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THE GAMING ALTERNATIVE

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CONJURINGS

Here it is again, a column and a half of blank space to be filled. So, what's going on that can fill this space.

Well, the big news around here is ORIGINS, the national gaming convention, which happens this weekend, and for which this issue of ABYSS is being madly rushed to the printer. Once again, we're featuring enlarged type, plus a selection of your favorite writers on appealing topics, at least so I hope.

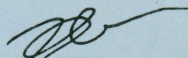
One notable item this issue is the pair of morbid little adventures from Eric Olson and myself, to be found this issue. Continuing the morbid theme, check out A. Sadel's 'The Fifth Musician', a bit of fantasy fiction, a sequel to the story in ABYSS #34. Eric Olson continues his much lauded presence with a bit on concealed weapons called 'The Viper's Kiss'.

And finally, bowing to munchkin pressure, you'll find my article on magic items leading off, with a bit of theory for the more ambitious among us and a large selection of items for the hardware-oriented. Naturally, you'll also find all of the usual features this issue, including letters and reviews.

Things are also moving fast here at Ragnarok, highlighted by the long-awaited release of Siege and Fortress, the comprehensive gaming aid we've been working on since 1982 and which a lot of faithful customers have been waiting for for an awfully long time. Siege and Fortress premiers at ORIGINS and we are expecting quite a warm reception.

Speaking of ORIGINS, this year ABYSS is once again nominated as 'Best Amateur Magazine'. I think this makes 5 or 6 nominations in a row, and maybe, for a change of pace, we'll actually win this year. If not, maybe they'll make a special award for the most nominations without winning. Also nominated as 'Best Fantasy Game of 1985' is Suburban Slasher, the first game of the Psychos & Slashers series. It is a good, sick game, but it is up against some tough competition, so we aren't holding our breath waiting for an award.

That's about it from me for this issue. Come by and see us. This year we will be in attendance at both ORIGINS and GENCON. Meet a ragman in person. It can be a rewarding experience.



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ART CREDITS

All art this issue from
Munchner Jugend, except on
p. 22 by Peter Chen

PRACTICAL MAGIC

DAVE NALLE

Too many role-playing campaigns, especially among the great mass of AD&D players, are afflicted not only with the proliferation of magic items but with magic items of inferior design and quality. Quite simply, there are good and bad magic items, and too many of the magic items presented by games like AD&D are just bad items. This is the result of proliferation of magic which demands that there be a large selection of items without regard to such mundanities as a reason for those items existence or the means by which they were created.

More than one campaign has been destroyed by unchecked availability of magic which causes power levels in play to escalate to a point where it is not the character who matters but the items which he carries. In addition, if items are just cobbled together monstrosities with no coherent purpose to them, they become hard to take seriously, as do the characters who bear them. To be an effective gamemaster you need the respect of your players, and they will not respect your efforts if they produce magic items which are little more than random assortments of powers. If you care so little about your campaign that you don't take care to make magic items believable, the characters players create may show as little care as well and be illogical cyphers without real personality. There are two basic steps which can be taken to prevent this and improve a campaign plagued by overwhelming and unrealistic magic.

First and simplest, you can limit the amount of magic available in your campaign. All this takes is a measure of willpower and the ability to convince players that they can get more out of an adventure than some new powerful bauble which may make them more capable of slaughtering orcs, but does nothing to advance the growth of the personality or uniqueness of their characters.

The second step is more difficult and the more interesting. As a Gamemaster, you can take the initiative to assure that all of the magic items available in your campaign, no matter what their numbers, are characterized by internal logic, with a reason for existing, a believable function, an origin and a practical technical basis. If you make the magic items you use interesting, original and believable then they will help players understand their world and will not interfere with role-playing and imaginative participation in the campaign.

There are a number of ways to look at magic items and their nature. One of the most basic is to divide them up by source and nature of their origin. Essentially there are two ways that magic items can come into existence, either by natural or artificial means. Artificial items are more familiar to most gamers. They are those items which are created by a mage of some sort to serve a specific function, to do particular things within certain limits, perhaps even created to the order of some customer or for a special situation. The selection of powers in an artificial item is

determined by some human agency, but usually the item is intended to serve some purpose, so all of the powers will share a unity of function, in that they will all contribute in some way to a particular goal. For example, all the powers in a sword might be of value in combat or in battle. Natural items are not created by a conscious process. They are the type of item often found in good fantasy fiction. They are essentially self created or created by a situation or special circumstances. Rather than being made, they are grown. For example, if a great hero used a sword for all his life and killed many foes with it and it were then interred with him, when that sword came to the hands of someone centuries later it might bear an imprint of the personality and deeds of that hero. Over time such an item might gather mana to it and develop some appropriate powers. This type of thing is likely to happen with items which are closely associated with persons of great personal power, essentially making them into relics which have genuine magical powers. Of course, an item can go through this process much faster if it is involved even briefly as a central part of a truly momentous event. For example, the spear which pierced Christ's side was only associated with him briefly, but its role was



sufficiently important that it would be elevated beyond the normal status of a spear and by a natural process it would become a magical relic. The essence of natural creation of magic items is that there is a unity of logic, so that whatever powers it has are related to the nature and source of its origin and generally guided by consistent internal logic.

One of the most important considerations in designing magic items for a campaign is the source of the magic in the item and the nature by which it is restored. While magic is not a science in the real world, there are certain set rules which can be established or adopted to govern it with some logic. Perhaps the most important of these is that you don't get something for nothing, and for an item to perform magical wonders it must have a source of power, be that something internal or external. This source of power is generally called mana and is found throughout the world more or less evenly dispersed, though it becomes somewhat more concentrated in magic items, people and magical creatures. As mana is expended it can provide the magical power to create a desired effect. Most magic items have a reservoir of mana points which are spent for them to work. Some work by other means, and the five main types of magic items are outlined here. Not all of these types of items are equally powerful and they are not necessarily interchangeable.

Constant Power: This is probably the most powerful and least likely type of item. This type of item apparently has an unlimited amount of mana available to it, which it gathers by some means from the surrounding area. In such an item the power is always available to be used as called on. This type of item can be given interesting side effects, such as draining other nearby items, people or the general atmosphere of mana.

Spirit Power: This is probably the most logical power system for magic items which are fairly potent. In such an item a spirit or soul of some sort is imprisoned in the item to serve as the repository for the mana of the item in exactly the same way that the spirit of a human mage stores up mana so that he can cast spells. In this type of item, the powers of the item are essentially the spells of the spirit which is bound to it, and it casts them as long as it has the mana to do so and regenerates at its normal rate. There are problems with this sort of item. For example, if the spirit is not extremely well restrained by magic it may develop a will of its own and begin to decide for itself when and how to use its powers, rather than obeying its owner. Most of the potential problems with this sort of item are inherent in the fact that spirits have a natural origin and are beyond the scope of the creator of the item to define and control.

Regenerating Power: It is also possible to set up items which work essentially like those which are spirit based, but regenerate their mana according to strict principles on a mechanical basis. Such an item would be enchanted to attract mana to recharge itself after each use at a predetermined rate. For example, the power would be used once and then not usable again for a period of 3 hours while it gathers the mana necessary to function again. The

rate at which an item regenerates might depend on the amount of mana needed to use the power of the item. Some versions of this item type can be quite sophisticated, with different powers regenerating at different rates.

Reservoir Power: This sort of magic item operates from a reservoir of a certain amount of mana which does not regenerate under normal circumstances. Each use of the item consumes a certain portion of the mana reserve, sometimes referred to as a charge. In complex versions of this type of item there may be a number of different powers which consume different amounts of mana from the reservoir. In many campaigns this sort of item can be recharged by a mage with the appropriate abilities.

Empty Matrix: This sort of item is the simplest and most basic. The item itself is merely imprinted with the form of a power, which is used to shape the mana of the user into a functioning power. In essence, the user sends his own mana through the item and the item shapes it into a magical effect. The only real drawback of this sort of item is that the user must be able to provide the mana to operate it and that may cut into his magical potential for casting spells himself.

Taking these five types of items and the idea of natural and created origins for items, it is pretty clear that naturally generated items will tend to be of the first three types, while the last two types are likely to be artificially created, though there are no hard and fast rules, as sophisticated mages could certainly imprison a spirit in an item fairly easily.

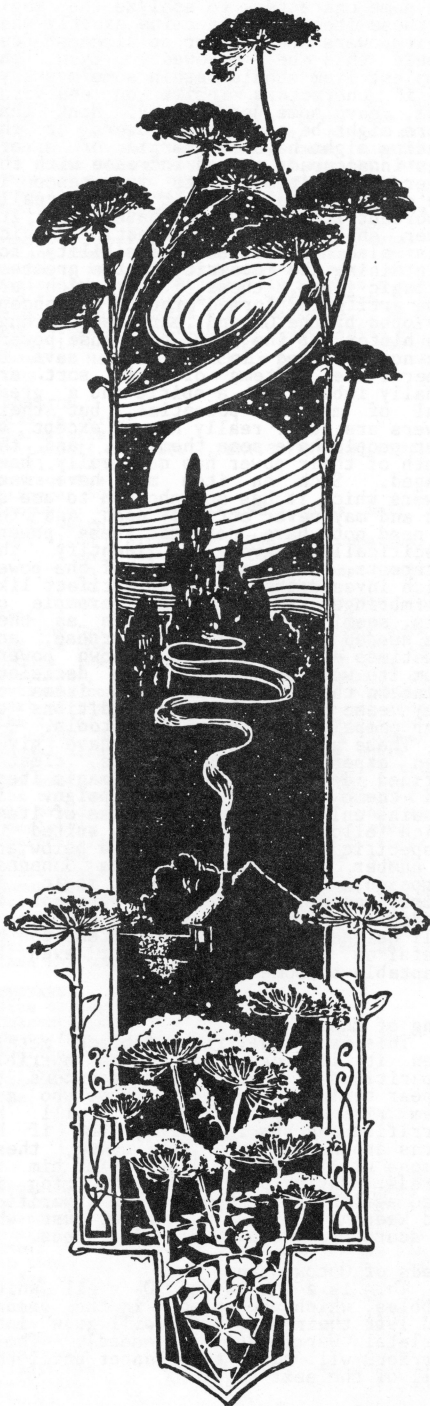
One other mechanical factor to consider when making magic items is the nature of the trigger or activating circumstance of the item. Most of us assume that items will be triggered on command, but there is no real standard for what the nature of that command should be and some GMs may not be aware of alternative forms of trigger or motivation for sophisticated items. The two most basic triggers are either a mental command or some sort of switch or button equivalent. With the first sort of trigger, the item must be sensitive to the mental command of the user and be able to accept and interpret that command when formulated properly, though that format may be something special and specific. In some cases an item may even respond to set verbal commands, hand signals or even music, and some items may even be capable of responding or discussing their orders. In the case of items with spirits and awareness they may be capable of choosing to follow orders only when they want to or only when those orders serve some personal goal or orientation of the item. A physical, concrete trigger could take almost any form, including such things as movable sections, pressed gems or panels, etc. Other more unusual types of trigger may not come to mind as readily. Some items may require specific conditions or situations to be triggered, and may be triggered automatically in those situations, or not be able to be triggered by a command except under the right conditions, which may be highly specialized. For example, an item might only work by night, in the light of the full moon, or when used against women. The nature of such limitations would tend

to depend on the intent of the designer. Other items might require a set ritual or invocation before operating, or even a sacrifice of some sort. There are many such ways to limit and define the triggering circumstances of an item, and this can be one way of controlling the power of magic items and giving them some individuality.

Something which many magical theorists suggest when discussing magic items is the idea of balancing every item, so that it has negative factors or powers as well as its positive and valuable powers. This concept has some validity, as it is impossible to keep magic within limits and reinforce for players the basic principle that nothing is really free. Two things also need to be considered here. First, limitations on items need not be in the form of negative powers and not all items need to have limitations. Some items may have social limitations, such as having their powers and nature well known, or practical limitations such as personality quirks or demanding human sacrifice. Second, what limitations you use in an item should fit the logic of the item. It would be particularly good if the bad aspects of an item were offshoots of the main powers or dangerous side-effects.

When, as a gamemaster, you create a magic item, you should approach it with an awareness of the constraints operating on the creator of that item in the campaign world as well as attention to the role you want it to play in your world. You should consider the number and types of items which you want to have available in your campaign, and such factors as whether it should be possible to buy minor items or if they should be so rare that they can only be discovered in obscure places or granted as gifts of the gods. Also to be considered is the possibility that items might be able to be custom manufactured for player characters, and you should have some guidelines for this. In general, the proliferation of magic items can hurt a campaign, though the occasional well thought out item adds an element of the fantastic. In most fantasy literature magic items of any kind are rare, with only the occasional high-powered, god or demon inspired artifact showing up to sway the balance of the world. Such items as the Holy Grail, Excalibur, Durendal, Stormbringer and the Ring of Andvari fit into this category. However, some campaigns will have a higher general level of magic, so that minor items may be common. This will require more monitoring by the GM, and in this sort of circumstance the nature and origin of the item is particularly important to keep in mind. Always think of where an item came from. Let this guide its nature and powers. If the item was created to as an aid for a ship's captain, give it control of winds, weather prediction, even water breathing, but don't give it the power to throw fireballs. If the item was the sword of a vicious marauder, don't give it healing powers or the ability to charm animals. Let it drink blood, get extra damage on women and children or inspire fear. Keep origin and purpose in mind, and remember that magic items take a lot of effort to make and should be both useful and economical in their design.

Above all else, magic items are surrounded in mystery, something which many GMs sacrifice for practical



purposes. One of the largest problems in putting magic items into a campaign, particularly with AD&D, is the potential for some characters to analyze the magic of those items and determine exactly what their powers are. Under no circumstances should this be allowed. Even the simplest item should retain some mystery, and if characters insist on analyzing them, leave some uncertainty. Hint that there might be additional powers or the reading might have a margin of error. This inaccuracy should increase with the power of the item and its importance in the campaign, and if it is a really important item, it should have among its power shielding from detection magic. This also leaves the possibility for maintaining the integrity of the greatest of magic items, those items which are true artifacts, formed around a concept developed by the GM and expanded through the history of the item, but whose powers are not defined in any way, save by general area. Items of this sort are usually imbued with a spirit and a great deal of magical potential, but their powers are never really known, except by what people have seen them do, and the depth of their power has not really been gauged. Such an item may have many powers which it has not chosen to use as yet and may never actually need, and the GM need not have defined these powers specifically, save to identify the interests, limits and domain of the power which invests the item. An artifact like Stormbringer is the perfect example of this, seeming to develop powers as they are needed to fulfill its purpose, and sometimes even withholding known powers from its wielder by its own decision. Maintain the mystery of magic items or they cease to be fantastic additions to your campaign and become drab tools.

These guidelines should have given even experienced GMs a more clearly defined idea of the nature of magic items and their role in the campaign. It remains only to provide examples of items which follow these guidelines, suited to a specific campaign. Described below are a number of items from the Jahannam campaign, a campaign where magic is fairly scarce, but when it is present it tends to be fairly powerful and have a well defined purpose. These items can be useful as examples and might even be adaptable to some campaigns.

Ring of Ezhaz

This is a small ring of black metal. When it is worn, it causes horrible apparitions of demons and monsters to appear behind the wearer. Those who see them rising up behind him will be horrified and run in terror, but if he turns around to see the cause, these demons will become real and rip him to shreds. Having people who the ring is used against point towards the apparition and keeping the user unaware of just why he scares people away are good ideas.

Seeds of Ostoxanbandi

This is a bag with 30 small white pebbles, which when placed in the ground and left their over night will grow into Skeletal Warriors(1 per seed). These warriors will serve the planter until the fall of the next night.

Wand of Greater Sealings

This wand is limited to 3 charges, after which it cannot be recharged. It has the power to seal doors and gates of a magical nature which have been opened, including gates between planes. It seals them permanently, with a sealing spell of 100th level, which cannot be broken by a spell of lower level. The wand must be touched to the door to be sealed, and is 3ft long.

The Key of The Planes

This 'key' is actually a long metal rod with inscriptions all over it, giving a lengthy phonetic chant to use to activate the rod. Using the rod drains off 75 Mana Points from the user, or for AD&D the equivalent of 15 levels of spells. It can be touched to any previous or closed planal gate or to a weak point between two planes of existence, and it will open that gate or form an opening. That opening or opened gate will stay open for 1 hour. It will dispell sealing spells of up to 100th level. The cost to open some gates which have been closed for a very long time may be slightly greater.

Dark Arm of Sutekh

This is a cestus, designed to be worn on the right hand and made of a reddish crystal. In addition to working as +2/+2 doing 1D12 damage as a cestus, it makes the wearer's hand totally immune to magic of all kinds, allowing him to touch and manipulate otherwise deadly items. It is also fire, cold and radiation proof.

Staff of Tab'id

This 4ft long staff of ancient, petrified wood is a very powerful magic item. It has 50 charges, which may be expended at a variable rate as needed. Each charge dismisses one level worth of extra planal being to his plane of origin if the bearer can strike that being with it and if the being fails his save. Extra charges can be expended to lower the save at -1 per extra charge. It cannot be recharged.

Sword of Dhelu

This is a magical shortsword developed by the ancient exorcist Dhelu. It is +3/+3 and does 1D10 damage, but its main remarkable property is that if it kills someone his spirit or any spirit possessing him is imprisoned in the sword until it can break free or until it is imprisoned elsewhere with appropriate spells. Generally a spirit will remain imprisoned for 100/WIL hours. For AD&D use experience level instead of WIL.

Hammer of Dusares

This is a large, hammer with a long shaft, intended to be used in two hands. In order to even pick it up a character must have a STR of at least 15. However, those who can wield it can do much with it. When struck on the ground, there is a STRx2% chance of causing a minor earthquake, lasting about one CR, causing all those within a quarter mile to have to save against being unbalanced and falling down. In combat it does 1D20 damage, is used in 2 hands and is +(STR/3)-4 to hit. It also does a great deal of structural damage, three times the normal damage. It also gives the bearer a DEXx3% chance of deflecting meteors, should any come his way. The

item is holy to the earth god Dusares, and he may chose to repossess it if it is used too much. In addition, it will tend to act to benefit Dusares above all else, so if the character has an opportunity to help Dusares it may try to encourage him by only using its powers if the character works in the service of its master.

Iron Crown of Axieras

This crown represents the power of the earth goddess Axieras. It is a simple iron circlet with a single turquoise set in it. It gives the wearer 50% protection from damage from any elemental attack and discourages animals from molesting the wearer 50% of the time. It also gives the ability to command animals to do reasonable actions which do not endanger their lives a great deal. The wearer may also speak with animals, and may ask the crown one question per day which it will answer truthfully and accurately so long as it has to do with the realm of natural things. It is sacred to Axieras, and she may take it back at any time. In addition, if there is an opportunity for the wearer to advance the causes of Axieras it will encourage such a course by limiting access to its powers until the character follows the right course. If the wearer attacks or damages a wild beast while wearing it, it will shrink until it crushes that person's head.

Sword of Aran

This is the sacred sword of the ancestors of Kings of Arania. It is a Greatsword and is +4/+4, doing 1D12 damage. Most of its powers are not combat related, but related to abilities needed by a king and war leader. It has the power to cloud mens minds and cause confusion, to still the seas and storms and to inform the bearer if anyone who he is speaking with is lying. It is not used frequently, because each use of one of the major powers has a 30% chance of costing the user 1 point of CON.

Eye of the Marid

This is a copper amulet bearing an aquamarine stone. It has in it part of the power of a Marid, which is a greater water elemental. While wearing it the wearer cannot drown or be harmed by water or creatures of the water. Water will reject his body and creatures of the element will shy away from him. It has no other notable effects, and the powers wear off after a year and a day.

The Bow of Eros

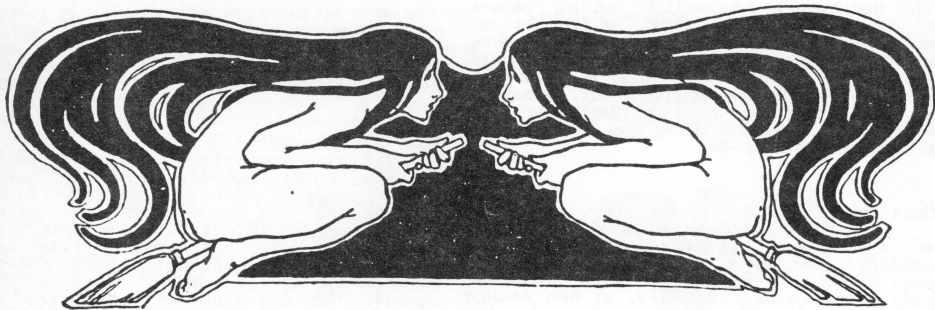
This is the traditional bow of this minor godling, but it is cleverly disguised as a fairly normal magical bow which is +2/+2. However, anyone hit by an arrow fired from it has to make a WILx2% roll (use WIS for AD&D), or fall unconscious regardless of the damage done. When he awakens the first person of the opposite gender whom he sees will be the love of his life and he will pursue her madly. The unconscious state lasts for 10 minutes. If the wielder of the bow should slay someone with it or kill someone hit with an arrow from it, he will be punished by losing the bow at the first opportunity and becoming the first target of the new owner by the will of the gods. Also, the love into which he falls in this circumstance will be unrequited, destructive and even perhaps homosexual.

The Wand of the Winds

This wand has implanted in it the matrics for the spells Wind Blast, Create Wind and Wall of Wind, which can be used by paying the appropriate cost in Mana Points and channeling that magic through the wand, which has a natural Magic Index of 300, which is added to the MI of the person using it. For AD&D this item will work best if you choose three appropriate wind-type spells and allow the bearer to cast them in place of one of their normal spells of the same level.

Sword of Spes

This item is an impressive and valuable looking Short Sword. It is a decent weapon in combat, being +3/+3 and +3 on defense, doing 1D8 damage. But its main powers are for leadership. It causes the bearer to be completely without fear or caution, though he is not aware of this. He will enter unwinnable situations happily, sure of his ultimate victory. In addition, there is a 60-INT% chance for each person he attempts to lead to believe him and also share his unrealistic optimism. Everyone who he leads under these circumstances gets a +2/+2 bonus in combat, but despite their beliefs, which they will hold to the gate of death, there is no guarantee of victory.



ECHOES FROM THE ABYSS



Dear Dave,

Relieve your baited breath and rest easy. I've removed the last dusty shekels from my vault and converted them, by means of arcane transformation, into an eighteen dollar check for another eighteen issues of ABYSS. Of all the blackened pits into which I regularly hurl my money, I must admit that ABYSS gives me one of the most enjoyable returns on my investment.

I have a few brief comments on ABYSS #36, 'African Cults', would have been far more useful and interesting if you had gone below the superficial level of description which characterizes so many of your articles of this kind. If you don't have the space to do it right, don't do it. I love 'In the Speculum', but I tire of your magazine's continual tirades against TSR. I respect the fact that you are up front about your opinions and biases in this area, but I'm also well aware of them by now, so why waste space endlessly rehashing them? Lastly, 'Revenge in Rio' was an excellent adventure, with one major flaw: the detailed citymap reproduced in the central two pages was unreadable. Again, if you're not willing to devote enough space to a subject to make it viable (or just comprehensible), why print it at all?

I'd like to say in closing that it is nice to see that there are still people out there producing game products as much for the sake of fun and creative expression as for profit. Keep up the good work.

Garrett Menning
San Jose, CA

[Sorry about the superficiality of 'African Cults', but it is a surprisingly obscure topic, given to the study of Anthropologists rather than true Mythologists, so little more detail is available. As for tirades against TSR, we will try to keep them to a minimum, and who knows, maybe we'll do an occasional favorable review, depending on the availability of good products, of course. I still think that there is some merit in warning readers off about particularly bad items. As for the map in 'Revenge in Rio', we have the problem of needing to work with out of copyright or uncopyrighted material, and in this case, in order to include the whole map, we had to reduce it a bit, though I thought it was to the border of legibility, but perhaps others have less strong eyes. We'll try to do better henceforth.--DN]

Dear Dave,

I have enclosed an SASE, please send me submission guidelines for art and articles for ABYSS. By the way, I love your magazine! Though I have received only three issues (#35-37), it has proven to be well worth the cost of the subscription. I really wish it was monthly, and larger, both in format and number of pages. I personally would pay

more to see ABYSS improved. Then it could really compete with DRAGON magazine.

I ordered the old edition of *Ysgarth*, and plan to get around to buying the new edition this summer. I really enjoy the edition I have, and even though I gamemaster for a group of fanatic *Dragonquest* players, I found they thought highly of *Ysgarth*. We are all sword foes of TSR and its games. We are trying to introduce the new generation of role-playing games to other gamers who have never played anything but AD&D. The poor wretches have no idea what they are missing.

Some comments on ABYSS. The number of reviews is nice, but I'd rather see great articles like 'Creative Campaigns' by Eric Olson, instead. Not wanting to sound contradictory, but what about reviewing fantasy movies? Very few ever come out, and I have yet to see a really good one, but if there is one, how about letting us know about it. Keep the larger print. I hate the thought of having things cut out of the magazine, but at least now it is easier to read what is there.

Best of luck to you and your company. I hope that one day Ragnarok Enterprises becomes as successful as it deserves.

Quin McConnell
Hermiston, OR

[I wish we could increase the number of pages and the size of our pages, and I'm glad that some readers would pay more for this, but to actually achieve this, we need more readers, not more money from the readers we have. To go into a larger format we need to have sales in retail stores. This means you should go to your local store and tell them to order ABYSS from us or from their distributor. Pursue them and maybe we can get that growth. By the way, we may do a trial issue in full-size format, probably issue #40, mainly as an experiment. The problem with reviewing movies is that most movies close in a week or two, and ABYSS only comes out every two months, so by the time we get a review out the movie would have already closed. An alternative we might think about would be reviews of fantasy movies on VCR, something which is a bit more practical.--DN]

Dear ABYSS people,

Yet more comments from deep within the ABYSS. As a whole, ABYSS #37 was a very well put together issue. 'Conjurings' had the usual, but is always nice to read. 'Creative Campaigns' was very well written and put across many good points! I personally look forward to anything by Eric Olson. He is a fine writer. 'In the Speculum' was again far too large. You gotta kill all the reviews, please! 'Castle of the Void' was an excellent, well put together module. It was very well done.

'Characters by Design' was a bit confusing, but useful once I understood it. It had a good point, but it is a hard subject to correct. 'Echoes' had some interesting, not so polite letters. Mondo Combat addressed a good point, but didn't give us an ideal answer. I love the new print size, keep it. I think 'feedback' is better off dead. I mean, who the hell cared. We all know how much we care an issue. Once again, Eric Olson, gives my Golden Succubus award for Creative Campaigns, a very useful piece. The art was good in this issue also. Keep up the good work and I bid my friends godspeed and wealth.

John E. Green
Chicago, IL

[Everyone seems to be slamming ITS as being too large, so we cut it down a bit this issue. It just seems like somebody ought to review all these new games, especially now that STARDATE and GAME NEWS are gone. In the future we will keep reviews in control, or so I hope, but deserving releases will still get attention.--DN]

Dear Dave,
ABYSS #37 had some good points and some bad ones. 'Creative Campaigns' was well done and I'm sure many gamemasters will benefit from it. I think the idea could have been expanded to include more on different types of political systems and also more examples. In the Speculum was too long, it should have been cut down a little. I don't understand why you keep reviewing TSR products and modules. Some of TSR's modules are good, but role-playing is much more fulfilling, to both the players and the GM, when the ideas are coming directly from some warped gamemaster's head rather than a little booklet.

I don't play Ysgarth (sorry...), and I found 'Castle of the Void' nearly impossible to blend into any of my present fantasy campaigns.

'Characters by Design' was well...terrible. It just won't work. The higher level you want your character to start, the lower his ability scores and number of magic items. The more powerful magic you want, the lower everything else is, including ability scores and levels. I would think that a higher level character or a character with high ability scores would be able to get more powerful items than a lesser character. You could easily generate a first level fighter with a +5 sword. How do I, as a GM, explain this? Well, enough of that, the whole thing is a real mess.

The bigger print is much better, but how about adding a few pages? The artwork you chose this issue is better, especially the cover and page twenty-one.

Looking forward to #38.

Mike Mihalas
Cheshire, CT

[Boy, Eric is really gathering in the cudos...I can see his head swelling from here. 'Characters by Design' really is viable, especially as what it was intended for, a convention tournament character creation system. It is also just as viable in a higher level one-shot game. It was used at UTHERCON this year and was a smashing success.--DN]

Dear Dave,

I'm growing tired of all these letters telling us that we attack TSR to extremis. While it is certainly true that I have little respect for a company which is killing the market by mass production of pointless hackwork, I do not go out of my way to attack their products. This is due to the simple fact that I don't really have to. Their products set themselves up for my (and others) abuse. Our readers have to realize that we don't just abuse TSR, we abuse any product which we feel is not worth the paper it is printed on. While I am on the subject of not worth the paper it is printed on, when was the last time there was a worthwhile issue of DRAGON? The last interesting issue had to be back in the early sixties. It is a shame that all of the quality magazines are dying and all we are left with is DRAGON. It will be a sad day when only it remains. All those staunch TSR fans can now vent their rage. I hope to make at least one convention this year, probably ORIGINS or GENCON, and I invite all TSR defenders to tell me how they feel in person.

Eric Olson
An Overworked Defender of Democracy
Somewhere at Sea

[This is why ABYSS exists, right...an alternative to DRAGON and a place for Eric to get rabid.--DN]

Dear ABYSS,
I had just heard that GAME NEWS had discontinued publication when my first issue of ABYSS (#37) arrived in my mail slot. Although I enjoyed all of the articles, especially 'Characters by Design' and 'Castle of the Void', the thing which really pleased me was the wide selection of reviews, not just of obvious products like Star Trek, but also obscure items like 'Castle Thrax' and 'Victorian Adventure' which I might not have heard of otherwise. It's also nice to read reviews with some meat in them, not just bland plugs of the products or ideological rants. Although some of your reviews were a bit short, most of them really gave a good description of the product, as well as some personal insight and what looks like an intelligent opinion of the product. With all sorts of gaming magazines folding and some, like DIFFERENT WORLDS, a bit too biased to trust, ABYSS was a timely discovery for me, since I like to have an idea what a product might be worth to me before I go out and buy it.

I hope you can keep doing such a good job. ABYSS is a valuable resource.

Aaron Sharp
Ellsworth, ME

[We do make an effort to find and review obscure games, giving them a fair shake without basing our opinion on the packaging or marketing. However, Aaron is still in the minority as far as liking reviews, so unless we hear what the rest of you think, we'll probably keep them trimmed down. Write us. Tell us what you think and what you'd like to see. ABYSS is your magazine and we are your servants...slaves, even!--DN]

TO THE READERS OF ABYSS
FROM
THE QUARTERMASTER
 The mail order hobby shop
 P.O. BOX 175
 BURLINGAME, CA 94011-0175

YOUR EDITOR SENT ME A COMPLIMENTARY ISSUE AND AN ADVERTISING RATE SHEET. IT WAS AN OFFER THAT I COULDN'T REFUSE, SO I WROTE HIM AND ASKED IF YOU WOULD BE INTERESTED IN A SCIENCE FICTION MINIATURES GAME. HIS ANSWER WAS A POSITIVE YES.

THIS LETTER IS THE FIRST OF A SERIES TO TELL YOU ABOUT THE STARGUARD FAMILY OF GAMES. THE PURPOSE, OF COURSE, IS TO WHET YOUR INTEREST AND TO GET YOU TO SPEND A FEW BUCKS.

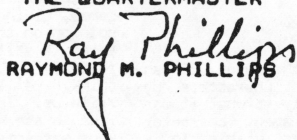
THERE IS A CHANCE THAT SOME OF YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD OR SEEN ANYTHING ABOUT "STARGUARD". IF THAT IS TRUE, THEN I THINK YOU SHOULD NOT GET "WARBOTS & DEATH MACHINES", REVIEWED ELSEWHERE IN THIS ISSUE, BUT START OFF WITH THE BASE GAME. EACH GAME CAN STAND ALONE AND, WHILE IT IS TWICE THE FUN IF THE ROBOTS HAVE HUMAN ENEMIES, "STARGUARD" ALONE IS EASIER TO PLAY.

"STARGUARD" WAS PUBLISHED IN 1974 AND IS STILL POPULAR. THEN, FOR REASONS COVERED IN DETAIL IN VOL. I "LIGHTNING BOLTS & LASERS", IT DROPPED OUT OF SIGHT EXCEPT IN THE SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA. THIS WAS AN UNBEARABLE SITUATION FOR THE FANS. THEY SCoured THE HOBBY SHOPS IN OUT-OF-THE-WAY PLACES TO FIND THE MINIATURES AND MODIFYING WHAT THEY COULD FIND TO FILL OUT THEIR ARMIES. HAPPILY THIS SITUATION NO LONGER EXISTS.

"STARGUARD", INSPIRED BY HEINLEIN'S "STARSHIP TROOPERS", DICKSON'S "DORSAI" AND JERRY PORNELL'S "CODOMINIUM MARINES", IS A MIXTURE OF BATTLING SPACEFARING HUMANS AND AN IMAGINATIVE COLLECTION OF ALIENS. THEIR HISTORIES ARE AMUSING. THE LIST KEEPS GROWING EACH YEAR. OVER A HUNDRED NEW MINIATURES WERE DESIGNED LAST YEAR ALONE AND THIS YEAR PROMISES TO BE THE SAME. THE "AMAZON VALKYRIE WARRIORS" AND THEIR "FEMBOTS" LEAD THE FIELD IN POPULARITY. (MORE ABOUT THEM IN MY NEXT LETTER).

THE "STARGUARD" GAME RULES ARE FOUND IN A THREE VOLUME SET: "STARGUARD, ORILLA, & LIGHTNING BOLTS & LASERS VOL. I". COST \$20.00. IF YOU WANT TO TAKE A CHANCE AND ORDER "WARBOTS & DEATH MACHINES", ADD ANOTHER \$15.00. MENTION "ABYSS" AND I'LL WAIVE OUR \$2.50 SHIPPING CHARGE.

OUR BOOK FLYER IS FREE AND A CATALOG SUBSCRIPTION COSTS \$3.00 (REFUNDABLE WITH FIRST ORDER). HOPE TO HEAR FROM YOU SOON.

SINCERELY YOURS,
 THE QUARTERMASTER

 RAYMOND M. PHILLIPS

IN THE SPECULUM MAGAZINES

DEMON ISSUE

APP:5 CON:4 VAL:6 PER:6 OVE:5

Garen Ewing, POB 65155, Los Angeles, CA 90065

DEMON ISSUE is an interesting item on the fanzine scene. It is edited by Garen Ewing and started in the UK, but the editor has now moved to California, and with #5 it is being published here in the US. The current issue is 28 pages in 8.5x5.5 format, with most of the text produced on a Macintosh with a Laserwriter, though this doesn't really pull the appearance up as much as you would think, as they layout and art are pretty poor. Subscription prices are unknown, but you can get a sample copy from the address above for \$1.

DEMON ISSUE has a surprisingly broad focus, covering boardgames as well as role-playing games, with items for T&T, AD&D, Bushido and Car Wars this issue. It has an interview with Ken St. Andre, adventure-based fiction and a cartoon, but mostly it contains adventure scenarios and ideas for background and campaign design. DEMON ISSUE seems rather poorly organized and of uneven quality, though some of the ideas are fairly interesting. The field covered is certainly broad enough to provide something for almost every gamer, and there is an intriguing combination of British and American styles of fanzine production and might be worth checking out as it matures. (Dave Nalle)

DEMON 5 ISSUE



high and consistent level of quality to the articles. The problem which goes with this is that the primary orientation of the fanzine seems to be on tunnels & trolls, a fun game which has almost totally disappeared in the gaming market. Issue #15 includes a nice blend of humorous and useful material, with a large number of editorial and opinion pieces. Some of the articles are incredibly pointless, like the one which compares and reviews a selection of ancient T&T solo adventures or another in which the author introduces us to his T&T characters. The most interesting sections are probably Mike Stackpole's look at what's happening around FBI and the T&T solo adventure in the center of the issue. Looking at an earlier issue which I have on hand I note that the T&T emphasis is not quite as strong as in #15, but it is still quite dominant.

THE SORCERER'S SCROLLS is a great little T&T fanzine, but that is about all it is. For T&T players it is a must, but for anyone else it has to be considered marginal. Unlike SORCERER'S APPRENTICE, the deceased FBI magazine, there seems to be little effort to broaden the horizon of TSS beyond the very limited scope of T&T. This is sort of a pity, because although T&T is a fun system, it is outdated and will never have a renaissance, so those who contribute to TSS might find their time better used as gamers or writers if they investigated and wrote about a broader selection of games. (Dave Nalle)

GAMES

STARSECTOR ATLAS 5

by Ken Campbell & Edward Simbalist
from Fantasy Games Unlimited

Starsector Atlas 5 is the latest in a long running series of starsector atlases which detail the universe of FGU's science fiction role-playing game Space Opera. This atlas deals with the Ranan, a humanoid race which is based on the communist Chinese. Everything in the text looks and feels like a mirror image of China. The United Ranan Worlds are ruled under a communist system that is in tenuous alliance with the other communist power in the universe, the GPR--Galactic Peoples Republic. Like anything FGU does, this atlas is very detailed. Each world is described by thirty-three separate references, such as;

THE SORCERER'S SCROLLS

APP:4 CON:5 VAL:7 PER:4 OVE:5

POB 117, San Simon, AZ 85632

This is an American fanzine which I only just discovered, although it appears to have been hiding out there for some fifteen issues. THE SORCERER'S SCROLLS is in 8.5x5.5 format at 28 pages this issue, with text produced on near and letter quality computer printers, but with rather uneven layouts and terrible xerox reproduction. A lot of space is wasted each issue despite reduced type size. The editor is Tori Bergquist, and you can get a copy for \$1 or a subscription for \$10, presumably for 12 issues.

SORCERER'S SCROLLS seems to have attracted some pretty high-flying writers, and there is a fairly

planetary diameter, year length, tech level, hydrosphere characteristics, government type, repression index and many more. This is followed by a brief description of the planet, its importance, and other interesting facts. The descriptions go from a single paragraph to almost three pages. This makes the Space Opera universe come to life much more than say the Traveller universe. This atlas is worth buying even if you don't own the Space Opera system as it is interesting reading and in no way relies on that particular system. The atlases can be easily adapted to other systems. Each atlas deals with a particular space empire or unique race. The atlas will detail the history of the region/race and give complete data on culture, religion, and politics. Overall, a well prepared and laid out product. I recommend it highly to anyone who plays science fiction role playing. To those who do, I also recommend Space Opera and even if you don't use the system, the race and system descriptions should prove very useful.

Now that I have given the positive side and hyped the product, I would like to air a pet peeve. Being basically a politics major, I find the politics and monolithic thinking of the great space empires very childish. I enjoy the puns such as Mekpurr for a race of felines and Rauwoff for a race of canines, but single minded ideas for races pushed to the extreme become annoying, instead of appealing. The Ranan being the Chinese, the G.P.R. being the Soviets, and the Azuriach Imperium being space Nazi's was cute at first. Assuming that empires of hundreds of planets would all think and act exactly alike is ridiculous. Hopefully, in the future they will get away from the simple black and white of their current politics and write with some of the imagination these products show. A listing of where everyone is located on the star chart would also be nice and ease confusion. I also wonder if FGU will be putting out its own magazine or newsletter to support its growing line of products/role-playing systems.

I recommend all of these atlases, but if you want to try one, I would suggest Atlas 2: The Mercantile League or Atlas 1: The Terran Sector before going on to the others, as these are the more valuable and the most interesting. If you like them, then I would suggest moving on to Starsector Atlas 5: The United Ranan Worlds and the others. (Eric Olson)

DARK DREAMS

by David Hargrave
from Dragon Tree Press

Dark Dreams is the latest from the innovative David Hargrave. Dave Hargrave is best known for his Arduin trilogy of books. Dark Dreams is the second book of a new trilogy. I enjoyed the first trilogy as you could always find new and unique ideas in them. The ideas were fresh and always at the very least thought provoking. This latest book was disappointing as I was expecting something very similar to the first books. The new book is about twenty pages shorter in text and laid out in a somewhat different fashion. The material within does not live up to past standards. The best sections were those on gladiators, black metals, and silk of arachnid origin. The rest wasn't that interesting and in the case of the street gangs of Arduin...silly. This is especially evident with their war cry "waa-waa-wabbits". This whole product appears to be either hodgepodge Hargrave material or a rushed product. I got the impression that they were publishing this just to keep Mr. Hargrave's name out on the market while waiting for Arduin, Bloody Arduin to be published. It seems to me that putting out a product like this does more harm than good. It would have been better to have merged this with the next book or taken some of the fourth book and put it in Dark Dreams.

As I said in the beginning, I'm a great fan of Dave Hargrave and I anxiously await Arduin, Bloody Arduin, which should be a great game, but I cannot



The Arduin Scenario Vol V
ISBN 0-85-061-004-4 from Dragon Tree Press

recommend Dark Dreams. I still admire the creativeness of Dave Hargrave and would still suggest his first three books to gamers even though they were written eight years ago. I also look forward to his next book, which I hope will be far better than Dark Dreams. (Eric Olson)

LANKHMAR CITY OF ADVENTURE
from TSR

It appears from the title of this game aid, that another great fantasy writer has sold out to TSR. I was sorry to see Robert E. Howard degraded with all of the Conan trivia put out by TSR and thought that Fritz Lieber was the next luminary to fall. To put it bluntly, I had little hope for Lankhmar.

Lankhmar details portions of the great city of Fafrhd and the Grey Mouser. This game aid is very detailed and professionally done. It gives an exhaustive list of all of the people ever named in Mr. Lieber's books and uses them as NPC's. They also use many of the familiar locals in their city book. Another good point of the book is the section of story lines from the books and how they can be used as adventures. If you are a Lieber buff, you will enjoy this simply as a reference publication. This game aid is just the first in a series of Lankhmar modules and aids. I haven't seen any of the follow-up material, but Lankhmar is good. If you need a ready made city that is several notches above the old Judges Guild city products, you might want to give Lankhmar a look. Even if you aren't a Lankhmar fan, you can easily use the city as a valuable aid. Consider all of this a mild recommendation. (Eric Olson)

DRAGONS OF WAR (DRAGONLANCE 8)
by Tracy and Laura Hickman
DRAGONS OF DECEIT (DRAGONLANCE 9)
by Douglas Niles
from TSR

The Dragonlance series has been the cornerstone of TSR in the last year. The reason for this has been their production quality and a clarity of thought along with a specific plot. This storyline has been both a strength and a weakness as the players appear to be locked into a set chain of events and any player can read the books and know what is going to happen as the modules are far behind the books. Another problem is the fact that the books deal with great battles that detract from individual play. These latest two outings are among the best of the Dragonlance series as they offer more than just the set storyline. DL 8's adventure is based around the spirits of the High Tower that is not even mentioned in the books. This adventure is both original and interesting. DL 9, which follows the

TWO FROM THE GRAVE

THE REVENANT ERIC OLSON

THE SETTING

The adventure takes place in a large overgrown villa on the outskirts of the small city of Doron. venture location: Large overgrown villa on the outskirts of the small city of Doron on the island of Heljos. Characters for this adventure should be between 4th and 6th levels.

THE SITUATION

Something is stalking the Mages of Heljos, a small island dedicated to research in the arcane. Heljos was once known as the isle of scholars, and was home to an elite group of multi-racial mages and wise men. Disaster has pursued the scholars of the island since the last equinox. And the role of the party will be to try and protect the survivors and deal with the situation. They will be contacted by Baltazan, the lone survivor, who needs protection and aid. Baltazan will give the party 20,000 in gold to protect him and end the curse. He does not feel that it will be long before he will be attacked, and to aid the specialists he is calling in he already has 15 veteran guards from the island. They are broken into three teams; one for the grounds, one for the villa, and his personal guards. Your job is to devise a defense for him of your own resources. The guards are equal to third level fighters with 20HP each.

THE STATEMENT OF BALTAZAN

It started with a terrible laboratory accident which resulted in the gruesome death of one Achios a Half-Drow Mage/Alchemist. Then four months ago Madian was strangled in his room on Heljos. Jarrold died the following night, though guards were present and magical wards were set. Perel was strangled next and all attempts to raise him or contact his spirit were of no use, despite the magical resources available to the sages. The remaining members of the Heljos company fled in an atmosphere of fear and distrust, though flight proved to be of little avail. Toros died in the Drowic capital. Allieg died while sailing from Lorien. Pantaers died less than a week ago in a shrine of Kothir, God of Magic. Finally, there were only two of us left, Bremis and myself. Bremis contacted me before Pantaers died, and said he knew what was killing us off. His message was brief, merely stating that he was going to contact Pantaers and then he would join me and we would create a defense. Bremis died yesterday, little more than a day away from reaching me. I am desperate. My friends are gone and I am the next to die.

THE VILLA

The villa was once the summer palace for some wealthy prince, but has suffered years of neglect. It was designed not as a fortress but as a beautiful retreat. There is a twelve foot wall surrounding the entire grounds, but it is also sadly in need of repair. There is one main gated entrance and a smaller half-gate entrance near the back of the villa itself. The grounds were once the home of well-maintained, shaded lanes and hedge gardens. All are overgrown and would provide easy cover to an assailant. The villa is an imposing and airy structure of three stories, with an elevated tower to the northeast. There are a large number of windows in which to gain entrance and four doors. Inside are a series of disused rooms including a large central hall and second story ballroom. Baltazan has allowed the structure to decline, except for the northeastern tower which is his home. Baltazan lives in the uppermost level which has two entrances, one from the stairs below and one from the roof walk. The villa and grounds are left up to the individual GM to draw up. Basically, Baltazan could have picked a much better place to make his last stand.

THE KILLER

The slayer of the Mages of Heljos is the Revenant of Achios. Achios was killed (the accident was rigged) through a conspiracy of several of the Mages of Heljos, who obtained the help of the others without their knowledge; so to the destroyed mind of Achios, all are guilty and must die. Achios inhabits the body of a dead Heljos guardsman who will be recognized by the other guards. Only Baltazan can see him in his true form. No magical ward can keep him out. If there is no party member with the grounds guards, they will die quickly and quietly. His goal is either to avoid defenses or use a quick spell to kill or otherwise occupy the guards. Remember that his primary objective is the destruction of Baltazan, and should that be accomplished, the malignant spirit will only stick around for another five rounds, perhaps to gloat. Good Luck.

ACHIOS (REVENANT FORM)

AD&D STATS

AC:10 SIZE:M ATTACKS (NO/DAM):1 2-16
 HD:8 MOVE:8 SPECIAL ATTACKS:Paralyzing Stare
 HP:50 INTE:Hi SPECIAL DEFENSES:See Magic Below
 MR:50% ALIG:C/E

YSGARTH STATS

AR:40 AV:0/0/0 MP:100 DEI:Kothir ATTACKS:Embrace(LR1)MD16
 DC:15 DR:15/15/15 AP:80 ALI:7/3 or Paralyzing Stare
 MR:40 HP:50 ST:7 HEI:5'10"
 RC:10 FP:100 RN:10 WET:0

In addition to these special revenant stats and abilities, Achios retains the abilities of a 12th level mage, with the following spells. Lev 1: Spider Climb, Affect Normal Fires, Magic Missile(x2); Lev 2: Stinking Cloud, Web, Mirror Image, Wizard Lock; Lev 3: Blink, Fireball, Lightning Bolt, Item; Lev 4: Otilukes Resiliant Sphere, Evard's Black Tentacles, Minor Globe of Invulnerability, Confusion; Lev 5: Passwall, Animate dead, Cone of Cold, Transmute Rock to Mud; Lev 6: Disintigrate. For those not using the AD&D system, here are some quick spell descriptions. Blink: Allowers caster to immediately transport himself anywhere in his sight. Item: Caster can reduce any non-magical item he touches to 1/12th of its normal size. Achios will attempt to touch a helmet or armor to crush and kill an opponent. Otiluke'S Resiliant Sphere: Caster throws the pre-made sphere at his target and if hit, it will englobe the target, imprisoning him. Can only be brought down by a disintigrate spell. Evard's Black Tentacles: Spell causes black tentacles to spring from the ground in a large area, attacking all present. Minor Globe of Invulnerability: Makes caster immune to all spells third level and below. When he attacks, he will have his minor globe up and will save Otiluke's Resiliant Sphere for the party's Mage. He will use Item to constrict a players armor/helm/gauntlet to immobilize or kill them. He will use Evard's black tentacles to immobilize guards, and he will raise dead guards to fight for him (possibly raising the dead grounds guards to attack from below as a diversion while he comes from elsewhere). Achios has a profound affect on Baltazan, who will only be able to mumble Achios' name for the first few rounds. Afterwards, his attacks are slow and he will never win initiative on Achios. Remember as you play the revnant of Achios, that he is highly intelligent and diabolically clever. He will attack from unexpected areas (i.e. Passwall) and will use his spells creatively. Achios regenerates at three points per round unless burned. If driven out of the body (by its destruction), he can reanimate himself in the body of anyone he has killed in the last hour and start again. If he kills Baltazan, his "life" lasts only five more rounds. In that time, he will try to kill the henchmen of his enemy. After that time, his spirit will be appeased and it will depart the remains he has animated.

WEDDED IN BLOOD

DAVE NALLE

THE SETTING

This adventure takes place in the world of Jahannam, in the ancient city of Zarmizegethusa, on the Cytheran coast. This region is inhabited mostly by Phari and Ilchan settlers in coastal cities, surrounded by tribes of Vorate nomads in the rough countryside around the cities. Characters for the adventure should be between 5th and 7th level, and it would be very helpful if there was a decent proportion of mages and priests among them. Thief and assassin type characters are discouraged. As usual, fighters would be quite suitable. Characters should be human by race and of fairly high social status, as any warrior types will be friends of the merchant Osmal Kumari, and any mages or priests will be among those called in to consult with him in secret.

THE SITUATION

Osmal Kumari is a wealthy young merchant in the port of Zarmizegethusa, having recently inherited his father's large shipping business. Recently he took a stunningly attractive wife named Faisura. Despite all this, Osmal seems troubled and has not been able to concentrate on his work. One morning, Osmal gathers together some of his friends and some priests and mages with whom he is acquainted (the party), and tells them his troubles.

It seems that in the month he has been married to Faisura he has noticed some disturbing abnormalities in her behavior. It seems that from time to time Osmal has awoken at night and found that Faisura was missing from his bed, and he believes that this is a regular occurrence. He has looked around for her at these times and there has been no sign of her anywhere. However, when Osmal awakens in the morning she is invariably there, but she continues to sleep after he arises, usually until quite late in the day. When she dines with the family in the evening she touches hardly any of her food. On less social occasions she prefers to eat in privacy, though at these times her plate is usually cleaned fairly well. Adding to his concern is the fact that Faisura's background is somewhat mysterious, coming with excellent references from an old but impoverished family. Unfortunately, neither Osmal nor anyone in his family have met her relatives, these formalities being passed over in Osmal's burning desire to possess her. Osmal is worried, and he would like his friends to check up on just what his wife does at night. To this

end, he will give them the run of his town-estate, allow them to take roles as servants or guests, and do what he can to aid them, though he does not wish to be directly involved himself, as he does not want to offend her.

QUESTIONING THE SERVANTS

One likely course of investigation which may come up before more direct courses is to question the servants. By and large this will only bring general observations of suspicion about Faisura, but there are a couple of specific clues to discover. A maid has seen Faisura in the courtyard of the house, and claims hysterically that she saw the mistress vanish into the ground by magic. She seems rather terrified. Also, a stable boy saw Faisura throwing food from her plate to the dogs by the stable, not once, but several times.

INVESTIGATING FAISURA'S FAMILY

Faisura came with references as the daughter of Mazzufar, Jamalshah, a scholar from a good merchant family who was employed of the imperial court some years ago. They have an address for Mazzufar, but things which Faisura has mentioned indicate that he is in poor health and should not be disturbed. All pre-marital communication was by mail.

If they go to the house, they will find that it is in an old section of town which was of high quality a few years ago, but is now becoming run down and being given over to warehouses and factories. When they reach Mazzufar's house, it appears to be abandoned, and the door is hanging open. If they venture inside, they will find what they seek in an upper room. In a bed there is the desiccated body of an ancient sage. He appears to have been dead for some months, and appropriate spells or skills can place his death as having happened some five months past, three months before the wedding. On a desk near the bed is writing paper belonging to Mazzufar, and fresh ink stains which are far more recent than the corpse, indicating that someone had been there using his paper since his death.

This evidence may be enough to take to Osmal, in which case you should proceed to the section on confronting Faisura.

FOLLOWING FAISURA

Should the characters opt to follow Faisura, they will be able to discover her activities fairly easily, though they will have to take care that she doesn't see them, which may be easier if they keep the number of people following her to a minimum. Practically speaking, it would be better if they were able to follow her without being discovered, though the fear of discovery should be strong.

Faisura waits until Osmal is deeply asleep. Then she leaves his bed and dresses in dark, concealing clothing. She goes to the courtyard and lifts up a flagstone at the base of the fountain there, lowering herself into what seems to be a dark tunnel. Note that should they attempt to lift the flagstone and follow her, they will find that it requires a single person of STR 22 or more or two people of STR 32 or more total to lift the flagstone, which should make it clear to them that she is rather strong, as she was able to lift it aside with ease.

If they pursue her in the tunnel, there is a fair chance that they will get lost and find themselves in a ruined part of the city, but they should be able to retrace their steps and find her true route, which takes her to an ancient necropolis on the outskirts of the city. Following her route through the necropolis will take them to an old, open crypt, where they will see her dining with six other relatively normal looking people, male and female. What is not normal is that they seem to be drinking blood in crystal goblets from a huge bowl of blood. If the pursuers move closer they can hear part of their conversation, which seems to be about their lives in normal society and how they have duped poor humans into wedding and supporting them. Their talk also seems to indicate that they feed off of their spouses and relatives in secret. Note that if the pursuers move close enough to hear the conversation there should be a chance that they will be caught by the ghouls, especially if only one or two party members are there, creating a mystery for the remainder of the party solve. If they are spotted and escape, keep in mind that the ghouls will be alerted and will make an effort to protect themselves with an early attack.

The party breaks up about two hours before dawn, and it would be a good idea if the observers were gone by then. However, if they are not, they will have the opportunity to follow one or more of the other ghouls and find out where they live so that they can deal with them later.

OSMAL'S REACTION

On hearing this news, in private, Osmal will want to confront Faisura, and wise advisors or mages will encourage him to destroy her, which will appeal to him. He will also want to track down and slay the other ghouls, possibly taking them as a group at their nightly meeting, or trailing them and then taking them one by one.

CONFRONTING FAISURA

Osmal will push to confront Faisura as soon as possible. His tactic will be to confront her alone at bedtime, with the party members lurking behind curtains for protection and support.

When he tells her of his suspicions, she will try to dismiss them, and when he proves resolute, she will ask him if anyone else knows, fain affection when he says it is just their secret, and then try to kill him. At this point the party members should try to save him and slay Faisura.

When she sees she is outnumbered, she will try to flee rather than fight, but this realization may take several rounds, during which she will first attack Osmal and then anyone blocking her escape. They will have to do their best to slay her. It is important to keep in mind that the means by which they slay her is important, and anything less than the correct method of execution will not be permanent, though

other means of killing her will work until the next dawn, at which point she will come back from anything, even complete cremation.

The proper method of putting down one of these ghouls is to chop off its head, fill the mouth with tanna leaves, sew it shut, and then bury the head separate from the body in a lead-sealed bronze casket. There is a chance that any mages or priests may know this, give them a 3xINT% roll. Even if they fail the roll, they should think they know the answer, so tell them some other disposal method as if it were the truth, even telling different people different answers. If they are can convince Osmal they need further consultation (unlikely), a NPC sage will give the correct answer for 5000 gold, or a bogus one will give a wrong answer for 2000 gold.

VENGEANCE

It would really be ideal if they fail to kill Faisura permanently so that she can come back to wreck vengeance a few nights later on Osmal and on each of the party members. Her basic plan would be to attack Osmal herself and send the other ghouls after the party members, trying to catch them alone, all at the same time.

If they should dispose of her properly, she will be able to send out a psychic call for help to the other ghouls, who will investigate and discover what happened, and then take out party members, Osmal, and his family one or two at a time, attacking in groups of 3 or so.

Naturally, all attacks will be at night, as that is when the ghouls feel most secure and normal people are least protected. The schedule of vengeance will be stepped up if there are indications that the identities of the other ghouls are known or if there are attempts to dispose of any of them.

Note that the stats provided below are for all of the Ghouls, regardless of sex or of status.

GHOULS OF ZARMIZEGETHUSA

AD&D STATS

AC:-2	SIZE:M	ATTACKS (NO/DAM):2 Claws 1D20
HD:8	MOVE:10	SPECIAL ATTACKS:See Magic Below
HP:80	INTE:H	SPECIAL DEFENSES:See Magic Below
MR:70%	ALIG:C/E	

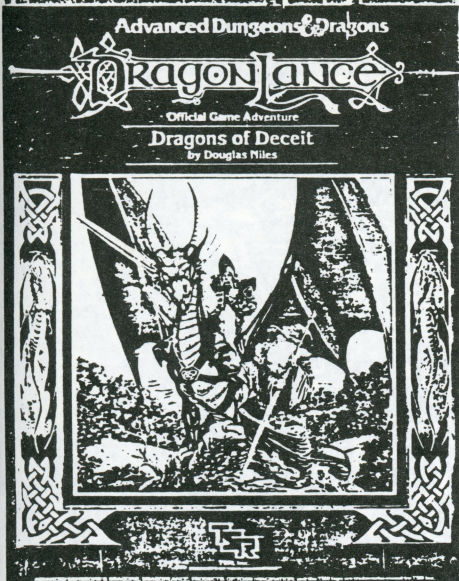
YSGARTH STATS

AR:50	AV:2/2/2	MP:150	DEI:Zu	ATTACKS:(L2R1)Claws(MD12)
DC:20	DR:50/50/50	AP:75	ALI:3/3	
MR:25	HP:80	ST:6	HEI:Various	
RC:10	FP:100	RN:8	WEI:Various	

In addition to being able to pass fully for human, these ghouls have a number of special powers, not the least of which is having to be destroyed by the special means mentioned above. In addition, when slain by other means, they do not actually die, but just seem dead, beginning to regenerate with the next nightfall and rising at dawn. At all times they regenerate up to 10HP per minute. They also have to power to go immaterial at will, with a delay of 1D6 CR and a total duration per day of 30 minutes. In this form they can fly and pass most barriers. Naturally, they can see in the dark and sense movement at some distance. Finally, most of them have learned at least some magic, essentially functioning as mages of half their level. In Ysgarth they will probably specialize in Necromancy, Sorcery or Enchantment.



DL95 Concluding the Second Book of the Dragonlance Campaign



books more closely, has a number of new encounters and small paragraphs on possible other adventuring opportunities. While I am not satisfied with the overall Dragonlance series, they are the best of what TSR puts out these days and at least they are always well thought out and of very high production standards. (Eric Olson)

ENCYCLOPEDIA HARNICA

from Columbia Games, Inc.

Columbia Games is offering a relatively new product called the Encyclopedia Harnica. It is rather unusual, however, in that it is broken down into monthly installments of about 20 pages each. This line of modules was intended to expand and detail the World of Harn, a fantasy campaign setting from Columbia Games. It has a standard format, first providing an 'environment' article, in which a city or some small scale area of interest is mapped out and described. This is done with an eye toward providing a general background, instead of a rigid adventure. Although there is a reasonable amount of detail, it is up to the GM to mold this raw material into an adventure. Another article which appears to be consistent from issue to issue is what I call the 'culture' article, in which some aspect of Harnic life is discussed by the creators (an example would be one rather nice piece on Harnic law). Sometimes there is a third or fourth article, usually related to material offered elsewhere in the issue. The last part is invariably the best; the Atlas Harnica. This section provides the reader with an average of seven regional and local scale maps per issue. These have to be about the highest quality maps I have seen in any gaming aid. They combine the use of roadmap-like symbols (which convey a lot of information at a glance), and full color scenery; an attractive combination. There are two full color maps per issue on glossy paper with the rest in black and white. A nice feature is that there are B&W player maps which are suitable for photo-copying, minus the numbering and labels, of course.

Encyclopedia Harnica is not without flaws, perhaps the greatest of which is its price. While \$6 is not a lot to pay for a single issue, it gets rather steep if you want a full year subscription at \$60. Also, unless you plan on using World of Harn many of the regional maps will be useless,

pretty though they may be. This is not as much of a problem with the city maps. All things considered, Encyclopedia Harnica is definitely worth looking into, although I would recommend that those of you who don't own World of Harn pick and choose issues, as they are simply too expensive if you aren't planning on using the whole background. (Paul Sudlow)

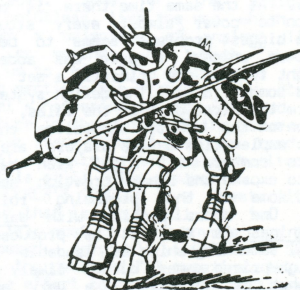
EVIL RUINS

from Mayfair Games

Evil Ruins is an FRP adventure suitable for use with the AD&D rules, although the trademark is used without permission from TSR, published under the Role-Aids line. It is designed to appeal to novice players who want more out of adventuring than 'hack and slash'. An adventure for 4-8 characters of levels 2-5, Evil Ruins provides the GM with a 32 page script, including seven maps and several nice illustrations. The plot centers on Tintagel Castle (which actually exists in Cornwall), where an evil mystery took place centuries ago, but still haunts the castle. It is the responsibility of the party to unveil this mystery and set things straight at Tintagel. The adventure has enough twists in the plot (and subplot) to keep undemanding players interested, and there are some variations on standard monsters to keep more jaded players on their toes. The major NPCs live and breathe, and have their own motivations for the GM to consider when running them. Evil Ruins is well organized and is different enough from most other dungeon adventures to warrant a look. (Paul Sudlow)

WARBOTS & DEATH MACHINES
DESIGN MANUAL

By John McEwan



WARBOTS & DEATH MACHINES

by John McEwan
from The Quartermaster

Sometimes the line dividing miniatures, boardgaming and role-playing is very thin, especially when what is essentially a tactical game reaches a level of detail and personal identification which makes it more than just a matter of map and miniatures. Warbots and Death Machines is the third game I've seen which approaches the theme of mechanized combat made popular by Japanese robot models, and in many ways it is the most successful, though it is not as flashy as its main competition, Battletech. The game consists of two booklets in 8.5x5.5 format, a 'Design Manual' and a 'Combat Manual'. Also provided with the system is an abstract of charts and tables. Altogether there are some 80 pages of dense, organized text at a cover price of \$15.

The 'Combat Manual' is the first book of the system, though it seems sort of odd to plunge right into combat before designing a robot of your own. It begins with a section of history and proceeds directly to the rules for combat, beginning with the turn sequence, followed by terrain, fire and

all the minutiae of battle. Combat is based on a percentile bonus system, variable for range, type of weapon and special circumstances. The system is logical, straightforward and quite playable, even giving adequate attention to moving and evading targets. There are also rules for hand to hand combat, which becomes a bit more awkward, but still seems to work fairly well. Stats are given for lots of weapons, as well as their cost in what I assume are Development Points, though the function of these points is not explained until the second book.

The 'Design Manual' covers the creation of Warbots. It uses a system of Development Points, based on the dimensions of the robot in question and its means of locomotion. All of the further calculations are also based on the dimensions of the robot model being used and certain constants. Development Points are used to purchase a brain, instruments of various sorts and armor. There are additional rules for force screens, power sources, pseudomuscles (or the strength of the robot), speed, agility, flight, and special purpose designs. As has already been noted, weapons and combat are covered in the first book, though it seems that it would be more logical for the book covering design to come before the book on combat. A great deal of information is provided in this book, but as with the combat system, the design system relies on a number of fairly complex formulae, though the system has plenty of flexibility to it if you are willing to go through the calculations. One significant lack is in rules for designing original robots without basing them on a model in hand, as this limits the variability of play. Of course, the intrepid player could extrapolate design formulae for this purpose from those provided if he was willing to do a little work.

Warbots and Death Machines is basically a pretty good game. The topic is interesting and is fairly hot. It is mechanically sound and surprisingly playable, despite mathematical complexity. At the same time there is plenty of information to cover almost every situation in play. The biggest problems seem to be in the design system, which I suspect was added as an afterthought to what are primarily a set of robot miniatures combat rules. The design system should really form the first part of the rules, providing information on the robots themselves and giving some basic explanation before players are plunged right into combat. It might even have been possible to expand the robot creation section to emphasize some of the promising role-playing potential. One other problem with Warbots and Death Machines is that it is produced on a shoestring, something which is laudable in these days of high-priced games, but is likely to hurt sales of what is potentially a very marketable game. The art is functional and the packaging is minimal, though this is no reflection of the quality of the game. Robot combat can be a lot of fun, and Warbots and Death Machines may not be perfect, but it is the best system of this sort which I have seen to date.

TWILIGHT 2000

by Frank Chadwick
from GDW

It is sort of hard to know how to start discussing a game where the strongest points are also its greatest failings, a problem which is certainly central to Twilight 2000, which is an interesting game and a promising game, but at the same time not really a successful design or even a viable concept.

Twilight 2000 comes in two slim rather nicely illustrated booklets plus a selection of reference sheets and record sheets and a short adventure. The first book outlines the game for the players and the second gives needed information for the referee.



The first thing that strikes you in the players book is a real feeling of mood, established in part by the appropriately grimy illustrations, but mostly by the italicized section introductions which are little monologues by characters in the setting which illustrate the function of the rules in that section. These draw the player right into the rather harsh world of Europe after a third world war and make you identify with the stranded soldiers trying to fight their way out of Poland.

Beneath this initial impression there is a problem with the players book. It is just too damned sketchy. Although the information on character creation starts out well enough when it outlines a fairly creative rolling system, it falls down after that, not giving enough information on skills and abilities for the player to actually fully complete a character without asking the referee questions which are only answered in the referees book. This means that the players book is only really useful for general background and does not really perform the whole role for which it was intended, though it does go into some detail on the combat system. Combat is the second great enigma of Twilight 2000, because it combines oversimplification in the area of wounds and their effects with extremely detailed analysis of special types of combat and situations and the difference between direct and indirect fire. It gives a great feeling for some of the tactics of modern combat, but characters aren't really threatened a great deal, and whether they live or die is really more or less a function of chance.

The referee's manual is more detailed, outlining world background and history rather nicely, though this could be put into the player's book, and explaining the skill system, encounters and play situations. The skill system is seriously flawed, or at least unusually limited, with all skills seemingly combat related and a very small selection available, implying that characters had no lives before the army and have no outside interests or abilities, helpful to their mission or otherwise. One nice aspect of the skill system is that ability or rate of improvement goes down as one gets better with a skill, so it becomes harder to improve, though the system for handling this is

mechanically overcomplicated.

The main technical problems in Twilight 2000 are probably the type of math used and the use of abbreviations. Calculations of secondary characteristics, combat stats and skill percentages involve complex formulae which are described obliquely, and in several cases key stats involve minute fractions which can be a real pain to refigure in play. The problem of abbreviations is rampant in the game. Everything has a 2 or 3 letter designation, which gives it a military feel, but is damned confusing. This is particularly true in the skill section, where the skills have abbreviations instead of names and some of these abbreviations are similar and bear no clear resemblance to the name most of us would give that skill.

The conceptual problem in Twilight 2000 is one shared by many recent systems (Paranoia, Judge Dredd, etc.). The Twilight 2000 setting is wonderful, well detailed and imaginative. Even with the mechanical flaws it would be fun to play in this world. However, there is no way you can play an extended campaign in a world which is this limited and this consistently depressing. There is only so much you can do with military refugees, and unless the referee redesigns and expands the background, any campaign will fade away fairly quickly. Despite my criticisms of the mechanics, they are playable, but Twilight 2000 can never really be more than a throwaway game, the kind you play a few times for a change before going back to something with more durable qualities. (Dave Nalle)

GURPS

by Steve Jackson

from Steve Jackson Games

GURPS is the long awaited role-playing system from Steve Jackson, the successor to The Fantasy System, and an interesting game despite the awkward name, which stands for 'Generic Universal Role-Playing System'. GURPS is barely out, but I believe it will be boxed in a set, with three books, one on 'Characters', one on 'Adventuring', one containing an two introductory scenarios and an abstract of charts and tables. On the whole, the system shows promise in a number of areas, and while it may not be ideal for every role-player it is usable in a variety of settings and will certainly please TTF players.

To get an idea of the basic system of GURPS you might look at the Man to Man review last issue, as that system is essentially a tactical expansion of GURPS. The 'Character' book covers character design and set up. There are four basic stats, as in TTF, plus additional non-essential descriptive stats, such as height and weight. Borrowing a bit from Champions and other contemporary systems there are rules for reputation, quirks, advantages and disadvantages, ranging from the logical to the absurd. Fairly cleverly, advantages are purchased, while disadvantages are picked up the same way at a negative cost. One limitation of the system becomes clear in the skill section, because skills are learned with the same points which are used to purchase characteristics and advantages, keeping things simple and flexible, but perhaps leaving things a little too open to outrageous manipulation. There is a fairly good selection of skills and the system is clearly open for more to be added. Skills cover both modern and historical periods for a variety of campaign settings. One annoying aspect of the skill section is that some skills, like psionic skills or certain magical skills, are discussed briefly and then the reader is instructed to refer to a game-background book which has yet to be released. Combat is reserved for the 'Adventuring' book, as are the specifics of applying other skills, leading to a slight amount of confusion when first creating a character, though this problem will end when the system becomes more familiar.

For a system which is so simple in the key areas of character creation and skills, it is

interesting that a large portion of the 'Adventuring' book is devoted not to good GMing or to hints on world design, but to detailing a combat system which, while basically simple, is weighed down with a hodge-podge of special rules and exceptions which cover every possibility, but create complexity where it was not really needed. Basic combat involves the totalling of attack and defense values, and then both attacker and defender roll against their skills, modified by the combat values mentioned. Different types of defenses are possible if the characters have the appropriate skills or situation to work with. Advanced combat becomes more complex, with movement rules, maneuvering and facing considered. It is basically similar to Man to Man combat, and should probably not be used in a role-playing campaign, though some aspects like the hit location system could add some badly needed detail, though of the two hit location systems offered the aimed blow system is definitely preferable to the random system. Criticals are also covered and might be useful in some campaigns. Combat is covered very thoroughly, and lots of options and situations are detailed which most games just leave up to the judgement of the GM. Combat is followed by the section on 'Game Mastering', which takes some curious stands, seemingly implying that maps and movement are at the heart of role-playing and that GMs should map out everything on tactical displays and players should map everywhere they go. There is also some good basic advice on managing encounters and non-player characters, but this section really doesn't seem to have much of a grasp of the difference between role-playing and success in a mission. Another problem in the sections providing GM guidelines is that along with more contemporary ideas on adventure design, there seems to be an endorsement of the outmoded concept of the dungeon, something which was the bane of TTF and other early generation systems.

In the scenario booklet there is a solo adventure called 'All in a Night's Work'. It is a fairly interesting and intelligent adventure in a traditional fantasy setting, though it is somewhat limited in scope. Providing a solo adventure as well as the usual introductory adventure strikes me as a good idea, especially in a new game which has not yet got a big following. The flip side of this booklet has a more traditional adventure, also with a fantasy setting, titled 'Caravan to Ein Arris'. It is a fairly simple and well detailed scenario and should serve as a good introduction. It was sort of disappointed to see that both of the scenarios for a 'generic' game have a fantasy setting, when so much more could be possible with the flexibility of the system. In fact, with the lack of detail on magic and the supernatural in the rules, other settings might have been a wiser choice.

GURPS is a promising game in many ways. There are some problems and omissions, but the rules are mostly simple and logical. A wider selection of characteristics and some simplification in combat would probably have made the system a bit more attractive to role-players as would less emphasis on tactics, movement and the 'dungeoneering' tradition. Nonetheless, GURPS is a workable generic system, though it needs filling in to adapt it to specific settings, something which I suspect SJG is already working on. I'm not sure I can recommend GURPS for most experienced role-players, but it might be interesting as a change or for beginning players. Its value to experienced players will depend on the quality of background aids yet to come. As a so-called generic game it is a good cut above systems like Chaosium's Basic Role-Playing, as it is not only simple and adaptable, but also genuinely playable. (Dave Nalle)

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A VIPER'S KISS

ERIC OLSON

History abounds with stories of kings being killed by an assassin who snuck a weapon past skilled guards. Even a small dart, if poisoned or administered by an expert, can slay the best protected monarch. You have to realize that people don't live in armor. Sometime during the day (probably about 90% of the time), a character or important non-player character should be going unarmored or in something comfortable and minimally protective. Armor is extremely uncomfortable and encumbering, so it is worn only when it is absolutely needed.

The main protection for an important person in a medieval/fantasy world would not be personal armor, but hired guards (cannonfodder). These men would wear light armor and it would be their job to use their bodies to shield their employer so that he can be comfortable and not have to wear armor. One of the main functions of these guards is to search anyone who approaches their employer to be sure that he does not carry with him any small and lethal weapon. Hopefully, on a one to one basis without weapons the employer could at least hold his own until help could get to him, but unarmed against an opponent with concealed weapons he would be doomed.

Unfortunately, for AD&D and most other gaming systems there are no rules for concealing weapons or for spotting concealed weapons. This is a serious problem, as it is the concealed weapon which makes playing an assassin worthwhile and can make or break many situations. For example, when captured, a concealed weapon could save your hide, or from the GMs point of view, add a nice twist to the situation if it were discovered. If you are an assassin and your target's defenses are too tough, disguising yourself as a friend and carrying in a concealed weapon could make your life much easier, and you could have a nice little adventure trying to get back out of his stronghold. To remedy this problem, especially in AD&D, I have drawn up a percentile based system for concealing a weapon successfully.

The first table shows the AD&D character classes and their percentage chance of concealing a weapon based on their level. The second table gives modifiers to adjust this percentage for the situation the character enters. Additional adjustments can be added, and skill or particular wariness on the part of the searcher should be considered as well.

For skill-based systems I suggest that they go the route of Ysgarth and provide skills for concealing weapons and for searching suspected persons, as found in the skill section of the new edition of Ysgarth. These skills should work against each other to produce a percentile chance based on the skill of the concealer and the skill of the searcher, and the modifications suggested for AD&D should also be applied.

For an example of how all this would work, a sixth level assassin (base 30%), with a 16 INT and WIS (+6 and +2 respectively), walks into the Merchant's Guild disguised as a distinguished member, so there is no physical search (+30%). His weapon is a 12in dagger (no bonus), he is wearing heavy robes/clothing (+20%), but the lighting is quite good (-10%). So the overall chance is $30+6+2+30+20-10=78\%$ of not being spotted. Of course, this just gives him an opportunity, and should give him a bonus on getting surprise, but he will still have to attack and kill his target.

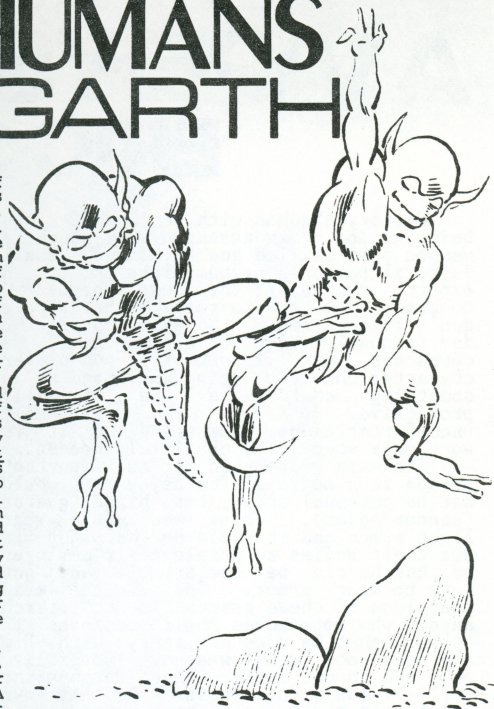
In general, concealed weapons are important to keep in mind as player and GM. Players should note regularly concealed weapons on their character sheets, and GMs should have guards conduct searches and disarm characters whenever they approach an important personage. Another think to keep in mind in AD&D is that the system provided in the rules for assassination based solely on a percentile roll should never, ever be used. It is much better to provide special, appropriate abilities like this to your assassin and then let him actually work through the assassination situation and use his wits. This is role-playing, not just a die roll for death.

Character Class	%/Level
Mage, Illusionist, Cleric, Paladin	1%
Fighter, Druid, Ranger	2%
Monk, Thief	3%
Assassin	5%

Modifying Situation	% + or -
Each point of INT over 14	+3%
Each point of WIS over 14	+1%
No search made at all	+40%
No physical search	+30%
Quick physical search	-10%
Thorough physical search	-30%
Careful visual search	-15%
Quick visual search	-5%
Weapon 8-14in	---
Weapon 1-8in	+10%
Weapon 15-20in	-5%
Disguised weapon	+40%
Light/little clothing	-15%
Heavy clothing/armor	+20%
Lighting--Birght	-10%
Average	---
Dark/under average	+10%
Moonlight or less	+20%



NON-HUMANS OF YSGARTH



Ysgarth is characterized by being one of the few systems and worlds which features racial diversity between different human races, which, because of the nature of the skill system, is actually a significant factor in the development of a character. While the system is in flux, what many players are not aware of is that the variety found among humans is no less great than the great diversity of non-human races. While intelligent non-human races together make up less than 4% of the total population of Ysgarth, they offer some interesting background alternatives for imaginative players.

Provided here are skill benefits and background for the major non-human races of Ysgarth. If you are an Ysgarth player this information should prove valuable. If you play with another skill-based system like RuneQuest or Fantasy Hero, you can easily use this information as a guideline for setting up characters in these races, or perhaps you will consider adapting the skill benefit system from Ysgarth to your campaign to add some logic and meaning to character background. For the vast body of AD&D players out there, I can only suggest that you look at these races and perhaps find in them some ideas for developing character background and variety in your campaign, borrowing the ideas, since the mechanics will be fairly useless to you.

These races are described in three areas, and the system used may be unfamiliar to many. Skill Benefits are given with negative number values for each of five pairs of skills. A character may take that number as a cost reduction on one or the other of the skills in each of the five pairs. Attribute Adjustments are of two types. A Size Value is provided, which is plugged into the regular Size Class formula in Ysgarth to replace 70, which is the normal human value. In addition, certain primary characteristics may be listed with numbers after them. These indicate the costs of those characteristics to that race. Normally, humans pay 1 point for each characteristic point when setting up a character. Non-humans start with the same number of characteristic points, but some stats may cost them more or less than they do for humans. If they cost more, a number greater than one will be given, if they cost less a decimal value will be given. No matter what the cost for the characteristic, the total number of actual points which may be spent on it remains 24, and for distribution limitations, it is the points spent, not the result, which counts. For example, if a race has a cost of .5 for STR, a player could still only spend 24 points on STR, but it would give a STR of 48. A value is also given for Average Age, which is the age around which characters should start being played, and Lifespan, which is about the average age of death from natural causes. Starting wealth should be figured as if they had a human age parallel to their actual age, relative to a human lifespan of 70 years. Also provided are racial languages, group and cost.

As a final note, use these races fairly sparingly in your campaign. Don't just let starting characters create non-humans. They are rare among player characters and even rarer among the population as a whole, and many of the races never even interact with humans. Chitare, Uvezka, Skraeka and Kaituka each make up less than 1/1000th of the total population. Koranyet, Roanes and Melusines each make up less than 1/500th of the total population. Ellyllon, Gwyllion and Gwragedd together make up slightly less than 1/100th of the population. Trozards and Batragi each make up about 1/200th of the population. Koblynau make up about 1/150th of the population and Dwerga make up about 1/100th of the population. Despite these figures, most of these races are not actually anywhere near this common, as almost all of these races stay far from the mainstream of human activity.

UVEZKA

Size Value:85

Characteristic

Costs:INT(.8),WIL(.8),TAL(.7),JUD(1.25),ZEA(1.4)

),CON(1.25),APP(1.25)

Average Age:20

Lifespan:70

Language: Probably Machar, Kymraeg, Vaen or

Ukral, but others are possible

SBs:

-1 Mana Shield or Resonance

-1 on 1 Social or Combat Skill

-1 on 2 Sorcerer or Conjuror Spells

This race is not truly a race at all, but a classification for the half-breed offspring of demons from the Abyss and human mates. There are three breeds of demons in the Abyss, and the Uvezka are children of the Uvezich, who are the rulling class in the Abyss. Such children are invariably born out of wedlock, and usually exposed by their mothers who are likely to become outcasts themselves for having consorted with a demon. They are marked and recognizable from birth, because of the grayish palor of their skin, their complete hairlessness and the pointed, almost webbed shape of their large ears. Born into human society and rejected or ignored by demon society, theirs is a life of scorn and derision, though of the demon-breeds the Uvezka are relatively capable of passing in human society, should they live to maturity. Because of their background their magical potential is high. In addition to the listed skill benefits, if they were actually raised by parents, they have the option to trade off up to half their skill benefits for benefits from their parent's race.

SKRAEKA

Size Value:65

Characteristic

Costs:JUD(.8),TAL(.8),DEX.8,AGI(1.25),CON(1.25)

,STR(1.25)

Average Age:20

Lifespan:70

Language: Probably Machar, Kymraeg, Vaen or

Ukral, but others are possible

SBs:

-1 Mana Shield or Resonance

-1 Lost Scrips or Somatic

-1 on 1 Craft Skill or 1 Thief Skill

-1 on 1 Enchanter or Diviner Spell

-1 on 1 Combat Skill or 1 Craft Skill

The Skraeka are the second of the demon breeds, born in much the same circumstances as the Uvezka, but by the breeding of humans and

members of the Skraedja race or the Abyss, the caste of demon craftsmen. They can actually pass for human, but among those races which know about demon-breeds, the signs will be easy to recognize and they will probably be cast out before their reach puberty. They look more or less human, but they have enlarged, elongated heads, with forward-sloping foreheads and jutting chins, large noses and bristly hair. In addition, there is a tendency for their hair to be discolored with many large red splotches, something which also happens in regular human children from time to time. As with the Uvezka, they may have the opportunity to mix SBs if they are raised by their family, though this is unlikely.

KALTUKA

Size Value:75
Characteristic
Costs:AGI(.8),STR(.8),DEX.8,INT(1.25),WIL(1.25)
JUD(1.25),SOC(1.25)
Average Age:15
Lifespan:50
Language: Probably Machar, Kymraeg, Vaen or Ukral, but others are possible
SBs: -2 Flying or Riding
-1 on 1 Combat Skill or Resonance
-1 on 1 Combat Skill or Ritual
-1 on 1 Spell or 1 Stealth Skill

The Kaltuga are the lowest caste of the Abyss, the winged demonic warriors, and their offspring are the most reviled and endangered of the demon-breeds. They inherit their parent's batlike wings, as well as a greyish skin and rudimentary claws on hands and feet. However, in most cases the wings never form fully, and the best they can manage is erratic flapping for very limited periods of time. In many cases the parents will rip the wings off the child at birth to try to make it pass for normal. If they carry their wings to adult hood, they will be capable primarily of gliding rather than true flight, though they have the capability to maneuver and to climb a little bit, with great effort. Like the other demon-breeds they may mix skill benefits in the unlikely situation that their parents did not expose them on the nearest hillside or throw them to the local wolf pack.

ELLYLLON

Size Value:50
Characteristic
Costs:AGI(.8),TAL(.8),DEX.8,CON(1.25),STR(1.25)
WIL(1.25)
Average Age:60
Lifespan:200
Language: Elyllon(4211:CST7), plus half cost on Tylweith(4211:CST8)
SBs: -1 on 1 Magical Skill or Craft Skill
-1 on 1 Woodland or Craft Skill
-1 on 1 Woodland or Unarmed Combat Skill
-1 on 1 Herbalist or Beastmaster Spell
-1 on 1 Magical or Unarmed Combat Skill

The Elyllon are one of the three elf-like races of Ysgarth. There are three main legends of the origins of the elves, one of which applies closely to the Elyllon, who are believed to be the surviving descendants of the pre-human inhabitants of Ysgarth, the Dothian or Wrathlords. However, genetically they are capable of interbreeding with humans to produce sterile mules, and can produce viable offspring with any of the other elf races, so it is suspected that they are merely an unusual offshoot of human stock. They are somewhat smaller than humans, with very delicate features, pale skin and reddish hair which is usually allowed to grow quite long. Their fingers are longer than human fingers and they are quite agile and dextrous. Their society is rather withdrawn and their population is declining through assimilation with human populations and through extermination. Those who survive try to avoid humans and often work mischief on them in the woods, leading them off cliffs, etc. They are the weakest and least numerous of the elves, with no nations of their own, and spread through wooded wilderlands on the borders of human habitation.

GWRAGEDD

Size Value:55
Characteristic
Costs:AGI(.8),TAL(.8),DEX.8,CON(1.25),WIL(1.25)
JUD(1.25)
Average Age:60
Lifespan:200
Language: Gwragedd(4213:CST7), plus half cost on Tylweith(4211:CST8)

SBs: -1 on 1 Magical Skill or Craft Skill
-1 on 1 Nautical or Craft Skill
-1 on 1 Nautical or Blade Combat Skill
-1 on 1 Aeromancer or Hydromancer Spell
-1 on 1 Magical or Unarmed Combat Skill

The Gwragedd are the elves of the coasts and islands, and are fairly strong in their own way. They believe themselves to have one of several possible origins, the most likely being that they were created by the gods Freyr and Aegir as a race to dwell on the sea as humans dwell on land. However, as these are human gods of fairly recent origin, sages suspect that those names have merely been substituted for older and stranger gods of similar aspect. They are shorter than humans in stature, have greyish-black hair and pale skin. Their features are fine, though they tend to be a bit blockier than the Elyllon or Gwyllion. They are great seafarers and have many coastal and island fishing communities in areas a bit too rough or isolated for humans to make use of. Their diet is almost entirely fish as a result, and they know little of agriculture, though some of their crafts are remarkable. Much of the Gwragedd population is concentrated on the large island of Seregond off the northwest coast of Morganwc, which is ruled by a Gwragedd king.

GWYLLION

Size Value:60
Characteristic
Costs:AGI(.8),TAL(.7),DEX(.8),WIL(.8),CON(1.4),
JUD(1.4),ZEA(1.4)
Average Age:100
Lifespan:500
Language: Gwyllion(4214:CST7), plus half cost on Tylweith(4211:CST8)
SBs: -1 on 1 Ritual or 1 Unarmed Combat Skill
-1 on 1 Relative or Contagion
-1 on 1 Rapier or Unarmed Combat Skill
-1 on Riding or 1 Smith Skill
-1 on 1 Magic Skill or Unarmed Combat Skill

The Gwyllion are probably the most numerous and the most organized of the elvish races, though they have the least to do with humankind, their population being almost entirely concentrated in the far northeastern part of the Vaen steppes in a mountain range at the tip of the Abyss. In this mountainous area of heavy glaciation they have a number of feudal kingdoms of ancient origin, where they dwell in huge, labyrinthine mountain fortresses and small valley villages which wrest food from the chilled soil. They are the tallest of the elf breeds, with long, dark hair and almost completely white skin. Their eyes are characterized by having no retinas to speak of and large, black pupils. They are known for their magic, their cruelty and their hatred of humankind. They have many legends of their origin, with the more corrupt believing them to be the children or descendants of the gods Ullir and Ullin, and others believing them to be the original race of Ysgarth, more ancient even than the Dothian.

TROZARD

Size Value:150
Characteristic
Costs:INT(.8),CON(.8),JUD(1.25),AGI(1.25)
Average Age:30
Lifespan:120
Language: Trozard(4311:CST6)
SBs: -1 on 1 Language or Craft Skill
-1 on 1 Military Skill or Smith Skill
-1 on 1 Woodland or Shield Skill
-1 on Greatsword or Brewing
-1 on Battle Axe or Javelin

The Trozards are one of the oldest races in Ysgarth, a breed of giant lizard-like humanoid. They are bipeds who walk erect and stand over 8ft tall on the average. They have sharp teeth, short claws and gray-green scales. Their heads are almost square in shape, similar to those of an iguana or salamander, with a ridge running from the forehead, down the back to the large, balancing tail. Trozards predate humans on Ysgarth, and tend to dwell far from human population centers, though many have abandoned traditional family life to seek employment in human cities. Their culture and traditions are ancient, but much of their technology and science have been forgotten, though they have no resentment towards the species which now dominate what they see as their world. It is said that their decline came when they were dominant and fought a war against the Chitare hives, destroying both

civilizations, though remnants remain. They prefer dry mountain and steppe regions for dwelling.

BATRAG
 Size Value:130
 Characteristic
 Costs:WIL(.7),JUD(.8),ZEA(.7),CON(.8),INT(1.25)
 AGI(1.6),DEX(1.25),SOC(1.25)
 Average Age:15
 Lifespan:60
 Language: Batraksch(4321:CST6)
 SBS: -1 on 1 Priestly Skill or Halberd
 -1 on 1 Priest Spell or Pike
 -1 on 1 Ritual or Incantation
 -1 on 1 Axe Weapon or Craft Skill
 -1 on 1 Nautical Skill or Wrestling

The Batrags are a race of frog-like humanoid of considerable size. They are of amphibian descent, but walk erect, and have fully formed manipulative hands. Their bodies are large and heavy, and they have long, bowed legs. Their fingers and toes are webbed, and some have long spines on their head and arms. Their facial features are rather like those of a large toad. They are fully intelligent, and dwell in swampy areas in the southern parts of Ysgarth, where they build villages on stilts above the water. They have considerable intercourse with humans, and often hire out as guards or soldiers. They like humid climates, but can survive well enough away from the water. The race is said to be old, but they keep no real history or records to speak of, and are mentioned only in passing in the oldest human records, though it is likely they predate humanity on Ysgarth.

CHITARE
 Size Value:100
 Characteristic
 Costs:JUD(.7),AGI(.7),ZEA(.7),CON(1.4),INT(1.3),TAL(1.6)
 Average Age:10
 Lifespan:50
 Language: Chitare(4331:CST9)
 SBS: -3 on any 1 Skill
 -2 on any 1 Skill

The Chitare are a race of intelligent insects who live in hive communities in the most remote regions of the world. Their population was almost completely destroyed several thousand years ago in a war with the Trozards, and since then they have not really been able to make a full recovery, and it is suspected that there are less than a dozen Chitare communities left in the entire world. They hate and despise all other races, and do their best to avoid them. The only Chitare who will have any contact with humans are those who are cast out of the hive for imperfection or deviance. The hive dictates strict patterns of thought and activity, and those who do not fill their role properly are generally ostracized. Physically, a Chitare resembles a human-sized preying-mantis, though the physical form is a bit more humanoid and they have three fingered hands with opposable thumbs at their mid-section, in addition to fighting claw/pincers at their upper shoulders. They find it difficult to simulate human speech, and very few ever actually contact humans at all.

DWERGA
 Size Value:40
 Characteristic
 Costs:CON(.8),DEX(.8),WIL(.8),ZEA(.8),STR(.8),AGI(1.4),JUD(1.3),APP(1.3),SOC(1.25)
 Average Age:40
 Lifespan:200
 Language: Khuzdaral(4222:CST6), plus half cost on Dwergrmal(4221:CST8)
 SBS: -1 on 1 Magical Skill or Craft Skill
 -1 on Excavation or 1 Craft Skill
 -1 on Merchant or Mechanical
 -1 on Round Shield or Spear
 -1 on Short Sword or 1 Enchanter Spell

The Dwerga are a race of dwarven humanoids who dwell in the mountains of north central Ysgarth, in the mountain kingdom of Khuzdaral. They are fairly technologically advanced and masters of trade and diplomacy. They are given to ruddy complexions and red hair, and are usually quite hirsute. They have a low regard for humans and their nation is run with efficiency and an excess of laws for control of foreigners. Although they are traded with eagerly, they are reviled among humans for their practice of buying the children of impoverished Vaen nomad tribes and putting them to work in their army, mines and workshops.

They have an ancient history and tradition, and are master artisans and craftsmen.

KOBLYNNAU
 Size Value:50
 Characteristic
 Costs:AGI(.6),STR(.6),CON(.6),WIL(1.2),INT(1.3),JUD(1.3),SOC(1.3),APP(1.5),CHA(1.4)
 Average Age:15
 Lifespan:80
 Language: Koblynau(4231:CST6), plus 2 off cost of Tylweith(4211:CST8)

SBS: -1 on Contagion or Relative
 -1 on Mountaineering or a Survivall Skill
 -1 on 1 Club Weapon or Shield
 -1 on Hunting or Gathering
 -1 on Mace or Hammer

This race dwells mostly in the northern mountains of Ysgarth. They are thought by many to be a degenerate offshoot of the Gwillion. They are humanoids of somewhat smaller stature, but unusually tough and wiry. They are given to red and black hair and greyish complected rough-looking skin. They are very tough in facing physical damage, but rather vulnerable to disease, perhaps because of their practice of dwelling in caves and their poor diet. Their culture is mostly a mystery, though they do have priests, shamen and tribal leaders. They have little technology except for some metal and leather working, though they are good warriors and hunters. They are disliked by almost all of their lowland neighbors, because they have no agriculture or herding skill, and when hunting in the mountains becomes poor, they will come into the lowlands in small bands to steal food and goods, and in times of famine huge hordes will appear which can ravage a whole county. They are also said to steal human children and eat them, though they deny it vehemently.

ROANE
 Size Value:45
 Characteristic
 Costs:AGI(.6),DEX(.6),CHA(.8),INT(1.4),JUD(1.5),WIL(1.5),ZEA(1.5),SOC(1.3)
 Average Age:10
 Lifespan:45
 Language: Roane(4241:CST5)
 SBS: -5 on Swimming
 -2 on Hold Breath
 -1 on any 2 Fishing or Nautical Skills
 -1 on 1 Unarmed Combat or Spear

Roanes are a race of intelligent sea-dwelling humanoids, though to have developed from a racial stock similar to terrestrial seals. They look more or less like humans, but their bodies are covered with a fine fur and they are capable of holding their breath exceptionally well under water, though they are mammals. Their bodies are also unusually well suited to swimming, though they are fully human in general configuration. They dwell on the rocky coasts of northern Ysgarth and are unusually resistant to the cold water temperatures. They have little or no technology, but a great oral tradition of legends and stories. Their unusual skill benefits reflect their natural aquatic abilities, and players playing a Roane should be encouraged to take significant levels of these skills.



THE FIFTH MUSICIAN

A. SADEL

Looking back Mazyrik could see the dark forest of Aveyrone stretching behind him. He fancied he could see sunlight off the windows of Vyones, and even mists along the coast of the Ligurian sea. He untied the old ash walking stick from his pack, ready for use now that the way was smoother and there was a road to follow. With pack on back and stick in hand he followed the road north out of the mountains.

Later that afternoon he crossed an aetherial line which marked the border between the counties of Meduns and Aveyrone, though the woods and fields looked much the same on either side. Night descended as he passed by grape arbors in the shadow of the mountains. The summer nights promised to be warmer in the valley than they had been in the mountains. Mazyrik made his camp in a flat spot by the road in the shade of a squat old oak. He gathered sticks and dry grass for kindling and piled a few branches on top to make a fire. A few words and gestures would have let his power bring the kindling to flame, but instead he took out flint and steel and scraped sparks into the driest bits until they started to smolder and could be fanned alite. The flame spread and he soon had a strong fire going.

Mazyrik sat in the warmth of the fire for a few moments, until he caught a glimpse of a rabbit on the edge of the lighted circle it cast. It edged up beside Mazyrik slowly, drawn by the light. Suddenly Mazyrik's left hand snapped out to his side, pinning the rabbit to the ground. He drew it to him taking its ears in his right hand and drawing back its head. In a single smooth motion he brought it to his lips and bit into its neck. Almost daintily he drained its small body of blood. He wiped his lips and laid the limp form on a rock. With a thin bladed knife he skinned the rabbit and cut the meat into strips to roast over the fire and eat before retiring.

Philippa sat in her room, trying to make out her face through the tarnish on an old, bronze mirror. What she saw was pleasing, or so her father had told her often enough. She seemed pale, despite the ruddy cast of the mirror, at least in comparison to the brown-skinned village girls who washed their clothes in the river outside her window. Outdoor activity made them rough and healthy, while Philippa's father kept her indoors, away from such rough company. He provided for her needs as he had for her mother and watched her wither slowly day by day, furious that his loins should have



produced fruit so frail, fearing for the time when she, like her mother, would leave him in the night.

Philippa worried far less about her health and isolation than did her father. Familiar loneliness faded in anticipation of the fete her father had planned for her thirteenth birthday. She had nagged him about it for months, remembering tales the servants told of dances and parties during her mother's day. He had finally given in, willing to break his own reclusive habits to indulge his only daughter. All the guest had been invited, neighbors and old familiars, or their sons and heirs, a mixed group of gentry, minor nobles and even a few gentrified townspeople. Preparations were almost complete, and it remained only for her and Nurse to have her new dress ready in time.

Days on the road passed quickly. Mazyrik sang to himself while he walked, accompanied by the thudding of his stick on the dust and by the wind among the trees of the forest. Game was plentiful and the nights were warm and dry. He made good time through Meduns and Neustria and would soon pass into Ameruic and reach Carsiacs.

Laudric, Count of Meduns, worried too much. He worried about the crop. He worried about his vassals. He worried about the King. Most of all he worried about his daughter Philippa. Meduns was a small, poor county. He could not afford to hire the skilled churgeons and mages of the court in Aurians from his meagre treasury, and unless she received special care he was sure Philippa would find the same early death as her mother. Perhaps she would also die in childbirth, or perhaps even sooner.

Philippa seemed almost to fade away as he watched. Perhaps the fete would raise her spirits. He knew he should let her get out more, but he hated the risks that would confront her. Each day he was out hunting, but each night he paced his echoing chambers, constantly praying in silence.

It was noon. Mazyrik sat on a bank by the road, carving the head of a new walking stick to replace the one which had split from hard use. With luck he could get the new one shod with brass in the next town.

He thought he could hear the baying of hounds in the woods across the road, growing louder and coming nearer. In a moment this conjecture was proven true, as a pack of hounds, with no apparent quarry, leapt across the ditch on the far side of the road, surrounding him, nuzzling at his pack. They were followed by a mounted hunter with spear in hand, who reined in before Mazyrik.

He sat for a moment, assessing the rider's status, and concluding that anyone with a horse in this poor land deserved attention, rose and inclined his head respectfully.

"Ho, stranger, and who might you be?"

"A traveler from the east. My name is Mazyrik, Radul Mazyrik. Now you have the advantage of me."

"I'm Laudric, Count of Meduns."

Mazyrik inclined his head more deeply and removed his cap with a flourish. "And Meduns. I take it, is this fair county through which I travel?"

"So it is." He looked the tall easterner up and down, suspecting from his bearing that he was more than a peasant vagabond. "My dogs seem to have taken a liking to you. Perhaps you'd care to spend the night in my house. It's about a league down the road towards Aurians. We've a fete planned for tonight, and I suspect you could add to the entertainment with a tale or two from your travels."

A real bed was an irresistible temptation after weeks on the road, so he followed after the count, learning something of the troubles of Meduns and telling the count a bit about his native land of Orszagia. When they reached the gates of the castle they knew each other somewhat better.

Nurse had Philippa put her dress on before putting the final touches to her hair. The dark curls emphasized the palor of her face, but the white dress brought out a little of the color hidden in her cheeks.

The guests were already arriving from Aurians and from all over the county. There were courtiers, chevaliers, and even Prince Louis, the King's third son. The rarely used guest quarters had been aired and were all filled. Extra servants had to be brought up from the village and so that the preparations could be completed in time.

Mazyrik was given a room at the top of a small tower. The entire place bustled with life. There were guests, servants and musicians everywhere, all brightly arrayed. Guests were trying to find their rooms, while servants saw to the horses and preparations in the grand hall and musicians tuned their instruments. Mazyrik found his room with some help from a harried valet. He changed from his travelling clothes to a better suit which he carried with him.

The banquet was scheduled to start at sunset. By then all the guests and performers should have had time to get ready. The count had spared little expense, to the limit of his resources, and there were players, trouveurs, musicians, fantastics and jongeleurs from Aurians and Cassinogis, as well as wanderers like Mazyrik. All in all more than five score guests had places in the grand hall.

When he was dressed and ready, the sun was just setting, so Mazyrik hurried through the castle corridors, reaching the hall at the tail of a large crowd. Three tables were set in an open ended square, already laden with food and drink. There were places for each guest appropriate to their station. Mazyrik was flattered to find his place about half way up one of the side table between two knights in the count's service.

When all had taken their places the count arrived, seating Prince Louis on his left and Philippa, dazzling in her white dress, on his right. The dinner passed in boisterous merriment, spurred on by dancers and jugglers between the tables. Some of the dandier courtiers lifted their eyebrows at the rural delicacies served to them, but their snide observations were drowned out by the laughter of the local worthies who held the majority. Conversation was lively and Mazyrik found eager ears for tales of his travels in the east.

After the last course had been cleared the tables were rapidly cleared and taken down, the legs removed, and the top-boards stacked to make a dias, upon which a group of four musicians, with lute, harp, horn and pipes took their places to play for dancing. The crowd milled around as the music began, with no one willing to be the first to take the floor. Local guests were reluctant to show their awkward steps before the sophisticates of the court while the courtly visitors scoffed at the rough cadences of the musicians. Fortunately, the count took Philippa's hand and led her out for the first dance.

Mazyrik danced with several of the less timid ladies who gave in to the attraction of his dark and foreign looks, and Philippa was kept constantly in motion by the young men of the court. As the night wore on, Mazyrick eventually found himself dancing with his host's young daughter.

As they danced, Mazyrik thought he saw something strange. When the dance had begun there had been four musicians on the dias. Now it seemed that a fifth had joined them. This new entertainer was of strange demeanor and played on a sinister instrument. At first it appeared that a fiddle nestled beneath his sharp chin. On closer inspection Mazyrik began to think it looked more like a human thigh bone, while the bow looked rather like a long rib-bone. It gave out a raucous wailing, out of tune with the rest of the performance. No one seemed to notice except Mazyrik and Philippa, who halted in her steps and then staggered into a dance in time with the music of the fifth musician.

When Mazyrik saw the musician's face beneath a broad brimmed hat, he was alarmed, for he had seen it before. Half a year ago he had been passing through a town in Italy which had been stricken with the plague. He had seen this same figure, armed with a sword, striding through the fires where they burned the bodies of the dead. He would never forget the gace that all men knew but few saw more than once, the gaunt features and empty eye sockets.

The interloper stepped down from the dias and walked out on the dance floor playing his morbid instrument. At that moment the young prince tapped Mazyrik on the shoulder. He whirled and his hands were almost at the youth's throat, when he saw the look of terror in the boy's eyes and realized he only wanted to cut in. Mazyrik stepped aside and made a hasty bow, turning as he bowed to watch the apparition which was now weaving through the dancers towards Philippa, unnoticed by those around him.

Mazyrik realized he would have to act. He walked towards the thing and stood before it, blocking its path towards Philippa. Not realizing that Mazyrik could see it, it stepped around him, but he interposed himself once more. Really noticing its opponent for the first time, the thing hissed at Mazyrik through tattered lips, whispering unintelligible threats. He just stood his ground, blocking it from his host's daughter.

Spitting in frustration, it reached out for Mazyrik, willing to take him instead of its intended charge. Hoping his suspicions and his breeding proved true, Mazyrik let it touch him on the shoulder. He felt a slight coldness at the touch, but nothing more. It might have been a fantasy born of fear, but he thought he heard his mother's voice over his shoulder whispering "he is not yours" to the thing.

The empty eye sockets seemed to glow with a ruddy light, then the thing howled, throwing its instrument to the floor, where it shattered with an ear-rending screech. It glared for a moment at Mazyrik, as if to memorize his features, then it vanished.

Mazyrik looked back to see Philippa dancing happily in the prince's embrace, new color seeming to rise in her cheeks. Just then the count strolled up to invite him into the sitting room to tell tales of his travels. Mazyrik followed happily. It was the least he could do to repay his host's hospitality.

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