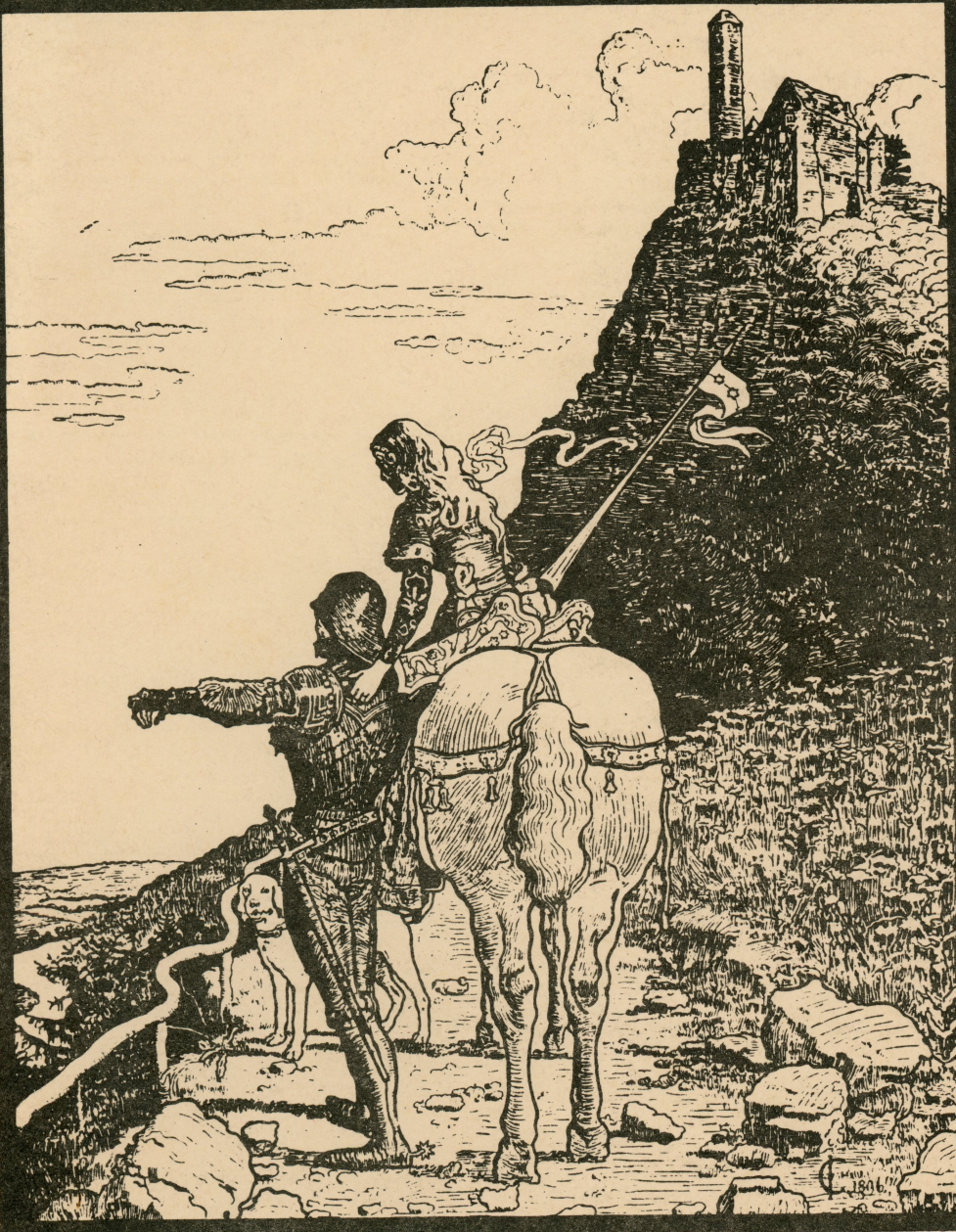


ABYSS 35



ABYSS MAGAZINE

V.7, N.3 SUM '85

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Peter Chent: 5, 19, 21, 22, 23
All other art of mysterious origin

CONJURINGS

Another issue comes in a bit late and we carry on with a new tradition. As a result don't be too surprised if ABYSS #36 shows up suspiciously soon. We've discovered the interesting fact that it is almost as easy to prepare two issues of simultaneously as it is to prepare a single issue in that same space. Thus, as I write this and send #35 off to the printer most of #36 is already in the computer and ready to be formatted and put in print.

It's taken a while to recover from my recent trip to the UK, but it was a rewarding mission, resulting in some useful contacts and advancing my doctoral research considerably. Sales of ABYSS and other RE products are booming in the UK, perhaps the harbinger of a coming sales boom here in the US. Things are also running slowly because of the new Ysarth system which is moving on a rather tight schedule and demands a great deal of work, including at least two or three playtesting sessions per week, which places a considerable demand on my GMing time. I've also just come out of a two week paper-grading marathon, so don't expect me to be coherent.

So, what's in this issue? The proofreaders gave it rave reviews. Maybe you'll like it too. I give my highest recommendation to 'Robbers of the Sea' the scenario inserted in the middle of this issue. It is an adventure based on some research I have been doing for my degree. It is interesting in that it uses historical characters in a role-playing context and presents a realistic medieval situation for play. You may notice a heightened AD&D emphasis this issue, with the adventure done for AD&D and with 'On Golem Construction' from Don and Rosemary Webb. We're not doing away with our emphasis on gaming in general, but we have decided to present a few more system-specific pieces this issue. Also of note is the start of 'The Eye of Odin', a new tale from Ollazren the Storyteller, recounting his earliest adventures with Orm Thegnon. The rest of the issue is pretty hot as well and I hope you enjoy it.

Next issue is worth looking forward too. It will have lots of the regular features, plus an article on the 'Survival Game', a special feature from Eric Olson, an examination of supernatural horror and role-playing, and a look at African Cults, the first part of a new column on comic books and a special adventure scenario. It should be quite an issue so don't forget to camp out by your mailbox.

While I'm jabbering, here is some news from the magazine scene. Most of you probably know that Chaosium has unloaded DIFFERENT WORLDS on Slueth Publications, but no issues have hit the stands as yet. More recently Steve Jackson Games has sold SPACEGAMER to a California company called DTI and it is going to become a 6 page section in a magazine called VIP OF GAMING, which also has yet to hit the stands. With these two major magazines in flux all that remains in the gaming magazine market is DRAGON, GAME NEWS, NEXUS and STARDATE. Of these, GAME NEWS is a specialized, limited appeal magazine which hasn't produced an issue in half a year. NEXUS is devoted pretty much to one game and STARDATE is a mysterious blend which I have yet to see on sale. That leaves DRAGON as the only mass-market gaming magazine still being published for sure. This leaves a vacuum which ABYSS can fill. Spread the word, tell your friends, put up posters, do whatever you have to...help us grow to fill this void and maybe something wonderful will happen!

I've got a killer cold and am losing my grip on reality. I'll be back sooner than you think, but for now it's time to collapse.

TOTEMS

ERIC OLSON

When discussing 'primitive' cultures, the word 'totem' is thrown around a lot, but few people really understand the importance of this concept or its potential value in a role-playing context. A totem is some sort of object, most likely an animal, plant or natural phenomenon which a group of people or an individual adopt in a kinship or patron/protector type role. There may be many results from this, including identification with the totem through ritual dress and the avoidance of harming the totem object or creature. A totem can be the religious, cultural and even attitudinal focus of a non-civilized tribe (whatever that may mean in your campaign). A tribal Shaman (Beastmaster [YRS] or Druid[D&D]) might have special powers related to the tribal totem and some characters might have special affinity or power over their personal totems. Early Roman writings claimed that a Druid could take the form of a totem animal and that animals of that type would come at his call. As most role-playing worlds feature a range of cultures including the primitive, the use of totems might help define some of these groups.

In Ysgarth most 'primitive' peoples are at a skill benefit disadvantage compared with their civilized neighbors. While they have good combat skills, they have few or no benefits in practical or magical skills. Totems and totem powers might be a way to make up for this. Uncivilized tribes could be given power over a particular animal and possibly a benefit on nature related powers to help balance out the skill benefits while keeping within the general characteristics of the races.

For AD&D the same concept could be of great benefit, especially as a way to add flavor to a campaign which is generally set in a primitive background, so that most characters would be allowed to have totems and the benefits derived from them as a way to broaden their abilities and scope a bit. This can be done through the use of special acquired skills, abilities or powers based on levels like those of the character classes, but awarded on the basis of totem rather than on the basis of the character class, so that totem powers would be acquired regardless of profession.

It is important to understand clearly that it is not the physical aspect of the totem which is 'worshipped', but rather its spirit essence. Thus, if a place or type of tree is the totem, it is the spirit which inhabits it, such as a dryad or a genius locii which is the real totem. With an animal, such as a wolf, it is the spirit of the wolf in abstract, essentially the essence of wolfness, which is the totem. This spirit may also be associated closely with a particular historical individual, such as a wolf which saved the tribe many years ago or a tree of a particular significance, which might survive in sacred cuttings. Depending on the level of magic in your campaign, the spirit might even manifest itself physically on special occasions or on a regular basis.

For Ysgarth the following benefits might be appropriate. A tribesman should gain a free affinity with one animal (not a whole classification, merely a single type of animal--mice rather than rodents in general), treated as a Beastmaster affinity. A tribesman should be able use the following Beastmaster spells without actually learning them with Skill Points, but usable only with that particular animal: Locate, Converse, Hold, Turn and Control. For these abilities his MI should be tripled. In addition, other Beastmaster spells may be learnt for use with that animal at half normal SP cost. If a tribesman becomes a Beastmaster he should be able to acquire the



affinity(for a whole species) appropriate to his totem at half cost. For example, if his tribal totem were the Hawk he could get Avian affinity at half cost. Finally, a tribesman acting as a Druid or Beastmaster should get -1 on the cost of all nature-related spells.

Most of this can easily be adapted to AD&D. Tribesmen should have the innate ability to track and locate their totem animal as well as speak with them. Tribesmen should have the innate ability to track and locate their totem animal as well as speak with them. The totem animal should act as if under an Animal Friendship spell. The tribesmen should know everything about their totem beast. If you want you might also allow them to be able to call a totem animal as with an Animal Summoning spell. Tribesmen may also tend to adapt the characteristics and attitudes of a totem animal. If the tribal totem is a leopard, tribesmen may move with unusual quiet and stealth. You might want to give them a natural skill to move silently(as say a thief of the same level). Another example might be if the hawk was the totem, perhaps yielding superior eyesight and accuracy with missiles. If the tribe's totem were a tree or other plant or a forest area, they might get appropriate skill with healing herbs found in that area. They might also be able to pass through the totem area without leaving traces(as the Druid), and they should be able to pass through restricted terrain(dense woods, bushes, brambles, briars, etc.) easily. This might seem to be a tremendous advantage, but the tribesmen lived and thrived in these areas without the benefits of forged weapons and the wonders of 'civilization'. They should have some advantage on their home turf over civilized men who hunt only for pleasure and only occasionally. They know their own element better than any other; even visiting Druids and Rangers and they should get some advantage from their knowledge.

The use and worship of a totem does not preclude other worship, but it is a limiting factor. Worship might best be restricted to deities appropriate to the nature of the totem and environment. By this I mean nature related deities. Even then, worship will probably work best in a primitive format. Temples should be rare, more likely temporary shrines. Priests should be shamanistic, perhaps organized on a family basis, combining some elements of magic and a great deal of mysticism. Worship of the deity might indeed be done through the totem as its agent or incarnation. In many cases worship of the totem for itself might come to dominate over the worship of a specific traditional deity.

Totem worship comes into its own in the context of Ysgarth Supplement 3: Expanding Worlds. This opens up wide areas of Ysgarth for play, including quite a few 'primitive' areas. I would suggest the adoption of some sort of totemism for the following tribes: Vaen(Ysgarth), Khazak, Vorates(Jahannam), Banonga, Njemugan, E'oka, Bivemba, Mameque, Mungala, Illassi, Tectan(Arojika). Some good totems would be hawks, eagles, horses, wolves, bears, dogs, any large cat, crocodiles, dolphins, sharks, whales, ironwood tress, cottonwood trees and even smaller plants with some character.

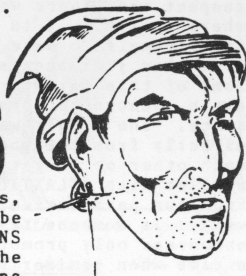
The power of the totem can be very strong, increasing the power of spells cast within sight of the totem by as much as 50%(longer range, duration, damage, etc.) This is only relevant for spells directly relating to the tribe's totem(i.e. if the totem is a hawk, aeromancy, beastmaster and druid spells would fit). The totem is not merely a symbol of the tribes power, but they may actually believe it to be the vessel of their might and well-being. If the totem is harmed, ill may indeed befall the tribe. If the totem is destroyed they would lose all their benefits and much of their spirit and will until the loss is avenged or restored, perhaps requiring a long, elaborate and unpleasant ritual. This might involve the sacrifice of transgressors or innocent parties or revenge against the totem of an enemy. In such circumstances the tribe may actually begin to dissolve.

To this point I have dealt mostly with standard tribesmen. Spellcasters(Shamans, Witchdoctors, etc) are another matter. The Shaman of a totem worshipping tribe should be able to take the form of the totem animal once per day. The form taken will be of a large size, though within the range of the species(he may not become a magical or truly giant variety of the totem). This is not really similar to standard lycanthropy. The shapechanged shaman is still subject to all normal weapons and spells. He can maintain this form for up to an hour. A shaman should be allowed to substitute a special form of animal summoning for a 4th level shaman spell. The spell is similar to the AD&D Druid spell Animal Summoning, but will summon 3-6(1D4+2) of the totem animals and each will have at least 4HP per die. If the tribes totem is a tree or area, the shaman should be able to replace standard spells with the following Druid spells: Level 1-Detect Snares and Pits, Entangle, Pass without Trace, Predict Weather, Purify Water, Shillelagh; Level 2-Barkskin, Locate Plants, Obscurement, Trip, Warp Wood; Level 3-Plant Growth, Snare, Tree; Level 4-Hallucinatory Forest, Hold Plant, Plant Door, Speak with Plants. To balance things out with animal totem Shamans, you may wish to let the plant oriented shaman speak freely with plants or to take the form of a totem plant once per day(basically a free Tree spell).

Essentially, this gives tribesmen an advantage when in their natural element, an advantage which they probably deserve and certainly need to offset their disadvantage in magic and practical skills. These skills may also prove

valuable to the adventuring character who leaves his tribe for the civilized world. Heroic literature is full of stories of tribes with exceptional sight, climbing ability, stealth, or near-telepathic affinity with animals. These suggestions should be familiar to players who read at all, and believe it or not, they have some basis other than my occasionally warped mind. All of this is left fairly open to GameMaster adjustment and variation, and it is up to you how and where you want to fit totems into your campaign.

ONCE AGAIN... ORIGINS



After a long wait and a series of dubious locations, ORIGINS finally returned to Baltimore, its real home. Maybe it is just the rosy mist of memory, but I don't think ORIGINS this year was up to the standard of previous years on the east coast, though it was far better than at other far-flung locations.

Our ORIGINS staff was smaller than we had anticipated, actually a blessing, as we ended up with the right number of people rather than too many, as we usually have, or too few, as we had in Detroit. Manning the Ragnarok booth were Lew Bryson (VA: Asst. Ed. of ABYSS), Howard Alt (CA: our PBM programmer), John Bashaw (VA: PBM reviewer and consultant), Dan Raspler (NY: Ragman the Stars) and Ian Hense (TX: Author of the new Modules for Munchkins series from DOA Ent.). Our booth had a fairly good location, with amiable neighbors and a steady flow of customers. A number of old customers made a showing or at least a quick surgical strike. We had a number of new releases, including two surprise issues of ABYSS (#s 33 & 34), 'RoleCraft' (the first book of the new Ysgarth), Dark Waters (the sixth in our Ysgarth Adventure Series), Challengers (our new superhero system) and Suburban Slasher (the first of the Psychos & Slashers series of games). The pattern of sales was a bit unexpected. It was no surprise that 'RoleCraft' and orders for the complete set of the new Ysgarth split the sales lead with Challengers, but we were all a bit surprised that Suburban Slasher came in a very strong second (we actually ran out of copies on Sunday afternoon and had to take orders). On the whole sales were good at the Rag booth. Oddly enough, although ORIGINS has a bit of a boardgaming slant, there seemed to be far more interest in role-playing material than in boardgames, despite the fact that Passage to Cathay was nominated as 'best pre-20th century boardgame'. This seems to go against recent sales trends, but I'm certainly not one to complain. While total sales for Ragnarok were respectable, they were not comparable with previous east-coast ORIGINS, coming in about half way between Dallas or Detroit and Baltimore in '82. On the whole there were far fewer dealers than their have been in the past. It looked like dealer attendance was down about 30% from Dallas and about 50% from ORIGINS '82. This presumably made the dealer room a good bit less satisfying for those who were there to buy the newest and best. Particularly conspicuous by their absence was TSR. There also seemed to be fewer small companies present (mostly represented by distributors) and far fewer special new releases for the convention. Looking at the dealer room, ORIGINS almost seemed like just another gaming convention rather than the national event it is supposed to be. We did see some interesting new products, particularly ICE's new SpaceLaw system, a curious game called World Wide Adventure, an AD&D oriented module called Catapult Run which looks like a first class small press production, a classy boardgame called Supremacy and several interesting new items from Pacesetters. We collected review copies of games we've had a hard time tracking down through the usual means, including Lands of Adventure, Flashing Swords and Element Masters. The review section of ABYSS should be bulging for the next few issues.

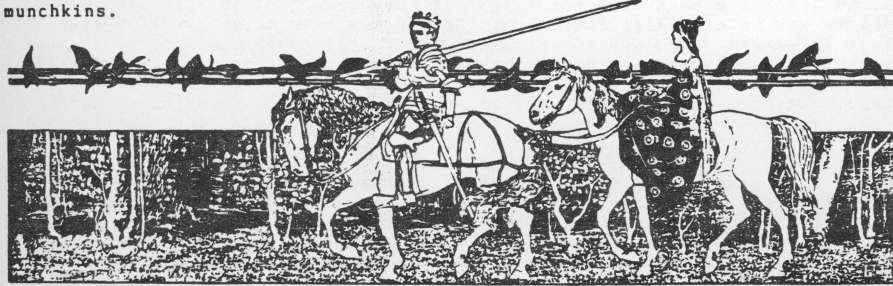
There was a satisfyingly large selection of events, especially boardgames. From what I heard events were not filled as they have been in previous years and unless you were looking for one of the top few events you could actually get into the event you wanted at the door. Although we continued are tradition of substantive seminars, we saw a continuation of the trend towards seminars which were little more than for products. This was accelerated by the fact that one of the other groups which was running serious topical seminars did not show up for the convention. I suspect this aided attendance at our events, which were fairly full, but it does not bode well for the future of meaningful seminars and lectures at ORIGINS. We ran a large selection of seminars with new and untried topics. They went rather well and Dan Raspler made a particularly good addition to the team. We will probably redo a couple of them over for ORIGINS in LA next year.

Although this ORIGINS was better than the last two, there were some serious problems. It was almost as if a deliberate effort was made to negate all the benefits of having the convention in Baltimore. The big problem

overall was that the convention was spread all over a large and confusing campus with an inaccurate map provided and insufficient transportation. The clear result of this was that attendees had to choose between playing in events and going to the dealer room, because it just wasn't practical to do both. To make matters worse, registration was in a separate building from the dealer room, so there was no reason at all to go to the dealer room, and I suspect that there were people who didn't even know there was a dealer room or where it was. It is about time that GAMA set some standards for facilities and attempts to make the convention practical and workable. This was not the case this year because of the remoteness of the different locations involved. Some of this may start to sound familiar. I may have to bang some old drums. Again, demonstrations were not ticketed and were not scheduled in discreet space. The result was that no one showed up for demos(except when dragged directly from the booth), and players and runners were often unable to find each other or to get the privacy and space they needed. This has not been a problem with ATLANTICON run conventions in the past, but it was this time. From our perspective there were further problems with seminar management as well. Is someone trying to put an end to informative, meaningful seminars and encourage only promotional sessions? It certainly looks that way. There was a time when seminar holders were paid for the tickets which were sold, either less a percentage or a straight fee. Recently a new method has been developed, where you only get paid for the tickets you actually collect. This year they had a whole new scam. Not only did you only get paid for tickets collected, but you only got 75% of that amount. If this doesn't stop seminars will be a thing of the past. If we were just running seminars as we started out doing in '79, '80 and '81, we would no longer be going to ORIGINS or we would have to charge \$5 or \$6 for our seminars. This time we ran 6 seminars at \$3 per person. Our promotion, topics and efforts sold some 240 tickets. Because of scheduling we collected only about 100 tickets. After the 25% reduction this means that we are owed about \$225. We actually sold about \$720 worth of tickets. The result of this is that we earned some \$500 for the convention. I really have to ask why the convention gets twice as much money as we do for our efforts. We have to do just as much work if no matter how many people show up, and we should get paid a reasonable amount for efforts. We earned the money. We should get it. Of course, this is just rampant greed speaking, but it isn't cheap to support a group of rabid, alcoholic ragmen for a whole weekend. If we had been attending just to run events(as we have done in the past), we would have ended up losing about \$80 per person in the course of the convention. I'm also afraid that since there are so few real seminars higher prices are neither smart marketing or fair to attendees, so there is really no hope of making seminars pay for themselves. There isn't much point in going on about this. It is really a matter for discussion in GAMA and I hope to spearhead a campaign to upgrade the standards of ORIGINS management. I feel ripped off and I think that in the long run it is the convention attendees who are being ripped off, as this spells the end of informative seminars or else a prohibitive rise in price. Otherwise event management was pretty good and the convention was well organized, but I got the feeling there was an attempt to cut costs and that this was the reason for the poor location and rather mercenary policies. As a final note, I think the choice of LA for the next ORIGINS is a huge mistake. The last ORIGINS on the west coast was the first one which flopped. They could have gone for Memphis(which I understand was also being considered) or even somewhere on the east coast. I'll be there, but I have serious doubts.

All these things aside, we had a good time, got to meet some interesting people, and held our own economically. ORIGINS usually comes out even no matter what the problems, but this time it didn't really live up to its considerable potential, becoming just another in a series of disappointing conventions. If ORIGINS is to compete with GENCON it will have to be better run and overcome the kind of problems which have been endemic with GENCON and are creeping into ORIGINS as well. GAMA just has to decide if ORIGINS is some sort of scam or a convention for game manufacturers to show products and for gamers to have a good time.

We'll be at ORIGINS next year, and for the first time we'll also be at GENCON, as I've heard that it is an undreamt of El Dorado of money-clutching munchkins.



IN THE SPECULUM MAGAZINES

DEMON'S DRAW
APP:6 CON:6 VAL:6 PER:7 OVE:7
49 Longdon Rd., Congleton, Cheshire, CW12 4QH UK

Several of my UK contacts suggested this as the current leading games fanzine in Great Britain. It has been going for 13 issues, more than almost any of its competitors, and is presented in the standard digest-sized format, with greyed-out cheapo xerox print, but nice art and layout. The current issue is 44 pages for 55p, and you could probably get a copy sent to the US for about \$2.00 or so. The editor is Jeremy Nuttall and their is a rather huge contributing staff.

DEMONS DRAW is skillfully organized in the modified magazine style made popular by BEHOLDER and DRAGONLORDS. Articles contain a good bit more thought than might be expected. The high points are an article on morality in role-playing and a piece on fantasy economics. Many of the articles seem to be a little behind the times, such as a bit on classless systems, a worthwhile if archaic subject. Monsters and Modules do not abound. There is one adventure presented, and it is imaginative and original, both in style and content. The letter and review columns are up to standard and contain some interesting discussion. Almost all the material is generally suited to FRP'ing and worth checking out. The chat and content are balanced out well so that you get a feeling that you are reading an active and living zine.

I can easily recommend DEMON'S DRAW. From what I've seen it is as good as or better than any fanzine currently being published in the UK, though it doesn't quite attain the wit or imagination of DRAGONLORDS, though that is a standard we can't really expect to see challenged. From what I've seen this is probably the best the UK has to offer these days.



THE FIERY CROSS
APP:3 CON:5 VAL:5 PER:5 OVE:5
The Mill House, Rays Hill, Hawridge, N. Chesham, Bucks HP5 2LJ UK

This is a fairly new UK fanzine. The production is sort of sloppy and the art and graphics are downright awful, and the printing looks like mimeo, but a fair amount of the content is worth checking out. The third issue is 40 xeroxed pages in standard digest-sized format at 45p (try \$2.00 from the US). The editor is Tom Stacey.

The big problem with this zine is that everything seems to be cut off. All the articles are annoyingly short. There is even a module which is all of three pages long. There are some reviews and a brief letter column in this issue, as well as a couple of background pieces, three modules and some magic items. The most interesting of the modules is a fairly original solo-adventure. What is nice about this zine is the effort to provide a mix of material. There is a nice balance between several systems, including material for fantasy, horror and superhero backgrounds.

FIERY CROSS is not a great fanzine. It is sloppily done and doesn't have a great deal of character, but there are some interesting pieces and it might be worth checking out, perhaps after it has had a few issues in which to mature.

JOURNAL OF THE SENSELESS CARNAGE SOCIETY
APP:3 CON:4 VAL:4 PER:6 OVE:5
5 Burgh Heath Rd., Epsom, Surrey KT17 4LW UK
Most good fanzines try to present interesting content in a personal and interesting way. Too often a fanzine will concentrate on the content and become dry. The very name of the JOURNAL OF THE SENSELESS CARNAGE

SOCIETY gives away its problem. It went to the opposite extreme and is all character with almost no content.

The current issue of JSCS is #10, so it has been around past the point at which fanzines either flourish or fail. It runs 32p in standard digest format for 50p (try \$2 US). The editor is Simon Hartley. The printing and art are pretty awful, but they get the point across when they need to. It is done by cheap xerox and the layout and graphics are awful. Some of the titles are even hand written, so if flash is what you want look elsewhere.

In this issue there are really only two articles, and they are fairly good. There is a wry look at how to be a good GM called 'A GM's Manifesto' (with observations ranging from the obvious to the inspired) and a critique of fantasy world economics. There is also a rather of sketchy 'traveller' scenario. The rest of the issue is filled with letters, plugs and quick comments and observations, plus a bit of silly fiction and a twisted comic strip. The zine has a good strong feel to it and this at least partially makes up for the lack of more concrete material.

The JSCS will appeal to some readers and might well be worth checking out. It isn't heavy reading, but it can be fun and sometimes even edifying.



DEAD ELF
APP:4 CON:4 VAL:5 PER:4 OVE:4
2 The Limes, Hitchin, Herts SG5 2AY UK

If nothing else, this zine certainly has an endearing name. #4 is a 32 page, standard digest-sized zine at 45p per issue (try \$2 when ordering from the US). The production values are a bit better than average, but none too flashy. Some of the art is passable, and the print is in a clear, cheap xerox. The editors are Andrew Fisher and Graeme Anderson.

Despite an amusing 'Know Your Enemy' section on Irvings (Brit for Munchkins) and how to identify and deal with them, this is essentially munchkin fare. The zine consists almost entirely of modules with a few reviews and letters thrown in. There is nothing really unusual here, but it does have a nice feel and there is clearly an effort to provide some quality and variety. Much of the material is amusing, though it tends to be a bit sophomoric.

DEAD ELF looks like it has the potential to develop into something worthwhile, but as it stands it is does not really stand out from the crowd, so I'll neither recommend it or warn you off.

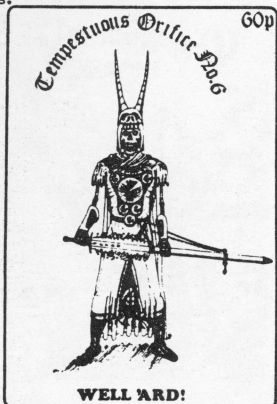


TEMPESTUOUS ORIFICE
APP:7 CON:6 VAL:4 PER:6 OVE:6
2 Grasmere Rd., Purley, Surrey, UK

This is definitely the best looking zine on hand. #6 is on hand and is produced in a slightly smaller format than most British zines, with the cover and interior genuinely and clearly printed, with justified letter-quality print and some fairly good art. This issue is 32 pages for 60p (try \$2 from the US), somewhat more than the usual British zine. It is edited by Patrick Fama and Chris Davies.

TEMPESTUOUS ORIFICE is characterized by excellent organization and clear presentation. It is well ordered and easy to follow and there is a genuine effort at professional quality writing and editing, though a table of contents would be a big help. The material presented is sort of uneven. There is a well developed article on characteristics and their function in RPing, but that is about it. The rest of the issue is reviews, letters and modules, including, of all things, a T&T solo adventure. There isn't a great amount of material here, but what there is denies the fanzine tradition and is actually fully fleshed out, so that the articles are actually a decent read.

TO is definitely worth checking out, though given the way it is produced and the somewhat high price, I wouldn't be surprised if it has some problems staying in print. Of all the British fanzines I have seen, it is the one which comes closest in style to its US counterparts.

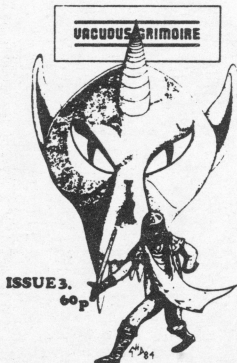


VACUOUS GRIMOIRE
APP:5 CON:2 VAL:4 PER:5 OVE:4
52 Whalesmead Rd., Bishopstoke, Eastleigh, Hants SO5 6HL UK

This is another fairly new fanzine. All things considered, the name is rather well chosen. Issue #3 is 32 pages of justified dot-matrix print. The price is 60p, so send the usual \$2 from the US. The editor is Richard Roberts.

This issue consists almost entirely of modules, bad art and white-space. There aren't even the usual letter and review columns. The orientation is primarily towards AD&D, and the only actual article is a useless piece on text-based computer adventures. The modules which take up the majority of the space are pure munchkin bait, with illogical rooms, random tables, etc.

On the whole I really can't recommend VACUOUS GRIMOIRE and have little else to say about it. If you plan to look at only a limited number of UK zines, don't bother to make this one of them.



GREEN GOBLIN
APP:4 CON:6 VAL:5 PER:6 OVE:6
17c Uplands Cres., Swansea, SA1 0NX, Wales UK

This fanzine is a rather good value, with the second issue having 42 pages at 50p (try \$2 US), with awful art but a good selection of material and some substantive content.

The editor is John Breakwell. The organization is a little strange, with the editorial on pages 2,3 and 41 and the TOC on page 4, but once you get past that there is quite a variety of material.

The outstanding items in this issue of GREEN GOBLIN include an article on why hacking and slashing is therapeutic fun, a good letter section, some very strange fiction and useful zine reviews. There are no modules in this issue, but some dubious bits on monster origins and the usual blige. On the whole it is an interesting read, with a tongue-in-cheek attitude which never gets too serious.

GG is not the most intellectual or useful zine you will find, but it is a pleasant and interesting read and probably worth checking out.

TROLLCRUSHER
APP:4 CON:3 VAL:4 PER:5 OVE:4

24 Barsby Dr., Loughboro, Leics., UK
Something ought to be said about what is probably the UK's oldest surviving fanzine, although TROLLCRUSHER is actually an APA, although it is produced in doigest-sized fanzine format. It has had some problems of late, and I have #29 at hand. There may or may not be further issues forthcoming. This issue is 75p for 40 pages or \$2 from the US, a bit high-priced as British fanzines go, an rather outrageous for what you actually get. Needless to say, the art and graphics are gruesome, but that is the nature of APAs (for those who don't know, an APA is a collection of discreet letter/articles submitted by paying contributors and not edited or restricted). The editors are R. O. McLean and John Drake.

If you've seen an APA here in the US or elsewhere, you have a pretty good idea what TROLLCRUSHER has to offer (almost nothing). There are about a dozen contributors, but in the tradition of APAs, most of what they offer is topical discussion, in-jokes, comments and various drivel. As far as I could tell everything here was either useless babbling or doubtful mechanical manipulation. There was nothing I could really use, though it was interesting to see some discussion of what is of current interest in the UK.

I can't really recommend TROLLCRUSHER for most gamers, though for those who like the APA format it might give an interesting alternative view.

GAMES

TSR IN THE MASS MARKET

TSR is incredibly prolific. Their seemingly inexhaustible supplies of money and energy have taken them into some pretty strange areas. It is a pity that their imaginations could not stretch as far as their sticky fingers. Not satisfied with their wide range of role-playing games and SPI's first-class selection of wargames, they have moved into the parlor game market, the realm of Scrabble, Monopoly, Trivial Pursuit and Parchesi. Three games exemplify this rather curious venture.

Crosscheck is probably the most viable of TSR's mass appeal games. It is essentially a combination of a Scrabble type game board and the idea of a crossword puzzle, with the gameboard used as a multi-function crossword puzzle matrix and three books of clues and answers provided. It adds elements of track-type games



Based on the popular ABC daytime serial

1027



in that the goal is to string words together on the board by answering the clues to reach a set home base. The game is nicely produced, at minimal practical expense. It has a puzzle-style board and a grease pencil with which to write on it, and the books are easy to follow, but large enough to provide variety. In the whole, *Crosscheck* is an interesting, if somewhat derivative game. It is enjoyable to play, with a bit of the feel of a number of other popular games. With the elements it combines it is probably a fairly safe bet from a marketing standpoint, though it tends to lose appeal after repeated play.

Spy Ring can best be described as a 'party game', similar to traditional games like charades or *Clue*. It actually bears a close similarity to a primitive form of role-playing called the 'Ragman Roll', but that is not really relevant. It follows the basic theme of having players take the roles of set characters and setting them to solve a mystery. This is a basically good idea, but the mystery idea has been handled much better in other games and the role-playing element is simplistic and could easily be equalled without resorting to this expensive package. None of this makes it a bad game. What really detracts from its attraction to me is the insultingly infantile way in which the game is presented. It is described as being for 'Adults of all ages', but I cannot imagine anyone over the age of 8 or so being able to take the 'childish' accoutrements of party napkins, invitations, posters, etc. seriously, and the rules governing the running of the game. The package consists mostly of unnecessary and rather tacky props, and I certainly would not want to be seen playing this by anyone who I wanted to respect me afterwards. If you want a mystery game that you can play at a party, buy *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective* which will challenge your intellect and imagination more and offend your dignity less.

The topper for this little triad is the *All My Children* game. This one is probably better left to your imagination. It follows in the tradition of the classic games based on *Dallas* and *General Hospital*, and makes a point about the banality of soap operas which can be reduced to spaces on a board and the venality of game manufacturers who will prostitute their skills to make a game like this one which has nothing original or imaginative in it. In fact, the most interesting things in this game are the pictures taken from the soap opera and the torrid descriptions of the characters. There really is nothing else. It is a simple track and card game, reminiscent of *Life*, *Monopoly* and their descendants. As John Wayne says in "North to Alaska"... "I wouldn't wish it on a goat!"

All three of these games feature high-quality production and a clear attention to what has made money in the mass market in the past. They break no new ground but should insure some steady Christmas sales. For the most part they work for what they are, though *Spy Ring* seems a bit ill-directed. These games will never be a threat to traditional mass-market sales leaders, but they will fill shelf-space nicely and offer saleable variations on proven themes. The only conclusion has to be that these games are a very calculated effort to get some steady income to support TSR, products more of marketing surveys than of the imagination (as claimed in TSR's logo slogan).

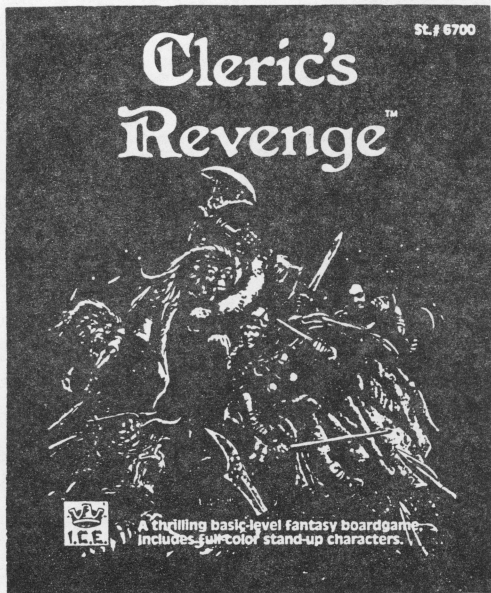
ICE IN SPACE

Well, I've finally gotten hold of the full set of rules for ICE's *Space Master* and can do a review of the whole system. This is a rather nicely produced package. It comes boxed with two books, *Future Law* and *Tech Law*. In addition the box contains a star map, a tactical display, inexpensive ship counters and a set of chart abstracts. The print is clear and readable, the charts are well-organized and there are some excellent technical illustrations. The only aspect which mars the production is the art, which ranges from adequate to awful. Most of the interior illustrations are passable, but the color cover art, while imaginative, is sloppy, distorted and unclear and really doesn't make a good impression, though this is certainly not what a game should be judged on.

Future Law covers character creation, race skills, psychic abilities and setting up background and adventures. The contents are well organized. The skill system follows the pattern of earlier ICE games, and is sort of a compromise between a fully developed skill system and a more traditional bonus/aptitude system. The psychic system is sort of a jumble of powers and skills and doesn't seem to be sure of where it wants to go, although it has some neat ideas. In both cases the skill lists are well developed and provide some interesting variety. Once nice aspect of the psychic system is that the psi combat follows the same general pattern as the rest of the combat systems, which provides an admirable consistency, although whether you like this type of combat is mostly a matter of taste. My main substantive complaint about this book is that the section on setting up a background is awfully sketchy. It gives some basic ideas and a few random tables plus some description of a pre-set campaign background, but it doesn't really provide enough detail or guidelines for a beginning GM or even one who prefers to have some guidance provided.

The second book is *Tech Law*. It presents the hardware for the system and background and the general combat mechanics both for personal and vehicular combat. The equipment sections are interesting with plenty of unique aspects which give the game some character to set it apart from other SF settings. The weapons are varied and there is a good examination of robots, androids and genetic tailoring. These rules and hardware are probably the best and most original material in the game and worth checking out no matter what system you plan to play with. The personal combat system follows the pattern of other ICE games, featuring innumerable charts, though these are organized and logically presented. The system is a bit more streamlined than in older versions, but it is overcomplicated as far as I'm concerned. Combat is certainly realistic, but it passes the line where it is an aid to play and seriously hinders the flow of the game as everyone flips from page to page and runs their fingers down charts. The charts alone take up 14 pages. That's just too much. A nice bit of constancy is that the vehicular and space combat systems run on basically the same system as the personal combat but adjusted for their different scale and abilities. In parallel these systems are too complex, but once you've adjusted to the cumbersome approach once you are ready to deal with any aspect of combat in the system.

On the whole Space Master is a good effort. It is a little flashy than I would have expected from this upward moving company, but that doesn't hurt the contents, which are solid and well designed. The combat system is cumbersome in the ICE tradition, but the rest of the game works fairly well and because it grows out of a tradition of similar games it is smooth and finished with few glitches. Although I have some doubts about parts of the mechanics, the background elements and the ideas about technology, science and campaign design are excellent and worth looking into.



ICE ON THE BOARDS

ICE seems to be making an effort to expand its horizons and to take every aspect of gaming and apply it to their lucrative Middle-Earth line. The Middle Earth Role Playing Game and its extensive line of modules should already be fairly familiar to most. Now they are branching out into boardgames. This started with The Lonely Mountain which has already been reviewed here. Now they have added Riddle of the Ring, a boardgame which simulates the conflicts and events of Tolkein's classic Lord of the Rings. Riddle of the Ring aims to do more or less the same thing as the character portion of SPI's old Lord of the Rings game. It is a card and board game, in which the players take the roles of major characters, some evil and some good and compete to either save or destroy the ring. There are various interactive cards which can be played on the other players and effect the results of combat or interactions. The game bears a striking structural resemblance to Games Workshop's Judge Dredd. Characters bob around madly, zapping each other with all sorts of strange things, often playing for revenge and losing track of the spirit of the game. It doesn't really preserve the essence of the books, but it can be fun to play because of the variety of things which you can do. The only major problem of play is the combat, which is too clear cut, with the win always going to the person with the best cards. This could be fixed by making it closer to most of the other games it resembles by adding a die roll on each side to the combat totals. 106 would serve just fine to add a little random element. Riddle of the Ring is well produced and fun to play, but it may not do justice to Tolkein's work for those who revere the classic. It is also fairly simple so it may not hold a great deal of long term interest.

ICE's boardgaming ventures are not limited to Middle Earth, and they include another recent release, Cleric's Revenge. The first thing that strikes one about this game is the lovely map, a puzzleboard terrain marked out in hexes. There are also some rather attractively illustrated stand up character cards. This is sort of in the tradition of games like Dungeons or Lalisan, but it adds elements of Chess and other board strategy games, placing two players in opposition in a fantasy-type setting. There are different terrain features to be dealt with and different types of units on each side. The rules are very basic and the strategies are somewhat limited, but the first few plays are a lot of fun as the players learn the different obstacles and character capabilities. It is flogged for ages 11 and up, but I think younger players would have no problems with it and I think it will pale fairly quickly for anyone beyond their middle teens. However, it is a well put together and enjoyable game within its limits.

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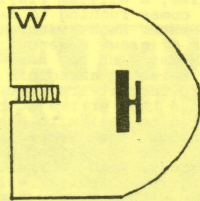
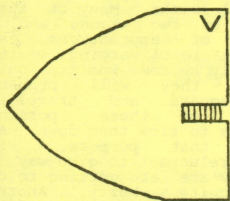
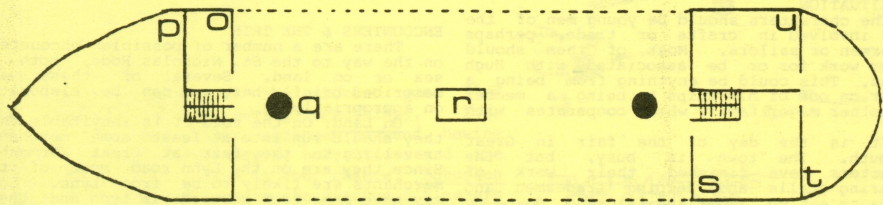
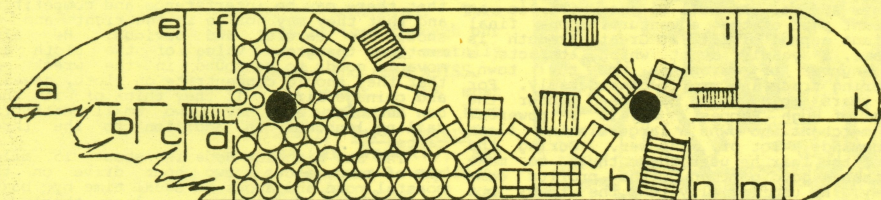
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ROBBERS OF THE SEA



INTRODUCTION

This adventure is intended for use with AD&D, Ysgarth or To Challenge Tomorrow, but could easily be adapted to other systems. This is a historical adventure, not merely in that it is set in a historical place and time, but in the fact that the characters are based on people who really lived and the events are based on a variety of similar events which actually happened in the period. Some specifics have been changed or added, but in essence, this is how it was six-hundred and fifty years ago.

The nature of the money as used here should be noted. The standard coinage is the Pound[L](20s), the Shilling[s](12p) and the Penny[p]. The Shilling is equal in value to the AD&D Gold Piece, the TCT Dollar or the Ysgarth Mark.

Characters for use in this adventure should be made aware of some of the background. They should have almost no personal possessions(10-60s) and be young and inexperienced. It might be a good idea to play with a fairly large party, as many as 8-12 characters as such numbers may be needed. Alternatively, it might work well with a party of 4-6 primary characters with one or more retainers or hangers-on.

BACKGROUND

It is March 19, 1342(First Tuesday After the Passion, 16 Edward III). The characters are natives of the city of Great Yarmouth(Magna Jernemuth) on the eastern coast of Norfolk. Edward III is King of England, and although the economy is unstable because of the war in France, the Norfolk coast is kept prosperous by active merchants who are involved in trade, smuggling and even piracy.

Local officials and personages of note include Robert Causton(Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk), Peter Cressy(Bailiff of Great Yarmouth), John Perbroun(Former Admiral, Member of Parliament for Great Yarmouth), Sir Robert Morle(Admiral of the Northern Fleet, Baron), Sir John Shardelowe(Local Knight), Sir John Bardolf(Baron), John Elys(Former Admiral), Sir Thomas Drayton(Former Admiral, Baron) and Hugh Reppes(Powerful Local Merchant & Pirate). More of the significance of these characters will be developed later.

Great Yarmouth is a major port for international trade and for herring fishing. Major exports going through the port include fish, wool, grain and cloth. Major imports include iron, salt, and wine. The merchants of the town have become rich and powerful through this trade, and some families have as many as a dozen ships and close to 1000 men in

their employ. The Reppes, Perbroun and Drayton families are particularly powerful. There is competition with other Norfolk ports, particularly Lynn to the north. When not engaged in honest shipping merchants from Great Yarmouth engage in piracy and raiding along the coast of Flanders and France. Their counterparts across the sea often respond in kind, so regular private wars spring up from time to time. Because of the large number of ships controlled by these merchants of Great Yarmouth (over 50), they have been recruited as a major part of King Edward's fleet, a status which earns them considerable protection when they stray outside the law. Another regular practice is that of stripping wrecked ships, a right which the king assigns to various local nobles, but which the merchants of the town often preempt by reaching the wreck first and removing the goods before the rightful wreckers arrive. As will be seen, this is an important part of the adventure. One final important aspect of life at Great Yarmouth is the fair, a yearly event which attracts a large number of merchants to the town, bolstering trade and profit considerably. For some years this fair has been under the control of Hugh Reppes. He is a powerful local merchant who owns a large fishing fleet and commands a lot of manpower. During the time of the fair he uses these thugs to make sure that a good portion of the profits come his way. He unofficially runs the town, but usually maintains good relations with the other major merchants and nobles in the area.

THE SITUATION

The characters should be young men of the town, involved in crafts or trade, perhaps fishermen or sailors. Most of them should either work for or be associated with Hugh Reppes. This could be anything from being a sailor on one of his ships to being a member of another major family which cooperates with him.

It is the day of the fair in Great Yarmouth. The town is busy, but the characters have finished their work of preparing stalls and helping tradesmen and merchants set up. They are sitting down on the Yare wharf having some beer and bread for an early lunch. They have seen little of Hugh Reppes, because he is extremely busy up at the Guildhall coordinating the fair. To their surprise, a William Playford, a clerk in the town, comes running to find them and reports that Master Hugh wishes to see them on a matter of great urgency. As an alternative the GM may wish to have one member of the party selected ahead of time, contacted and used to recruit the rest of the characters.

When they arrive at the guildhall they are taken in to meet with Master Hugh in a private back room. Hugh Reppes is there with Peter Cressy, one of his top associates. He seems very busy, and while they are talking messengers and clerks will come in from time to time with messages for him. He informs the characters or at least the leader that during the night a ship was wrecked on the St. Nicholas Rode, an area of sand-bars and shoals north of the town. He believes that this ship is the Rodecogge belonging to an old enemy, John Pape of Graveling in Flanders. The ship is stuck on a sandbar with a major breach in its hull, but it is likely that at high-tide it will be floated free and then sink.

It is now about 10am, and something has to be done about the ship before it is floated free at the 5pm high tide. Unfortunately all of the men who regularly work the coasts as wreckers for Hugh and his cronies are currently occupied with the fair, so he has to find someone he can trust who might be interested in this opportunity for advancement. Those who are willing to go to the Rodecogge and remove everything of value will probably advance in Hugh's favor (useful if they plan to continue to live in Great Yarmouth) and will also receive a percentage of the take. He will offer something like 5% of the take, but expects to settle for around 10% split among the wreckers. He would go as high as 15% or even 20%. However, the higher he goes the more attention he will pay to just what they bring back, and as he has a good idea of the content of the ship he will not react well if they pocket too much. If they take a small percentage he will be much more lenient on what they steal. He has a good intelligence network and even has a partial manifest of the ship, not surprising since a

member of the crew named Charles Benoit is in his pay and was at least partially responsible for the wreck. Once the arrangements are made, he will see that they are given three carts with horses and encourage them to set out immediately. A large party will be useful for getting out the most possible loot, but it will mean more people for it to be divided among. This whole interview will be rushed, so it will not be until they have agreed and are on their way out that Peter Cressy (who will lead them to the wagons) mentions that there may be as many as a dozen crew members still on board guarding the cargo and that other members of the crew may have gone either to the Sheriff (Robert Causton), one of the local barons, or the Admiral (Robert Morle) for aid. Incidentally, Robert Morle has the official salvage rights for that particular part of the coast. So, they should be aware that there may be interference and competition and that they may not be in the right and so should be careful and devious. He also mentions the great value of the cloth and movable goods to be found in the wreck and that they should concentrate on cloth, jewelry and coinage first. If they think of it they can ask for and have two small cart-size sailing launches in addition to the three carts.

The St. Nicholas Rode is about 15 miles out of town, about a two hour drive on the coastal road and about an equal time by boat, for although the distance is less there are more obstructions. If they set out by 11am they should arrive at 1pm and have some four hours to do their work.

ENCOUNTERS & THE TRIP

There are a number of possible encounters on the way to the St. Nicholas Rode, both at sea or on land. Several of these are described briefly here and can be elaborated on appropriately.

On Land: On the road it is inevitable that they should run into at least some merchants travelling to the fair at Great Yarmouth. Since they are on the Lynn road most of the merchants are likely to be from Lynn. Some may have come from Norwich via Lynn and there will even be some from York or other farther off places in the north. Some typical merchants would be wool-sellers with hides of wool, farmers with produce or even livestock, vintners and brewers, butchers, tailors and various sorts of metal smiths. Many of these will travel with one or two wagons and an appropriate number of apprentices and journeymen. They will be of varying wealth, and there will probably be some who are quite poor. In addition they will probably encounter a few beggars and travelling entertainers. Many of these possible encounters could serve to slow them down, and should be used for that purpose. Rich merchants are always reluctant to give way to anyone, and since they are late getting to the fair they will be in quite a hurry. Another possible encounter might be Benedict Sardica, the papal claimant to the Bishopric of Norwich, an annoying and self-important Italian whose claim to the bishopric has not been legitimized by the king. They might even run into Hugh Betele, the Mayor of Lynn with a number of his men (say 10-12), who, if he were to find out about the wreck might want to salvage it himself. Finally, one or more of the people they encounter might have seen the wreck from the road or might have encountered the party which was sent out from the ship that morning, in which case they might be able to inform them that a party was sent down to Norfolk to contact the Sheriff. Some might even mention how they had run into Sir Robert Morle on the road and told him of the wreck, at which point he had turned home to fetch more men to establish his right to wreck on that bit of coast.

Encounters at sea should be somewhat rarer and easier to avoid. The most likely encounter would be with one of the ships which patrol the Norfolk coast looking for smugglers and pirates. If this should happen they it should be with the Magdalene from Lynn which is under the command of Peter Melchebourn. It will stop them and question them, and if suspicions are aroused it will keep an eye on them so that they cannot approach the wreck. The Magdalene carries a crew of 80 and is empowered by the king to take any measures necessary to maintain order on the coast. If they avoid this encounter or deal successfully

with it the Magdelene is not likely to discover the wreck while they are working on it. One other sea encounter which might be viable would be with another group of wreckers sent down by boat from Lynn (the next nearest large town). They would be organized and fairly serious to deal with, perhaps with 10-15 men, but might be willing to team up.

AT THE ST. NICHOLAS RODES

The St. Nicholas Rodes is a complex of sand-bars, rock shoals and tidal pools which covers a fair portion of the coast near Great Yarmouth. At high tide it is completely submerged, but provides hidden dangers beneath the waves. At low tide large portions are exposed and it is possible to walk fairly far out to sea, though the footing on the wet sand and rocks is treacherous.

The Rodecogge has been breached by rocks and is caught up on a sand-bar about 50 yards from shore, but it is possible to walk to it at low tide (from about 10am to 5pm if they are lucky).

The ship is easily spotted from the shore. The characters will first see it from a bluff above the shore which is reached on a track from the main road. There is a slope down the bluff, but it is too steep and treacherous for horses and carts, though people can scuffle down with little trouble. Thus, they will have to leave any loot on the beach and then carry it up to the wagons above. From the bluff or the beach they will be able to tell that there are a few men on the deck of the ship and that they have a launch in the water around the stern to depart with if they need. They will also see that two men from the boat are posted as guards on the beach, apparently having walked in on the sands. These guards will be hard to approach covertly, as they are surrounded by open sand in a 30 yard radius. Once they are a bit closer, perhaps down on the beach, the characters will see that the breach in the prow of the boat is large enough for it to sink rapidly, but also large enough for a man to pass through, although it is partly filled with sand.

The two guards on the beach are Flemish Marines (see Appendix). They are armed and will confront any suspicious persons, but they will be reluctant to attack a large group, preferring to retreat judiciously. If attacked they will defend themselves. Note also that anyone attacking them will be within range of the crossbowmen on the ship who can reach about half way to the bluff (20yds up the beach) with some accuracy. There are 13 more marines on board. Remember that they can see everything that happens on the beach and can communicate by shouting.

The men on the deck of the ship have crossbows and other weapons, and attempting to scale the sides would be suicidal, but once under the prow two or three attackers would be shielded by the curvature of the hull and be able to dig out enough sand fairly quickly to enter the hold through the hole. It would be useful if this were to occur to someone in the party after they have dealt with the two guards on the beach.

The distance on the sands to the Rodecogge is 50 yards of unsure footing. This should take about three Combat Rounds for the average character. However there is a 100-(AGI or DEX)x4% chance of each character stepping on sinking sand and being delayed for 1d4 CR extricating himself. All the time they are crossing the sands or trapped on the sands the 13 crossbowmen on the ship can fire on them with potentially devastating effect.

Once they reach the wreck they will have to dig inside. It will take 100 CR/# of Diggers to clear the sand. However, each person there over 3 has a 20% chance of being exposed to fire from the deck, rolled each CR. While they are digging it will take 25 CR for 10 of the marines to be lowered to the sands so that they can run around and attack the characters. It would probably be wise for them to make some effort to defend their rear once they get into the hold, perhaps by filling in the gap with sand, moving something over the hole or attempting to ambush the pursuers if they follow them into the hold.

THE WRECK OF THE RODECOGGE

The letters given here refer to the maps of the Rodecogge which are provided. Descriptions and information apply to those areas as they are approached or entered by the

characters. All creatures and crew mentioned are described in the appendix.

A: The front of the ship is breached in a number of places in the lower hull. This consists mostly of a large rip in the left part of the bow. This rip has opened the sides of a number of cabins. This is one of them. It is used as a cabin for crew members, but the contents have been broken and swept out by the impact of the wreck. The room is partially filled with sand and there is a dead body trapped under the sand with just a leg sticking out. No furniture or personal possessions remain.

B: This is just the corner of a large cabin which housed 8 crewmen. It is mostly full of sand, but provides an easy access to the corridor which leads to the hold.

C: This cabin housed 4 men, but is now empty except for sand.

D: This cabin is almost completely filled with sand, buried in which are the bodies of 3 of the four men who were sleeping here when the ship wrecked. The door at the back is blocked by wine casks which are jumbled up against it, though they can be moved and a passage out cleared if two men work for three hours. The stairs up can be reached in just 20 minutes by three men moving casks.

E: This cabin is intact, but empty. The 6 crewmembers who were in it escaped through the hole in the prow and climbed to the deck after the wreck. Some of their personal possessions are still there, but nothing of value was left behind.

F: This cabin was unoccupied when the ship wrecked, but was used by 4 men. Since the cabin is sealed shut by casks their personal possessions remain, including their personal fortunes. This money is hidden beneath a loose board in one wall and consists of 135s worth of coin and jewelry.

G: Eventually they should be able to make a path through the casks as described at D. This will allow them to reach this open area in the hold and pass through it towards the stern of the ship, if they wish. There are a number of different types of things stored in the hold, including barrels of various liquids and powders (circles on map), bales of cloth and hides (crossed squares on map) and cages for wild animals (hatched squares on map). The barrels/casks contain Salt (150L worth--half a wagon load), Iron (1000L worth--a full wagon load), Wine (1500L worth--two full wagon loads), Oil (200L worth--one half wagon load) and indigo (3500L worth--half a wagon load). The bales are linen (150L worth--half a wagon load), Silk (2000L worth--half a wagon load) and wool fells (1500L worth--half a wagon load). A wagon load corresponds approximately to the load for a skiff, so there is enough here for several loads for their available transport. All told, these goods make a total of 10,000L value (200,000GP). Most of the cages have been broken open and released the exotic animals which they contained. There are a few harmless, colorful birds flying about and no dangerous animals in area G. If the birds can be caught they will be worth about 500L more. The dangerous animals are out of their cages, but blocked from area G by a line of bales and cages which can be climbed over by agile men. They are making a forbidding racket. For more detail see H. In addition, characters in this area can be seen from an open hatch in the roof directly between the two masts (see R). There is a fair chance that as many as 6 crossbowmen will be posted there to fire on them as they pass through the hold, assuming they know the ship is being invaded. Both of the stairways in this hold lead up to the main deck.

H: In this section there are several loose wild animals which have broken out of their cages. These are a pair of large wolves (male and female) and a leopard. When the characters enter the hold they will hear the sound of animals fighting. By the time they arrive at this area they will discover that the two wolves have killed the leopard and that one of the wolves is wounded. The cages and bales are arranged in such a way that the wolves cannot escape easily, but the wolves are scared and angry and not disposed to let anyone pass. There are many ways to deal with the wolves, such as fire, attacking them, distracting them, etc. Characters will have to find which way works best for them.

I: This cabin was empty at the time of the wreck. It is used by 4 sailors and most of their personal possessions are there, including 35s hidden in one of the bedrolls.

J: This cabin houses 6 men who were on duty during the wreck. Personal possessions left behind are of little value, save for a jeweled locket hung on the wall which is worth 50s.

K: The 6 residents of this cabin have vacated it and moved their gear above decks.

L: Essentially the same situation as K.

M: This cabin houses 4 men. Some possessions were left behind, including a rather nice collection of carved ivory worth about 10L.

N: This cabin also houses 4 men. Of these three were above decks during the wreck, but one was below. He was attacked and killed by the leopard and his partially eaten corpse is in this room. In a pouch he has collected all the goods of his comrades, worth a total of 5L.

O: This is the cabin of the Helmsman of the Rodecogge. The cabin is fairly lavishly furnished, with some tapestries and rugs, as well as finely made furniture. In a small desk there is a pouch which contains 75L in gold and two emeralds worth 120L.

P: This is the galley. It is used to cook and serve all meals, to store food, wine and water, and as a residence for the cook and two cabin boys/assistants.

Q: At this point one of two masts comes up through the deck of the ship. It is on this deck where most of the surviving crew will be found. All of the crew are either on this or one of the upper decks.

R: This is the hatch through which goods are lowered into the hold. Marines on deck will use it to fire on any intruders in the hold.

S: This is a sitting room and map room used by the captain. There are some fairly valuable books, maps and charts stored here, worth about 10L.

T: This is the captain's sitting room, used for meetings with merchants and officials and for entertaining. There is a long table with silverware and accoutrements worth 80L.

U: This is the captain's private cabin. He owns some valuable jewelry, including an ornamental chain, a pair of brooches and a gilt picture frame, valued at a total of 30L. Beneath the bed, as might be expected, is a strongbox containing the gold which is being transported as part of the cargo as well as the operating funds for the ship, totalling some 5000L of easily transported loot.

V: This is the forward castle (fo'csl), a raised deck ideal for boarding other ships and for placing archers and also useful for mounting seige engines, though there is none aboard at this time. The launch is kept here when not in use.

W: This is the rear castle, a raised deck used primarily by the helmsman who steers the ship from the large wheel mounted at the back and linked by ropes to the rudder which is at the rear of the ship. The rudder lines run externally down the stern of the ship and the wheel is rather large and hard to operate, a not completely refined technological innovation.

Status of Ship and Crew: Originally there was a crew of 70 men. 28 men died in the wreck or were swept overboard and lost. Of the remaining 42 the captain (John Pape), 12 marines and 5 sailors set out for help. 2 marines were posted on the beach. This leaves the helmsman (in command), 10 marines and 12 sailors alive and on board to guard the ship. All these men will be on deck and ready to defend the ship. See the appendix for appropriate characteristics. Note that the marines will go into combat first and if they are defeated the sailors will be likely to surrender or try to strike a deal with the raiders. They might even be willing to help unload the ship for a share in the loot. It is important to note that if the crew can be impressed with overwhelming odds (for example if Lord Morle teams up with the characters) they might make a deal on the spot and trade willing assistance in robbing the ship for freedom and a share in the loot.

EVENTS DURING THE RAID

While the characters are subduing the defenders and unloading the ship there are events transpiring in the background which may be important.

News of the wreck has reached Sir Robert Morle, Admiral of the North, who has wrecking rights on this stretch of the coast. He will gather up some of his mounted men fairly hastily and head to the ship to assert his rights and rob the ship himself. He will be able to raise 15 men plus himself, all mounted, skilled and well armed, but they will get there fairly late in the day, probably between noon and 3.

After the wreck Captain Pape was fairly quick about setting out with 17 men (as mentioned above). They went on foot to where the sheriff and get his protection, because they have a licence of protection from the king, which theoretically makes them immune to Lord Morle's wrecking rights and grants them protection from robbers like the characters. Sometime between 3 and 6pm (possibly after the ship has begun to sink) Sheriff Robert Causton will show up with 20 armed and mounted men. Also with him will be Captain Pape and his men. Causton's goal will be to get all the goods off the ship and to a safe warehouse in Great Yarmouth until the king can dispose of them. Once the ship has been emptied Causton will attempt to pursue or find the criminals, seize the goods and make appropriate reparations and arrange for punishment. If they are captured they will be held in the rather formidable edifice of Norwich Castle, a Norman fortress recently turned to use as a prison.

It is also possible that around noon a group of competing wreckers from Lynn will show up. This group will consist of 12-20 seamen-types looking for some loot to grab up.

Finally, remember that Charles Benoit, a member of the crew, is in the pay of Hugh Reppes, and will do what he can to help the characters out short of endangering his own life, such as persuading the rest of the crew to make a deal and doing little things to slow the crew down.

In any and all of these encounters the persons involved will be cautious and leery of getting into direct conflict. Lord Morle or wreckers from Lynn will be willing to team up in the robbery. Causton will be far firmer and official. Lord Morle will attempt to assert his rights and overawe the characters before attempting to deal with them. If they have already taken the ship the situation will be quite a bit different, as they will have an advantaged position in dealing with any who arrive. If they have not taken the ship they will need help quite a bit more. How all these conflicting interests are resolved is up to the GM.

TRANSPORTING THE GOODS

Once the goods have been removed from the Rodecogge by whatever means they will need to be taken to Great Yarmouth as quickly and efficiently as possible. There are 6 wagonloads worth of goods with a total value of 15,000L (including the captain's gold). They should have at least three wagons and possibly two boats as well. The gold takes up little space and is of great value, so should definitely be taken. The most valuable 3 wagon load would be the Indigo, the Silk, the Wool, the Iron and a quarter of the Wine. If they also have the two boats they would want to take the remainder of the wine as well. This would necessitate leaving behind the Salt, Oil and Linen, a total value of only 500L, which they might use to pay off those who assist them or could come back for later. If they have only the two wagons they may very well wish to make two trips, in which case they will have to leave goods behind, with someone to guard the goods, who will certainly encounter both Lord Morle and the Sheriff, and be in serious trouble, though they might try something subtle like hiding the leftover goods in the nearby woods or burying it.

Should they decide to take off on their own and not return the goods to Hugh Reppes in Great Yarmouth, they will become hunted outlaws and also be placed on his hit list (and he has powerful connections). In addition, they will have a very hard time selling the stolen goods at anything near their actual value without his connections. If they take them back as originally planned, they will be paid the full percentage arranged before they set out, which might be enough to make them rather wealthy men. In addition, while under Hugh Reppes' protection they will be fairly safe from prosecution or pursuit.

APPENDIX OF CHARACTERS & CREATURES

These characters and creatures are mentioned in the text. These descriptions are provided here for reference. The statistics which are given are for To Challenge Tomorrow, Ysgarth and Advanced Dungeons & Dragons. The stats AR(Attack Rating)[For all weapons mentioned in the Attack section], DR(Defense Rating)[For both missiles and melee attacks], AP(Activity Points), DC(Damage Class)[Double this for TCT AFR] and AV(Absorption Value) are for use with either Ysgarth or TCT. The stats AC(Armor Class), LV(Level)[Corresponds to Ysgarth Rank] and AC(Armor Class) are for use with AD&D. They follow the standard application for the respective systems. In addition, stats like HEI(Height), WEI(Weight) and HP(Hit Points) are provided, which can be used equally well with any of these systems. Also provided is SAV(Saving Throw), which is a mark on a D20 roll. Stats for weapons are provided as well. They should apply with all systems mentioned. Alignment is provided in old Ysgarth terms, with numerical Law-Chaos and Good-Evil axis. High numbers are Law or Good, low numbers are Chaos or Evil. Numbers range from 1 to 24. Thus, 18/4 would be Lawful/Evil, more or less.

FLEMISH MARINES/SHERIFF'S MEN

AR:30 AV:3/3/3 HEI:5'8" Attacks: Sword(1D8)
 DR:25 AC:4 WEI:144 or Crossbow(2D8)/Longbow(1D8)
 DC:10 HP:35 SAV:10
 AP:55 LV:5 ALI:11/13

These stats should serve for both the marines on board the Rodecogge and for the men accompanying Sheriff Rober Causton should he show up. For the Englishmen replace Crossbows with Longbows.

FLEMISH SAILORS/OTHER WRECKERS

AR:22 AV:1/1/1 HEI:5'6" Attacks: Club(1D6)/Staff(2D4)
 DR:18 AC:6 WEI:132
 DC:8 HP:30 SAV:12
 AP:60 LV:4 ALI:8/12

These stats are for either sailors on the Rodecogge or any wreckers who show up from Lynn. Give the sailors the shorter clubs and the wreckers the staves.

MEN AT ARMS

AR:35 AV:4/5/3 HEI:5'9" Attacks: Broadsword(1D8)
 DR:30 AC:2 WEI:155 or Mounted Lance(2D12)
 DC:15 HP:45 SAV:9
 AP:50 LV:7 ALI:12/10

These stats will serve for the mounted soldiers serving with Robert Morle or for any other elite troops or military characters encountered. They will have their own horses and be fully equipped.

SIR ROBERT MORLE, ADMIRAL OF THE NORTH

AR:50 AV:5/6/4 HEI:5'11" Attacks: Broadsword(1D10)
 DR:40 AC:-1 WEI:180 or Mounted Lance(3D10)
 DC:15 HP:60 SAV:7
 AP:60 LV:12 ALI:14/12

Robert Morle is one of the major nobles of Norfolk. He is a local baron and Admiral of the Northern Fleet, with 50-80 ships at his command. He is a trusted friend of the king with considerable clout and good connections. He has the wrecking rights on the St. Nicholas Rodes and tries to make them pay whenever possible, though he is a fairly reasonable man and willing to take a smaller profit if someone else does all the work.

JOHN PAPE, CAPTAIN OF THE RODECOGGE

AR:35 AV:4/3/3 HEI:5'8" Attacks: Sword(1D8)
 DR:45 AC:1 WEI:140 or Crossbow(2D8)
 DC:10 HP:35 SAV:8
 AP:65 LV:10 ALI:7/9

John Pape is a Flemish merchant and pirate who has some dealings with the English King and the Count of Flanders. He has been a constant thorn in the side of English merchants, but usually manages to avoid any retribution. He has protection from the King, at least theoretically, and this will be supported by royal officials if he can track any down.

ROBERT CAUSTON, SHERIFF OF NORFOLK

AR:50 AV:3/4/3 HEI:5'9" Attacks: Sword(1D8)
 DR:25 AC:3 WEI:156 or Longbow(1D8)
 DC:20 HP:50 SAV:8
 AP:50 LV:10 ALI:15/13

Robert Causton is Sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk and a member of a major regional family. He controls considerable power because of his value to the king and the position to which he has been appointed, which includes responsibility for domestic security for the entirety of East Anglia.

THOMAS SWEYN, HELMSMAN OF THE RODECOGGE

AR:40 AV:2/2/2 HEI:6'1" Attacks: Staff(2D8)
 DR:30 AC:3 WEI:205
 DC:20 HP:75 SAV:7
 AP:55 LV:8 ALI:8/11

This is the helmsman of the Rodecogge and the second in command of the ship. He is a large, hard-tempered Flemishman who has served with Pape for a few years. He maintains discipline on the ship and is loyal to his employer, but should it seem wise he would readily sell him out as he is a true pirate at heart.

WOLVES

AR:35 AV:1/3/2 LEN:6' Attacks: Bite(1D12)
 DR:30 AC:4 WEI:200 and 2 Claws(1D6 each)
 DC:15 HP:70 SAV:9
 AP:60 LV:7 ALI:4/11

These stats are for the two wolves trapped in the hold of the Rodecogge. Remember that they are scared and agitated and will be hard to calm and eager to attack anything which bothers them.

CHARLES BENOIT, AGENT OF HUGH REPPES

AR:35 AV:1/1/1 HEI:5'9" Attacks: Short Sword(1D6)
 DR:35 AC:4 WEI:167
 DC:10 HP:45 SAV:10
 AP:58 LV:7 ALI:6/9

Charles Benoit is a typical Flemish seaman who has spent some time in England and was contacted by Hugh Reppes to act as a spy in John Pape's crew. He is a bit more skilled than the average sailor and is also a pilot/helmsman.

PETER CRESSY OF GREAT YARMOUTH

AR:45 AV:3/4/4 HEI:6'0" Attacks: Mace(1D8)
DR:30 AC:2 WEI:200
DC:15 HP:60 SAV:9
AP:50 LV:8 ALI:7/9

Peter Cressy is a merchant of Great Yarmouth and one of Hugh Reppes chief lieutenants. He is a skilled seaman and warrior and good at convincing people to do his will by whatever means necessary. He has a background serving with the king in the French wars.

PETER MELCHEBOURNE OF LYNN

AR:45 AV:4/5/4 HEI:6'0" Attacks: Greatsword(1D12)
DR:30 AC:1 WEI:180
DC:10 HP:60 SAV:8
AP:65 LV:10 ALI:15/9

Peter Melchebourne is a major merchant of Lynn and captain of the Magdalene which is one of the ships commissioned by the king and admiral to patrol the coast for attacks, pirates and smugglers. He will arrest anyone suspicious and have them taken to Lynn and then to gaol in Norwich. If the evidence is overwhelming against those arrested the merchants of Lynn have been known to dispose of criminals in a free form manner.

HUGH REPPES OF GREAT YARMOUTH

AR:45 AV:4/4/4 HEI:5'9" Attacks: Broadsword(1D8)
DR:25 AC:2 WEI:180
DC:15 HP:60 SAV:7
AP:55 LV:10 ALI:5/9

Hugh Reppes is the boss of the Great Yarmouth Fair and coordinates the actions of illegal wreckers and pirates in the area. He is a royal customs official and has held other public offices, as well as being one of the major merchants providing ships for the northern navy. He has a good bit of pull in his region despite his dubious activities and is on good terms with the king, which makes all the difference.

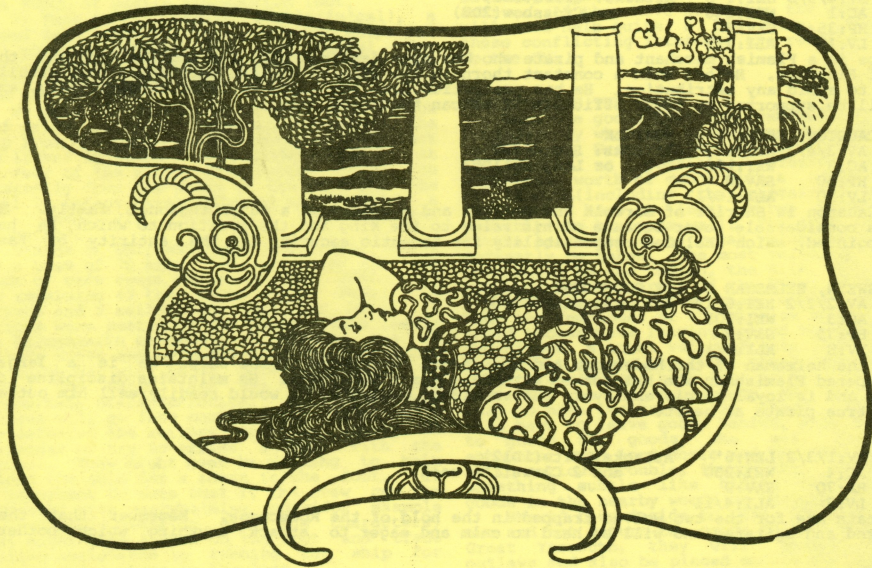
SETTING UP CHARACTERS FOR THE ADVENTURE

For AD&D there should be little difficulty creating characters for the adventure. The main restrictions should be on magic, both normal and priestly. Essentially it would be good if there were no mages, but if their are it should be very unlikely that their spells will do much of anything, perhaps dividing all effects by a third would be good. Clerics should be allowed, with weapon restrictions and with spells limited pretty much to healing. Magic of any kind which has an obvious visible manifestation should not really be allowed. This is not a time of magic, though it is a time of charlatantry and some miracles. Note that this sort of restriction should apply with other systems as well. Non human characters are right out.

For Ysgarth skill benefits for the characters should be on Staff(-1), Longbow(-1), Helm/Pilote(-1), Net Fishing(-1) and Sail Tending(-1). Professional and other benefits should be run as normal. To keep things simple characters should be from East Anglia, though other regions and races would be possible in an extended campaign.

For To Challenge Tomorrow skill benefit should follow the pattern for the first period in Book Two, with the English regional benefits modified to be: Oceanology(-1), Sailing(-1), Bow(-2), Naval Operations(-1), Staff(-1), Fishing(-2), Farming(-1), Strategy(-1).

Other appropriate modifications can be made along these lines for other systems as seems needed. These examples should give an idea of the period and regional orientation.



RAG FILE

ADVENTURES GALORE

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

There are currently 20 in print. The most recent are Citadel of Zushran (nominated as best role-playing module at ORIGINS), Dark Waters (an urban fantasy horror tale set in Ysgarth), and Hills of Binazmia (middle eastern espionage adventure). Coming soon are Challenge of the Toymaker and Rivermasters of Arania. Each adventure is only \$3 (a hell of a value), and you can get any 4 for \$10. Modules are for morons, but these modules are for YOU!



RIVERMASTERS OF ARANIA

HAPPY SLASHING!

Psychos & Slashers is the sickest game I've ever seen (and that's saying something). Ever wanted to be a mad killer, chainsaw in hand, hewing your way through cheerleaders, babysitters and the local police? Well, this is your chance. Suburban Slasher is the first game in the Psychos & Slashers trilogy, a challenging card game set in suburbia where you can become one of a variety of psychotic killers and do your will with the unsuspecting populace. This is the ultimate recreation of the slasher films we all love so much. Stay tuned, we're trying to get an endorsement from Joe Bob Briggs. Suburban Slasher is only \$6.95 so order now. Remember, coming soon—Kamp Killjoy—watch for it!



NEED SOME HELP?

A variety of play aids are available for use with both Ysgarth and To Challenge Tomorrow. Record sheets are available for both systems. We have character record sheets and GM record sheets for keeping track of events on an adventure. All record sheets should be ordered in increments of 10 each at \$1.50 for 10. Order as many as you need, but be sure to specify how many you want of each (TCT Character Sheets-6101, TCT GM Sheets-6102, Ysgarth Character Sheets-4101, Ysgarth GM Sheets-4102). Sheets will be in compliance with the current status of rules and modifications.

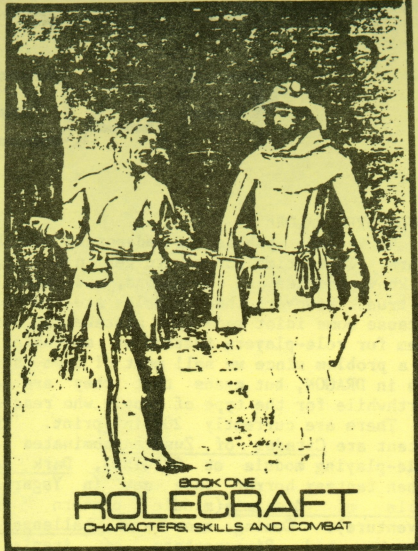
Also available as a new item are character set-up and play info sheets on card stock, with all the tables you need to create characters or play either Ysgarth or TCT, with the latest rule modifications and expansions. These sheets are 50 cents each, and can be ordered in any numbers. They include all necessary tables and skills, but no text. Specify which system and type when ordering. Sheets will be in compliance with current rules and variant modifications.

YSGARTH, NOW MORE THAN EVER!

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

Guess what else. About the time you read this the second volume of Ysgarth will be in ready. This is 'Spellcraft', which covers all aspects of religion and magic, including extensive detail on gods, guilds and cults, over 300 spells and skills, completely new magic mechanics and an extensive fumble and spell interaction system. It is the most realistic and flexible magic system in any role-playing game to date. In addition, it is more or less compatible with the old Ysgarth system.

Coming early next year is the third and final book which will complete Ysgarth. It is sub-titled 'Worldcraft', and will cover world set-up and design with a selection of adventure scenarios and background information from the world of Ysgarth. If the first book isn't enough for you, you can order the whole set for \$15 and we will send book one immediately and follow it up with each of the other books as they are released. Once again: our slogan..Ysgarth—A revolution in role-playing.



TAKE THE CHALLENGE!

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



<This Part You Read>

FEEDBACK RESULTS FOR #31		
Article	Rating	Change
Conjurings	54	-37
Gods of SC	84	+10
In the Speculum	91	+1
Unto the Gates...	96	—
The End of Dreams	90	—
Behind the Wheel	55	—
The Artists &c.	95	-1
Overall	81	-5

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

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

YOUR FEEDBACK ON #32	
Rate these items on a scale from 1(awful) to 100(great)	
Conjurings	_____
Totems	_____
Origins	_____
In the Speculum	_____
Robbers of the Sea	_____
On Golem Construction	_____
Echbes from the Abyss	_____
The Eye of Odin	_____
Peter Chen	_____
Undead Art	_____

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ON GOLEM CONSTRUCTION DON & ROSEMARY WEBB

Rochelyn the Animatrix
Tower of Golgapwyn
Tlon Uqbar

Amelfa, Wizard of the Seven Thunders
Oroth on the Thelem
Zothique

Greetings in the names of the demons
Looroo and Hastur.

The smell of burning stone and the echoes of my vanquished foe still fill my thoughts. I am most grateful for the two slim volumes of Gantil's Magikal Diaries that you procured for me. With their aid and my skills of thaumaturgy it was no great matter to lay waste his magical kingdom. For the ruin of his tower and fortunes I now gratefully repay my debt to you.

Concerning your inquiries about the construction of those magical mannikins known as 'golems', there are two parts to the working: the practical and the ceremonial.

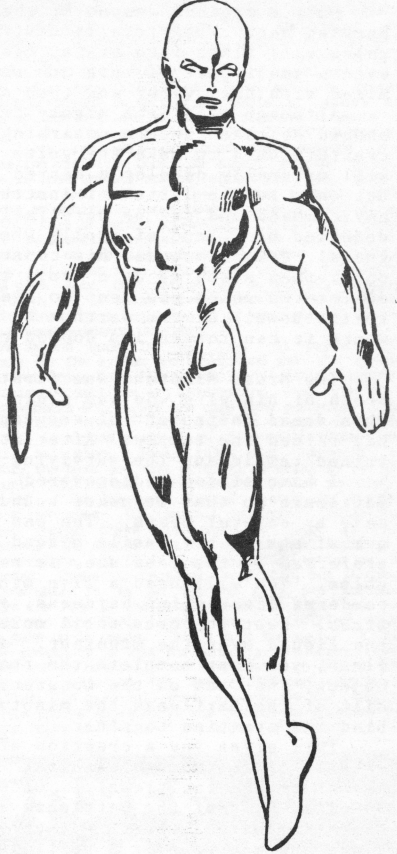
Any metal should begin in the form of raw ore, never having been worked into a tool or weapon. Creatures, when used, should be whole, unhurt and the strongest specimens available. Be aware that inferior quality materials may increase the chance of a defect or dramatic miscarriage.

These workings are extremely challenging in their complexity. For that reason, I have found that first detailing the methods you will use and then inscribing the scrolls needed for a particular construction prepares you best for the process and reduces the chance of error (creating in the process a Manual of Golem Construction suitable for repeated use). Simply reciting the spells leaves the door open to error for even the most skilled. In creating this book an ink containing some of the blood of the mage is recommended for its properties in binding the work to its creator. A manual written by another mage will serve, but may not be as reliable as a personal copy.

Most of those advanced in the arts are already at least somewhat aware of the ancient rituals for creating the four common golems. Here I will pass on to you knowledge gained from several learned colleagues on the construction of three unusual constructs which may prove useful, the **Burning Man**, the **Brass Minotaur** and the **Phantom Flyer**.

The **Burning Man** was first researched for the Man-Troll wars of Utar the Cruel. Utar was much amused by immolating his captives alive in a body-cage of wicker. The mage Tukah pandered to his liege and transformed this recreation into a formidable weapon.

Tukah began with several human and human-like creatures held within a man-shaped wicker construction (I recommend a great ape if you cannot scare up a human who will not be missed). On this form the mage cast **Burning Sphere**, **True Name**, **Wish** and **Geas**. The screams of the flaming victims became a fearsome keening, an attack that the golem can use once per day to communicate its suffering to any living creature. Anyone hearing this sound is affected with fear. Any victim has the same chance of escaping this terror as he has of evading damage when breathed upon by a dragon.



The **Burning Man** will appear as a humanoid figure of glowing red coals covered in white-hot cinders. When it strikes with its fists, burning cinders fall onto the body of its foe where they remain and will continue to burn until washed away. Each blow will add to the cinders on the victim. Unless the victim is protected from fire, the pain should be great and distract him, with a lessening of his physical abilities.

Few attacks will be effective against a construct of flame. Naturally, flame and lightning magic do not effect it, though the spell **Quench Fire** will negate the burning cinders and reduce its protection to the equivalent of studded leather armor for some minutes until it revives. Immersing the construct in water will also extinguish the cinders until it touches air again where it will relight.

Only a magical weapon of the second rank(+2) or higher will damage the **Burning Man**. When totally destroyed by damage or magic, each segment of the golem will flash into bright flame and collapse into ash. Over a great time even a small part of this ash might be able to reconstitute itself if not mixed with holy water and then scattered.

Although this is a mighty creation and a powerful servant, extreme care should be taken before embarking on this enchantment. The spirit of the creature used to make the golem is trapped in constant torment. The golem will naturally develop a hatred for its creator; it is compelled to obedience, but only to the letter of instructions. It will seek to pervert the spirit of any command and can be unreliable for many delicate uses. Utar was finally defeated by a band of trolls when he was ambushed with only a **Burning Man** as guard. Utar commanded his construct to attack the trolls. The golem did so once, then stood by as a troll tore out Utar's throat. After its master's demise the golem was seen to seek the lower parts of his stronghold which led to the bowels of the earth. No doubt it still burns in some cool dark place where it can forget its doomed condition.

The **Brass Minotaur** was first created by Relnar the Just to avenge the death of his wife who was slain in the desecration of the temple to Athene. This dread instrument of vengeance was sent in pursuit of the barbarians who had raided the temple. After it achieved this task it was sent to guard the ruined temple and the surviving Daughters of Athene until they could rebuild.

I have since rediscovered Relnar's techniques. You first enchant a **Battleaxe** so that it makes wounds that do not close and that will not heal save by natural means. The end of the hilt should be capped with a flawless gem of a size not easily hidden in your closed fist. Once this weapon, preferred by the creature, is ready, you may begin the preparation of the golem. You will need a live minotaur, **Charmed** to your will, three handfuls of powdered diamond for hardness, and the copper and tin necessary for making brass. Heat the ores until molten, mix them with the diamond dust, and pour the liquid over the minotaur. As the brass takes the place of the minotaur's flesh, you must complete the transformation by casting **Strength**, **Polymorph any Object**, and **Geas** on the monster; **Trap the Soul** and **Maze** on the jewel in the hilt of the **Battleaxe** the minotaur is holding; and finish this with a **Wish** to bind the creation together.

This gives you a creation of twice the physical power of an iron golem and with other fearsome abilities. The **Brass Minotaur**, once he sees an opponent, can track him faultlessly. Once each day he can **Trap** an opponent within the jewelled hilt of the **Battleaxe** and can pursue the doomed person within this extra-dimensional **Maze**. By entering this **Maze** the golem vanishes from this plane and may recover a portion of its strength if damaged. While in the **Maze** he can attack a victim trapped there without outside interference. Should someone find his way out of the **Maze**, he will reappear at the point where he was caught. Once an opponent is eliminated, the **Brass Minotaur** may remain safe in the **Maze** and seek his quarries as though ethereal, though he must return to material form to attack.

This golem may only be struck by magical weapons of third or higher rank(+3 or more). Lesser weapons will even shatter on its hard skin half the time. Magic has no effect on the golem, but a priest or priestess may destroy it through the use of **Find the Path**. If directed towards the gem holding the **Maze** while the **Brass Minotaur** is concealed there it will force him to take material form so that he may be attacked. When cast directly on his material form there is a small chance of instant destruction, though the mighty forces which make up this construct give it some resistance.

Finally, my own pride, the **Phantom Flyer**. This creation offers swift and discrete service in the realms of the night. In daylight it can hide from prying eyes until the light fades. To create such a faithful servant, you need two large mirrors, silver enough to fill a chalice, the pinions of a vrock, and enough fresh and unused spider silk of the dark elves to cover the pinions twice. You must set the mirrors exactly eleven paces apart, facing each other squarely. Place the pinions and silk between the mirrors, with the crucible of molten silver directly before you, between you and the wing materials. Onto this central area between the mirrors you cast **Continual Darkness**, **Evard's Black Tentacles**, **Fly**, **Wish**, **Disintegrate** and **Geas**.

What will be left is the mere reflection of a creature and a silver whistle with which to control it. The shimmering beast has a wingspan of twenty feet and two tentacles of similar length. Only one in ten persons will even be able to see it, and it constantly radiates an aura of **Forgetfulness** so that even those who see it may well forget seeing it. My black beauty flies silently, twice as swift as most dragons, and can carry two fully-equipped man-sized creatures on his back. If need arises, the **Phantom Flyer** can even lift a draft horse in his tentacles or carry messages and retrieve property and persons. The only item he cannot carry without a rider to guide him is the silver whistle used to summon and command him.

Any opponent who wishes to harm him must wield as fine an enchanted weapon as needed to strike the **Brass Minotaur**, but a foe must first find and reach my pet. Magic of flame or frost have no effect, but light spells cast on my beauty do no damage but remove his power of flight and pinpoint his position. If caught abroad during the day he must seek shelter; he canhide anywhere as a normal shadow--under a wagon, a barrel, anything convenient, and can change shape as a shadow does to face away from the sun. Only a **True Sight** spell can penetrate his disguise, though a **Detect Magic** wioll warn of his presence.

You also mentioned a desire to create some of the smaller constructs. It has been my experience that in general the man-shaped golems are more usefual than those animated slaves of lower form viz. the necrotons and necrophidii. If properly constructed, golems can perform any taks that a human servant does, but tirelessly and with greater strength. They sleep not, nor eat, nor grow covetous of their mistress' position.

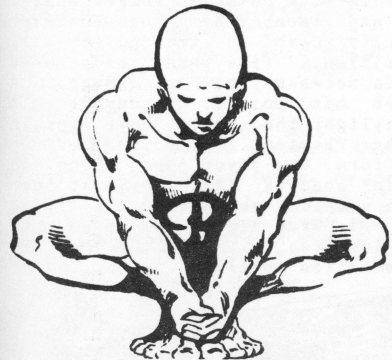
There are several tricks not commonly known even to mages skilled in the construction of golems. In enchanting an iron golem, include with the iron seven handfuls of powdered rubies, engendered in the earth by the rays of the sun. Thus, resistance to fire is obtained.

If you wish to create a flesh golem, you should take care to use fresh meat. Propinquity to a cemetery or a relationship with an executioner can be usefual. If you lack a **Lightning Bolt** spell to quicken the corpse, you might work the enchantment on a sromy night and let nature do your work. Some of these golems obtain a dim awareness after years of animation, even to the point of memory of their mortal lives. Any such creature should forthwith be destroyed, for it shall prove an unwilling--nay, even dangerous servant.

My inkwell runs dry. The time has come for me to oversee the apprentices at the looting of Gantil's hoards. I shall summon my beloved shadow servant, the **Phantom Flyer**, and have him bear this letter to you. Use the knowledge I have given you well. Your service to me has been invaluable, but be forewarned: it would go ill for you if you should sell me as you have sold your brother Gantil.

Until our ways cross again, may you dream the dreams of Cthulhu and grow in art and understanding.

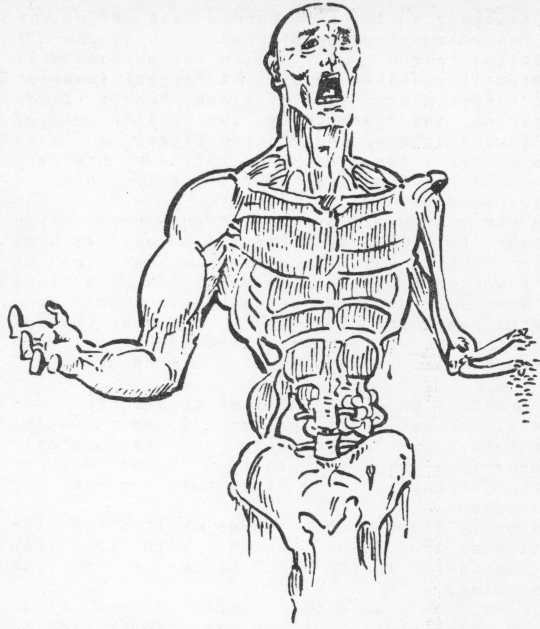
With darkest affection
Rochelyn the Animatrix



DETAILS OF CONSTRUCTION

Brass Minotaur: This golem requires 5 months of construction time by a mage of 20th level or higher at a cost of 100K GP. The minotaur has twice the strength of an iron golem and can do two points of structural damage per round. Once per day he can **Trap** an opponent's soul (standard 'to-hit' roll by 20th level creature required) in the gem in the naft of its **Battleaxe of Wounding**. Once trapped, the foe is within a **Maze** spell. He is unaffected by the maze himself and can follow into the extra-dimensional area in pursuit of a victim. Once the trapped creature is destroyed or escaped (by making the saving throw against **Maze**) the minotaur can remain in the maze and travel as though ethereal if he wishes. To attack another person he must return to the Prime Material Plane. Once the minotaur leaves the gem, it must trap another soul if it wishes to enter again. Each time it enters the maze (no more than once per day) it regains 10-60% of any damage it has sustained. The minotaur can be struck only with magical weapons of +3 or more. Lesser weapons do no damage and have 50% chance of shattering. The only magical attack which effects the minotaur is the clerical spell **Find the Path**. If the spell is cast upon the area where the minotaur disappeared with a victim, the minotaur and whoever else is in the maze is automatically dumped back onto the Prime Material Plane. If the spell is cast directly onto the minotaur, the golem has a chance to save against a spell; failure means destruction.

The Burning Man: This golem requires 3 months of construction by a mage of at least 14th level and costs 80K GP. The Burning Man has the same physical strength as a flesh golem and can do one point of structural damage per three rounds. The terrible keening of the victims inside the body is a weapon to be used once per day. Any creature within hearing of the golem must save versus breath weapon or be effected by **Fear**. When this creation attacks with its powerful fists, each successful strike transfers glowing cinders which continue to do damage at a rate of 1 point per blow which has struck in each round until they are doused with water or earth. Unless magically protected from fire, any oponent so covered will be effected as though by a **Symbol of Pain** for 2-20 minutes. Such effects are not cumulative except for damage; the maximum dexterity penalty is -2, but an opponent struck twice would



continue taking an additional two points of damage per round until doused. The Burning Man is impervious to magical attacks based on fire or lightning. The druidical spell **Quench Fire** extinguishes the cinders and reduces the golem's AC to AC 6; this lasts one round per experience level of the caster. A +2 or better weapon is needed to damage this construct. A Burning Man regenerates at a rate of one point per turn. Once hacked to pieces, this golem can only be kept from regenerating by mixing the ashes with water.

Phantom Flyer: This golem requires 3 months of construction time by a mage of 18th or higher level; it costs 90K GP. The Phantom Flyer has the strength of an iron golem and can do one point of structural damage per round. The Phantom Flyer is seen as two wings, a horse-like back and two black tentacles. It is controlled by the possessor of the silver whistle. If the whistle should become lost the flyer will simply lurk near it until someone finds and uses the whistle. The flyer is truly comfortable only in darkness. It is 90% undetectable in torchlight or less. It also radiates a constant **Forget** spell. The possessor of the whistle, however, can see and remember her pet whatever form it has assumed. Any light spell successfully cast on the golem will cause it to land. This also pinpoints its position. Fire and cold based spell do not harm it. A +3 or better weapon is necessary to do damage. A **Darkness** spell cast on the golem restores 1-8 hit points of damage. A **Continual Darkness** restores 3-17 points. In daylight the flyer must remain hidden. Any shadow of any size can conceal the Phantom Flyer, whether on ground or under an object. If noticed in this form, the flyer just seems to be a particularly dark shadow. While hiding in shadows this way, it can neither attack nor fly, but it can flow through existing shadows at its flying rate as long as an uninterrupted path exists. Only **True Sight** will reveal the golem in this form, bu if magic is **Detected** in its area a faint dweomer is evident(similar to the effect of a **Distance Distortion** spell).



ECHOES FROM THE ABYSS



Dear Abyss (Dave, Lew, etc),

I was flabbergasted! Receiving #33 was one thing, but getting #34 the next day was too much!

By the way, why don't you review some products from the Companions. I have The Curse on Hareth, an excellent module, and The Cards of Power, a useful game aid with some interesting magic items. You might also consider reviewing any of Steven Brust's books. The two part series of Therog and Yendi are great books about assassins, and go into detail on the personality of that sort of character. Psionics, teleportation and healing are a bit too common in the background he creates, but they work well in the plot. Also by Brust is To Reign in Hell, a great retelling of the revolt of the angels. I think Brust is one of the best author's I've read. It would be nice to see an article on 'The Worlds of Steven Brust'. As he has written only three books, I won't be too disappointed if you don't run such an article.

Well, that's about all I've got to say, so keep up the good work.

Your maligned
but still loyal and
sympathetic customer,
Robert C. Karcher
Chicago, IL

[We'd love to review these products, but there are limits which keep us from omniscience for the time being. There are essentially three types of reviews which we run in ABYSS. Most reviews are for games which we have received review copies of through the mail. Photos are made of the covers and then the games sent out to one of our regular reviewers who then send back their reviews. At conventions like ORIGINS various Rogmen go around to the booths of companies, especially new companies, and convince them to give up a copy of a game they are interested in which they then review for ABYSS. These two methods don't cover all the games on the market, so we also publish reviews which are sent in just like any other article. For example, Robert Karcher, fan of the Companions could send in his glowing review of some of their products accompanied by a reproducible photo or xerox of the cover of the game. This last type of review is essential and welcomed, because there are many products from obscure writers and companies which we just cannot get hold of or may never have even heard of. So, if there is a book or game you love and think should be reviewed, do it yourself and if you can convince us that other people really would like to know about it you may well see your review in ABYSS--DN]

Hiya Dave,

Saw the review of AG IV and was pleasantly surprised. Thanks.

Here's a bit to keep you up to date on Arduin and on Dave Hargrave.

To begin with, Dragon Tree is publishing a 'Second Trilogy' with the permission of Grimoire Games. The first volume you have already seen. The second, called Dark Dreams-AG V is in Dragon Trees hands (artwork and all) and should be out in August. They tell me it is better than AG IV (in their opinion).

The last volume of the second trilogy is tentatively titled The House of the Rising Sun and is being worked on now for publication sometime, hopefully, around Christmas). The format for this second trilogy was deliberately chosen to be as close to the original three

books as possible (just with better production values).

The Arduin, Bloody Arduin 600+ page monster is being redone even as you read this on our newly acquired MAC 512 for a tentative Christmas release from Grimoire Games.

Dragon Tree asked me personally (came over to my old place in Willits and, literally, camped in my front yard) to do a new Grimire. They wouldn't take no for an answer. Grimoire games liked the idea, and to tell you the truth I was itching to do something like that anyway. So here we are.

Let's see, since 1980 I did an article or two for DIFFERENT WORLDS, ABYSS and one or two other 'zines. I also did two scenario modules for Chaosium's Call of Cthulhu called 'Black Devil Mountain' and 'Dark Carnival'. Several other projects fell through, a couple after months of negotiation. Avalon Hill, Hero Games, Chaosium and others said they wanted me to work for them, but when push came to shove, there was never anything behind the words. Chaosium recently proposed that I work on a large (60 page or so) RuneQuest scenario-module for them and even sent along a contract. I huck away at it between the three new AGs, AB and such. Who knows, perhaps this one will hit the stores in '86. Let's hope so.

I really haven't dropped out. I'm still running my campaign one to three times (or more) each month, as well as getting in a few licks at other games. I've even played in a few from time to time for a change. Hooray!

Let's see...oh, I was one of the Guests of Honor at PolyCon in San Luis Obispo a while back and again at Games Caucus in San Mateo this year. Gave seminars, ran games, headed panel discussions and so forth at both--had a good time, too.

In between I've been in the hospital to have my heart looked at, started taking diabetic pills (yuck!) and sticking my finger each day to check the blood sugar level and have moved south from Willits to Ukiah. Quite a change from a beautiful all cedar house in the redwoods to a tiny, crummy apartment (noisy!) in town. Aargh!

If anyone needs professional work done, I'm your man. I've done a bit of 'ghosting' for a couple of game lines currently out when they got hard pressed for quality material, fast. So what if my name's not there, it's work and it pays, though not much, I must say.

At any rate, drop me a line or three and we can reminisce. Sheesh! I just realized I've been in this over ten years. I must be getting old!

Take Care,
Dave Hargrave
Ukiah, CA

[It's great to hear from Dave again, and I hope this will be the beginning of a 'meaningful dialog', perhaps resulting in Arduin-oriented articles or features in future issues of ABYSS. I encourage everyone to seek out the new Arduin materia, because it is one of the best developed and most imaginative role-playing campaigns I know of and should be valuable to players using any system--DN]

Dear Dave,

Well, here's another letter giving my thoughts on RE from a (starship) enterprise point of view.

ABYSS #33: 'Japanese Bestiary'-I liked this, let's have more on Japan. 'MythQuest'-Mierik is a good adventure writer, too bad he wasted his talents on By the Gods. 'RuneQuest Reincarnated'-my god, are you ever going to like anything the large companies do? 'Cross my Palm'-yep, it was short, obnoxious and pointless!. Overall-well, it finally got here, but it certainly seems a step down from 31-32. I've noticed that ABYSS does mythology and adventures best. I also suspect that you would be good at culture packs. Maybe you should write up a High Middle Ages England culture pack while over there.

ABYSS #34: 'Gods of the Slave Coast'-who plays African games? 'Behind the Wheel'-a total waste, bogged down in a mechanical quagmire.

That's about it. See if you can get ABYSS out sooner. It is still one of the best game mags.

Bryan Blackwell
Enterprise, AL

[A further note on reviews: if you disagree with a review in ABYSS we'd love to hear why, either in a letter to 'Echoes' giving some of your objections or in a well-developed counter review. While our reviewers come from varied backgrounds they do tend to develop particular interests and prejudices and certainly do not represent the only perspective. As far as culture packs, we are working on a series called 'WorldBooks' to be released in the near future. The first will be 'Utgard' which is also the 5th Ysarth supplement. One other comment, I'm sorry if Bryan and others don't play African games...they should, it's their loss--DN]

Dear Echoes and Company,

I think the usual high quality of ABYSS is going down the tubes! To be honest with you, as a whole ABYSS 33/34 really hit the rod. I think you're throwing together issues just to get people out of your hair. Put some effort into it. We all have our off days, but this has to improve soon.

First of all, in issue #33 we have 'Violence' which actually has not a damned thing to do with gaming. 'Japanese Bestiary' once again saved the issue from getting thrown away all together. Mr. Burchett keep up the good work! 'Supergames' was really bogus, just space filler! 'MythQuest' was confusing and useless. It is used with By the Gods which is used with Challengers. Come on guys! RuneQuest I mean you the hell really cares! I did like 'Cross my Palm'. It was better than the rest, but then that isn't much of a compliment.

Going to issue #34, 'Gods of the Slave Coast' was well done. 'In the Speculum' just was not that hot for me, except for the Propaganda defense section which was well done. I loved it! I'm not a real fiction fan, so 'The End of Dreams' didn't go over too well! 'Behind the Wheel' was satisfying but a bit shabby. 'Unto the Gates of Death' was

very good. I'd like to see more from John Davies.

So, my suggestion is to shape up ABYSS staff. By the way, the 'Dead German' art credit is getting old and stale, enough is enough. Thanks for the efforts.

John Green
Chicago, IL

Dear Sir,

I'm writing to suggest ways in which my opinion would improve your magazine or should I say fanzine, because ABYSS really shouldn't be called a magazine. The reason for this is mainly to be realistic about gaming unlike some other magazines. There are some things which I really must complain about.

First, you cover almost all of your games and not some of the more popular games like Advanced Dungeons and Dragons, RuneQuest, Traveller and others.

Second, I think that you should always have at least one page of letters and you should answer some of the letters that point out things in your fanzine, like this one.

Third, you waste the last page of every issue. You should use it for something called small advertisements or personal advertisements. With these advertisements gamers could sell games that they didn't like, find fellow gamers in the area or find out who has an old issue of a magazine. Please use this page even if it isn't the best article or advertisement and if you use that to mail sample issues to people, do you think that your loyal subscribers should be deprived of a page every issue so that you can give out free issues.

Fourth, another thing which I find wrong with your fanzine is its expense. For two dollars you can buy a 40 page fully color illustrated magazine which is full paged unlike your fanzine. In England fanzines cost half the price of magazines. If you say the reason you are so expensive is because you don't have advertisements, then get them. I'm sure your readers won't mind some advertisements if it brings the price down.

Finally, I must say that I have only received two of your issues, but I hope that you will think about my suggestions.

Greg Witkowski
Avon, NJ

[This is a curious letter and I'd like to address some of Greg's complaints. First, I don't really give a damn what he calls ABYSS. It is not a professional magazine in that it does not have any full time staff, but it is not a fanzine in that it is actually edited, printed and produced in accordance with professional standards and practices. In the SF field it would be called a semi-prozine...good enough? I sort of object to the complaint that we cover all of our games and not 'popular' games like AD&D, RQ and Traveller. There are several things I can say here. First, we have never run articles on a large number of our games. Second, while we have run articles on Challengers, Ysarth and To Challenge Tomorrow we have never had more than one per issue. Third, we have run a fair number of features on or for other systems, including RQ, Call of Cthulhu, Champions and especially AD&D (at least one per issue). The reason there are few articles specifically set for any of these systems is that we try to keep the majority of the articles suited to use with almost any game system so that players of both popular and unpopular systems will be able to use them. I might also note that the fact that a system is popular is really far more indicative of good marketing these days than of any kind of quality, and we will always place our emphasis on quality. Moving on, this is a section of letters and I'm answering them for the first time in over

a year. How do you like it? By the way, we do answer far more letters than we have time for directly through the mail. The last page of each issue has to be blank so we can send ABYSS through the mail by bulk rate—not just for free, but to everyone. It's either that or tack another 40 cents on the price. We'd be glad to run personal ads, but I've seen no real desire for them. We do have rates for ads. They're low and you can write us if you want to take one out. Finally, regarding the price. The reason that fanzines in the UK cost about \$1 on the average for a greater number of pages is that they are, for the most part, reproduced on high-school mimeos or office xerox machines without any printing cost or overhead. ABYSS is printed by a professional printer at some cost. The result is that ABYSS looks a hell of a lot better than most britzines, but costs a good bit more. We also offer a subscription discount which lowers the actual price, something you don't find in the UK. Also, ABYSS averages about 1000 words per page, more than any larger format magazine or any fanzine. The amount of text you get in an issue of ABYSS is about twice what you would find in DRAGON and I also think the quality of thought is a good bit better. Sorry to rant on so long, but I think ABYSS is really a better deal than most anything else on the market—but I am a bit biased—DN]

Dear David,

I am writing this letter in response to a review I saw in issue #33 of ABYSS. I have no objection to the opinion of our game Villains and Vigilantes taken by the reviewer. After all, anyone is entitled to their opinion and reviews are only opinions. The fact that I would disagree is obvious and the reasons are far to lengthy to warrant discussion in this format.

What bothered me about the review is that Lew Bryson states that FGJ has apparently abandoned V&V because he has not seen any support material. Funny thing, we have only published 12 adventures for this game and are currently doing one each month. This is more than any of the other games listed. I do assume that Mr. Bryson is from Planet Earth

and wonder how a responsible reviewer could be unaware of this, especially as these have been advertised for years.

It is also worthy to note that the original V&V predates all other games reviewed as the first edition was released in March of 1979. This is only worthy of note in that Mr. Bryson makes a point of commenting that one of the other games appeared to be the oldest of the bunch.

So, despite my refusal to take ignorant reviewers seriously, I would appreciate your getting the simple facts straight. The only other review that inked me in recent months was one that had all the prices wrong. Here, I cannot make that objection as none were listed.

Scott B. Bizar
Fantasy Games Unlimited
Mineola, NY

[Well, there is some doubt as to Lew's origin, and he is in fact from Paradise, PA, which is about as far from the beaten tracks of gaming as you can get. To back him up, I have played V&V and support all his general criticisms. I don't live in a backwater (Austin & DC), and I find it nearly impossible to get hold of FGJ products. FGJ's distribution is terrible and until recently their advertising has been virtually non-existent, and if I can't even find a copy of V&V itself here in Austin, how is Lew supposed to find supplements in Paradise. If FGJ made an effort to keep magazines informed of new releases and sent out review copies the way other publishers do, this might not be a problem. I'm not being critical here, I think they are pulling this together. They did give us a number of items for review while we were at ORIGINS, and you should be seeing the reviews here soon. As Scott's other comments, I can only say that I know Lew to be a credit to Librarians everywhere, and that I believe he will be writing with his own response next issue and that should clear everything up—DN]

THE EYE OF ODIN OLLAZREN THE STORYTELLER

The rain fell in sheets and a stiff wind tore at my cloak as I made my way down the Street of the Gods towards the Temple of Bragi. It was the kind of day that makes you feel you should never have gotten out of bed. Had I known the events which were coming to meet me I probably would have gone with the urge to stay asleep.

Eventually I reached the crowded temple. Twenty or so acolyte skalds were gathered inside the darkened mainchamber listening to a master perform some ancient lay in a language I could not understand. I took a seat in the rear of the room anyway, hoping that the next skald would offer something I could understand and perhaps add to my own repertoire.

Boredom sent my eyes wandering around the room. Thus I was the first to see the wounded man stumble into the temple and collapse. As I ran over to him my eyes took in many details. His clothes were torn and dirty, as if he had travelled far through rough lands at some speed. His exposed flesh was covered with cuts and bruises, many obviously caused by combat. The most striking detail was the large, black wound on his chest, visible through his slit jerkin. As I approached him I could smell the stench of his punctured bowels.

"I have seen the Eye of Odin," he whispered to me as I cradled his head in my lap. "It is in the North..." With those words he fell silent and lapsed into unconsciousness.

I had already shouted out once and after hearing this I called for aid again. I thought he was delirious and paid little heed to his words. Little did I know then what those words portended.

When the priest arrived, he attempted a variety of healing prayers, but he soon turned to me and said, "It's hopeless. I've no idea how he got this foul wound, but it is beyond my powers to heal. Has he told you who he is? Did he say anything?"

"He said something about seeing the eye of odin..."

"The Eye of Odin!" He shrieked. Suddenly he turned and yelled, "Call the High Priest! Assemble the best healers! This man must be saved! He has looked on the Eye of Odin!"

Three more priests hurried to carry the wounded man into the inner sanctum. I followed along and was allowed to watch as the priest-skalds did their best to save the man. After many tries the High Priest placed his hands to the man's temples. I later learned that he was communing with the man's rapidly fading spirit. Despite these efforts he soon gave out a death rattle and his spirit sped to Valhalla.

Later that afternoon, the High Priest called me to his office. He offered me something to eat and smiled knowingly, immediately arousing my suspicions.

"Ollazran, as I recall, you were the first to encounter the wounded man and it was upon you that he laid his Quest."

"What quest would that be Holy One," I replied, sensing the first signs of a 'thrilling adventure' of which I was to be the victim.

"This quest is to obtain the Eye of Odin and return to the temple of Odin here in Ptolemeias where it belongs, of course," he said with a smile.

"What's to keep me from winding up like that other guy." I had no desire to meet with a similar fate, ending with a large, putrid hole in my chest.

Upon hearing those words the High Priest's smile widened. "You don't think we expect you to undertake this quest alone? The Temples of Odin, Aegir, and Van have volunteered people to accompany you. The party will number seven, including yourself. It is an auspicious number. Surely a party of seven capable men can succeed at the task at hand?"

The look in the High Priest's eyes told me I didn't really have much choice in the matter. He told me to meet the rest of the party early the next morning in front of the Temple of Odin. As I left I wondered how many capable men had accompanied the dead man on his quest and what had become of them.

What a collection of losers, I thought to myself on seeing my fellow questors. The Temple of Bragi had sent a bard by the name of Kabrelle to accompany me, but since it is the nature of bards to be useless, I just ignored him. The Temple of Odin had sent three men in a fit of zealous one-ups-manship. One was a shifty looking warrior who called himself Venster. Another was a tall plain-faced warrior named Colyn, who was from my native land of Lloeygr. The final Odinite, Gyllim the Dwarf, appeared the only one of the bunch who was barely useful, a stout, if depressingly short, fighter who could obviously defend himself. From the Temple of Aegir, came an elf, Vyldechere, a hydromancer who was appeared to be somewhat retarded. The final member of the party stood out among the others despite his disreputable appearance. He was Orm Thegnson from the Temple of Van. A tall, blonde haired Vaen nomad, he claimed to be a shaman in training for his tribe, the Rugia. He carried no weapon save a short wooden lance that looked as if it would break the first time he entered combat. He didn't handle it with particular skill, for that matter. His face was fixed in a grimly serious expression that made him appear ridiculous yet noble at the same time. Something about him troubled me.

After a brief of introduction and a shaking of hands all round, we mounted our horses and set out on our quest. I kept quiet and listened to my companions as they talked, trying to gauge their combat experience and discover what useful skills they had. To my horror most of them seemed to have never done anything of worth in their entire lives. Except for Kabrelle and Gyllim, they were inexperienced and inept. Even the two veterans seemed to have minor psychological problems which made me wonder about their ultimate value. The only person who I still was not sure of was the enigmatic Orm, who remained quiet and serious. I later found out why he didn't speak; he could only speak Vaen.

Slowly the realization dawned that we were expendable and this was a suicide mission. They didn't really expect us to succeed. They were merely clearing unwanted rabble from their temples. If we failed, they would be rid of us, and if we succeeded, they would have the Eye of Odin.

At that point I resolved that somehow, someday I would find the Eye of Odin, whatever it might be, and return with it and all my companions intact. My only clues were that the dead man had passed on to the High Priest, in his final moments, that he had been in the city of Zaeglin on his return journey and that the Eye was in a land where it was extremely cold yet never snowed. This information would surely lead eventually to the Eye of Odin. Once it was found I would return to Ptolemeias and shove it up the High Priests' ass. I would prove that I, Ollazran, am not a loser, despite the company they put me in.

The first days of the journey took us to the Northeast, passing through the city of Hlaye to the town of Yfellenrhyd. The land about us changed slowly from the rich farmlands near Ptolemeias to the deep forests and foothills of the Kingdom of Seisyllwch. Fortunately we did not meet any of the bands of highwaymen that roam the road between Hlaye and Yfellenrhyd, a blessing as our kitterish crew probably couldn't have handled them.

It was on our fifth day out from Ptolemeias, just before we reached Yfellenrhyd, that our first mishap occurred. It had rained the evening before and everything was wet and muddy, including us. Around noon we encountered an

enormous puddle that covered the whole road. It didn't seem very deep, but something about its appearance disturbed me. I got off my horse and probed the puddle with my foot. Remarkably, instead of sinking into the water, my foot created an indentation in the surface.

"What kind of foul magic is this?", I murmured to myself. Then I yelled back to the party, "We'd best ride around this puddle, there's something strange about it. It could be dangerous." Most of the party immediately complied and began to ride around. The only member of the party who didn't speak Cansa, Orm, gave me a look usually reserved for babbling madmen and ignored my warnings. He rode unwittingly onto the middle of the gigantic bubble disguised as a puddle.

Naturally, the bubble burst under the weight of Orm and his horse. The hole it disguised was about twenty feet deep. Orm and his horse plunged within and landed with a tremendous thud. The horse hit first snapping all four legs in the process. Orm slid off, breaking his left arm as he slammed into the side of the pit.

Quickly I went to my packhorse for a rope. With Gyllim and Colyn holding the end I climbed down and tried to help Orm. As soon as I saw his arm I knew it was broken. I tried to set and splint it, but he refused let me. With his good hand he drew a dagger from his jerkin. Grimly he staggered over the body of his fallen mount. He silenced its piteous screams quickly with his dagger, and began to chant in Vaen, while squatting on the ground at its side. I later found out that Orm was consecrating the blood of his horse to Van. After securely binding his injured arm I tied a rope around his waist and the two men above me pulled him up.

After an hour's travel we managed to get clear of the area. We encountered other bubble puddles but passed them without incident. In the coming days, Orm would show an unusual interest in foreign languages, particularly Cansa. For my part I wondered what forces had created these treacherous pitfalls and just what it was we had to face. I remembered the smiling face of the priest who had sent me on this one-way mission and resolved once again to remove that smirk.

On the evening of the fifth day we reached Yfelenrhyd. Yfelenrhyd is a large, walled town on the river Effernw, at the base of the Steppes. The steppes are a gigantic grassy plain which turns to tundra in the far north. They are the home of the Vaen tribes, an apparently purposeless nomadic people of which Orm was a member.

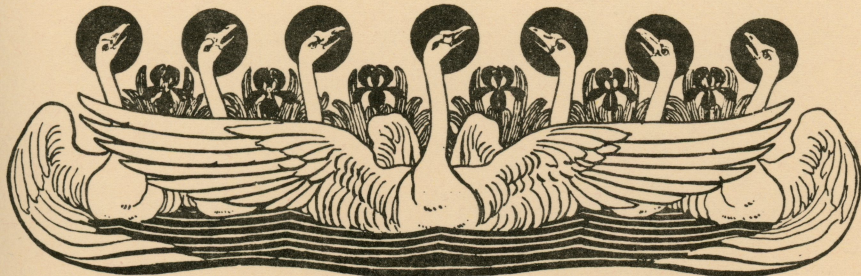
As soon as I had found a suitable inn, a place called the Black Pheasant, I went inside and began to drink heavily, something I don't ordinarily do. But had you been listening to Kabrelle tune his harp and play the same song over and over, or hearing Vydachere conjecture on possible ways to create giant bubbles, you would have been drinking heavily too.

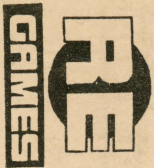
The only people I would let sit with me while I drank were Orm, because he couldn't speak a language I understood, and Gyllim the dwarf. Gyllim was not a total loss. He actually had experience as a fighter and could handle his weapon fairly well. He seemed intelligent, and though he seemed somewhat sullen and moody he differed from the rest in that he was not constantly obnoxious.

I happened to know the Aesir and their priests tend towards a prejudice against dwarves. I figured that this must have been the reason he was sent with the rest of the losers. The idea of a dwarf worshipping Odin was repugnant to both church and god. Eventually I stumbled up to bed. I woke up in the morning with a hangover and my purse light thirty silver marks. Well, such is life.

At breakfast I questioned a merchant about how best to reach Zaeglin. I found out that in order to get there we must cross a good portion of the steppes, an area dominated by several mid-sized Vaen tribes. He warned me that the Vaen were slimy bastards and we would probably have to pay off a few chieftains to cross the steppes safely. I wasn't too worried. I figured that any race that had spawned Orm couldn't be all that clever and would be easy to sway with the lure of a few bright pieces of gold.

Thanking the merchant, I finished my milk and left. I had refrained from eating, as I still wasn't feeling to well and the conduct of my companions left me with only grim visions of the future.





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