in permanent reserve. Players need to have characters live long enough to become interesting and developed. This makes a better campaign. They also need to know that death is present and could be waiting for them. When death comes it should be earned by the character and he should be made to feel that it was justifiable and unavoidable and that his own actions contributed to it in some way, if possible.

To make this work the GM should make sure that players are aware that adventuring is dangerous work. He should make it clear when a mission holds the threat of death and when it does not, and if the situation changes the characters should get some warning and an idea why things have changed. The immediate cause of death may be a surprise, but its presence should never be. One good technique to use is letting the players see the remains of those who have gone before or witness the death of non-player character companions.

There is very little room in role-playing for sudden, random death from no apparent cause. If a meteor falls on a character it had better be the result of his past transgressions against his god and not caused by a random roll for astronomical abnormalities or the whimsy of the GM. When random-seeming violence is called for it is best that it be directed at non-player characters or that the character just barely escape, though if there is a meteor shower it is perfectly alright to hit a character with the second or third meteor if the situation justifies it.

All of this is really just a matter of responsibility on the part of the GameMaster. Death must be handled consistently and fairly, common enough to maintain the thrill of danger but justified when it actually does show up. A campaign without death is no challenge and one which is just a sequence of gore is no fun. It may be necessary to kill a character from time to time to remind players of the reality of death, though such a death should be justifiable by circumstances. This requires the GM to exercise perfect judgement, but experienced GMs can come awfully close to this by applying their knowledge and common sense. The GM should handle death seriously. It is even important that the GM avoid making jokes about death or treating it playfully as this may cause players not to take it seriously and they will be offended when it happens to them.

DEATH WITH DIGNITY

When the inevitable happens and a character dies it means a lot to the player and it is important that each death be handled with dignity and respect. This helps give the death meaning and preserve the memory of the character and his actions beyond death. It can also add some interesting depth to a campaign.

There are many ways to make death meaningful. This starts at the moment of death and carries on beyond it. When a character's number comes up death is a little easier to deal with if it seems to have some meaning and significance. If the character has to sacrifice himself for an important mission or to save his comrades, he will seem to have achieved something. If his death is just an incident along the way it will mean a lot less. Along with this, if the circumstances of death are glorious it will be more memorable. For example going down in a desperate defense against great numbers, saving a village or innocents or taking on something like a dragon one-on-one. The player should be able to remember the moment of a character's death and know that he died for a reason and left his mark on the world.

There is plenty the GameMaster can do after a death to give it some meaning and let it enhance the quality of a campaign. Most of these methods work better and are more reasonable with characters who are of significant experience and have a bit of history so that there is something to remember. With lesser characters as much attention to their death is usually not necessary. The significance of death should be proportionate to the significance of life.

The various activities associated with death are one way to memorialize death. A funeral for a



character run as part of an adventure is always a good idea. A wake might be even more appropriate. You could even have other players deliver a eulogy in the role of one of their characters. Distributing the character's inheritance (if any) can also be a useful detail to present. Allowing the player to have the children of one character as characters after he dies is also a good option. Another fun but risky outgrowth of death is the feud or vendetta, where friends or family members seek out the people responsible for the death of the character and take appropriate measures to punish them. Vendettas can be destructive if they are between groups of player characters, but they can also be intense and involving if run carefully.

LIFE AFTER DEATH

Much of a character's approach to death may be determined by his religion and his moral perspective. Faith and the belief in the afterlife make a great deal to those about to die in this world and they should be no less significant in a game world.

The GameMaster should make an effort to keep the player aware of the nature and beliefs of his church. A religion should be more than some remote god. It is a living institution with policies and doctrine which may be meaningful to the character or player. Most religions promise something after death and this may be of help to players. If they know that they have the choice between eternal torment or paradise it may help guide their actions and attitudes and give death a little more added meaning. Some good ideas are to describe afterlife possibilities or even work up a system for reincarnation based on life achievement.

If the GameMaster is ambitious he might even carry on play after death in a limited context. It can be workable to describe the character's experience as his spirit leaves his body and then go through a brief run down of what happens to him as he goes into his afterlife abode. A little description of where he is and what he is doing after he dies can help a lot, though you should make sure that he understands that death is a gate from which he will not return. As a general rule it is very destructive to a campaign if resurrection or other forms of return from death are easily available, as they cheapen the event and lower players' regard for it. Resurrection is also an affront to the gods who expect to receive those souls as servants in their realms, and gods never like to be cheated.

For the imaginative GM death need not be the end to adventuring. If groups of characters start to accumulate in the same afterworld it might be possible to start afterlife adventures with dead characters. Many mythological afterworlds are organized on close parallel to the mortal world, with the god as the king and the dead as his subjects, often living just as if they had moved to a different, more magical country. This is particularly true of Scandinavian and Celtic belief. You can run quests or missions for the gods, and in some cases there may even be warfare between different gods and the underworlds they rule. In some cases a dead person may have been so holy or renowned in life that he may be raised to the status of demi-godhood. This opens a lot of possibilities for mobility between the worlds of gods and men, but he will still be in the domain of the gods, not the mortal world. Such status should be given out very sparingly.

One final possibility is that of a spirit existence for the character, but only if the circumstances call for it. A slain character might come back as a ghost to warn relatives of danger, to arrange vengeance, or for some similar compelling reason, but this should not be too common and should always have a good justification. The spirit should return to do his task and then be laid to rest. Along with this comes the possibility of an undead existence, but this should be dependent entirely on circumstances or the result of direct character actions. Becoming undead is less a matter of dying than a matter of choosing to make a change in the nature of life.

The barrier between life and death should be a one-way barrier, except in those few, rare exceptions mentioned here. Death should sever most ties to the mortal world, though this need not be the end of the usefulness of the character if the GM is willing to make cautious use of mythology and superstition to add some variety to the results of death, which need not always be oblivion.

THE IMAGE OF DEATH

One final touch which I heartily advocate is giving death some sort of tangible presence in a campaign. Making him into a non-player character of sorts who the players may observe at work or actually come face to face with. This is a strong tradition in mythology and gives death some added impact and significance. If they can say that they have seen the face of death then they know he exists.

Death takes different forms for different faiths, and there can be more than one representation of death in a single campaign. The traditional skeleton with scythe is drawn from British and Gallic belief and is a perfectly viable generic sort of figure to employ. He actually exists as a deity in some regions, such as Saturnus for the Romans or Ankou for the Gauls and Britains. In a large number of mythologies the dominant gods are gods of death or else most major deities rule over some sort of afterworld. Major Celtic deities like Arawn and Gwyn are after-life type deities and gather the dead to them. The image of the mad god Gwyn as the Hunter of Souls riding out to hunt down the doomed will certainly make players think about death. In Germanic and Scandinavian myth everyone gets some of the dead for their feasting halls, with the distribution often based on the form of death. Odin, Freyr, Ullr, Hei and Ran all collect large numbers of the dead. Freyr actually sleeps on grave mounds and Odin sends out his Valkyries to collect the dead in battle, rather like Gwyn.

With this approach you do run some risks, as with the traditional story of Heracles and other heroes who faced and beat or tricked death. Most characters are not Heracles and should not be able to wrestle and beat a personification of death, but that possibility can be held out as a plum, though it should also be made clear that actually trying a stunt like that is more likely to accelerate the approach of your own death. Heracles realized how foolish his attempt was the moment he had his temper in control, though he was able to carry through to victory.

Maintaining death myths and making the players aware of the folk-beliefs of their characters can broaden the campaign and give more meaning to death. Once players have seen their death striding across a battle field or walking among plague victims it may put a little chill in their hearts, be it a true vision or a hallucination. It can be especially effective if you remind them that traditionally only those who are near to death themselves can actually see death.

DEATH IN PERSPECTIVE

Death is a fascinating topic. All these ideas can enhance a campaign, so they have earned a good bit of space here. Don't let that mislead you. Don't go off and kill a bunch of characters so that they can have interesting deaths. The value of artistic morbidity declines rapidly if the techniques are over-used. Use death sparingly and fairly, but when you use it make it mean something. Don't over do things and let your campaign become morbid. At the same time maintain the sense of present danger which breeds excitement. Give characters the opportunity to crown a meaningful life with a glorious death and you will be rewarded with a more interesting and harmonious campaign.

You never know what life means till you die:
Even throughout life, 'tis death that makes life live,
Gives it whatever the significance.

--Robert Browning

VEHICLE	SZ	PW	THC	ARM	WMU	CST	WEI	SPD	ACC	TRN	CAP
Reliant K	19	10	50%	5	0	\$8800	2875	89	3.5	47	10
Datsun 280Z	18	15	50%	5	0	\$16400	3000	141	5.0	45	6
Chevy Nova II	22	12	50%	5	0	\$11600	3350	94	3.6	55	12
Dodge Omni	17	8	50%	5	0	\$9800	2525	80	3.2	42	9
Impala	28	14	50%	5	0	\$15400	4200	85	2.4	70	15
Mustang	22	15	50%	5	0	\$15650	3500	116	4.3	55	10
Saab 900	19	17	50%	5	0	\$18250	3225	152	5.3	48	7
Mercedes 300D	21	12	50%	5	0	\$11400	3225	97	3.7	52	11
Cadillac	26	14	50%	5	0	\$15000	3950	92	3.5	65	16
Fiat Brava	17	14	50%	5	0	\$13200	2825	140	4.9	42	6
Camaro	23	14	50%	5	0	\$14400	3575	103	3.9	58	12
Econoline Van	39	14	50%	5	0	\$17600	5575	61	2.5	97	28
Tradesman Van	33	12	50%	5	0	\$13800	4725	62	2.5	82	23
Armored Car	35	19	65%	50	2	\$87300	13905	100	1.4	87	16
Armored Scout	23	13	50%	25	2	\$66900	6025	97	1.7	57	12
X1	25	15	50%	20	4	\$61750	6150	102	2.4	72	8
X2	15	15	50%	20	1	\$38750	3850	170	3.9	37	3
X3	50	30	90%	60	6	\$370000	22200	92	1.4	125	6
X4	60	40	80%	100	9	\$698000	38900	96	1.0	150	26

When running vehicle combat, some simple guidelines should be enough. The great detail and accuracy of a tactical boardgame is not essential and simple mechanics should serve instead, fitting vehicle design into the general To Challenge Tomorrow combat system.

The Missile Defense Rating(MDR) of a vehicle is equal to: ((ACC x Driver's Skill Levels of Driving)/SZ) x 20. This should yield MDRs ranging as high as 100, but with a nice spread and a balancing of skill and mechanical capabilities. The attacker uses his normal MAR with the weapon he is using and any standard range adjustments.

Before entering combat a combat table should be designed for each vehicle. This is fairly simple. There are 3 areas which may be hit in combat. These are PW, WMU and CAP. Each takes up a specific amount of the SZ of the vehicle. PW takes up SQRT(PW)x3. WMU takes up 1 per WMU, and CAP has whatever SZ is left over. Take each of these SZ values and divide them by 2xSZ. This indicates the amount of space they occupy on the combat table. They should then be ranked appropriately. In cases where there is increased THC involved the space used for that purpose should be added to the space used by PW. For example, an Armored Car has SZ 35, PW 19, WMU 2 and CAP 16. THC is using up 4 SZ, PW is using 13 SZ, WMU is using 2 SZ and CAP is using 16 CAP. This gives a table as follows: 1-50=Miss, 51-72=CAP, 73-76=WMU, 77+=PW. MAR and MDR are used comparatively as is standard to determine whether the target is hit or not. The table can be rearranged if another area is being aimed at.

If the target is hit, different results occur depending on the area hit. First, ARM absorbs its value from the total damage. Any left over damage takes effect. Hits to CAP have a chance of injuring anyone in the vehicle. To keep things simple, have each person roll 1D120-20 and make that the percentage of the damage done by the attack which that person receives as overall damage. Hits to WMU are special in that ARM counts only half value for defending WMU. Each weapon has an additional defensive value equivalent to 30 HP per WMU which it occupies. If these are knocked down to 0 that weapon no longer functions. If there are multiple WMUs they should be split up on the attack table or rolled for specifically after a general WMU hit is made. Hits to PW have a direct effect. PW has HP equal to (PWxTHC)/20. At 1 times full damage SPD and ACC are halved. At 2 times full damage SPD and ACC are lowered to 0 each. At 3 times full damage there is an explosion which does an attack of PWx10 on both WMU and CAP, with armor counting half value against it.

As far as maneuvering in combat, the keys are ACC and TRN. The time which it takes a given vehicle to complete a turn is found with a moderately complex formula, giving a result measured in Activity Points needed to reach the new heading. This is: ((Degrees of Turn + Speed Travelling in MPH)x(TRN/(ACCxDriver's SL of Driving)))/3. Thus, a Fiat Brava traveling 30mph, making a 90 degree turn, with a SL 10 Driver, would take 34 AP to make the turn, roughly equal to 4 seconds. This indicates the time from starting to decelerate for the turn to reaching the same speed after the turn. Faster, high-risk turning is possible. The AP cost found by the formula is at full chance of success. Each percentage point which the AP cost is knocked down by knocks the chance of success down a parallel amount. Thus, that same turn could be made for 16 AP at a 50% chance of success. If a turn is attempted and failed, there are two possible results, a flip and a side-slip. The chance of flipping is equal to (MPH Traveled x SZ)/50%. If the car does flip, those inside should take MPH/2D20 attacks for (1D10 x MPH)/10 each, located randomly. If the car does not flip, the sideslip means that the car will make a turn equal to the percentage chance of success which the driver had as a percentage of the intended turn. If this results in a collision, treat it like a flip, but add in the MPH of whatever is hit, and increase damage by 50%. Car crashes should not be fun.

These guidelines should make combat easier and simpler. Adjustments should be made by the GM for terrain and other situational factors. In general vehicle combat should be run as quickly and as abstractly as possible while achieving appropriate results.

<Dubious Bogofied Figures>

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