

# ABYSS 40



THE GAMING ALTERNATIVE

# ABYSS MAGAZINE

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## CONJURINGS

Well, as usual we're behind schedule. Not really much point even bringing it up anymore, since every issue seems to be behind schedule. I'd beg your indulgence and praise your patience, but I'll concentrate on getting next issue out faster instead. That seems like a more practical solution.

Things are happening in gaming and it looks like this summer will produce some interesting news and controversy. 'Echoes from the Abyss' should give you a nice introduction to some of what is going on. One of the signs of change for the better is the birth of the Society of Independent Game Manufacturers, an industry organization which will provide support and services for the smaller, newer companies in gaming, filling the role which GAMA has chosen to abandon. Look for an announcement of the winners of the SIGMA Awards in the next issue of ABYSS, and if you are interested in joining you'll find information in the ad on page 20 of this issue.

The summer convention season is coming up in the next few months. Ragnarok will be attending ORIGINS in Baltimore and GENCON in Milwaukee. We will have booths in the dealer rooms at both conventions and plan to run a selection of demonstrations and informal tournaments at ORIGINS and a schedule of seminars on a number of topics at GENCON. I encourage all of you to attend these two excellent conventions and I hope that you'll stop by the Ragnarok booth and have a chat.

Despite delays parallel to those experienced by ABYSS, Ragnarok's publication schedule

continues to move forward. Kamp Killjoy was released this winter at WARCON and Dark Waters is just out. Also, after quite a wait SpellCraft, the second book of the new Ysgarth system is just about ready for release. Some final editing remains to be done and it should be back from the printer by mid-June, in time for ORIGINS. Other projects are also moving along well and if things go well Guns at Noon, Dark Continents and the new edition of To Challenge Tomorrow should be ready this summer.

This issue has returned to the slightly larger size which we missed last issue. As I mentioned earlier 'Echoes from the Abyss', which opens up this issue is particularly interesting. For Ysgarth players I recommend the 'Ysgarth Tactical System'. Everyone should find some amusement and edification in 'Miniatures and Role-Playing'. Eric Olson returns this issue with 'Religion in the Fantasy Campaign', which closes this issue. Finally, take a look at the insert this issue. It is something a little different, a set of rather creative encounters which will work with any game system which have been rather well received in playtesting. A strong issue which I hope you will enjoy.

One last plug. If you have a computer and a modem, INFINITE INCARNATIONS is the video equivalent of ABYSS. It is an online bulletin board system devoted to gaming and related topics. We are currently running six RPGs, including two AD&D games, Ysgarth, Call of Cthulhu, Champions and more. It is a free service, though it will be a long distance call for some of you. INFINITE INCARNATIONS operates at 300 or 1200 baud and is up 24 hours a day. The phone number is 512-323-9072. Give it a call and get involved in some of the most exciting gaming discussion online.

Look for ABYSS #41 to come your way fairly quickly. There's a lot of work to do around here, but ABYSS always has a high priority and there are several issues worth of excellent articles and some new fiction waiting on my desk. Until next time...

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# ECHOES FROM THE ABYSS

## ORIGINS

Dear Dave,

I got ABYSS #39 in the mail today, and would like to make a few comments about your ORIGINS review. I'm glad to see that you liked it, but it seems that your views differ from the rest of the hobby.

First off, the article in our newsletter was not a personal attack on you, but on your articles in both ABYSS and A&E. Our convention staff, which does not get paid to work at our shows, but does them out of love, didn't take kindly to your remarks that paid staff can run a better show (a comment that you had made in A&E). A single-fee convention can be as good as one with event fees, and in our case much better. Because gamers save money on event fees, they have money to spend in the dealer's room, which they do a lot of at our conventions!

As to staff people not knowing who Alan Emrich, the President of DTI is, that is understandable when one takes into account that we had over 300 people working at ORIGINS, and not all need to come into contact with him, instead needing only to contact the event directors and supervisors down the convention's 'Chain of Command'. Most come into contact with myself in my role as Director of Conventions.

In regards to the seminar problems, we took everything on a first-come, first-serve basis. The LAX Hilton has 90,000 sq. ft. of convention space, and is building a 10,000 sq. ft. ballroom, which will be done in time for ORIGINS '89. Emrich, by the way, we are hosting), and while we're on the subject of the hotel, it is nowhere near Watts, but is beside West LA and beautiful Santa Monica.

Now we get to your biggest gripe about the show: event registration. Gamers were allowed to pre-register for one event per day, and we allow events to fill to 80% by pre-registration. We also keep many events off the list so that they will only be available for at-the-door sign-ups. We do not give out tickets, but send postcards to those who pre-register, informing them what events they got. Of the gamers who attended ORIGINS '86, and for that matter, attend our regular conventions, 50% of them pre-registered for the convention. The gamers who didn't pre-register, along with those pre-registees who wanted to get into more games, had to stand in line for events, just like they would at any convention that I have ever been to. And to top it off, we had gamers wanting to pre-register for more than one event per day, saying the heck with everyone else. All I can say is this: if you know that you are going to a convention, pre-register as early as possible to ensure getting the events that you want. We ran 91 boardgame tournaments, 40 computer tournaments, 70 miniature events, 440 role-playing events, 54 demonstrations, 70 seminars and 5 auctions. Some 4955 people attended LA ORIGINS in one way or another (staff, exhibitor, paid attendee, visitor, VIP, etc.). So as you can see we put all 90,000 sq. ft. of the hotel to use, and ran as many events as we had time, space and staff for. If you wish to run a game, put on a seminar, or something else for ORIGINS '89, get in touch with myself at DTI, and we'll schedule you in.

In regards to the dealer room, we had plenty of new companies in there, along with new products. Most of these new companies couldn't afford to go to an ORIGINS on the East Coast, but did very well at this, their first ORIGINS. And speaking of sales, almost everyone has told us that ORIGINS '86 was in their top three ORIGINS in terms of sales, so I guess that both the gamers and the companies were happy.

Also enclosed is an ORIGINS convention badge which all paid attendees had at the show. The staff, visitors and dealers had our regular STRATEGICON badges, which didn't seem to bother them at all.



As a final note, I don't see how you can say that ORIGINS '86 is part of the declining spiral of ORIGINS, when almost everyone else thinks it was a tremendously successful, almost 'savior' ORIGINS. Even you feel that it was a good show.

See you at ORIGINS!

Jeff Alhanese  
Dir. of Conventions, DTI  
Long Beach, CA

[Thanks for the comments, Jeff. At least we are not disagreeing as violently over this as we have in the past. I'll try to respond point by point. Regarding the newsletter article, I suppose it was an attack on my articles, but since it denigrated my knowledge, experience and skills, I consider that somewhat personal. You're also misled if you think that I said that staff had to be paid to run a good convention. I never said anything about paying the staffs. My comments concerned remuneration for those running events, not for the convention staff, which will inevitably work mostly out of their sense of duty. Admittedly you had a large staff, but I still think that when I ask several of them where Alan Emrich, is they should at least be able to get hold of someone who can help me. I don't know if the LAX Hilton is near Watts or not. That was what a friend from the area informed me when we drove out to get dinner and found ourselves in the midst of slums, projects, pawn shops and liquor stores with barred windows (this was within three minutes drive and was the only type of neighborhood we were able to find near the hotel). I felt safer in Detroit. My problem with seminars is not that you did not have them, but that the variety was limited and that perhaps some effort to make the convention more attractive to experienced seminar runners would have increased the variety. In your letter, you make pretty clear what was wrong with the event registration process. If you only allow people to register for one event per day and have enormous lines to fill the space which is held for non-pre-registrants, chances are that most attendees will play in only one event per day and be left with a pretty empty schedule. The most popular events will still be the most popular with registration limited to one event per day, so they will fill up, so chances are that only those who deliberately don't sign up for their first choices will have a good chance of getting most of what they sign-up for. The result of this could easily be a large majority of the attendees coming to the convention without having been able to get into anything, having to stand in line more than playing and ending up with a very unsatisfactory schedule. This isn't just a theory. This was the case with almost everyone I talked to and with the half dozen people I brought with me from Austin. The typical case was getting into one second-choice event, one fourth choice event and nothing else, even by standing in line, except good 'Braggers-Rights Poker'. That's the way it was, however good your efforts and ideals. ORIGINS either needed more events or more room in the events. Perhaps if the convention were designed to attract more outside event runners this problem would be solved. I liked the dealer room, and sales went well, so I can't disagree with you there, and there were certainly more new companies at ORIGINS than there were at GENCON. Regarding the badge, it is a small matter, but there were those who were bothered by it. Perhaps they chose to mention it to me instead of offending your staff with their queries. Finally, I did not say that LA ORIGINS was part of the declining spiral. I think my review

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makes clear that it was a resurgence for ORIGINS. My comment regarded ORIGINS '88 and my hopes that it too would be a step forward. You're right, I do think LA ORIGINS was a good show, but there is nothing wrong with trying to make the few weak areas of an otherwise fine effort better, especially when some of the adjustments could be made so easily.--DN

## COMMENTS

Dear Dave,

Wow! Ragnarok Enterprises is still around! I hadn't heard from you in so long, I was beginning to wonder.

But anyway, I'm writing to let you know that I got the letter about resubscribing. Since you want comments about ABYSS, here they are.

On the up side, you publish the most consistently high quality gaming magazine I have ever read, *has none*. I like the approach you take of trying to give good ideas that can be used in a variety of systems, rather than a chart or similarly rigid gaming aid for a specific game. The variety of this type of articles, along with the regular features (I almost always like them all) makes a good magazine.

Of course, there is the inevitable down side (alas, the main reason I'm writing). I have been reading ABYSS long enough to be able to expect and cope with your infamous delays, but this is unbelievable. Shortly after sending in my subscription I received #32. After about three months, I received #34 and #35 arrived about a week later. Something like four to five months after that, I received issue #36 (not #33, but #36). This makes a grand total of four issues so far. Hmm, something seems to be wrong here. Anyway, that is that last I heard from you until now, having assumed that some catastrophic event must have occurred. It is sincerely encouraging to hear that you are still in business and I'd love to renew, but would I get my issues if I did?

Anyway, I would really appreciate if you would check over your records and make sure that these did get sent out to ye. And, believe it or not, I am fully aware that there is a good chance that the blame lies with the good ol' U. S. Postal Service (they also lost three issues of AMAZING HEROES for me), and I'm really not as annoyed as I might sound, and I just want to know what happened.

Well, that's about it for now, so I'd appreciate it if you would write to me if you can figure out what happened.

J. Michael Cobb  
Ft. Washington, PA

[Thanks for your comments. I'm glad to see that someone thinks ABYSS is achieving some of what we aim for. Of course, we don't aim for the kind of delays which we have or the errors which happen in the postal service. Our mailings are now completely automated, so if your issue doesn't get to you, it is almost certainly the result of an error in the post office. If an issue is late, it is more likely that it is a problem on our end. Of course, there are the occasional mis-entered addresses and clerical errors, and because of all these possibilities it is wise to write us if you have delays or missing issues. In this case what happened was that issues #33 and #34 were released within a week of each other and the later one arrived first for some people. This was in order to catch up on the month delay after #32. I don't know why you didn't get #35, #37 or #38, because I checked the computer file and it shows that they were sent, so I can only assume that something horrible happened in the mails. In response to this letter I've sent the missing issues, for I'd never want a deserving soul to go without a justly earned ABYSS. Remember that there are delays from time to time, so some issues may be late and others may be early to make up to that. We try to keep to a general schedule, and though we are far from perfect, we will continue to give you our best.--DN]

Dear ABYSS,

It's good to see ABYSS is once again reaching my little corner of the world.

ABYSS #38 was a good issue. 'Practical Magic' was excellent. In the Speculum was just about the right size and the two scenarios 'Wedded in Blood' and 'The Reverent' were quite good.

ABYSS #39 was a bit of a disappointment. In the Speculum was too large and Comic Books: Style and Innovation seemed a little out of place. Another disappointment was the absence of an adventure (or even a short scenario). Modules certainly don't carry my campaigns, but when your players catch you unprepared it's nice to have one to fall back on. ABYSS #39 was not without worth, though. 'Dream and Nightmare' was very good. How about a follow-up article? Details about the dream lords and the creatures that serve them would be nice. The cure for ADD's 'Illes' was interesting. Can ADD be saved? With the modifications Mr. Jones suggests, it might be possible.

Are you still planning to do a full-size issue of ABYSS? Please do! Even as an experiment.

Cheer up Dave, there are some people out here in munchkinland who appreciate your efforts.

Quin McConnell  
Hermiston, OR

[We appreciate all comments both positive and negative, they help us chart the future of ABYSS. We do try to include an adventure module in each issue, but occasionally we have an issue without one, for scheduling reasons or because we don't have a good one ready. When an issue runs over its allotted length the easiest thing to cut is the module. As for Ian Hense's comics article, we thought it was appropriate, since so many gamers are interested in comics and there are so many comic book RPGs on the market these days. I hope you can take it, but we will probably add some comics reviews to the ever burgeoning pages of 'In the Speculum'. I think that there probably will be a more specific follow-up to 'Dream and Nightmare' more or less along the lines you suggest. Look for it in an issue or two. As for a full-sized issue, that is mostly a function of our budget. Right now our funds are rather limited, and although we would like to at least experiment with the larger size we may not be able to. Expanding the size is definitely desirable, however, and will still be high on the agenda should we become more solvent.--DN]

Dear Abyss,

I really enjoyed your magazines (#37-39) especially the articles on improving ADD. For myself they came in very handy as our game here was stagnating and becoming boring and as a GM it is my responsibility to perk it back up. Your articles on converting to a skill system helped immensely. I'm looking forward to the next issues.

The idea of a skill based game intrigues me, so I'm enclosing an SASE for your catalog and price list. Oh yeah, what is the outlook for an Ysarth magazine in which various aspects are shared, improved and ideas exchanged and expounded?

Well, that seems to be all for now. Again, thank you, and keep up the excellent work.

Jim Stewart  
Omaha, NE

[Like Jim, any of you can send for a free Ragnarok catalog and order form. Skill based games are the way of the future as most ABYSS readers have probably already had pounded into their heads. As for an Ysarth magazine, that idea was tried for a while in the supplement series for Ysarth and might be back at some point for the new edition.--DN]

Dear Sirs,

It is truly cheering to see an alternative voice to DRAGON. I have been a fantasy gamer for more years than I care to admit and I have seen the hobby go through its many changes. The change that hits me most is the closing of the field. In its early days the gaming field was wide open. The many fanzines and several more professional publications offered a variety of voices. There were a lot of ideas circulating and a Game Master could pickup and use whatever struck his fancy.

Now it seems as though DRAGON reserves itself the right to be the final and official arbitrator on all things DRD. Instead of being a game played in the imagination, it is now a game played in the DRD universe by official DRD rules. In my opinion, this is constricting the field and takes away much of the charm of the game.

Robert J. Cantor  
Los Angeles, CA

[I think this letter expresses some of the dissatisfaction which exists in gaming and shows the void which ABYSS hopes to fill. We'll continue to deliver high quality, useful material while maintaining the fanzine tradition and hopefully we'll continue to give you what we want. If we don't, let us know.--DN]

# GAMA GRIPES

Dear Mr. Hense, Since you asked, GAMA is a TRADE organization. Apparently you have no idea what that means. Most of what GAMA does is not apparent to you, nor should it be. It has nothing to do with the day to day playing of games. We have (for instance) run a Credit Information Exchange for the last couple of years, which provides manufacturers and distributors with the names of the people who are currently buying things from game companies and not paying for them. To you that may be irrelevant, but it is of vital importance to companies wishing to stay in business.

As for 'deciding who can sell things at ORIGINS', ORIGINS is the only TRADE SHOW that the industry has at the moment (although GAMA will be holding its first exclusively trade show for retailers and manufacturers only, this March). It is where most of the game companies try to release their new products, and meet with their distributors, retailers and customers. There are a number of vital importance that the TRADE SHOW be put on by an organization that has a reasonable chance of succeeding. It is not a Science Fiction con, where everyone goes and parties, and if it turns out to be a disaster, no big deal. If ORIGINS ever really were a disaster, it could very well cause the bankruptcy of several game companies. Since ORIGINS is GAMA's trade show, you have to be a member of GAMA in order to attend and sell your merchandise. However, if the committee that passes on membership decides that you are not really a game company, then you are not allowed to join GAMA, but instead are offered a 'special license' to exhibit at ORIGINS. So in effect, anyone is allowed to sell at ORIGINS. The real limitation is that you are only allowed to sell your OWN merchandise. If I fly myself and 4 employees all the way to Baltimore in order to exhibit at ORIGINS, some retail store local to the area can't buy a table and offer all my games at 70% off. If this were allowed, it would very likely make it impossible for many of the smaller companies to attend ORIGINS unless it were in their own local area. The 'exclusivity' of ORIGINS allows small companies from all over the country to come to one show at the same time so the gamers can see and meet EVERYONE instead of just the big companies and the local companies. Is that worth anything to you?

And if you and other gamers want to take a poll of yourselves and decide where the annual national gaming show will be, go right ahead. Actually, I'm sure you can come up with a more exciting name than ORIGINS. That's just the one we've gotten used to. ORIGINS just happens to be the trademarked name of GAMA's official trade show and convention. Therefore GAMA has every right to decide where it is. If you want a show that is entirely a fan show, go ahead and start one of your own. But don't expect us manufacturers to make a vital business decision such as where to locate our annual trade show by taking a poll of individuals who have nothing to lose if the show is a flop! The Model Railroad Association doesn't take a poll of railroaders to see where to put their show. The Hobby Industry Association doesn't take a poll of hobbyists to see where to put their show. Etc. etc. etc.

As for other things GAMA does, we have spent a lot of time (volunteer time, by our members) and money organizing a speakers bureau and a 'retailer kit' to help local game stores combat bad publicity by the religious nuts who have been going around claiming that D&D causes suicides and devil worship. Again, this is something you have no reason to have heard about, and is of little importance to you, but if you think it doesn't matter, try asking some local shopkeeper who has been attacked by the local press and has seen sales drop 20%. Tell him that GAMA is of no use.



Thanks a lot for your insults. I have a few opinions about you, but I'll keep them to myself (Except I can't help remarking that you apparently like to shoot off your mouth about subjects you know nothing about). Those 20 Lus who have donated hundreds of hours of our time trying to do things with GAMA don't appreciate being insulted like that.

Rick Loomis  
Past President of GAMA  
Current Board Member

Dear Mr. Loomis, Thanks for the informative letter. It was a little more hostile than warranted, but hey, you're probably a hostile guy.

The information you gave me in the letter was exactly what I was looking for. You are right. I know very little about GAMA and what it does. I have seen some of the materials GAMA has available to help game companies deal with accusations against D&D and was impressed. It is just the sort of thing GAMA should be doing.

What you seem to have misunderstood is that I am a gamer who knows only a little about this 'trade' organization that seems to

have an important, if indirect, impact on my hobby. You can say as often as you want that GAMA is a trade organization, but it has a very real effect on the industry which is passed on to me. Thus I feel that I have some right to know about GAMA and its function. I am attending ORIGINS. I attended my first ORIGINS because it was billed as 'The National Game Convention'. I doubt very seriously if I would have spent several hundred dollars to attend if it was just billed as 'The Official Trade Show for GAMA'.

I don't remember mentioning that I was against exclusivity at ORIGINS. Exclusivity is important for any large convention. If local retailers tried to become involved, I think that even the smallest company could easily undercut them because the discount system in the industry is structure such that a manufacturer selling direct can sell at least 20% below any price a retailer could charge without losing a great deal of money. It is easy for a small company to compete with retailers, but much harder for them to pay the \$250 necessary to join GAMA (or the minor \$50 non-voting worthless services or rights) memberships. Adding this fee to travel, lodging and table expense (tables at ORIGINS this year are more expensive than ever, an additional \$250-\$450 each) makes it much more difficult for small game companies to attend. Exclusivity is the least of their worries at that point.

I happened to attend LA ORIGINS with a friend who owns a small press game company and got to attend the GAMA meeting. What I said in my editorial were my impressions of this meeting. My curiosity was aroused and I wanted to know exactly what this 'Trade' organization, an organization that effects a hobby I have been in for eleven years, actually did. Your attitude is that it's none of my business, so hose off. As you say, GAMA is a trade organization and thus gamers don't need to know about it.

I recently had a house fire and had an estimated \$100 worth of games library. It was less than half my total game library. I feel that when I spend close to a thousand dollars a year as a consumer in a hobby I ought to have a stake in knowing what goes on in that industry. Evidently you don't think so.

No matter how many trade organizations you have, the industry is nothing without the consumer. This is a basic business fact. So I think it is sort of a right for consumers to know something about GAMA. What does it mean when I go to my local store and pick up a game with the GAMA logo on it? Why do some games have it while others don't? Is it just politics or is the GAMA seal the mark of a quality game? Why is a convention that I spent over five hundred dollars to attend and another couple of hundred in the dealer room, billed as 'The National Gaming Convention' when it is actually nothing but a trade show and not really for the gamers at all?

As for the insults, I singled no one out. I gave my impressions and asked for information, which you thoughtfully provided. My opinions are my own, and I apologize if they insulted you personally. You are very generous to assume such a personal responsibility for all of GAMA's flaws. I mouted off about subjects I know nothing about precisely because I don't know anything about GAMA. That isn't right. Why don't you try telling consumers about what GAMA does. I can't believe an altruistic organization like GAMA has anything to hide. It might actually generate some good will. Gaming is my hobby (some call it an obsession) and I like to know a little about what is going on in it.

Ian Hense  
-Austin, TX

March, as a GAMA member I was never even informed of the existence of this special show, but then they rarely even manage to get the GAMA newsletter to me and I live in the town where it is published. As for the question of ORIGINS being scheduled by a poll of gamers, I agree with Rick that this is an impractical idea, but GAMA should be aware that without attendees ORIGINS will fail and no one will sell anything much, so the desires of the gamers should be taken into consideration. If ORIGINS is a Trade Show, then why are there so many events and an effort to attract gamers? If it is going to be a real convention as well as a Trade Show then the needs and interests of the attendees must be considered in all aspects of the convention. As for exclusivity and the inflated membership fees, it should be noted that letting non-members exhibit at ORIGINS would not harm GAMA exhibitors because of exclusivity and would add variety for the attendees while promoting the small end of the industry where future GAMA members may emerge. If it is a valuable organization to belong to GAMA should not have to coerce people into joining with ORIGINS as its leverage. People should want to join because of what GAMA has to offer. To clarify Rick's mention of volunteer time in GAMA I have to point out that last year GAMA spent over \$5000 on salaries for its officers, so that wasn't all volunteer time, now was it? As a conclusion from all this I'd like to say that up until recently I believed very strongly in the value of GAMA and the potential which it had to support and promote the gaming industry. I think that Rick still believes that it is the same organization which it was when he was President. It is not. GAMA seems to have become an elite club for a shrinking group of large companies and a strong backlash can be seen through such actions as the formation of SIGMA (The Society of Independent Game Manufacturers). In the future I suspect that more and more companies will lose faith in GAMA until little is left of it but a group of a dozen or so members who run ORIGINS and a much larger inactive group who pay the \$50 fee solely so they can exhibit at ORIGINS. I wish this weren't happening, because GAMA has done good things for the gaming industry, but I'm afraid some bad decisions have been made out of very good intentions and unless GAMA leaders wake up its future will be bleak.--DN)

## BLACK ALTARS

Experience the web of intrigue and corruption which binds together the religious hierarchy of the great city of Ptolemeias in this sophisticated urban adventure for use with AD&D or Ysgarth. This is a thinking adventure, the sequel to Dark Waters and Street Shadows, featuring a multi-option scenario structure which makes it into half a dozen full adventures usable for many exciting sessions. The emphasis of the adventure is on role-playing and the extremely detailed background. Black Altars is an invitation to thrilling adventure in a believable world.

Black Altars is the first Ysgarth adventure in our new, full-size format. It costs only \$3.95, including postage, when ordered by mail. The other adventures in the series can also be ordered at that price, or you can get four adventures for \$10.

## SIEGE AND FORTRESS

Find out all you could ever need to know about the techniques and technology of medieval warfare with this detailed and extensively researched aid from Low Bryson, Dave Nalle and Rick Bueker. Taken from a series of lectures at ORIGINS over the last few years, this comprehensive aid features detailed text and historical examples as well as over 180 useful maps and plans. If you are a historical gamer or interested in medieval role-playing or warfare Siege and Fortress is the resource you need. Siege and Fortress is \$4.95 including postage when ordered direct from Ragnarok.

**821E. 49th St. Austin, TX 78751**

[As a GAMA member and supporter I just want to add a few comments. I feel it was a bit unfair of us to print Rick's letter, written as it was in the heat of the omen, but he answers valid questions which the article brought up, and I thought that someone ought to speak in GAMA's behalf. I also have a few observations on comments made in Rick's letter. First, while Ian's tone was sarcastic, his article was primarily a retrospective on attending a GAMA meeting which he described rather accurately, if subjectively. He stated several times that his perspective was relatively uninformed and he invited informed response. Regarding the GAMA Trade Show in

# YSGARTH TACTICAL SYSTEM JAN MIERIK

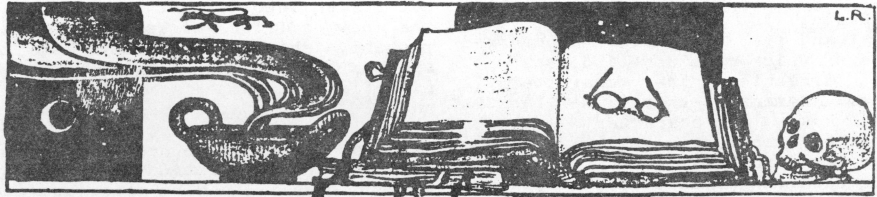
Ideally, a role-playing system is intended to be played primarily in the realm of the imagination, with little of the outside world interfering to distract the players from the game environment. However, quite often situations arise which cannot always be dealt with adequately solely in the realm of the imagination. Some situations work best when closely linked to some sort of physical representation which is used to determine spatial relationships, relative positioning, movement and distance, all of which can be very important in combat situations, pursuits and some types of magic. Traditionally, the vehicle for representing such situations has relied heavily on miniatures and unnecessarily complex and burdensome rule mechanics. Normally I would shy away from the introduction of too much attention to tactical detail into a game which is intended to emphasize role-playing, but even in Ysgarth there are some situations which cannot be resolved as quickly or as accurately without reference to some sort of tactical aid.

There are many factors to be taken into consideration in developing a system of rules for enhancing combat through tactical representation with miniatures or counters, but it helps to have a fairly flexible base system to work with when doing this as an adaptation for a role-playing game. Despite a personal dislike for them, miniatures work adequately as representative counters for tactical combat, as long as you don't take them too seriously. However, if you don't want the trouble and expense of miniatures, something like Steve Jackson's Cardboard Heroes will work well enough and still give you an image of the character, though I find

flat wargame counters with an arrow on them to indicate facing to be quite functional. The one thing you need in addition to counters is some sort of hex-paper or map, preferably marked out in genuine six-sided hexes rather than an alternative like off-set squares. The hexes should be big enough to hold your counters or the base of a miniature and there should be enough of them to represent the area of play. That is about all the special equipment you need, unless you want to mark in barriers and obstacles on the hex-sheet with a pencil or other implement.

Hexes on your map should be set as being one yard, pace or meter in their longest dimension, a distance of about 35 to 40 inches. This need not be too accurate, but must be a consistent measurement. The movement of an Ysgarth character is normally measured in feet per combat round, so his movement in hexes should be  $MOV/3$ , rounded down. This will leave the average character with a movement of about 10. Remember that the Activity Point Cost to move the full movement in the course of a CR is 30AP. However, if more AP are spent more distance can be covered, and when the AP are spent in the round may alter the effects of movement. It might be helpful to divide the movement rate of the character into 30, to determine how many AP it takes him to move 1 hex, as that might keep movement clearer and more flexible. AP and when and how they are spent become very important in this system, and it is necessary that they be kept track of fairly accurately, though some adjustments can be made to keep things simple.

To keep things simple, compare the AP of all the characters involved in



the combat. Take the highest value and use that as a basis for setting up an AP chart. Divide the AP of all the characters in half. The difference between the resulting number and the halved AP of the next fastest character will be each character's AP Edge. For example, if there were three characters involved, with total APs of 51, 57 and 65, they would have APE of 0, 3 and 4 respectively, with the lowest person getting 0 in all cases. The APE is the number of points of AP the character can spend before the next fastest character begins to act and after the next fastest character has completed his actions, so it could let him get a pre-emptive strike or a late blow in. Keep in mind that if a character wishes to defend himself in a round, that amount of AP should be spent before making this comparison, as should any AP cost of armor, equipment or AP loss from pain or stun effects. With defense and other costs thus out of the way, the only AP expenses which need concern one in combat are attacks and movement. Combat should start with the fastest character spending his APE. Then AP are counted down as he continues to spend AP and the next character joins in with his APE, after which the next one would join in, until the slowest character can begin to spend his AP and at that point everyone will be spending AP and taking actions at the same time. This makes it sound as if coupling AP by AP will make everything go quite slowly, but in fact, things whip along fairly well, as there are long stretches when everyone will be preparing for action rather than acting. As soon as someone finishes spending the required AP for an action, it is completed. For movement purposes remember to break the APC of moving down by single hexes. The AP aspects of the situation should already be fairly familiar, and will only be elaborated on further as needed later.

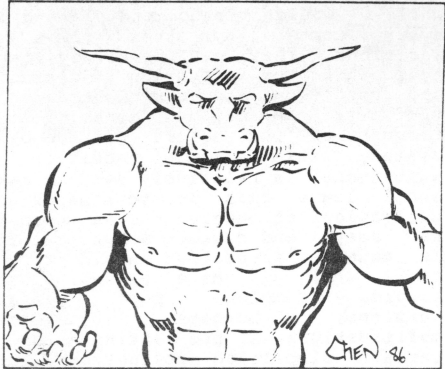
There are a number of special rules to be taken into consideration in a tactical situation. Particularly important among these are facing, the reach of weapons, the difficulty of facing multiple opponents and the problems of special tactical situations, all of which can really only be dealt with in a tactical display, and all of which can make a great deal of difference in an actual fight.

Facing is fairly easy to deal with, and is the reason you need counters which make some indication of which direction the character is facing. Remember that a hex has six sides, so a character may be approached from any of six directions, which are Front(F), Left Front(LF), Right Front(RF), Left Rear(LR), Right Rear(RR) and Rear(R). When embattled

a character can change his facing at a cost of 5 AP per angle changed, so to rotate completely would cost 30 AP. Against an attack from the front a character has 100% of his DR and AR. Against a LF or RF attack a character has 75% of his combined DR and AR to work with. He can choose to make this 100% of DR and 50% of AR, an even amount off each, or full AR with half DR. Against a LR or RR attack the character has 50% of his combined AR and DR to work with and he can choose how he wants to divide this up between attack and defense. Against attacks from the Rear a character has only 25% of his combined AR and DR to work with in the same way. Keep in mind that these reductions are to the total AR and DR he has established at that time including modifications for extra AP spent. In addition, a character can choose to deliberately lower his AR and/or DR from one direction to raise it in another, but points removed are reduced by the percentage reduction for the area they move to and points are removed from the total in that area after the indicated percentage reduction. Thus, Goron the Warrior who has a 40AR and a 40DR when attacked from the front, would have 30 of each at LF and RF, 20 at LR and RR and 10 from the Rear. If he was being attacked from the front and rear only, he could switch points around so that he still had 100% AR and DR in the front, and could raise AR and DR in the rear by 25 points each. The character cannot just switch his configuration of defense around freely every time he spends an AP, but may change it at the start of each new attack, but both AR and DR set-ups remain static until the start of the next attack. This facing system allows flexibility when dealing with multiple opponents, but still assures a significant degree of weakness when facing multiple foes, because it will not be possible to compensate for these reductions against everyone faced if the character is surrounded. Keep in mind that if a character is backed into a wall he can face attacks only from the F, LF and RF positions, but may use the advantage of left-over distribution points from his rear areas to enhance his abilities.

The other major question to be addressed is the reach of weapons, or how their length comes into play in combat. This is something which is not taken into account in the rules of the new edition of Ysqarth and which probably shouldn't be used in most combats, but which is certainly a significant factor in combat and should be considered when we are examining tactical options. For this section we will be referring to the 'Weapon Notes' section of RoleCraft, where weapon lengths are provided. The basic goal here is to determine





how far away you can hit with a given weapon, what is needed to get inside someone's guard and what the effects of that are. You cannot hit someone with a weapon unless you can reach him. The reach of a weapon varies according to the type of weapon, its length and how it is used. One handed club or edge weapons have a reach equal to their length plus 20 inches. One handed point weapons have a reach of their length plus 40 inches. Two handed edge or club weapons have a reach of their length plus 15 inches. Two handed point weapons have a reach of their length plus 30 inches. Thus, a Short Sword would have a reach of 44 inches cutting or 64 inches stabbing, while a Greatsword would have a reach of 88 inches as a two handed cutting weapon. These reach values are standardized and can be adjusted for the size of the character. In that case, in the above figures replace 40in with SCx3in, 30in with SCx2.25in, 20in with SCx1.5in and 15in with SCx1.13in. If the total reach with a weapon exceeds 20in, it can be used to strike in any adjacent hex. If the total reach with a weapon exceeds 60in, it can be used to strike up to two hexes away. If the total reach of a weapon exceeds 100in it can be used to strike up to 3 hexes away. If the total reach of a weapon exceeds 140in, it can be used to strike up to 4 hexes away. Weapons with a reach of more than 40in can only be used at half effectiveness if a character is grappled (in the same hex as opponent). Weapons with a reach of more than 80in can only be used at half effectiveness in an adjoining hex and not at all against a grappled foe. Weapons with a reach of more than 120in can only be used at half effectiveness two hexes away and not at all in any nearer hexes. Note that for purposes of reach the garotte is treated as having a length of only 12in and while unarmed attacks have no length added to the basic reach, unarmed foot attacks get double the basic reach indicated. With reach in mind, it becomes important to

determine if a given character can get within the reach of the weapon of a foe who has a long weapon, in order to make it more difficult for him to attack and defend himself. To get inside the reach of a foe, a special attack must be made. This attack costs 30AP, and the attacker uses his DR with any parrying or dodging skills as his AR and the defender's AR with his weapon as the defenders DR. If a hit is achieved, the attacker can move inside the range of the weapon of the defender. Note that this sort of maneuver will only work with weapons whose total reach is greater than 60in. If this attack is not successfully made the attacker cannot move closer to his foe than the reach of that foe's weapon. Once inside the reach of a weapon it gets the indicated disadvantages, or alternatively the defender whose reach is breached can lose 100% off the effectiveness of AR, DR or MD of that weapon, with that 100% loss distributed between those three effects, so that it could be 100% off one, 33% off each, or some other logical combination. This indicates limited but still semi-effective use of the weapon.

Also worth keeping in mind here is the matter of pursuit, because when pursuit is considered, such things as reach and facing become very important. In general, a character should be allowed to move freely if he wants to spend the AP, but a character with more AP or a higher movement should be able to eventually overtake him. As a pursuer approaches a target, if he has the AP he can swing at him, with the distance required to make that attack viable determined by the reach as indicated above.

Something ought to be said about missiles in tactical combat, but this is a fairly simple aspect. Range reductions should be based on the hexes between attacker and target counting the hexes which each of them is in. The number of hexes distance is divided by the RI to determine the AR reduction for that attack. With a tactical system like this it is also possible to keep track of line-of-sight much more effectively. If someone who the attacker does not wish to hit is in the line between himself and a target, the SC of that person is added to the DR of the target. If the attacker misses and that miss is within the difference between the adjusted DR and the defenders original DR, he hits the person who is in the way. This adjustment is made after any range reductions. If more than one person is in the way they are added into the attack in the same way.

Special conditions of combat should also be considered, most of which are described in the 'Special Actions' section of RoleCraft. They

can be adopted pretty much as they stand, and some of the special AP costs may be useful to keep in mind in a detailed combat situation. One item omitted in this section which should be mentioned is the Charge Attack, a tactic where an attack is enhanced by the running force of the attacker. A charge attack is intended to impale or add damage to a slicing attack. Basically, it adds the attacker's total movement rate in that round divided by 5 to his DC in determining his damage. Similarly, an attack which is set to receive a charging foe, with a point weapon, gets that same bonus, based on the movement rate of the charging attacker and the basic DC of the defender.

All of the ideas discussed here tend to mesh together when placed in

the context of a tactical combat, and while I wouldn't recommend playing out every combat by these rules and additions, they can certainly be a help when the situation is confusing and conditions and possible strategies need to be defined more clearly. Because of the nature of the basic system, this sort of addition and adjustment is relatively easy to make, so I leave this in your hands as a collection of useful ideas which you can adapt and develop as you see fit. In general adaptation should probably take what I have presented here towards simpler, more playable versions, perhaps by such modifications as pre-setting AP use to certain simplified applications, but I leave all that to you.

# MINIATURES & ROLE-PLAYING

## INTRODUCTION:

Judging from their popularity in stores, painting competitions at conventions and articles in various magazines, it is clear that a large proportion of today's role-players find miniatures to be a desirable addition to their campaign. At the same time there are those who feel that miniatures are anathema to role-playing, an unnecessary obstruction to the imagination which has been perpetuated because the first American role-players, like E. Gary Gygax, began their careers as miniatures players and because the earliest version of Dungeons and Dragons developed out of a miniatures rule-system called Chainmail. While this may not be the hottest argument in gaming today, it is an issue which continues to be current, and we one which has been batted about regularly by some of our steady contributors. We've managed to get three of these contributors to set down their views on this subject and with some judicious editing they are available here for you to review. I'm not sure that either side will win any converts by this, but I hope that some will be illuminated about unfamiliar playing styles. At the same time, it would be nice if this discussion developed into the start of a regular series of debate type articles and I encourage those who are interested in taking part in such a project to let me know. With that said, I'll yield the floor.



## THE VALUE OF MINIATURES:

There are many role-players who like to think that role-playing works best when it is confined purely to the realm of the imagination. It's all very well to pledge oneself to the expansion of the mind and the development of the character, but when it comes down to an important interactive situation there are two things which start to come into increasing significance, the mechanics by which you play and the means by which you keep track of spatial relationships. There are a growing number of technically adequate role-playing systems out there, at least one for every genre. There is also a clean, functional solution to the problem of keeping

track of actions and relationships in combat. Miniatures are the answer to this second problem, and no matter how good your role-playing mechanics are, without miniatures you are playing in a reality vacuum.

The value of miniatures in role-playing can be seen on several levels, both abstract and highly technical. For the role-player, a miniature gives him something to identify with. Admittedly, it is a piece of metal, but for the duration of a gaming session, it is also his character. This gives you something more concrete to cling to than a bunch of fairly abstract statistics and an idea you developed a long time ago of what your character's personality is like. A miniature should not dictate character personality, but a well-chosen miniature image can act as an excellent mnemonic to help a player get into his role. Perhaps the most important function of miniatures is in establishing spatial relationships, so that the player knows where his character is and what is around him at all times, so that when he says 'Well, I pick up Vortinvraz's sword', both player and GM will know if it is within reach. Of course, this example is only the tip of the iceberg which is the paramount importance of understanding positioning and spatial relationships, not only in combat, but in many other interactive situations as well (thieving, spell-casting, stealth, difficult maneuvers, etc.), though combat provides some of the best examples. One of the key applications of miniatures in combat situations is in determining who can attack whom and which characters block other characters or what terrain features are hazards to specific characters. Along with this miniatures allow you certainty of how many characters can attack a given person and of what side they attack from, their chances of sneaking up and getting a backstrike, and any other special tactics and benefits which might apply. Another key use is in checking line of sight to see if an arrow from one character will have to pass through a comrade or an obstacle before hitting its target. Miniatures and a good hex map of terrain allow the GM to gauge pursuit better so that he will know how easily a character can catch up with a fleeing enemy, how well a person can hide from missile attacks, or

where at target is relative to the potential range of an attacking weapon. On a larger scale, miniatures are essential for setting up playable ambushes, betrayals and assassinations, and can be a great deal of help in visualizing just what is an isn't feasible in a thieving-type situation. Many of these same benefits apply in magic, particularly the range information, as that is one of the major limiting factors of spells.

All these specifics aside, from a general perspective, if a GM has carefully mapped out the terrain of his adventure on hex-boards or the equivalent, and if players provide miniatures, it lets the players see everything in a situation in proportion, the size of his character relative to the size of objects and places, the size of a crowd, the height of a wall. This gives a degree of perspective which escapes all but the most imaginative, and helps the player to see the scene around his character as the character would see it, rather than as he imagines it based solely on the description of the GM. Face it, most people don't have a good imagination for distances, heights and dimensions. Many people even think two-dimensionally. For these people miniatures and terrain maps are a god-send, because they give them the perspective they need to bring adventures to life in their minds. Without this sort of aid, many perfectly good players become bumbling idiots, almost blinded because of their inability to translate complex technical descriptions into concrete images using only their own imagination and the irrelevant or false visualizations which it might produce, not having a perfect image of every possible situation already on file. [Carl Jones]

#### THE DANGER OF MINIATURES:

Not all roleplayers are equally gifted or equally strong of will, and to the weak-willed and the inexperienced, the danger of miniatures is one of seduction. This is especially true for the new player and the player who has not had much exposure to advanced systems, the player who sees the miniature and does not see beyond it, who is not yet sophisticated to distinguish the role from the image and the image from the role. Picture young Irving Murcheson. At school he saw some of

the older kids playing AD&D. He wants to be part of the in-crowd, so he goes to the hobby store in the local mall with his mother and convinces her to follow the advice of a salesman and purchase a selection of 'necessaries' for starting up an AD&D game. This will inevitably consist of several books from TSR, a pack of character sheets, some dice and a blister-pack of assorted miniatures. He then takes all this home, reads the books, examines the materials, designs a 'dungeon', and calls up his friends Tommy and Mort for a game. As they start out, he goes over the basics of character creation, gives each of them a miniature appropriate to the class they have chosen and explains 'this is your character', and whipping out an intricately constructed map he carries on to explain that it is the dungeon where they will be playing. From this point the novices will grow as gamers, shaped by an initially erroneous impression which will warp the emphasis of their roleplaying forever.

When you roleplay you create a character in your imagination. The character is not created by dice rolls. The character does not come into being by having a miniature assigned to represent him. The character is created by the concept which the player develops in his own mind for a personality, abilities and attributes. Rules may define the limits on this character, though they should never be too restrictive, but the character exists only in the mind of the player, just as the game-world and its inhabitants exist in the mind of the GM. A roleplaying adventure takes place when these two imaginative constructs interact. For impressionable players the miniature can be a powerful force. By making it unnecessary to fully visualize a character in your mind it opens a temptation which the untrained player will find hard to resist, the temptation to make the character fit the miniature. Admittedly, you can go out and find a miniature to fit almost any character concept, but a starting player will not be aware of this and will find it easy to accept an external image for his character. This is the same fault that most designers have realized limits rolled-characteristic systems, but the neophyte does not have the sophistication to realize that he is being robbed of the opportunity to develop his imagination. Once a player has

learned how to roleplay and how to make the character something real with the mind alone, this problem may not apply, though different problems will tend to surface at that point which make miniatures just as objectionable. Even experienced players can become lazy, especially if their roleplaying training was fairly lax. It always remains easy to fall into the trap of letting a convenient and attractive visual image tell you what kind of character you want to make rather than the criteria of the world, the situation and your imaginative needs. The really skilled roleplayer understands that his character is a person in a world, like a character in a story, not a mere metal figure in a diorama of mazes and combat. From this first faulty assumption it is easy to see how a campaign can devolve away from roleplaying into an interplay of meaningless tactics and manipulation of mechanics.

The dangers of miniatures for experienced players should not be understated. It is likely that some experienced players may decide to introduce some system for representing tactical situations in a complex campaign. In general it is better to avoid such situations if you have to than to resort to miniatures. The use of miniatures is a tempting vice and as a group roleplayers tend to have a bit too little will to resist this sort of temptation. It is inevitable that the more concerned you become with the tactics of movement and combat, the less concerned you become with the social and interactive situations of the game as your focus narrows to close in on the miniature and his situation on a map. As this orientation develops, the campaign is debased and even the best GMs can find themselves being drawn away from the imaginative interplay of character and world which is the heart of real roleplaying and sucked into a morass of complex combat situations. This change in emphasis can mark the death of a campaign, and while the occasional wargame is fun as a diversion, roleplaying is not wargaming, nor should it be. If combat becomes sufficiently complex that it is necessary to resort to miniatures and the additional time and mechanical complexities which come with them, then combat is too complex, and rather than adjusting his campaign to meet the cry for detail in combats the GM should develop his campaign situations away

# ON THE ROAD TO ADVENTURE

## INTRODUCTION

Adventures in a fantasy campaign world often take place in remote and exciting locales far from the ordinary habitat of adventuring characters. A lot of distance is covered by characters in getting to the locus of an adventure. It is possible to gloss over time spent in travel, but that does little to give players a feel for the world which they travel through. It is possible to make beneficial use of traveling time to expose characters to the world in which they live, increasing their familiarity with common elements of the world so that they come to understand the nature of the alternate reality in which they live.

The road is the focal point of danger and excitement and there are many types of events and encounters which travelers can experience. Provided here is a collection of situations which characters might encounter, some of them very simple and some much more complex. They are from a number of regions in several campaign worlds, but they can easily be adapted to suit your needs and are presented without specific statistics so that they can be easily adapted to any game system. All of these encounters have been used successfully in rather well developed and long-running campaigns. Remember that unusual roadside encounters should not be used so frequently that they become contrived, but a well used encounter can function as a strong and memorable image to bring characters closer to the world around them and involve characters in exciting situations.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Dy of Porford, Km of Selsyllwch

It's the first day of the full moon (not necessarily something at the forefront of the characters' minds), when a fur trader meets the party on the road, his cart laden with heavy furs of wolf, bear, seal and otter. He offers them to the characters at unusually reasonable prices, explaining that by selling them here on the road he saves some transportation costs and they cut out the markup of the middlemen he would sell them to in the next town.

If they buy some furs you can have a great follow-up four days later when the full moon ends and the furs, which were taken from slaughtered were-creatures, become human skins. It is perfect if this happens when they are passing a border just after the furs have changed and haven't been observing the furs, because the reaction of border guards searching their equipment will be quite interesting and possibly hazardous when they discover packs of human skins among the baggage.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Cy of Trasjar, Near Ptolemeias

As the party rides along the road a party of fat, wealthy looking priestly types are approaching from the opposite direction. There are half a dozen priests and a dozen guards. Two of the guards ride forward to tell the party to move off to the side of the road so that Heirophant Keimon of Laite may pass. He issues this order in the name of Odin (pick your own powerful oppressive deity). If they refuse to move the guards, who should be powerful fighters, will move them. If they do move they will hear high-voiced chuckles from the priests and comments like 'spineless peasants' or 'what a bunch of louts' as the priests ride on down the road.

This sort of encounter can always be useful for annoying characters and instilling in them a proper level of disrespect for oppressive authoritarian groups.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Km of Prydein, Near Arkinkolme

Just as they are leaving town to begin an adventure an ancient crone comes forward and offers to read their fortunes. For two Pennies she will read the palm of any party member and tell them that they face great dangers but will reap great rewards and other appropriate generalizations. She makes mystic passes over their hands and puts on a generally good show.

They travel on, but what they do not know is that the crone was secretly working for forces opposing their mission. When she read their palm she cast a mystic symbol on the hands she read, acting as a beacon for them to be easily located and perhaps attacked by appropriate magical sendings.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Cy of Vaerri, Km of Marchuk, Near Yngwald

The party is passing through hills and fields as they approach the great forest known as the Yngwald. One party member is stung by a bee and has an allergic reaction. He may even lose consciousness and start to



suffocate. Concerned peasants suggest that he see Mother Maerga, a healer who lives in a cottage on the edge of the wood, only a few minutes away. They hurry there and find her to be an old, rather crotchety witch woman who is willing to help. She asks no payment in advance and heals the afflicted character fairly easily. After she has healed him and they have all enjoyed some of her cookies, she asks for payment. She will ask for something unacceptable, like the first born male child of the afflicted person or an outrageous sum of money or some rare magical item one of his companions who cared little for the victim's life. If they pay her she will be happy, but if they refuse to pay her price or leave her with hollow promises, she will curse the afflicted person or the person who refused her payment, throwing what seem like hollow curses after them as they leave.

During their encounter with her she showed only non-magical medical skills, but the cursed person quickly learns that the curse is effective. Several curses are possible, such as clumsiness or bad luck, but my favorite is something a bit more elaborate and very effective on warrior characters. I suggest that she cause the spirit of all persons killed by the cursed person to come back to haunt him every night after he has killed them, with each successive haunting causing the loss of one hour of sleep. After 8 or so have been killed the character will be left pretty much sleepless so that he will have to crawl back to Mother Maerga to pay her price, a price which should probably have gone up by the time he returns.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Dy of Saldday, Km of Marchuk, in Yngwald

While traveling through this magical forest a character could very well pick up one of the mischievous spirits called Pukas. This spirit will attach itself to the least magical person in the party and make itself known gradually by causing him embarrassing clumsiness, unfortunate luck and all manner of humiliating accidents. The most magical person in this party will sometimes be able to see this spirit (resembling a small hare or dwarfish person), but will never be sure it is actually there.

To be rid of the Puka the character will have to find someone even less magical than himself or else consult with a sage of some sort who will explain that if the character can completely humiliate himself beyond anything the Puka could do to him, it may choose to leave him.

## CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Dy of Saldday, Km of Marchuk, in Yngwald

To the best knowledge of the characters they plan to take a straight route through the forest, but a few hours before nightfall, when they are deep in they find that the road splits into three forks. There is a marker stone in the middle of the branching, but the inscription on it is unreadable. Intevitably, they take the wrong route the first time, soon realizing that it is false as the road dead ends or peters out in the woods. The same

thing happens with the second branch they take after returning. Each time they pass it the marker stone becomes more readable as twilight approaches and the full moon begins to rise. Before they take the third route it becomes readable and they see that it bears an inscription imprisoning the spirit of a dead sorcerer of great evil, holding him fast except on the night of the fullest moon (that night). At this point, if they take either of the paths that proved false before it will turn out to be the true route, but if they take the one untried path it will lead to the spiritually reconstructed tower of the dead sorcerer who is a nasty combination vampire and mage. Naturally, they will be his guests, much to their regret, and if they try to turn back on this road they will become lost in the trackless woods.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth**

**REGION:** Dy of Saldaw, Km of Marchuk, in Yngwald

The party is making its way down the road when they see a lone traveller approaching from the opposite direction. As the first they think that he is accompanied by three large dogs, but as he comes closer they see that they are actually three Boreynes, large winged lions. When he reaches them he doffs his hat and has the Boreynes perform some aerobic tricks and mock combats. He then passes the hat. If he is not pleased with the take and if the party looks weak, the extremely well-trained beasts can be ordered to threaten or attack the party unless they give more money. A slightly different twist on the highway robbery tradition.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth**

**REGION:** Dy of Mawddy, Km of Morganac

The travelers are wary because they travel through a region torn by civil war. They have planned to stop at the town of Pentymarin where there is a friendly inn, but as they approach the town they see smoke ahead on the road. When they reach the town they are horrified to see it has been burnt. Men and children are butchered in the streets and most of the women seem to be missing. There are even a few babies roasted on spits and signs of rape and pillaging. It is hard to believe that either of the contending factions could have done something as foul as this massacre, and the trail of the attackers leads away from the town into the foothills of the nearby Terferagh Mountains. If they follow the trail they will find that the criminals were actually a raiding party of Goblins (Goblins or Orcs) under the leadership of Kloubyn the Slayer.

This can be followed up with an encounter with agents of one of the two factions involved in the war, who on hearing of the massacre will immediately claim that it was perpetrated by the other side, regardless of the protestations of the characters who witnessed it, and they might even offer to bribe the witnesses to testify that signs showed the other faction to be guilty of the raid.

This encounter originally took place during the war for the Morganac succession, but can be adapted to any warring world or time.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth**

**REGION:** By of Tulgarin, Km of Morganac

During a time of war the travelers are on a road passing through a minor barony when they are met by a large patrol of armed guards. If there is anyone of noble, military or chivalric bearing in the party the guards will insist that the travelers accompany them to the castle of Baron Ungion, who will insist that they put forward a champion to fight his champion, one Sir Maeguilr, or else pay some exorbitant fee. He is taking advantage of the lawless conditions in the warring countryside to profit off of travelers. Sir Maeguilr is, of course, a crossbreed of human and giant parents, unusually well endowed physically and magically protected.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth**

**REGION:** Cy of Cynleith, Km of Seisylluch

During the Morganac civil war the travelers are passing through nearby Cynleith and camp at a frequently used campsite. They are joined at nightfall by a single, scholarly-looking mad who looks a bit worse for wear and is carrying a huge pack on his back. Once he gets settled in he begins to make a nuisance of himself by peddling his wares. He is selling something made popular by the times and the opportunities they offer, documents. He has available legitimate, semi-legitimate and forged documents of all sorts, ideal to allow an opportunist to profit in the aftermath of a succession crisis. These include such things as genealogies, royal grants, charters, wills, writs of passage, commissions, royal grants of right, and even custom made documents on demand. Some of his wares are genuine, bought at cheap from plundering soldiers, and the rest of it might give the bearer a chance to gain land or status after the civil conflict is over.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth**

**REGION:** Cy of Creuwyrion, Dy of Ystrad Tyui

The travelers are about to cross the River Forial, a tributary of the Llynnon, using thin, old bridge, when a mounted man in full armor charges up onto the bridge and blocks their way. He bears no ensign on his shield, but bears a lance and his armor is that of a knight. The bridge is only wide enough for one mounted man to cross at a time, so the travelers will not be able to cross so long as he is there. Rather than just saying "None Shall Pass", this rather formidable looking fellow will maintain his position in silence. Should any attempt to cross he will stop them. If those who attempt to cross are not armed and armored, he will merely charge them and reign in, frightening any but the best warhorse and possibly throwing the rider into the river, a somewhat dangerous fall. If someone armed appropriately comes, he will charge them and attack. If they are defeated he will let the rest pass and expect the loser to enter his service as a knight. If he loses he will expect to serve to winner. If anyone attempts to treat with him or discuss passage he will ignore them. However, if someone walks up and places at least 200M on the bridge (unless they are clearly poor, in which case he probably wouldn't ride into view in the first place), he will let them pass. The knight has been cast out of the household of the Duke of Ystrad Tyui for cowardice, and hopes to redeem himself by returning with a small force of at least a dozen subject knights or else make enough money to get his father's baronage out of hock.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Isgartt**

**REGION:** Km of Kalcindaria, near Belkoian border

The travelers are on a rough and winding road through the hills of Northern Kalcindaria, when they come on a cart which has a broken wheel and is lying partially on its side, with much of the hay it is carrying spilled on the road, though many of the piles are large enough to conceal men, which they do. The old farmer who was driving the cart is trying to fix the wheel, but when he sees the travelers he will ask them to help him lift up his cart so that he can put a new wheel on. It will take at least three of them to lift up the corner of the cart and a fourth to put the wheel on. While this is happening and they are ill-prepared, a half dozen men will leap from the piles of hay and another half dozen will come from the woods, all armed and looking capable, using the incident to get the drop on them. The old farmer is their leader, the famous bandit Utrick the Wild, who strikes along roads in Northern Kalcindaria from a hidden base inside Belkoia. He will take their money, valuables and horses and ride off with his men, who also have horses hidden in the woods. He will take the horses attached to the cart, but leave the cart and the hay behind.

It is possible that unusually perceptive characters will spot this ruse. Possible giveaways are that Utrick's disguise, while good, may not completely hide the fact that he is young and strong, and the fact that the horses drawing the cart are warhorses, not cart horses, though they are dirtied up a bit.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Isgartt**

**REGION:** Km of Haultzia, Southern Mountains

It is inevitable that travelers in wilderness areas will encounter some of the local animal life. Most large predators will avoid a large party as will small herbivores. The most likely animal encounters are with those animals too slow to get out of the way or too stupid to know not to attack, or with animals motivated by conditions or situation to act abnormally hostile.

While traveling through the mountain passes of Southern Haultzia, the travelers stop for the night in what appears to be a relatively safe campsite. They light a fire and prepare to settle in for the night. However, before they can get too settled, a fairly large lizard (about 3 feet in length) comes flying into the camp and sits staring at the fire. He is quickly followed by dozens of other lizards who use their overdeveloped hind legs to leap into the camp so that they can get a better look at the fire, ignoring the people around them. After a while they get bored and will begin to try to investigate the travelers and their packs looking for food. The leaping lizards are curious and get underfoot, but they are not violent unless attacked. However, if they are chased away too violently or any of them are injured, the whole pack of two dozen or more will attack anyone in the area with their razor-sharp teeth, and once aroused they are vicious out of proportion to their small size. They can also leap great distances with their enlarged hind legs and like to go for the throat.

**CAMPAIGN WORLD: Isgartt**

**REGION:** Km of Dusteria

The travelers are in the hills of Dusteria when they have to stop for the night. While they are camped they hear the sound of metal clanking together coming up their hill in the darkness. It sounds rather like the approach

of a group of armored men, armored rather better than they would expect Dusteran irregulars to be, leading them to expect a scouting squad from Kalcindaria or else part of the Royal Guard of Dusteria. However, much to their surprise, when the source of the noise comes into view it is a cart with a superstructure on which are hung all manner of metal goods, driven by a rather disreputable looking tinkler. He will ask to join their camp, and then will regale them late into the night with the wonders of his products, offering collapsible silverware, portable pots and pans and even a few second rate pieces of armor and weapons. He will be a nuisance and annoying, and may even want to accompany them when they travel the next day, which will let him be an even greater nuisance.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Uttgart

REGION: Hegemony of Ulkhara, near Dashtar

The travelers are passing through eastern Ulkhara, heading towards New Ulkhar, when they come on a gruesome sight just outside of the small village of Udjikar. There is a stand of large trees by the road. Hanging from the largest branch of the largest tree are three men, one of whom seems to be just twitching his last as they arrive. The bodies hang out over the road, their feet about 10 feet off the ground. Some of the travelers may notice that there is a fourth figure perched where the branch joins the trunk. It seems to be a strange but lively individual, a muscular looking but unkept dwarf. As they watch he scuttles out along the branch and tweeks the ropes on which the men hang, giggling as they twitch. The hanged men appear to have been beaten or in a fight before they were hanged and they are all wearing the remnants of a uniform. It is a black uniform with a circular red insignia, which some of the travelers may recognize as that of the Knights of Gilrod. If they accost him the dwarf will give his name, which is Dourno. Aside from that all he will say is a little rhyme: 'Ringlord, Ringlord, where are your men? Send them to Ulkhara and they'll not be seen again.' He follows this with giggles. If they ask about the hanged men in the town they will get some rather nasty looks, no one will confess to any knowledge of the hangings, and if they press it, they too may be hanged as Gilrodite spies.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Uttgart

REGION: Km of Ulvar, Coastal District

The travelers should be from somewhere far to the east, unfamiliar with the language, customs and politics of Ulvar. As they are entering the widespread suburban slums of the city of Ulvar, they see the front of a small house burst into flame. An old man is rolling on the ground in front of it putting out his flaming clothes, while three tough looking young men are putting torches to the building. One of them is holding an old woman who appears to have been beaten. Neighbors are observing from a distance, but not interfering. If the travelers decide to get involved, the three ruffians will oppose them violently and no one will move to help them. If they have the chance, the ruffians will identify themselves as Royal Tax Collectors, though they are more likely to threaten them and tell them to shove off and mind their own business. Needless to say, meddling with Royal Tax Collectors in the process of making an example of a tax evader is a crime punishable by death from slow torture in the Kingdom of Ulvar and there are plenty of regular guards in the general area who will show up after a conflict with the Tax Collectors has had a chance to mature.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Km of Marchuk

The travelers are going south on a road which follows the course of the river Karya. Towards evening they set up camp near a large, flat rock on the river bank. On watch, someone with magical ability or potential thinks he hears what sounds like huge footsteps ascending a set of stairs. The sound seems to come from beneath the earth. This should rouse their apprehensions, as will the meter long footprints which appear around their fire. Shortly the invisible, 20' foot tall demonic being who is making the footprints will begin to dismember the party. It will pursue them and destroy them with demonic glee. However, although they do not know it, if they flee across the river, which should be dangerous at night, it will not pursue them farther into the water than its 10ft reach from shore. It will appear a bit after nightfall and disappear at midnight. This can be enough to ruin an evening.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Km of Suessiones, Cy of Bajoka

As they are traveling south from Ptolemeias they pass two heavily armored, mounted knights coming north. The knights will stop and politely ask them if they have seen anything out of the ordinary or talked with anyone who commented on a wild rogue boar which is supposed to be in the area called the Black Beast of Bajoka. They may mention that the Count of Bajoka is offering a reward for its head.

This encounter can end here as a set-piece, or it can go on. It is possible for them to have previously come across an overturned wagon whose injured driver reported

having seen the beast. Alternatively they can come across this or a similar situation after meeting the knights or they can even run directly into the Beast, which is a huge, ancient boar with a bad temperament and a taste for human meat. In any campaign it is important to remember the combat potential of wild pigs of all sorts.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Isgarth

REGION: Km of Saekmaria

As the first phase of this encounter they are abroad early in the morning and pass by some rather nice walled fields with herds of sheep in them. As they are approaching a woods they see a herd with isn't moving much, and as they get closer they see that it is rather bloodstained, consisting of about a dozen sheep who appear to have been slaughtered by some feral beast. Close examination will indicate that this happened rather recently.

In the next phase of this encounter they enter the woods and are about to ford a stream when they see a naked man bathing a bit downstream from them, with his clothing laid out on a rock. As in any medieval society bathing is considered somewhat unusual and it may arouse their curiosity. He will see them and hail them, asking to travel with them because he fears bandits (he actually wants some protective coloration).

Naturally, this happens on the second day of the cycle of the full moon and the person they have encountered is a werewolf, which may cause them problems later. Keep in mind that local farmers are probably out looking to string this fellow up and he is trying to avoid them.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: Km of Uscala, Cy of Luria

The travelers pass by a shrine on the side of the road. It is small and there are some offerings on the altar. There is a crude statuette of a man above the altar. It is not clear, but it is a shrine to Dunatis the god of the road. If they make a small offering their journey should be without peril, but if they do not, they should be plagued with problems later in the journey, like trolls, bandits and other mishaps. If some offer and some do not, those who fail could be afflicted by things like thrown horseshoes, broken saddle-straps, stinging insects etc. Remember magic and holy powers work in a fantasy world and this is a way to bring home how much they can pervert the world.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Uttgart

REGION: Km of Kirrodar, Near Sulymin

Just outside of the burgeoning trading city of Sulymin the characters just about run into a wild-haired young man who comes running staggering down the road towards them, glancing over his shoulder so that he hits one of the travelers. He is so out of breath that he cannot talk, but sits on the ground gesturing frantically behind him, a look of terror in his eyes. Shortly thereafter they will see a large, dark figure charging down the road after him. As it approaches he regains his breath and explains that it is the demon Thulax and that he failed in binding it and it seeks vengeance for being summoned into this world. Thulax is a horrible creature reminiscent of a huge, dead, rotting wolf who walks erect and has scales instead of fur and long fangs and claws. The mage will beg the travelers to defend him. Thulax cannot speak, but he is only after the soul of the hapless mage. He will mangle and destroy those who get in his way and keep him from his quarry, but he bears them no special grudge. He should be powerful and magically protected.

#### CAMPAIGN WORLD: Ysgarth

REGION: The Vaenmark, Cy of Syria

As the party is about to leave a small road and move into the mountains, an enraged, wounded boar comes from the woods to their right, charging across their path. If they take any action towards it the bear will attack them in its fury, in which case they will have to defend themselves. Not long after the attack of the bear a group of riders will emerge from the woods in pursuit. If the bear is dead, their rather imperious leader will be offended at the travelers for killing it. If it has gone on he will demand that they tell him where it went and perhaps that one of them guide him and his men. This obnoxious upper-class huntsman is Dietran and he is the favorite nephew of Stromjor the Vaen general in charge of the territory. He has 6 equally haughty Vaen youths with him.

#### CONCLUSION

How you use these encounters is entirely up to you, but from this large variety you should be able to find something to fit almost any wayfaring situation. You should also be able to derive some interesting variants off of these themes and perhaps they will stimulate you in the development of your own encounters. Encounters can be integral parts of your adventures, passing entertainment or pointless annoyances, depending largely on how well thought out they are and how you present them. Make your adventures mean something and they will add depth and interest to your campaign.

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"I encourage everyone to seek out the new Arduin material, because it is one of the best developed and imaginative role-playing campaigns I know of and should be valuable to players using any system"—Dave Mills (ABYSS #35)



from combat altogether and towards other sorts of interaction which are intellectually rewarding but do not encourage this sort of unnecessary distraction.

Miniatures are one of several tools with which roleplayers are lured from the potential path of good, imaginative roleplaying and into the mire of monster-slaying tactics and rules manipulation. Miniatures naturally alter the emphasis of a campaign from the world and the characters to the board and the miniatures and the more they are used the more this becomes true until the roleplaying elements of the world being to vanish altogether. New players who begin on this temptingly easy path will never get all that they could out of roleplaying and older players who are drawn into this syndrome by the visual appeal of miniatures will find their world shrinking to the limits of a hex map and will find their characters changed from real people to lead figures. (John Davies)

#### GIVING LIFE TO YOUR MINIATURES:

Miniatures are amazing. For about a buck you can buy a little person made out of lead. For a little more, with the right connections, you can buy naked figures of well-endowed dwarves ravishing elf maidens. There are thousands of designs, from ducks to spaceships. You can buy miniatures of lead, tin, plastic or even cardboard. When you roleplay you can let the miniature be your character for you and you can send your imagination out to get a beer. If you're good with them you can even intimidate the hell out of other players with a miniature so bizarre that it confuses and disorients them. After all, your character is just the way its miniature looks, right? I thought I'd use this space to help you deal with miniatures and the many problems and opportunities they present.

Just buying miniatures is not sufficient. Miniatures must be painted and receive proper care. To do this you will need one or more of the following: scissors, thread, wire clippers, rubber cement, stapler, needle, crayons, finger paints, a metric ruler, old scraps of cloth, ladyfingers (firecrackers, not pastries), a cuisinart, a scale, a cigarette lighter and possibly a selection of garden insects. With a little preparation and these items, when your friends whip out their miniatures you'll be ready to play. Oh yes, you'll need miniatures too, a whole bunch of them. See if you can find a grab-bag of them at a convention.

Once you are prepared there are many routes you can take, but I'll go over some of the best. First, take your favorite miniature, preferably something manlike. Use the wire-cutters to remove all of its limbs from its torso and to chop off its head. You then have two options. You can either reattach the limbs with rubber cement, or chop up a whole bunch of miniatures (try to mix robots, spaceships and fantasy monsters), and then reassemble the parts more or less at random. Once you have something you like put together you are ready for some realistic simulation, because when you are wounded you can just pull a leg, an arm or even a head off and say 'bummer, i'm hit.' Everyone will be impressed by the realism. This works even better if you borrow other peoples miniatures and do it without telling them. Next, try sewing up little tiny clothes for your miniatures. They don't have to look great, especially if you want to play a barbarian or the equivalent in a fantasy setting. Then when you compare your fancily garbed metal surrogate to the naked beasties of your comrades you can say 'gee guys, hope your little metal fellows aren't cold.' If you do this convincingly you could be on your way to a career in munchkin haberdashery. There are all sorts of little things you can do if you're inventive and love realism. Use a ruler to measure the height, limb length and diameter and then weigh your miniature. Use these objective stats to determine the real stats of your character. Everyone will be impressed. If you have a character who is an old veteran, put the cuisinart to work. A couple of seconds on 'mix' and he'll have some



good battle scars to boast about. A minute on puree and a matchbox and you can hold a closed-casket funeral for his remains. Dragons and fireballs are fun. Set your lighter on maximum range and when the moment comes torch up a few of the party (this works extra well if you coat them in a flammable glue first). This option is also available for napalm and flamethrower attacks in hi-tech games. If you're playing in a modern day campaign 'ladyfinger' size firecrackers are a must for interrogating hostages. Tie one of these babies between the legs of a hostage, light the fuse and tell him you'll put it out if he gives you the secret plans (wear goggles to avoid lead fragments). The great thing about miniatures is that no matter how much you abuse them they never complain, and they walk just as well without legs. Insects are the answer for total realism. A well-trained cockroach is just about 25mm long and can do all the moving and thinking for you. Hell, you don't even need to roll up a character, a good-size

cockroach can take out a lead figure one-on-one anyday. All of this can be fun, but don't forget to paint your miniatures. I suggest fingerpaints or crayons for this function. The former peel nicely after drying to give that flaking 'old-barn' look, and the later are great for simulating acne and the pox. Remember, your miniature is your character, so if you're playing in a party of geeky barbarian fighter types, why not whip out your handy hi-tech self-aware battle tank and train the old repeaters on them. Hell, they can't complain, the miniature is right there on the board, isn't it?

Miniatures can be so much more fun when used artistically. I just can't understand why so many people ignore them. Its just like playing with toy soldiers afterall. When one of them dies you can just go out and buy another one struck from the same mold. Miniatures are the blood-drenched heart of role-playing, so take these suggestions to heart and use them wisely. [Jon Schuller]

# MAGIC FOR TCT

## CARL JONES



In its original incarnation To Challenge Tomorrow featured a fairly elaborate, but rather vague system of psychic skills in lieu of any other approach to the supernatural or mental powers. While this is a good idea and appropriate to the game, as TCT becomes more popular and is adapted to more and stranger settings, it is increasingly clear that not only are psychic skills somewhat vague and generally overpowered, but the system could also benefit from some sort of regularized approach to traditional incantative magic. TCT is a simple system and these problems can be solved fairly simply with a few additions and adjustments.

The first step is to introduce a system of Psi Points, an additional limiting factor on the use of psychic skills in addition to Fatigue Points and Activity Points. A character's Psi Points should be equal to PSIx5, and after being expended they regenerate at a rate of PSI per day, broken down evenly throughout the

day. Each application of a psi skill has a cost in PP. This cost is determined by the formula:  $((\text{RAN} + \text{DUR} + \text{MD} + \text{RES}) \times \text{DIF}) / 5$ . In this formula RAN is distance to the target in meters, DUR is duration of effects in Combat Rounds, MD is the maximum potential damage of the effect, RES is the resistance of the target (a modifier to avoidance rolls) and DIF is the difficulty rating of the

application, adjusted for situation and target resistance. Note that if a particular application has no set DIF, the DIF is assumed to be 5. DUR and RAN are actually a bit more complex than they seem. DUR is measured in CR up until a DUR of 1 minute. From there DUR is increased by 1 per minute, up to a DUR of 10 minutes. From there DUR is increased by 1 per 10 minute period. Thus if a spell were to last 5CR the DUR factor would be 5, but if it were to last 5 minutes the DUR factor would be 14 rather than 50. The same applies with the RAN factor. Up to 10M the RAN increases one per meter. Over 10M it increases 1 per 10M. Over 100M it increases 1 per 100M. Unlike DUR, this decreasing rate of increase in cost continues indefinitely. Thus, a range of 5M would add a RAN factor of 5, a range of 50M would add a RAN of 14 and a range of 500M would add a RAN of 23. This helps keep costs believable for extremely long-range power applications like teleportation. A note should be thrown in here on resistance. In the formula above, RES is provided as a counter to the natural resistance of a target. It is roughly equivalent in function to MD. In many cases a target may have a characteristic based save against a given effect. This save is equal to 20 times the appropriate stat, divided by the resistance. Thus, in an attempt to Coerce a person with a RAT of 12, you might have to provide a RES of 24 to bring his resistance down to 10. It is extremely difficult to lower resistance to 0.

Another adjustment which has to be made is in the Fatigue Point Cost and Activity Point Cost system, though this adjustment is fairly small. As it stands now, FPC is fairly loosely defined, based on APC and rather unclear in its function, while APC is totally static, based only on the standard APC set for a given psychic skill. The APC for a psychic skill which is provided in the TCT rules should be treated as a base. To that base is added a value based on the Psi Point Cost of that particular application, as determined above. The increase in APC is equal to  $PPC \times DIF$  of the skill in that application, so that the total APC will tend to average about 50 more than in the original system. As for the FPC, this is figured out in more or less the same way, based on the AP spent on the use of that skill. However, there is a simple adjustment which adds some realism, taking into account the fact that the AP spent to use a skill can be spread out over more than one round. The basic FPC is 1FP per 40AP expended. This is fine, so long as the character spends less than half his total AP in a given round. However, in each round where he spends more than half of his



total AP for the round on that action, the FPC is doubled, and if he spends more than 3/4 of his AP for that round he pays four times the FP. Thus, if a psychic skill took 200AP to cast and a character had 50AP, he could cast it in 8 rounds at an FPC of 5 or in 4 rounds at a n FPC of 20, quite a significant difference. As a compromise he could do it in 6 rounds with an FPC of 6.

Another factor to add is that of specific spells. While TCT is generally oriented towards learning skills and applying them in different ways, in some campaigns it may be more appropriate for characters to learn specific spells which have set costs and can be used to perform only

one function. To do this, the GM should determine how much it would cost in AP and PP to carry out that function using the appropriate skill, but with the effective DIF halved (round up). The character can then learn that effect as a spell at a TP cost of half of the average of the PPC of the spell and the original TP cost of the skill on which it is based (minimum cost of 2, round up). Multiple Skill Levels with a specific spell should have the same effects they would have with the parent skill. A nice alternative to mix the two systems is to allow a character to learn both skills and spells related to them, with the SL of the skill applying to all spells which fall under it equally. Naturally, spells which are based on the same skill contribute to each other. When using specific spells all of the attributes of the spell are considered set, but they can be adjusted when the spell is being cast. For each time the caster chooses to expend the basic PP of the spell again after the initial cost, he can increase RAN, DUR, MD or RES by 100 percent of its original value.

Another factor to add, if it seems desirable is a fumble system, with a percentage chance of a given skill or spell malfunctioning when applied, leading to a fumble and a strange result. The character's chance of success with a skill is found just like with any other skill, but if he fails the roll, the GM should make up some particularly horrendous and appropriate result or mutation of the power, leading to horrible results. This works even better if you go to a specific spell system, though in such a case you use half the DIF of the skill on which the spell is based.

Having gone this far, you might consider borrowing a little bit from Ysgarth and modifying the Psi Shield skill to work like the Ysgarth skill Mana Shield, so that instead of giving a resistance against spells it has the effect of knocking 5 times your SL off the PP power behind that spell, reducing the effects appropriately. There are probably other ideas which you could also borrow from Ysgarth, and with these modifications the systems become relatively compatible in this area.

Once you start getting this sophisticated you begin to make The Challenge Tomorrow more and more like Ysgarth, and while that can be a good thing to some degree, it should not be allowed to run wild, and the use of magic in TCT should be kept limited and controlled, because it was never intended to be primarily a game of magic and the supernatural. Part of the function of these added rules is to limit the power of the supernatural in TCT, while at the same time making psychic abilities just a bit more flexible if you want

to use them. Naturally, these suggestions should be applied as seems appropriate to your campaign and setting, and in some cases you might just want to get rid of the psychic skills altogether.

## SPELLCRAFT

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# IN THE SPECULUM

THE MONSTRUM & DRAGONS  
by Dave Graves et al  
from Varanae/Role-Players

These two books just showed up on my doorstep with little warning and reminded me of just how unaware even I am of the wide range of activity which has been going on in the gaming small press for some time. These two items were published in 1980 and 1981 by a group of gamers in Washington state, presumably from their own campaign, after the style of some of the more respected fantasy small-presses, particularly Weirdbook Press. They are thick books, about 100 pages each, in full-sized format with attractive, slick black and white colors. The interiors are profusely illustrated and the type is professionally set, though a great deal of space is wasted unnecessarily, about enough to condense them into less than half the size without any significant sacrifice. As I understand it the reason these review copies were sent out is that the original author is resuming publication in a somewhat changed format, with the goal of producing these and other aids at a low price for a mail-order audience.

The Monstrum, as the title implies, is a collection of monster descriptions, about 90 of them. They are in the tradition of other aids from a few years ago, with the various creatures described in terms which may not be those of AD&D, but resemble them closely enough to be instantly adapted by even the least imaginative GM. Each creature description is accompanied by an illustration. The illustrations are of amateur quality,

but they are effective enough and some are surprisingly good considering the large number of them which had to be done by a single artist. Each description, consisting of a column of stats and a column of text, is set-up facing a page with an illustration. Unfortunately, the illustrations on the facing pages do not match the descriptions they face, but the descriptions on the following page. This is a minor layout error, but can be really annoying. The descriptions of the monsters are fairly detailed in a technical sense, but give little of a feel for the origin, ecology or rationale of the creatures. As in so many monster books the beasts here seem to exist with very little logic behind them, given powers and motivations just because a Gamemaster thought they would be a challenge for players who knew the Monster Manual backwards and forwards. Some of these creatures are original and fairly well thought out, like the Leaping Lizard, but the large majority are just rehashed versions of traditional creatures, one-shot surprises or badly mangled interpretations of mythological beings. The descriptions are also atrociously written. Also provided is a treasure table, clearly to keep things true to the AD&D model. This is clearly a beginner effort, and though there are some attractive aspects, it would be of little use to any save the most desperate AD&D player, because it is a relic from the times when D&D had no decent supporting material, a need which TSR has actually filled, though their efforts may not please everyone.

Dragons is the more recent of the two books. The art, by Doug Philip, is somewhat better, especially on the cover. It addresses the problem of all experienced AD&D gamemasters, that the power and majesty of the greatest saurian nightmares is only palely reflected in the statistics they dragons are given in AD&D. There is a brief introduction on the general nature of dragons and the remainder of the book is devoted to statistics, descriptions and illustrations in the same format as The Monstrum, except that the illustrations are placed properly in this book and the descriptions are much more detailed. The orientation here is still very much in the variant AD&D tradition, but the dragon descriptions are often quite sophisticated and have strong logic as well as a strong fantasy element. Some of the dragons, like the Grave Dragon, the Moon Dragon, the



Zen Dragon and the Salt Dragon are rather original and could offer players opportunities for role-playing instead of mere combat. There are some rather amusing variations presented and the art, though not perfect, really brings out the personality of the different breeds well. While this book does not have the ecological rationalization of some other works on dragons, it is packed full, with fifty of the beasts, the majority of which are engaging and imaginative creatures, some of which could be used sparingly in almost any fantasy campaign. I think what I liked best about the book is that not all of the dragons were presented as fearsome foes. Alternatives were offered as well, including intelligent, cooperative dragons and even domesticated breeds. This is a pleasant change from TSR's rather mundane approach to saurians.

As you can tell from all this I'd heartily recommend Dragons, while warning most players away from The Monstrum just as strongly. There is good potential in these efforts. It will be interesting to see what Dave Graves comes up with in the future.

#### THE VANISHING CONJUROR

by Mike Lewis and Simon Price  
THE STATUE OF THE SORCERER  
by Chris Elliott and Richard Edwards  
from Chaosium and Games Workshop

This booklet presents an interesting approach to adventure publishing which is new, at least in gaming. Following the concept of the old 'Ace Double' series of novels, this pair of Call of Cthulhu adventures from England are presented back to back, with a lavish full-color cover on the back and front of the book. Thus, if you open the book on one side you have one adventure and if you flip it over you can start another and they meet in the middle. The adventures have been developed by some of the best new talent at Games Workshop, including Mike Lewis and Marc Gascoigne, late of DRAGONLORDS fame. Both adventures are fairly short in comparison to the larger efforts from Chaosium, but they are presented well, in the same type of format as adventures in WHITE DWARF and the text is easy to follow and make use of.

The Statue of the Sorcerer is organized chronologically, with the course of actions mapped out pretty clearly in a sequence of events and investigation options. It includes the usual handouts of relevant evidence and leads the players into unsuspecting involvement in the plans of an immortal sorcerer. It is a fairly standard plot, with a puzzle added in the form of a magic square and a fairly interesting idea for the source of the sorcerer's longevity.



The investigative leads are fairly varied for so short an adventure, though because of the brevity and chronological design of the adventure the players will tend to get a feeling that they are being lead around by the nose or else merely participating as observers in an inevitable chain of events. Basically a good adventure, but experienced GMs might want to add some variations and sub or super plots.

The Vanishing Conjuror is actually shorter than The Statue of the Sorcerer, but because it is organized more loosely there is more potential for extended play and involvement. It is appropriate that the adventure has a British setting, though it is not for use with Cthulhu by Gaslight. It is intended for inclusion in a campaign, which makes it fairly adaptable. It is not a complex adventure, being set-up as a straightforward examination of the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of a stage conjuror. There are some interesting plot developments and unusual background characters, and the investigators get drawn into the intrigues of the Chinese underworld as well as magical cultists. The tone of the whole adventure is fairly light, and it is much more of a traditional pulp adventure than in the more oppressive traditionally Lovecraftian style. The adventure is not particularly complex and is well suited to new players and action type characters rather than experienced players who may find it rather brief and trivial or research-oriented occultist characters who will find library skills less use than a good intimidating glare.

Neither of these adventures is perfect and both of them follow pretty safe formulae, but they have a nice sprinkling of original ideas and are easy to run and enjoyable to play. They form a nice contrast in Call of Cthulhu styles and are brief enough to play in one sitting each, something which is harder to do with the more campaign-oriented material which is available. Both experienced and novice players should find something here to please them, whatever their preferred playing style.

#### THE HERO SYSTEM BESTIARY

by Michael J. Susko, Jr.

from Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises

This aid is for use with the growing number of games which use some version of the Hero System rules from Hero Games. It is presented in full-sized format, with a nicely illustrate and rather toothy cover, profuse interior illustrations and 56 pages of easy to follow text.

The Bestiary starts out with rules for creating new creatures for the system, which are basically a simplified variant on the standard Hero System rules, though the explanation here is a bit clearer than in most other versions. Animalistic skills are provided as well as disadvantages, keeping all the familiar aspects of the system. At the end of the book general guidelines are provided for running animals and other creatures and using them in the adventure setting. Much of this is just common sense, but all of it is sound and could be of help to a GM. The remainder of the book is taken up with descriptions of creatures for the system, broken down into 'Real Animals', 'Prehistoric Animals', 'Mythical Animals' and 'Movie Monsters'. The sections on 'Real Animals' and 'Prehistoric Animals' are by far the most detailed, with a wide range of species and different types examined, with a decent nod given to non-aggressive animal types as well as predators. The 'Mythical Animals' section covers only the most familiar creatures and actual descriptions are brief, but this would be an easy area for a GM to fill in with adaptations from many other systems. The 'Movie Monster' section is the only real disappointment, since it seems to concentrate primarily on bad Japanese films with no attention paid to some of the biggest classics: no vampires, werewolves, giant apes, zombies or reanimated dead. Ah well. Aside from that, the selection is good, the stats functional and the rules and guidelines intelligent.

This Bestiary should be quite useful to Hero System players, and while none of it will be new to players of other systems, some of the basic ideas on creature use and design could be of great help to a GM in any

game who wanted to be sure that his original monsters had some logic to them.

#### GADGETS

by Andrew M. Robinson

from Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises

This is the first in a new series of supplements for Champions and unlike earlier supplemental aids, such as Champions III, it is coherent and on a well defined single topic. Gadgets is a 40 page full-sized book with a color cover, clear and easy to read print and a selection of appropriate illustrations.

Gadgets begins with a general overview of the role of gadgets in the campaign, focusing on paramilitary groups, followed by some special rules on limitations which apply specifically to devices. The sections which follow cover a number of different types of weapons and tools, some of them quite inventive. These are broken down into 'Lethal Weapons', 'Non-Lethal Weapons', 'Protective Devices', 'Movement Aids', 'Squad Weapons', 'Squad Equipment' and 'Installation Equipment'. Most of the items you could ever want are covered, from the Hydraulic Jack to a Teleportation Neutralizer. To round out the package two rather useful sections are added. The first of these is 'Using Gadgets', which suggests a number of intelligent ways to fit them into a campaign and to make players more aware of the possibilities inherent in such devices. The final section is a system for 'Agent Generation', which doesn't necessarily fit with the themes of the rest of the book, though it does fit with the introduction. This system consists of random tables and basic guidelines for setting up agents in a high-tech group for use with Champions or other Hero System games. Particularly helpful in this section is a listing of organizations with ideas about how they might put gadgets to use.

Gadgets gives some very good ideas for weapons and devices for a high-tech or superhero campaign, ideas which would be great with Hero System games and could easily be adapted to other systems as well. Gadgets is as weak in systems and mechanics as it is strong in providing specific items. Very little effort seems to have gone into developing the liabilities which are provided or creatively interfacing it with the general power system of the game. There is no real system for designing new gadgets, and though there is a cost system, the economic unreality items which cannot be bought for money is carried over from Champions. I'd definatly recommend Gadgets for GMs who are looking for inventive hardware to throw at their players, but if you are looking for something which expands and improves

the Hero System in breadth of mechanics, then Gadgets may be rather unsatisfactory.

**THE CORIOLIS EFFECT**

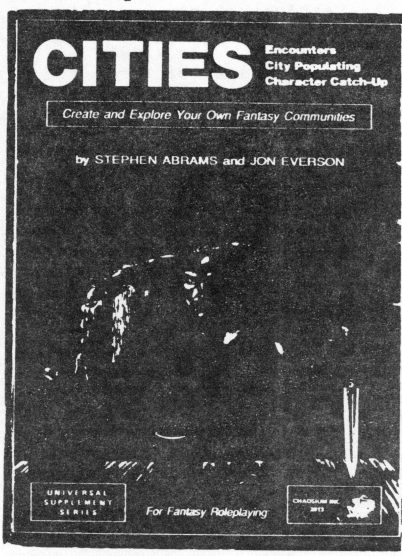
by Dennis Mallonee  
from Hero Games/Iron Crown Enterprises

This is advertised as being the fifth in a series of adventures, and though I have not seen the previous adventures, the quality of the concept of this effort certainly sets it apart from typical superhero fare. The Coriolis Effect is a 32 page booklet in full-size format with an effective but unattractive color cover. The interior design is virtually identical to that of other recent Champions aids and is clear and easy to follow with scattered functional illustrations.

What made this adventure particularly interesting to me was that it was oriented towards the conditions under which people become superheroes and it had a clearly-defined plot and situation with fairly believable characters and events involved. It is essentially the story of a young girl who was spirited away by a sorceress and then grows up to face down the menace to her family posed by the daughter of that sorceress. There are some very nice touches to this adventure. I particularly liked the idea of following along with the central character as her powers mature and she becomes a full-fledged superhero. The use of magic and elementals as the source of power in the adventure is also nice to see as a change from the usual mutants and martial arts approach. I've always liked magical superheroes and interplanal adventure and this scenario is full of it. The background characters, elementals and villains are well detailed and intelligently worked out and the basic plot is logical and relatively sophisticated. All this aside, there remain two areas in which the adventure falls short of its potential. The first is that it is designed for a party of regular Champions characters, who have to become part of the household of the heroine's grandfather and get involved in protecting her from magical vengeance. The adventure would be much, much better if the situation were modified so that one of the players could take the central role, though the level of power which she would eventually achieve would probably mean that she could not be played again as a player character. It would have been nice if the designers had perhaps put in mechanics for allowing someone to play the heroine with a system for determining how much she improved and setting some limits and flexibility. The other problem is that the tone of the

adventure and the nature of the characters make it pretty clear that it is oriented towards younger players. This may put off the more experienced players who would really appreciate the sophisticated plot, though it makes it really first rate for intelligent youngsters.

All things considered this is one of the best superhero scenarios I've seen to date, combining original ideas, good plotting and interesting characters, though the mechanism for involving player characters is a bit artificial. Normally I'm not big on adventures with pre-set characters, but if players were to take over the roles of the major background characters for this adventure and maybe add a few more, it would really shine as a one-shot adventure, especially for introducing those new to the genre. It might work even better with two small groups set up adversarially as heroes and villains.



**CITIES**  
by Stephen Abrams and John Everson  
from Chaosium/Midkemia Press

The vagaries of game publishing just seem to grow and grow. Now that Avalon Hill has taken over publishing some of Chaosium's line, Chaosium has taken over publishing some of the work of Midkemia Press. Midkemia was a small but very active concern in the late '70s and early '80s which produced some interesting low-budget campaign and module material as well as a somewhat garbled variant rule system. I had thought Midkemia was defunct, but Cities appears to be a new release done through Chaosium who are also publishing new editions of old Midkemia aids. Cities is a full-size 64 page booklet with an excellent color cover, refreshingly dense text



and some nice interior illustrations. It is part of what Chaosium is calling the 'Universal Supplement Series', intended for use with any fantasy game. It is apparently the third in this series, though I have yet to see the first two.

Cities was clearly developed in the course of a long and involved campaign with several people participating in the working of the world. It seems to be a compilation of information and ideas which were presented in more concrete form in earlier Midkemia releases. A lot of work went into the book and all that effort may save some GMs a great deal of pain and heartache. Cities takes a table-oriented approach to detailing the urban setting. Everything is charts for random rolls with minimal explanatory text provided. There are extensive encounter charts, broken down by the part of the city you are in. There are encounters with incidents in progress. There are encounters with a variety of citizen types, including barbarians, mercenaries, soldiers, watchmen, slavers, magicians, officials, pilgrims, street scum, aristocrats, slaves, workgangs, priests, other adventurers, madmen, townspeople, peasants, sailors, holy men, merchants, prostitutes, spies, animals and even gods. Most of these are not merely encounters, but also include a variety of possible situations and events relating to that encounter, all of them rolled randomly. There are tables for rolling for the nature and quality of lodgings, for rolling occupational background, the size of crowds and even the quality of stables. Just about every aspect of city life is covered in this first section, with charts available to roll for just about anything that might be needed. The next section gives

limited text on populating urban areas, mostly an explanation of how to use the charts. This is followed by a section on villages, with charts for everything which might apply, including the nature of buildings, types of businesses and contents of bazaars. The next section does the same thing for towns and cities, with a brief introduction and then lots of tables for building type and placement, businesses and merchant types. The next section gives some brief guidelines for keeping track of what a character does in the city between adventures, with appropriate charts for little incidents he is involved in, the results of regular work and investment, his expenses and involvements and all the little things that don't really come out in the course of a regular adventure. Cities is a mass of charts and tables, many of them involving intricate detail and quite a bit of imagination. It is possible, with this aid, to pretty much roll up an entire city and much of what happens in it, using dice to simulate urban life so that a character can experience it.

I have good and bad feelings about Cities. As a rule I'd rather see GMs given intelligent guidelines and detailed technical information which they could adapt for the design of their own, well-planned and original city, yet I realize that many GMs may not have the time to invest in that sort of work. I'm glad that an aid like this exists for those times when a GM has to rely on random rolls and cannot take time to design the whole urban setting. If you are going to have to follow that course Cities is a valuable resource which makes the use of random material much more palatable because of the high quality of thought which went into it.

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## SUBURBAN SLASHER KAMP KILLJOY



### DELUXE SET

# RELIGION

## IN THE FANTASY CAMPAIGN

### ERIC OLSON

After literally years of reading Gods articles in ABYSS, I thought it would be good to put together some basic ideas on how to effectively choose how to structure and organize religion in your campaign. How religion works in your world can have a great influence on the lives of characters in the world and well thought out religious systems can add depth and variety to the campaign environment.

The first thing to be considered is the question of monotheism. I know that Dave will probably scream, but a monotheistic campaign can work and work well. Examples can be found in many places, such as Katherine Kurtz's Deryni books or the old but still useful world of Chivalry and Sorcery. A single church need not be monolithic in nature, but can have internal diversity, as seen in the Catholic Church in the later middle ages. A single church can have many sects and sub-groups and still claim fundamental unity. The medieval church had its Franciscans, Dominicans, Benedictines and Cluniacs, yet most of the time they all acknowledged the primacy of the Pope in Rome. Heresy can arise and isolated communities may differ wildly from standard doctrine (for example the Coptic Christians of the Middle East). A single religion opens quite a can of worms, with heresy, inquisitions, witch hunts and wars of conversion. The best way to run such a campaign is to provide a single great religion for each human race. This allows for paganism in fringe areas and for clear religious definition of enemy races, as with Islam and Christianity. You should also come up with three or four recognized sects, a couple of secret sub-sects and some heresies. Sects should be centered in a particular region with a few 'chapters' in other regions. Finally, remember to allow for conflict within church hierarchy schism and even a

chaotic episode like the Avignon period of the papacy.

Next up to bat is polytheism or even omnitheism. One thing I have always objected to is the great mass of religions which are imposed on so many campaigns. For a religion to exist it should have a strong popular base somewhere that actually supports it. Religions and their institutions are not self-supporting. They have to have someone footing the bill. As you can see in the world around you, most religions are centered in one area with only a small number of worshippers outside of their central area. Also, as I noted earlier, many religions will have a racial, regional, professional or political link among their adherents. For example, Hindus are mostly Indian in origin, Voodoo is found most among Caribbean blacks of West African origin and Shinto is almost exclusively followed among the Japanese.

It is important to limit the number of religions in an area. I believe that for ease of play and realism there should be no more than two or three religions in one area, each with active or inactive support from at least 25% of the regional population, though most worshippers will be only sporadically active. There should also be a few smaller religions which are little more than cults with the support of 5 to 10% of the population. Smaller religions should center in cities or among fringe populations. A good way to divide up religions is by political states. In many cases the political states work hand in hand with the dominant local religion for mutual support and profit. After all that verbiage, let's apply these ideas. For an example, let's use the early Byzantine Empire. The predominant religion is Greek Orthodox, with 70% popular support. Next is Roman Catholicism with 15% popular support, centered in the North Balkans and Sicily. Next is

Armenian Catholicism which has 8% support. Last is Judaism with 5% support mostly in the Levant and the major cities. Other Christian groups would be found in the urban areas and stranger paganistic cults would be found among the fringe populations, like the Arabs, Georgians and Turks. The Empire and the major religion both have about the same borders. I have used a historical example to show how this could be done logically while still allowing for variety. Early Christian sects competed aggressively, sometimes even rioting against each other and there were times when Roman Catholicism did not look like it had a chance of achieving the dominance which it eventually did.

With polytheism there is the added question of whether you want to use a pantheon or a collection of cults. A pantheon gives you a logical and structured religious system of deities which can coexist logically. They are also ready made for internal intrigue and secret sects. If you use pantheons they should be racially or socially based, possibly with one strata of society following one group of gods and another strata following another group, as would be the case when one group conquers another. It might be a good idea to use one of the traditional mythological pantheons in your campaign or use an adapted version or at least use something like the Norse pantheon as a model for your religious system. A cult system works well in very sophisticated and racially varied societies like Imperial Rome. In this sort of case only some gods will have survived from early pantheons and immigrants will have brought their favorite deities with them, leading to a hodge-podge of specialized cults to serve every need, with some cults dominating because of their political affiliations with powerful families and groups. In this sort of system there will be cross-over between groups following specific deities and people will have some opportunity for religious choice, flexibility and multiple allegiance. This is a very fluid and potentially highly sophisticated system, but I still recommend limiting the number of religions and establishing a hierarchy of importance or pecking

order within the ones you use. Many campaigns have a tendency to overlook the significance of religion to the individual and his role in society. A person's faith helps to shape his whole outlook on life and gives him moral guidelines to operate under. As should be obvious, alignment (if you use it) is closely tied to religious affiliation. A character should also accept some more subtle political and moral laws of his church and possibly observe special eating or other practices. If the church looks down on something or someone the character is likely to also. Giving a character some religious observances and beliefs can help enhance role-playing.

In the past and present some churches have wielded great power and have had the ability to alter the course of history and the actions of emperors. Their impact for lesser characters and events should be even greater. Remember the political pull which churches have and let them use it for and against specific characters. Religious tension is a useful tool and characters and GMs should learn to make it part of their play. A GM should realize that the power of a church can be used to motivate characters both positively and negatively. Players should be aware of the benefits they can gain from their church. It can not only provide healing and holy succor, but it can also give protection and a political power base to the devout. A church is always interested in seeing followers rise in power, but remember that a church is most interested in its own survival and will turn against those who become too powerful and too independent or risky. Internationally based churches also work well as information networks or even as banking establishments.

There is a great deal which can be done with religion in a campaign, both with faith itself and with religious institutions. I realize that I have rambled a bit here, but I hope that I've shed some light on the possibilities of religion in gaming and that some of you will be inspired to explore the role-playing church of your choice.

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