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Staff Artist	Tony Lambert
Publisher's Assistants	James A. Diviney Kevin K. Kresse Valentin Ramos

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Howling At The Moon

GATEWAYS Magazine always welcomes your comments and suggestions. *Howling At The Moon* is your regular forum for opinions, debates, discussions, cries and whispers. If you have something to tell us or to tell your fellow gamers, write to: *Howling At The Moon*, Gateways Publications Inc. JAF Box 965, New York, N.Y. 10116

Dear Gateways:

Please do me the favor of telling D. Quartermain how much I liked his review of MERP in Gateways #5. (In fact, please forward this letter to him if you would.) He did a good job of concisely suggesting the sort of confusion a new player feels when coming to MERP.

Note, however, that the MERP 32-page introductory book makes the pretext of doing exactly what Quartermain says MERP fails to do -- distinguish the role of GM as knowledgeable facilitator and players as systems-ignorant novices. The introduction explicitly suggested that the GM begin as the expert, guiding the players in creating characters and playing beginning scenarios. However, the introductory book is a patch on the original system, and not a very convincing one, so I believe Quartermain's criticisms are accurate, though perhaps not completely fair, since MERP's failure on these grounds is apparently one of execution, not intent.

I appreciate how difficult it is to write a review of a puzzling game system. Quartermain's done a nice job here.

Ken Rolston
Tabor, N.J.

ed. reply: I did indeed forward the letter to Don, and he had this much to say:

"Although I might forgive an error of execution over intent in initial design, I was reviewing the game from a new player's perspective and had to accept the rules as they appeared. This was one case where the design got in the way of what might have been an excellent all-around game system. But I thank you for your kind criticism, and will try to be more impartial in the future." D. Quartermain

Dear Gateways:

Thank you very much for sending me a copy of Gateways #3. Your publication is very professional and I enjoyed it tremendously.

Although I am not a fan of role-playing games, the interview with Matt Wagner and the articles on Cerebus and Howard the Duck were both wonderful. Being a fan of Mage, I found the interview very well done and informative.

My only complaint is that I can't find this magazine here on the west coast. I doubt I would subscribe, since Gateways centralizes on role-playing games, so only specific issues would interest me. But I do wish it were generally available to me.

Thank you again and Magic is Green,
Brett Siler
Portland, OR



ed. reply: I'm glad you liked issue #3, Brett, that issue is rapidly selling out because of that Matt Wagner interview you mentioned. As to the availability of Gateways on the west coast, you should be able to find the magazine in select comic-book stores. Ask for it in the store you usually buy from, and show the owner the list of distributors we print inside the front cover. However, I'm afraid that the best way to get every issue of Gateways that you might be interested in is to subscribe, all you need to know to do just that is written on our inside front cover.

Dear Gateways:

As a father, I was concerned about these role-playing games my son has recently become interested in. Because I did not really understand them, and I've been hearing all sorts of horror stories about them, I have been reluctant to allow my son to play.

However, in one local hobby shop, my son picked up an issue of your magazine. He brought it home to me and we sat down to read it together.

I have never seen the genre put forth in such a positive light before. Your attitude is such that games make up one part of life, and not the whole existence. The Cosmic Streetcorner alone did more to reinforce this aspect in my mind than perhaps any of the other articles. All, however, were most interesting.

Gateways is a very refreshing magazine. You've made me less wary of the role-playing games and my son interested in pursuing his hobby through other media as well.

Thank You.
Jack Larron
Flushing, NY

ed. reply: Mr. Larron, we've been waiting for your letter a long time. Thank you!

From The Tower

A personal tale from the life of an editor and a dreamer.

It's 6:05 am, and I'm sitting at my personal Apple Macintosh and appreciating the sunrise in New York. Which really isn't a sunrise, you know...only a gradual lightening of the sky between the buildings and the rising of a thin mist from the East River. I don't usually get up this early, in fact, I didn't do so today. I haven't been to bed yet.

There were no wild parties last night, nor was there an especially good movie on the Late, Late Show. I was working until dawn, and stopped in an all night coffee shop to rap with my publisher and friend, Jeff Gomez on the way home. It had been a tough night, after a tough week. I was very tired, and wondered aloud why I was doing these crazy things, why I was awake and ready to actually go home, shower, change, and head back off to the city without even grabbing a cat-nap. After all, most normal people would have been fast asleep, having spent the night where they belonged, in bed. They would all wake up this morning, go to work, and finish their day with the usual feeling of mild weariness, and just keep on doing what they had to do.

But things just didn't work out like that for me this time. Art work was delayed, equipment was inexplicably difficult to work with, a technician was unavailable...and all during the final week of my deadlines. Which all goes to show you that bad times will not come to a halt just because I have a dream. Even if it is a good dream, and even if it's a dream that will make me happier than anything I could imagine right now. Because I have to tell you that having the dream, wishing and hoping and even working at a dream, all these things may not always be enough. Sometimes, you have to take the blows, roll with them, and get up again. Sometimes you have to stay up past dawn, and still keep going.

Recognizing that you have a dream is the first difficult step. You have to be a special person to see something as insubstantial as a dream. After all, you have to be 1) Open minded, 2) Dis-satisfied with what's considered "normal" or "expected", and 3) Willing to work toward that dream using all the talent, skill, and honest guts that you have. It doesn't matter if you want to be a writer, a dancer, a game designer, a computer programmer, a veterinarian, an artist, or a stockbroker. Once you put a name to what you want, you will have completed the first step. Great! Millions of people go through their lives never knowing what they want. A dream doesn't have to be "impossible". Your dream might just be to live in another city or country, to meet with and talk to--really talk to some one you



admire, and maybe do what that person does for a living. You might just want to be able to stop what you're doing now, or keep doing it for the rest of your life. Sometimes, in this world of high expectations and heavy pressures, a person might just dream of getting away from what "every one" thinks they should do or be. If you want to reach for the stars, and it seems that so many of you do, then by all means, put a name to that dream and remember it. But don't stop there. Work at it! Push *yourself!* For yourself. If your dream is really worth it, you'll know. Working toward it can be hell. It may also very well be the most rewarding hell you could envision. You have to persevere.

"You gotta pay your dues if you wanna sing the blues, and you know it don't come easy..." The dream cannot and will not come true if you don't work at it and sweat it out. Sometimes, you can find help (sometimes from the oddest of places), but there will be those days when no one but you will seem to believe. Relax. Believe in yourself. I believe in dreamers, but I really believe in workers. Go for it. Tell me about it. Make me believe in your dream. Show the world what you can do, and when you hit a setback, be ready to get up, brush yourself off, and pick up where you left off. No, it's not going to be simple, and no one is going to drop success and happiness in your lap. You just have to keep that dream in sight, take pleasure in your triumphs and work through your difficulties.

The rest, of course, is easy.

Laura Antoniou
Executive Editor

P.S. The staff of Gateways has been saddened to learn of the untimely death of the father of author Robert Asprin this past July. Our interview with Mr. Asprin has been regretfully postponed to a later issue.

The Tome



The Finer Art of Character Generation, Part 3

'Sex, Morality, and all the Good Stuff'

In this, the final part of my advanced character generation articles, I intend to briefly discuss two seemingly forbidden topics of fantasy role-playing games. A note for those Game Masters out there who didn't think that this series had anything to do with them...if you read only one article from *The Finer Art*, this should be the one! After all, it does take two to tango...

Of course, when I say "sex", I should say gender, because that is the correct term for this topic. Gender is usually only mentioned when some rulings junky decides that it's time to limit the strength of female characters or do something just as silly and raise their charisma, or some other such nonsense. Just to get that point out of the way, it is my firm suggestion that no one should be penalized or rewarded for playing a character of one sex over the other. We play our games in fantasy universes where anything is possible! So why nitpick over a dumb thing like a point or two on a player's stat sheet? Enough said, let's get on to the advanced stuff.

My true purpose in discussing gender is to encourage a little more exploration into the place of gender in role-playing games. If you are a player, have all of your characters been of the same sex? (Presumably your own?) If you are a female player, do you ever find yourself playing a male character because "it's easier"? If you are a male player, would the only time you would consider playing a female character be over your cold and still body?

Or worse, if you ever do play a female character, is she a ditzy airhead or some other over-used stereotype? When you are creating a character, remember that it is very important not to fall into a rut of playing the same type of character over and over again. Experiment once in a while, and try something new. When a male player sits down to

play a female character for the first time, he should try to act as his character personality suggests, not as how he thinks a woman would act. (See **Part Two** of this series for personality building.) Men and women with nearly identical personalities will tend to react in nearly identical ways. From that moment on, it will be up to the other player characters and the GM to determine how successful that daring player is. Who knows? You might gain some insight about how the "other half" lives and copes. And that goes for female players as well.

If you are a GM, are half of your Non-Player Characters women? Are any? Half of any world's population is female, but you couldn't tell it by watching a few role-playing games I had seen and played in. In your worlds, are women explorers, adventurers, rulers, innkeepers, heroes and villains, or are they a toss up between tavern wenches, slave girls, and highly kidnappable princesses? Do you encourage players to consider playing characters of the opposite sex, or do you expect a standard all-male party to go off to fight whatever you oppose them with? Hey - you run these games to show off how creative you are, right? Then be creative. Make the next NPC blacksmith a woman, the next royal family member to be rescued a prince. Let the players grapple with one small change in expectations, and you'll add a new dimension to the game. If you mix in a fair number of female NPCs, you'll be sure to make any female players you have feel that they are not alone in the world. But please, please, try to stay away from playing the same "Female Template" over and over again. Men and women share the abilities to be friendly, harsh, cruel, helpful, compassionate, warm, meek, bold, rude, and the millions of other personality traits which help make up our species.

There is one more rather touchy aspect about sex in fantasy role-playing games, and that has to do with, well, sex. (If you are easily offended, please go on to read something tame, like the *Star Wars* article.) Many years ago, sex in gaming was a topic that people joked about but never really admitted existed. It was the industry's long running gag. But there are thousands of gamers out there who are placing intimate encounters within their games, and there are a lot of people to whom this would appear strange, offensive, or at the very least, something that does not belong. Hm. That has been one aspect of censorship that has always confused me. Why would it be more acceptable to graphically describe the slaughter of thousands of inhuman monsters, murder player characters and non-player characters, participate in what could only be termed as "unjust wars" and otherwise cause mayhem and death, while it is unacceptable to mention that two individuals are in love, or that they are merely in lust? Why do characters of both sexes journey and adventure for as many years as it takes to get to a retirement age without ever seeing, wooing, or being wooed by a character or NPC of the opposite sex? One would think that a healthy, strong,

wealthy adventurer would be swamped with admirers. That is, of course, only one side of the coin. The other side is the awful type of world where nameless female NPCs who all look like Heather Locklear and dress like models from the French Riviera are endlessly available to any male adventurer who asks or plunks down his gold. (Any one who read that and says "Where do I sign up?" should not be reading an article on advanced character generation. Come back next year.)

In an advanced game, the GM and the players should work together to make their shared world as real in their imaginations as possible. This should include allowing players and NPCs to fall in love during their quest for magical artifacts, have an occasional gaze of desire shared across a crowded interstellar ballroom, and having the chance to share more than party treasure. Does this mean that the game should turn into a soap opera or romance story? No! - Unless that turns out to be the ultimate game that you've been looking for! What it does mean that if the players treat the existence of persons of the opposite sex as they are treated in real

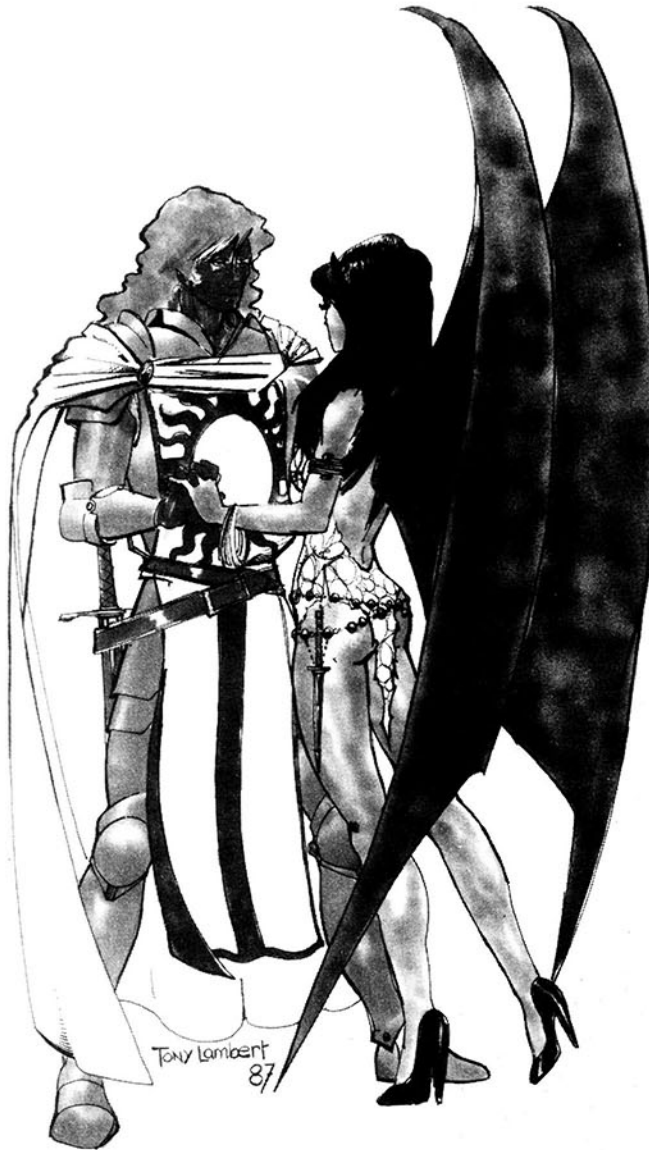
life, there can be found hundreds of plot twists, new motivations and new goals. It will also give the players something else to talk about other than the last gory battle they were involved in.

Now about morality...see how one subject kind of leads into the other? Morality and ethics have a lot to do with role-playing. Most of the game systems either require or encourage the player to state their moral standings, often

referred to as "alignment" at the beginning of a game. This has also been another forbidden topic in the industry, because it is so easy to misunderstand some aspects of it. In fantasy role-playing games, the players are pretending to be heroes like the ones found in all these fantasy and science fiction novels, right? Well, if they're supposed to be heroes, how come they can play characters who are evil? Neutral? Unscrupulous? And if they do play these types of characters, why do they get away with thieving, murdering, cheating, lying, and doing similar or more horrible things within some of these so-called-heroic games? Oh boy, is this a toughie. Famous names in the industry have said that running a good-aligned game or lawfully designed campaign world is necessary to maintain the proper spirit of the game. (See "THE Tracey Hickman Interview" in Gateways, issue 2) I feel that for most purposes, this is true.

However, the morality of individual players should be left up to a discussion between the GM and that individual player. I have played both evil and neutral character within various game settings, and in more than one case, found it difficult to cooperate with the party goal. Do not allow yourself to fall into this trap! The essential theme of any good game should be Participation+Cooperation+Friendship= Victory. A game where the Player Characters murder and steal from each other is a game that will ultimately fail as a role-playing game, and in the end become frustrating

and boring. If you feel that playing a character of dubious or loose morals is necessary to make a point or tell a story (players tell stories too, you know), then discuss it with the GM. Make it plausible that your character may journey and aid the party. Make it possible for your character to reform. Arrange a short, gloriously evil career with your GM and make a strong point when your wicked character meets their well-deserved end. Sometimes a GM

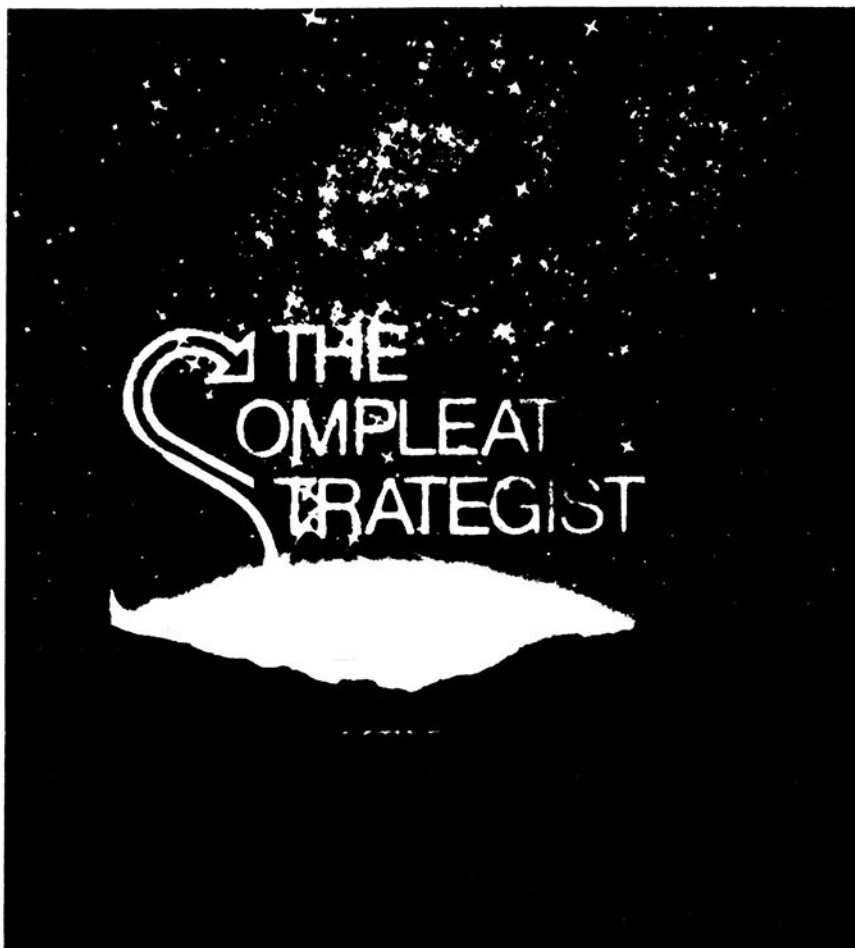


might want to throw an evil character into a party to create a moral dilemma, which can be challenging. But when the party learns to commit evil deeds rather than encourages the evil character to commit good ones, the challenge has failed.

Morality is a part of personality as well, and can be used to a creative player's benefit. For example, just because a character is "good" does not mean that they can't be rude, strange, harsh or cold. Just because your pirate-type character is neutral doesn't mean that he/she can't be warm, friendly, and a great lover of small children and puppies. These little alterations in the stereotype are sure to throw a few players or GMs into a brief fit of confusion, but will also assure you, the player, of a character that everyone will remember. An assassin I played once was a young, regal, energetic noblewoman who was shy among her male admirers, loved to dress in fancy ball gowns, and carried a lightweight long sword when travelling. People would look at the picture I had drawn of her and say "That's an assassin?" Break the stereotype, and create a character unique and apart from any you have ever played.

History, background, profession, motivation, personality, habits, gender, and morality. Taken as a group, it may look like a lot. But taken one step at a time, in small amounts varied with each new character, these ingredients make up the advanced character. And while this may be the end of the **Finer Art of Character Generation**, it is

no where near the end of the theories and practices which make up the finer art of role-playing. We've come a long way in the dozen or so years we've played, and there's no turning back. Look for future articles on the art of universe creation, storytelling, and character advancement. And a special note from me...good luck, and good gaming!



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A Great Adventure...

Interviews with the creators of Star Wars: The Role-playing Game

"I Was a Star Wars Playtester"

by Laura Antoniou

Ten years ago, I saw a movie that would literally change my life. This is a strong statement, yes, but I can truthfully say that if it had not been for George Lucas' *Star Wars*, I would be in an entirely different position today, doing entirely different things, and possibly missing out on dozens of friendships, parties, gatherings, books, other science fiction movies, role-playing games...

Role-playing games? Why would *Star Wars*, a movie released during the infancy of the role-playing industry lead me to gaming? Because Lucas threw all of my dreams, my visions, my hopes and needs right up there on a huge screen, clothed them in the fairy tale images I dimly recalled from childhood, and gave them the sheer excitement and passion that my life had very little of at that time. I needed to re-create that passion--but I also needed to tell my own story. So, using the methods that *Star Wars* taught me, I began spinning a tale of mythic adventure for my friends. It was, of course, a sword & sorcery game. It hadn't occurred to me to play in the *Star Wars* universe. There was no *Star Wars* game.

Ten years later, on a cold January day, I was first told about West End's upcoming *Star Wars* game. Without batting an eyelash I said that I wanted to playtest it. I got a few raised brows in response...editing a magazine has left me very little time to play. But as the game was officially announced at the 1987 Toy Fair, I was certain of one thing. I--and therefore *Gateways*--would keep an eye on it, and stand ready to play as soon as it was possible. Months passed, as drafts went through revision after revision, and Lucasfilm watched every move the creative folks at West End made. But as the project took hold, excitement grew, and the game became a labor of love. You will hear this in their own words. And still, I waited to get my hands on it.

My publisher, Jeff Gomez, came into my office in late spring with pages from an early draft. Within a few weeks, a copy was delivered to me, computerized print-outs xeroxed and presented in a slightly squashed box. No one could understand how important the *Star Wars* tale, myth, structure and method of storytelling had effected me, even now, ten years after the movie first came out.

Carefully, I constructed an adventure, guided my own playtesters into and through character generation, created brief yet solid backgrounds for each of them, and ran, for the first time in my GM-ing history, the one game I had been waiting for since the summer of 1977.

And it was worth the wait.

West End Games is a major force in the role-playing industry that is now adding a new line of *Star Wars* materials including a *Sourcebook*, a full role-play system and a ship to ship board game. Recently, *Gateways* went to West End Games to talk to the designers who worked on the *Star Wars* projects.

Chapter I: Star Warriors!

Douglas Kaufman is a game designer and developer at West End Games. He worked on the upcoming Star Warriors ship-to-ship combat game, a logical addition to the Star Wars universe of gaming. Not essentially a part of the role-playing game, it promises to simulate some of the spectacular outer-space combat sequences of the movies.

Gateways: *How similar are the Star Warriors ship combat rules to the rules in the Star Wars role-playing game?*

Douglas: Actually the ship combat rules in the role-playing game were sort of based on the the rules for the board games. A simplified version, for example, in plotting maneuvers, you have a piloting rating. You roll the dice and you add it to your score for maneuvering instead of actually maneuvering the pieces across the board.

GW: *Tell us about Star Warriors itself.*

Douglas: The original design concept was to try to get the feel of *Star Wars*, but to use as many mechanics from the role-playing game as possible. So we have the skill level and difficulty number concept. Each ship in *Star Warriors* has a control sheet that lists all the various difficulty numbers for all the various maneuvers you can perform: rolls, loops, and slips, etc. And you can pilot and designate which actions you want to perform.

GW: *What about staging particular battles, like the one with the Deathstar in the first film?*

Douglas: Because of the detailed level of each ship, each ship has to decide how tight it is banking, it is all very abstract. There is a bit of calculation involved but we have an option where you use "wing rules", where three or four ships move as one. That way, you can fly three times as many. This is good for flying the big battles. Or for dog-fights, or the Falcon vs. three Tie fighters. *Star Warriors* will have stats for the X-Wing, A-Wing, B-Wing, Y-Wing, Tie Fighter, Tie Interceptor, the Tie Interceptor Prototype that Darth Vader flew,

The Imperial Shuttle, The Slave One, the Millennium Falcon, a stock light freighter, and a couple of other things. We have the rules for the Star Destroyers! Each one takes up about eight hexes, and that is very big. It's like 4" long. We were going to have Super Star Destroyers but we calculated out that they would be a foot and a half long. And as for the Deathstar... it would be about the the size of a room in the scale of the game!

Chapter II: The Sourcebook!

Bill Slavicsek is also a developer and designer as well as a writer for the West End role-playing line. He is known as the co-writer of the Ghostbusters module "Scared Stiffs", and the co-designer of a new "Amber" board game due to come out next spring. He is the co-designer of the Star Wars Sourcebook.

GW: How did you get chosen to work on the Star Wars project?

Bill: I saw the movie 25 times in the cinema. I saw The Empire Strikes Back six times, and Return of the Jedi three times. They knew I was interested. I was sticking my nose into the role-playing game when it was first being designed. As the projects became more involved, I was taken in to help Curtis Smith on the Sourcebook.

GW: As a Star Wars fan, how do you feel about your contributions to the Sourcebook?

Bill: I think it will be a very good addition to the Star Wars mythos itself. As a fan, I have upheld the integrity of Star Wars, and, in my work, I make sure that that standard is maintained in the rules that I edit. If we invented stuff that wasn't there before, it's a result of the ground-work done by the Lucas people.

GW: Being a fan, you probably could have used a sourcebook like that during the summer of 1977!

Bill: It would have been hard to produce it at that point. One of the easiest things for us as designers is that there are three films full of so much "throwaway detail"...at least, to the Lucas people, they might have been throwaways---"Let's put that it 'cause it looks neat"---but all of that little detail helped flesh out this wonderful universe.

GW: Isn't there a conflict, though? Because Lucas had written a science-fiction/high fantasy epic, he could afford to put in those kinds of throwaways without interfering with the plot by explaining them each time they popped up. Yet here you are, trying to translate that epic into something workable for the Sourcebook.

Bill: Yes, it has to be workable, but we are still keeping the fantasy element. This is a world similiar to the Dungeons and Dragons world, for example, where magic is accepted as being part of reality. We are explaining things within that context. For the most part, it is magic that could work a long time ago in a galaxy far, far



away.

GW: In 1977, you saw Stars Wars--a popular, futuristic mythology that will last forever---in 1987, you're actually doing something to add to its legacy. How do you feel about that?

Bill: A little awed. But, at the same time, deadlines have a way of bringing you down to earth. I think that what we are doing will be part of that legacy you're talking about, and it's neat to be working on something like that. The quality of what we are doing---hardcover books---will last as long as people keep looking back at the Star Wars epic, through videos or what have you. I think that I will be humbled once I see my contribution in the bookstores with my name on it. Right now, it's kind of hard to see that goal in sight, because of all the running we're doing, just to get it out. The day-to-day work we do on this project has brought its fantastic elements down to a concrete level, but as soon as all of it is done, I will watch all the movies again for my enjoyment---because it's just that kind of epic story. I think that what we are doing will just help keep it alive until the next trilogy comes out.

GW: Can you summarize what the Sourcebook ultimately is in "25 words or less", as it were?

Bill: A compendium. It is, basically, a guide to the Star Wars universe. It contains a lot of information on some of the major alien races, the different types of ships and planets you can come across during a typical campaign, etc.

GW: And these all have their own statistics for compatibility with the Star Wars RPG?

Bill: Right. It can stand on its own as a product for the fans, not just the players or Game Masters. They could see it in the store and say, "Gee, that's Star Wars material! I wonder how such-and-such worked in the movie!" That alone makes it worthwhile for any fan of Star Wars, player or not. We describe, for example, the "Split-Head" alien who is seen in Jabba the Hut's palace in "Jedi". Actually, we tell you what his race is like, their real names (the Quarn), and we explain their culture in detail and its relation to the regal and spacefaring Moncolomari. An other example is that we explain how a Light Saber works. We also talk about the technological history of the

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different fighter-type ships, like the X-wing---who built them, what kinds of weapons they have, why the rebels are using them. Everything has history somewhere, and, in some cases, there will be short stories in the text to illustrate what points we consider important enough to mention.

Peter Corless can often be seen whizzing about the 11th floor corridors at West End Games, involving himself in many aspects of production--these days, naturally, on Star Wars. His enthusiasm for the project, though tested over the past ten months, is refreshing. He has been known to relieve fellow West Ender Martin Wixted of the duty of parading about gaming conventions in an Imperial Stormtrooper outfit, and claims to have been kicked out of every office in the company...

GW: So what do you really do around here, Peter?

Peter: I design games! I also do typesetting, some artwork, and on rare occasions, I have been known to drive a forklift. I'm currently co-designing and developing Starwarriors with Doug Kaufman. He was the mentor, I was the trainee. Basically, I just made enough annoying comments, that they said, "Doug! Why don't you take him, he's annoying us way too much!" I've also been pretty busy as background coordinator for all the Star Wars projects. I was the guy that made sure that the Imperial Lieutenants wore the same uniform in both the RPG and the Sourcebook, and the TIE fighters flew as fast in the RPG as they do in Starwarriors. A lot of that kind of continuity stuff, and so, basically, what it entailed was reading all the books--the Sketchbooks, the Art of--books, the Han Solo, the Lando Calrissian, listening to the radio plays, reading the comic books...

GW: Ugh! What horrible, uninteresting kind of work!

Peter: What I had to do, let's say for the Sourcebook, is I had to look through all three movies in rapid succession and write down every single thing I saw relating to, say, robots. Then I'd do it all over again for, say, aliens, or vehicles, uniforms, technical devices, and so on and so forth.

GW: Couldn't that sort of information just be sent to you from Lucasfilm?

Peter: Well, nobody at Lucasfilm has every gone through the films and compiled that stuff. This is really, I think, one of the first systematic catalogings that has been done, and in the process I've come across all kinds of interesting tidbits about the Star Wars universe.

GW: Like what?!

Peter: Well, I'm not allowed to say too much, but an example would be that there is no paper in the Star Wars universe. None at all. You never see it in the movies.

GW: There are still a lot of rumors about who exactly the Stormtroopers are.

Peter: They are all volunteers. We can't say what they are, specifically. That's one of the things we were told to stay away from. We are not even sure. That is one of the things Lucasfilm wants to keep people in the dark about.

GW: Who was Boba Fett?

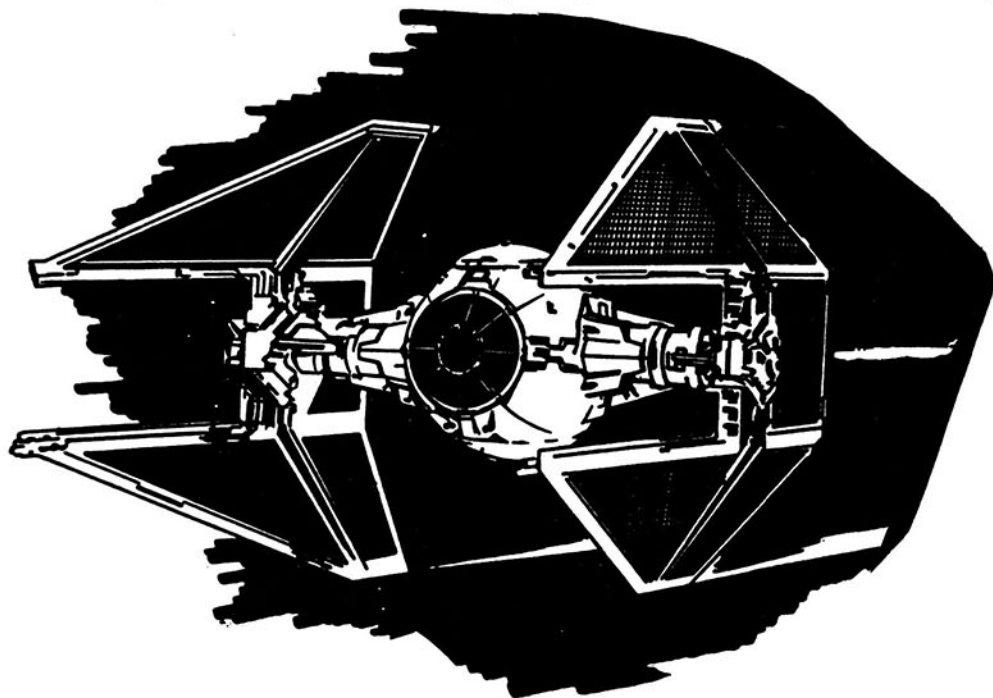
Peter: Actually, there is a lot of stuff about Boba Fett. He was part of the Mandalorian Guard. They were evil warriors that turned against the Jedi Knights during the

Clone Wars, and they were defeated by Jedi. Fett was either part of that Guard or had salvaged the uniform of a Guard member.

GW: You must have been about thirteen when you first saw Star Wars. Now you're creating things that will become official pieces of the mythos. How do you feel about that?

Peter: It's a real blast! It really is. One of the things I did in the Sourcebook is an Imperial Garrison Base. It's a huge fortress that can hold 3000 troops, a TIE Fighter Hangar that would make a Star Destroyer proud, AT-ATs galore--and I

(Continued on page 13)



The Star Wars Role-Playing Game

A review by Charles Barouch

The Challenge of "Doing" Star Wars

West End Games took on a huge challenge when they began this project. *Star Wars* has so impacted on the public conscience that almost any attempt to reproduce its look and feel in a game is doomed to fall short. To succeed in this type of a game design you would have to teach players a different slant on role-playing. After all, you aren't so much creating a game as recreating the impact of some of the highest grossing films ever made.

West End felt they were up to the challenge of converting these highly visual movies into a highly imaginative game. The result of their considerable efforts is the **STAR WARS ROLE-PLAYING GAME**.

I should mention that my review copy was presented to me as a photo copy of the galley proofs in a plain envelope. This meant that the game would have to impress me without photographs, graphics or packaging gimmicks. The good news is that, despite all the factors I mentioned above, I was very impressed. So impressed, in fact, that I am eagerly waiting for the actual game to come out so that all of you can see how well they did.

The Details

Now that I have teased you by skirting the issue, let's dive in and talk facts. The game redefines a lot of the previously held standards in role-playing. Statistics, Character Classes, Combat and Saving Throws have been heavily restructured or totally removed. It also has the virtue of simplicity. Non-role-players should be able to play an hour after opening the rule book. A veteran gamer should do it in about fifteen minutes. The key to the game is the character generation system.

The whole character system rests on the concept of Character "Templates". A Template is character sheet that indicates the character's profession/life style. This is not a character class as most gamers are used to seeing it. For example, skills are, in a few cases, restricted to one Template or another. A Templates will include a brief sample of what a character in this profession might have had in the way of a background and history as well as providing you with a partially filled-in skill list. The Template allows for very quick character generation and helps get the players into a "movie mood". There are twenty-four Templates included and they range from **Smugglers** to **Bounty**

Hunters to **Smart Alec Kids**. (There are even rules for playing 'Droids, although this does not come highly recommended. There's just too much potential human and alien drama in a *Star Wars* game. But if that's what really interests you, the West End people have designed a system that is flexible enough for almost anything.)

The statistics indicated on the Templates are measured in absolute numbers; there are no "Strength: 17" stats here. In fact, you should really refer to the character-defining slots as skills rather than stats. They don't measure raw strength or agility as much as they give a character a better or lesser chance of succeeding at a certain task. They are measured, not in a given number generated at the beginning of the game, but as the number of six-sided dice the character "has" to roll for success. For example, you might have a character with a **Dexterity** of 2D+2 (roll two six-siders and add two). If you did something that required a roll, like tightrope walking, your GM would assign a difficulty number. You would then roll that number of dice, succeeding if you rolled under your established Dex Stat. Players get to customize their Templates with a certain amount of "free dice", which allows them to choose which skills they would like to specialize in as well as which skills suit the personality of their character. **Directors**, or Game Masters, are invited to design their own Templates, and simple rules are provided just for that purpose.

In addition to the statistics roll for unusual skills, you can have specific Dexterity related skills, like **Blaster**, that have special dice ratings of their own. If you have a Dexterity value of 2D, and you also have a Blaster skill of 1D, then you would roll 3D whenever you wanted to fire at something. Each time you fire, the GM will assign a difficulty number based on the situation.

Combat in this system reflects the "movie" feel with a set of simple multi-move rules. The rules are simply stated, and allow you to perform complex operations such as: "I drop to the floor, roll to the other side and come up firing!" While this type of move is traditionally four separate actions in most game systems (therefore impractical), in *Star Wars*, you can make all those moves in one round and simply accept a die roll penalty for performing multiple actions. This gives a good chance to pull off the sort of moves that **Han Solo** and **Luke Skywalker** often used in the movies. Combat is quick...so quick that veteran gamers might be left wondering how things could happen so fast after the end of a combat round. This in turn encourages the hectic, exciting action of movie-land combat without excess gore and endless charted details.

To illustrate these points, the game text uses quotes from the movies. This is a technique that allows you to easily see what each rule really mean in practice. It also gives

you an excellent example of how the game rules relate to the movie. The premise appears to be that George Lucas, in doing the "Star Wars Trilogy", also created a set of three modules in doing so. West End merely supplied the rule system. All the movies could be played out with the game and the **Star Wars Sourcebook** (soon to be released) in hand. (Finally, you get to if you could have saved Alderran!)

The Force

Of course, no game based upon this mythos would be complete without including a system for using "The Force". This is a tricky area for a game designer, especially since only three out of nine planned **Star Wars** movies were released, leaving a number of force-inspired powers unexplained or unexplored. Also, rules for psionics always tend to complicate a game, and in no way was this set of rules intended to be complicated. West End addresses this issue in a number of clever ways.

There are four Force-using Templates. All Character Templates have some potential for using the Force, but these four have the potential for mastering it for different effects: the **Minor Jedi**, the **Failed Jedi**, the **Quixotic Jedi**, and the **Alien Master**. Each have developed their Force-related skills, and all of them were sufficiently unimportant so as to escape the Dark Emperor's persecutions, an important reason why a true or master Jedi Knight was not included in the basic rule book. (Maybe we'll see an advanced version soon...?) Force use is measured as any other skill

It is important to remember, in keeping with the spirit of the game, that there is a **Dark Side** of the Force, as well as the **Light**. Since all beings share the Force, all beings run the risk of being seduced by the Dark Side. The Force-sensitives, being what they are, are more vulnerable to this temptation. If a Force-sensitive Template character uses the Force for any evil or selfish purpose, he will slowly be brought under the shadow of the Dark Side each time he does so. Once he is completely eclipsed, the Template is taken from the player and becomes an evil NPC. Lucasfilm was firm in insisting that there be no evil PC's in the game, and for a game such as **Star Wars**, one is forced to agree. Explorations into the Dark Side may still be a strong element in plotting and character involvement, and the characters are still free to fall into the hands of the **Emperor**. But it will always be understood that those choices are totally up to the player by virtue of his own character's actions during play. It also should be noted that the emphasis is on how often one turns to the Dark Side for power. Even a certain **Dark Lord of the Sith** was redeemable in the eyes of the Force...

And That's Not All

All the above should give you a sense of what the game is like, but this is only scratching the surface. West End is also coming out with a **Sourcebook** that will expand the system with backgrounds on alien races, ship designs, and more information about the **Star Wars** Universe. Advance viewings have revealed that the **Sourcebook** will be of great interest not only to those gamers who are adventuring in that universe, but to all **Star Wars** fans who still collect memorabilia. Plans for a number of new modules are already in the works. In addition, the **Star Warriors** game from the same company is a more sophisticated ship-to-ship combat system that can be played on its own as well as played as a part of the **Star Wars RPG**.

Not Just Another Pretty Game

There is another aspect to this system that I must mention. Located within the text for the rulebook are also some well-thought ideas on how to role-play. I would recommend this book as reading material for any GM or player on the basis of this fact, regardless of what game system is being used presently. The concepts extolled here are important to all campaigns, from hard-core science fiction, to space opera, high fantasy and superhero games. Good examples include "**Eight Useful Things to Remember About Game Mastering**" at the end of chapter one, and "**Role-Play It Out!**" in chapter two. If you ever wanted to add a touch of cinema to your favorite game, this is your instruction book.

And That's a Wrap

As a gamer and a **Star Wars** fan, I like the game. It manages to give the players a feeling that they are part of a movie, a grand and star-spanning space adventure. Like many other games set in the milieu of popular stories, it encourages to write your own through the role-play. Unlike many of those, it will slowly teach you how. Ten years after the first movie was released, the question was, How could this be made into a game without losing the magic of the films? That answer lies within the incredible notion (for these rule-conscious '80's) that a good game, designed around a solid science-fantasy, without heavy charts and tons of rules is just plain *fun* to play.

If the **Sourcebook** and the other supplementary materials can match the clarity and quality of the game (and from the proofs and galleys we've seen the color and rare illustrations have never looked better!), then West End has truly made the impossible a reality. The Force is with this game. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got an appointment with a princess--and no, I am not a little short for a Stormtrooper... C.B.



TM & c. 1987, Lucasfilm, Ltd.

built it from the ground up! I took the ideas from a lot of different places and built the most impressive and oppressive thing I could think of. It's great! You can just plop it down on any planet and it's automatically subdued. You know, people are going to be using the fortress in the game for years to come and having adventures based around these things.

GW: *It could theoretically wind up in a film! It sounds like you really had the fans in mind in doing this.*

Peter: At first we were real concerned that these games were not going to meet up with the fans expectations. But the more we worked with it, the more confident I became that we were going in the right direction. And now, Wow! It's the last quarter of the game and we are ahead of the opposing team--the workload and stuff like that--and we're all doing cheerleader jumps, and we're really happy with it.

Part Three: The Role Playing Game!

Greg Costikyan and Eric Goldberg were the two ace game designers in charge of West End's Star Wars project. Starting as a "scab" fourteen year-old working for the now defunct SPI games, Costikyan is known popularly for his work on Steve Jackson Games' TOON, as well as The Creature That Ate Sheboygan, Price of Freedom and his contribution to the Ghostbusters Role-playing Game.

GW: Greg, with Eric Goldberg you convinced the powers that be to take a gamble on Star Wars, setting into motion one of the largest acquisitions the gaming industry has ever undertaken. I'll bet you were a fan!

Greg: The night I saw Star Wars for the first time, I'd already been up for about 24 hours playing D&D. One of my friends came in as we were wrapping for the weekend and said, "Hey, I've bought tickets to see Star Wars!" It had been out for a little while by then, and all the hype made me reluctant to see it on my own....I sat through it three times that night.

GW: What did it for you?

Greg: It was everything I could have hoped a space opera would be on film. 2001: A Space Odyssey was excel-

lent science fiction, but I was young--I wanted to see Pournelle, Heinlein and Moorcock on the screen. And when I saw the scene where Luke Skywalker stands on that dune gazing toward that double sunset, well, that's what really did it for me.

GW: That one quiet scene probably stirred more hearts than all of the battle dazzle combined! How do you try to capture this feeling for the RPG?

Greg: Well, first of all we did not want to give in to "system snobs" by creating a rulebook that emphasized numbers and calculations over role playability. We wanted to capture the universe's flavor for gaming the way that D&D did for fantasy. In D&D, between character classes and alignments a player has a hook into role-playing. The character templates in Star Wars come from this, and what that amounts to is that there is a personality type, a skill base, even a type of speech recommended. There's also an open ended advancement system, like in D&D for players to try for Han Solo level ability with blasters and so forth. We decided to set the parameters of the game in precisely the way George Lucas did for the movies in that players must be a part of the Rebellion and must be of good alignment. One of the problems with the later Marvel Comic Star Wars was that there was no villain. Between the Rebels and the Empire there will always be chaos and anarchy--and that's where you channel the players. That's where the excitement comes from.

GW: We understand that you and Eric Goldberg will now be leaving West End Games. Any parting thoughts?

Greg: Both Eric and I will be freelancing for the foreseeable future. We're done here, and we're very proud of everything we've contributed to West End. Star Wars is my best role-playing game to date. I'm positive that in my old age I'll be playing these games, and by then, hopefully, role-playing games will be an accepted and essential part of our popular culture.

This article was written by Charles Barouch, Laura Antoniou, Jeffrey Gomez, & Alan J. Berkson.



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A FUTURE ON FIRE!

Dark Tidings in the X-Men™ Universe

Serge F. Clermont

"Mutie scum!" the rogue leader screamed as Adam Daltrey watched from his perch on the abandoned tenement near Park Avenue. "Now you're gonna die!"

The two unfortunate victims were tied to a lamppost, apparently too groggy to use any powers they might have had to escape their tormentors. The rogue leader, encouraged by his fellows, backhanded one of the mutants so hard across the face that blood flew. Adam could then see the inhibitor collar that prevented the use of mutant powers on the woman's neck as her neck lolled back. Poor luck, he thought. They don't have a chance---not unless I rescue them. But...do I really want to get involved?

With a guerilla strike planned on Sentinel headquarters so close in the future? But then, the real question: How could I not get involved?

He closed his eyes and allowed his magnetic powers flow into the background field of the area, letting his awareness of all things in his vicinity made of metal increase. He could feel the knives and chains of the rogue gang, their studs and jewelry, the lamppost, the sewer main in the street---

Then, suddenly, he picked up a much larger pattern of energy entering the picture in his mind as he tensed to give an intense magnetic 'snap' to everything in the area. His eyes flew open in terror as he realized his danger. "Sentinels!" he shouted just as a blast from one of the robotic mutant hunters destroyed part of the building beneath him.

"No!" He caught himself on a magnetic carrier wave before he fell too far, but he couldn't remain airborne. I should have kept my mask-

ing field up, he kept repeating to himself silently as he hit the ground, they wouldn't have found me if I had kept it up. He could not longer see the scene of drama that had been in the process of reaching its climax. The rogues had probably left the sentinel triad to their prey---for three robots there were, towering in the middle of what had been a large four lane boulevard before the civil war of 1984. The two mutants were probably dead, buried underneath the rubble.

Lucky them, Adam thought.

A human voice called from the rubble at their feet. "Give it up, mutant! It is three against your one. You can't escape! Come along peacefully, and you can be sure that if you are cooperative, your internment at the Center will be more...pleasant."

"No way, whiteshirt!" Adam yelled back to the human that appeared. "Cooperative for you means ratting on my friends, and that's not my style! You and your NASTI-allied tincans can keep your offer. I'll fight you to the bitter end!" Inwardly he thought, I endangered the mission because of my botched rescue---but, at least I can take some of these monsters with me.

"Mutant, you are in violation of the law." intoned the lead sentinel in a cold, computerized voice. "Prepare to be executed."

Well, Adam thought as he girded himself for the final effort, at least they didn't send Nimrod after me. At the most, I've got a chance at making out of this alive....

This is the world of the future as depicted by the MX1-4 series modules for the Marvel Super

Heroes Game™. It is based on the plotlines tentatively explored and created by Chris Claremont for the Uncanny X-Men™ title; a possible alternate future turned nightmare for mutants all over America.

The story: due to the assassination of a prominent senator by mutant terrorists and the release of a movie starring a mutant in the Mid-1980's, a wave of anti-mutant fear and hatred is triggered across the country. This results in the government sanctioned re-activation of the Sentinels, robots who were created to control the mutant population and defend humankind from the mutant menace. They were in fact only a part of the illegal government program known as Project: Wideawake, which sought to answer and resolve the mutant question with different approaches to the problem. Some people wanted mutants to be registered with the U.S. government and placed into concentration camps ("internment centers") to be studied and catalogued, like the first and second-generation Japanese during World War II. Others wanted mutants to have all their legal rights under the Constitution stripped away because they weren't human, like the blacks before the Civil War. Still others wanted the extermination of all mutants, potential and otherwise, like the Jews in Hitler's Germany. Several years later, these wishes were fulfilled to some degree as the Sentinels took over for the sake of humankind in order to carry out their prime directive. Thus begins the darkest chapter in America's history to date. "Never again" happened...again.

The modules are set up by chapter, and are primarily supplements. They basically describe the



reason behind the chain of events that led to the U.S.A.'s present state of economic and social depression. It now resembles any war-torn country in the world today, crushed underfoot by tyranny. It is a harsh world, where there must finally come a time when America's fate rests in the hands of the people, to decide for themselves the path which America will follow...the road to collapse---or the road to freedom? The modules also describe the conditions of living in America as a mutant or a human, and the political repercussions of the Sentinel takeover of North America.

The adventures themselves are less detailed than they have been for previous modules for MSH, allowing (and sometimes forcing) the GM to inject his own material into the adventure. From the feel of the text, and the information provided, the writers of these modules did their homework on racial and ethnic persecution in history.

Warren Spector, known as the co-designer of Steve Jackson's cartoon game *Toon*, is the author of *MX-3*, entitled *"Reap the Whirlwind"*. He enlisted his wife Caroline to aid in researching the historical analogues for his part of the dark quartet.

"The most terrible thing about the work we did for these modules," she admitted during an interview, "was going through this information, day after day, extrapolating what we needed from the material we used, and seeing how horrifying this future world was becoming. This is a world where the true heroism lies in self-sacrifice, which the characters being run in this game will have to do, sooner or later, in order to uphold the ideals behind the game and superheroes in general. I think this will be the first supplement venture in any system that will ask such a thing of the players and their characters, instead of the 'go in, kill the monster, take the treasure, and everything's hunky dory' idea behind basic role-playing games."

"We didn't work too closely

with Marvel on this," Warren Spector added. "We took what information we needed to know about the *'Nightmares of Futures, Past'* world for the six or seven comic issues it appeared in, beginning with *X-MEN #141-142*, and its subsequent appearances in that title and that of the *New Mutants*. Then, we just built it up from there. This world is our own 'alternate universe'. It was and is not really affected by anything that happens in Marvel's present mainstream of titles beyond what we needed to build our world. It's something of a necessity, because our response time, when compared to that of Marvel, is really slow. We just couldn't keep up with the constant flux that is typical of Marvel's continuity."

Dave Cook, the prolific creator whose past works include co-authoring *Oriental Adventures*, and working on the design of the *Conan™* and *Indiana Jones™* role-playing games (not to mention too many modules to mention here) is the writer of the fourth and final module of the series, entitled *"Flames of Doom"*. His part? To tie up all the loose ends throughout this "new universe" and set them up for a number of high tension, revealing and explosive endings.

"The thing I liked about my part in the deal was that I would be able to do something moderately serious with a previously none-too-serious genre in the industry. And because I was given creative free rein by the very nature of this 'alternate universe', I came up with four possible endings to the story that is going to blow everyone away. One of those endings involves the return of a very famous mutant and the new army he's gathered underneath him for the final 'do or die' effort against the *Sentinels'* oppressive society. That was the most fun I think all of us had in this project; trying to figure out what happened to every major figure who hadn't been killed outright in the Marvel Universe during this collapse

of North America. It gave us a chance to do what Marvel didn't---take advantage of a great theme (which Mike Dobson is responsible for picking up, by the way) and go into more detail, coming up with a great series. A small example was figuring out *Mystique's* role during all of this was a major mystery in the comic books. She had been head of the Department of Defense when this whole business got started, and now her plans and motivations are explored in detail in the third module.

"The odds may seem a bit overwhelming against the characters," says Warren, "but we do give the players a fighting chance. In the third module, there is a chance for the players to discover a certain suit of armor that was created by a certain known technological genius *for mutants*."

"Yet we don't say that the player-characters are going to *win*, either," Dave Cook added, chuckling evilly. "They have a chance to make their world better---to decide the route of America's future---to make it easier for the coming generations. Something as big as the forces the characters are up against...well, we figured out all the statistics before we started, and we concluded that in an all-out confrontation against their oppressors, the mutants wouldn't have a chance. This is guerilla warfare we're talking here, an underground network of freedom fighters. The characters have to be sneaky and smart. They have to unify amongst themselves in order to have the slightest chance of gaining a victory against the *Sentinels*. Hopefully, they'll join up with the *Canadian Resistance Force*, which is at that time led by *Nick Fury*, the former head of *S.H.I.E.L.D.*, and *Wolverine*, if the GM decides to use that element."

"There's no doubt that this is a deadly set of scenarios, to match the intensity of what's supposed to be going on in these supplements," continues Caroline. "That's why we advise that would-be players roll up new

characters at the onset, no matter where they're starting in the sequence.

The characters they might be used to playing with probably played in a Marvel Universe that is pretty tame compared to this one that we've adapted for the style of role-playing we wanted to explore. In other words, your average Marvel Super Hero character from the present-day Marvel Universe campaign will most likely buy it (if the adventures are run properly) because it's a totally different world. It's vicious, and nasty, and it'll rip your throat out if you're not careful. All the characters that play in this series have to be really, really tough---not in terms of powers, or anything like that, but they have to be created with the history of this world in mind. They have to be able to take it as well as dish it out, at the same time striving not to lose sight of the ultimate goal with all the warfare going on around them. Like I

had said earlier, the players and the characters have to be heroes."

Important Facts: So what do talented module and game designers do after they create the world's toughest super-hero adventure? They head for the nearest cartoons, of course! Dave Cook and Warren Spector are currently making plans for the **Rocky And Bullwinkle Role-Playing Game™**, (we kid you not!) which should be out sometime in June or July '88. They are currently working on the **Second Edition of the AD&D Game System™**. With respect to the MSH Game System, a new 3-module series on the **Elders of the Universe™** (featuring such luminaries as the Silver Surfer, Doctor Strange, and Phoenix!) tentatively scheduled for release in late spring and possible projects for the future include the adaptation of the **Deluxe Edition Handbook**

of the **Marvel Universe™** to the **Marvel Super-Heroes Game System** in a perforated looseleaf, three-ring format for easy updating, and a **Book of Mini-Adventures** for the game.



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Can This Really Happen?

What is most disturbing about the current anti-mutant sentiment in the world of the current **Marvel** mainstream is the extent to which it has been carried without protest from normal people in that universe. The last major appearance of a pro-mutant faction formed mainly by humans was in issue #200 of the **X-Men** ("The Trial of Magneto"). Since then, almost nothing.

It is pretty obvious that one could substitute any minority label in place of "mutant", i.e. black, female, gay, Jewish, etc. I did. And once I read the story of the anti-(*fill-in-the-blank*) storyline by Chris Claremont with my own label in mind for the blank, I was pretty shocked at his interpretation of what the public reaction of the United States would be to such blatant persecution. It seems that the **Marvel Universe United States** is more and more resembling Germany just before the Nazi Regime. Tolerance for mutantkind was at such a low in the **Marvel Comics** for the past six months that it's a wonder that the **Fall of the Mutants** hadn't occurred already. The apathy demonstrated by "everyday folk" in this Universe is amazing. Chris Claremont is playing with dangerous fire here. From what I've seen, he's saying that, despite the Constitution, despite the fights for civil rights and freedoms for blacks and other minorities, the people of the U.S. will calmly sit back and watch as fellow living human beings are exterminated for being *different*. It sounds a little simplistic, true,

but come on! There were whites who fought for blacks to have civil rights, and they evidently had supported the passing of such bills with enough strength to have made a difference. Why isn't the situation be the same for mutants? Remember that at one dark time in our history, many people didn't think that a person with black skin was a real human being. Times have changed, and much for the better, but you couldn't tell that by looking at the **Marvel Universe**.

All I see are cops whipping out their guns, screaming, "Mutie!", mobs assembling in the streets, screaming "Mutie!"---clean cut youths, wild-haired punks, three-piece-suits, blue-collar minorities (!)---all walks of life have been portrayed as rabid mutant haters and potential murderers. There seem to be no sympathizers, no equal-rights groups, not one word of compassion from all of human-kind. I see no one saying, "Leave them alone---they're living, thinking, human beings, just like we are!" Sure, someone could say, "But mutants have all these superpowers---they *can't* be human!" Well, according the definition of "mutant" *anywhere*, it means anything different from the genetic make up of the parent in the genetic makeup of its offspring. By that definition, all human beings are mutants in one form or another.

Can you imagine the world as Chris Claremont depicts it, for the *handicapped at birth*?

Somebody better not tell the Sentinels....

Or, for that matter, Chris Claremont.

SC

Our Army at War

A Review of Avalon Hill's *Platoon*

Wayne Koh

I've played a few wargames in my time, some of them complex to the point of tears, such as *Star Fleet Battles*, and *Squad Leader*, some a bit less complicated, like *Fortress America*, and more than a few "traditional" land and naval wargames, as well as a select few that were quite easy to deal with, such as *Axis & Allies*. If I happen to enjoy a game, then I will almost always play it, the levels of relative difficulty not being a primary weighing factor. If it's good, then it's good! Players do not need a thousand-page rules booklet that deals with each individual soldier's bad habits, background history, carrying capacity, morale factors for every conceivable occurrence in all types of weather, and which breakfast cereal he prefers at roll call.

We also don't need 85 to 100 acres of hex maps or more of those tiny playing chits than Einstein had brain cells (I know, I counted them!) I mean, if you want realism that badly, then get a friend, a pair of carrier groups, two modern conventional armies, and about 140 billion U.S. dollars to finance the whole deal for about an hour of fun (the above

price includes your lawyer's fees, since you'll need one when the government tries to lock you up for assault with deadly force).

I have only good things to say about *Platoon*; the people at Avalon Hill went through a lot of trouble to earn their money when they cranked this baby out. The game contains a rules sheet, a battle manual supplement, a two-piece hex board that measures approximately 28 by 18 inches, 76 black plastic chit stands, 148 playing counters and chits that depict individual soldiers (U.S. and NVA), booby traps, claymore mines, barbed wire, foxholes, bunkers, US/NVA turn chits, and pinned down chits (placed on units which are, what else?) Also, the game has things called substitution markers; instead of stacking twenty men in one hex, all you have to do is put the marker on the board, and then dump all those counters on a substitution card. Easy, right? The rules are simple and easy to understand, except one point, for example, claymores, booby traps, and incoming fire attacks the entire hex and all of the troops in it (a



good reason not to mass your men in one area), whereas with rocket propelled grenades, LAWs (anti-tank rocket launcher, they're disposable), M-79 grenade launchers, and hand grenades affect only one soldier per hex. That sounds a little strange to me. Besides that, the game itself is fun and easy to play.

The battle manual is the heart of the game; it gives **Platoon** its life and takes it far above most "strategic, historical, blow 'em up games". Its 20 pages include several detailed firefight scenarios (those depicted in the stunning Oliver Stone movie from which the game is licensed), multiple descriptions of the infantry weapons of the Vietnam War (M16s, AKMs, you know, all that fun stuff), Some very helpful examples of play and hints, useful optional rules which increase the game's challenge a bit, and finally a section on some suggested reading.

Turns are not run by the standard "I go and then you go" system. Each side will have roughly eight action chits for a total of sixteen actions that are gone through before a turn is fully completed. (Each firefight lasts about four turns.) Players randomly draw one of sixteen action chits to determine who goes first, and after that action another such chit is drawn, and so on, until all the chits have been drawn and the round is over. It can get quite tense at times seeing your opponent have three actions in a row, but that adds to the game's realism. The idea is to play more cautiously since you can't always accurately predict who is going to go



next and how many times. I think it's a superior alternative to many of the other games that I have played. The object of the firefights is not necessarily the total annihilation of your enemy, but to achieve some goal (e.g., exiting the map board with whatever's left of your forces after having been ambushed without losing them). Deception is a key part to winning any firefight; making the other guy give up his position of his light machinegun, or his radio man, or forcing his squad into a claymore mine or a boobytrap (always aim for maximum results with a minimum of bloodshed). Because of the extremely dense terrain (jungles are like that), you and your opponent will have to get real close, and the mere thought of your man at the point being jumped by another unit containing anything from one to twelve men is positively ulcer causing. Just remember this: 1) keep your forces within reach of each other, but avoid massing them, lest you lose them to claymores and incoming fire; 2) keep your forces balanced, don't put all of your heavy weapons in one group because their rate of fire is noticeably slower. Your rifles are faster, but they're also a lot weaker than machineguns, so keep that in mind when organizing your forces; 3) bullets are almost never enough to bring down the enemy, whomever that may be. It requires brains as well. If you can force the bad guys to blow themselves up, it means that your men won't have to be sacrificed to get the needed results.

The game, like the war, is extremely bloody, and 75% casualties per side is not uncommon during a prolonged firefight. The whole idea is not to completely kill people, but to keep your own forces alive, which is what war is really all about. The game does not condone war or "righteous killing," but it does realistically represent what the troops went through in Vietnam from 1968-73. Remember the movies (**Platoon**, **Full Metal Jacket**, and **Hamburger Hill**)? You should, at least when you play the game. Jungle warfare was a horrible experience for most Americans, many of which still carry noticeable scars, especially since they were fighting an enemy who was both on its own ground, and to this day considered by many to be the best jungle fighters in the world.

Platoon is a good game, it contains both military, strategic, and educational aspects. It emulates the movie well, which means that its politics may not be suitable to all wargaming enthusiasts. In fact, as you might have been able to gather, **Platoon** is remarkable in that it does have a serious political point of view. In fact, Avalon Hill Vice President Thomas Shaw has alleged--and I agree--that the board game can easily lend itself to an actual role-playing/combat campaign set in Southeast Asia as portrayed in any number of excellent game systems currently available. So if you're a role-player with a special interest in the mythically **Star Wars**-like dynamic of **Elias-Barnes-Charlie Sheen** (**Obi-wan-Vader-Mark Hamill**), then keep **Platoon**, the board game in mind! It is smartly boxed, and a trifle expensive for what you get, but as I said, if it's good, who cares?

Howling Commandos!

Gary Gygax's New Campaign Arrives

Bob Brinkman

Cyborg Commando, published by New Infinities Inc. is a game set in the twenty-fourth century. In this future, Earth has been invaded by alien **Xenoborgs**. Earth's counter attacking commando forces are cybernetically altered humans or **Cyborgs**. (Get it?) This is the premise of Gary Gygax's latest entry into the role-playing field, a science-fiction combat game co-created by Frank Mentzer and former **Dragon** editor Kim Mohan. It might not be the most original theme for a combat-oriented adventure game, but any game-lover has to look at that line-up and consider the amount of experience behind these three creators. Does **Cyborg Commando** live up to the expectations of anyone who has known and played with the countless games and supplements produced by these former TSR luminaries? Let's take a look.

The beginning portion of the **Cyborg Commando Forces Manual (CCF)** contains a detailed history of the invention of cybernetic technology and the invasion of the Earth. Each player is a rebel trying to aid in the overthrow of the aliens. They come equipped with a cyborg body which houses their brain (the mortal body is kept frozen elsewhere), and have a computer actually within them.

Included in the CCF Manual are basic and advanced rules for both character generation and combat. The first question that comes to mind when considering a new game is "How easy is it?" Well, basic character generation takes approximately fifteen minutes. Players are given 60 stat/skill points (SP) to divide between three statistics. No dice are needed. After that, simple multiplication and division is needed. The remainder of the player's SP's go into their chosen skills. The computer also aids the character by adding to the Cyborg's abilities in different ways. The Cyborg has enhanced senses able to see the X-Ray spectrum (along with the ever-present ultraviolet and infrared) and many other modifications and enhancements. Weapons are built in, but players do have the option of buying hand-held weapons later on.

This is the basic character; the advanced character generation sheets start the player with 180 SP's. However, the nine statistics which make up the advanced character make generation and play somewhat cumbersome. Character generation at an advanced level can take up to twenty minutes, but is not all that difficult to understand. The variety of skills available to advanced characters is lengthy and can add a bit of spice to the game. A good look at the

rules will show that they are complex but not that confusing.

The general rules are set up for those gamers who are novices to this type of game, but the advanced rules make the game fun and challenging for novices and pros alike. The relative ease of the rules make players feel secure, but this can also seem very condescending; there are charts included with the game which show die-rolling probabilities, a repeat of possibly the most boring part of TSR's **Dungeon Master's Guide**. (Which for those new to the hobby was also written by Gygax.) This is unimportant and unnecessary and detracts some from the reading of the rules.

Both the basic and advanced rules for combat contain points which can be confusing. The combat system is based on die rolls which are then modified by a particular statistic. Since the **Xenoborgs** do not have that particular statistic, they must simply roll higher than the character who is attacking. A note about these aliens—they are pretty disgusting. It's not difficult to hate them, which may lend to the ease of "getting into character". But this might tend to make the game a little bit dull after a while. Challenges will probably be of the puzzle solving and Bug-Eyed-Monster-Bashing type.

Along with the CCF Manual, there is also the **Campaign Book**. This book contains material about the Earth of the **Cyborg Commando**. This material includes the locations of research facilities, and the locations of both the **Cyborg Headquarters** and that of the **Aliens**. All of the information provided in this book allows for world-scale warfare as well as light "Bug-Blasting" games.

Finally, the set comes with a booklet of adventure notes that includes twenty short adventure set-ups as well as suggestions for creating adventures to suit your own campaigns. This booklet contains information for both the player and the gamemaster and completes the game by filling in the blanks.

Put all of this in a package similar to the science fiction movie posters of the 1950's, tack on three of the biggest names in the gaming industry, and you have **Cyborg Commando**. With three adventure booklets on the way and an expansion set due out in six months, it will be supported by New Infinities. And while it is not a role-playing game that will attract millions of followers and set new standards in the industry, it is a fine example of a neat system designed around a single theme.

"THE OTHER GUY"

An Afternoon With Dave Arneson

Jeffrey Gomez

The most popular and prolific fantasy role-playing game of all time was not created by one man. With a mixture of pride and pain, after lawsuits and twists of fate that have left both himself and Gary Gygax (*Gateways #5*) outside of TSR Inc., the co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons™* has now made his voice heard. In this brief but fascinating interview Dave Arneson tells *Gateways Magazine* his side of the story.

From a table in the makeshift cafeteria on the Mecca floor of the *Gen Con* gaming convention, Arneson recounted his experiences in the late 1960s and early '70s as a wargamer. A part of the small but substantial group of military history buffs who use miniatures (tiny but accurate figurines, usually die-cast metal and pain-stakingly painted, which can represent anything from a single soldier to a Sherman tank to a battalion of marines) to recreate famous conflicts, Arneson was completing a four to five year Napoleonic Campaign, and was tired.

"...I told them we were going to take a break that weekend...that they were going to a castle on the black moor. It was very popular."

--Dave Arneson, 1987

"It was the fall of 1972, during one of those *Monster Movie Weekends* that channel 5 would screen in my hometown," said Arneson of the precise origin of the famous game concept. "I'd been watching the stuff all day long, eating popcorn, having spent the rest of my time reading the Howard *Conan* books. It hit me just then, and I thought, 'Hey! Maybe I'll design and build a scale model castle, populate it with monsters, and send the guys through a time warp with nothing with them but what they were carrying and what was in their car trunks to fight them with. When they came in and saw this big castle I'd built on a table for them, they wanted to know what it had to do with Napoleon. I told them we were going to take a break this weekend and that they were going to a castle on the black moor. It was very popular."

Thus, according to Arneson, was born the campaign fantasy world eventually named *Blackmoor*, a world which exists in slick module packs created at TSR, and has since become mythic in its status as a staple of the *Dungeons & Dragons* game. Hundreds of thousands of players, young and old, have visited *Blackmoor* in all of its

various incarnations in the 16 years since its creation that Saturday in 1972. Having had to start somewhere, however, Arneson's basic vision was not without some bugs.

"They didn't like dying on the roll of a single die," admits the co-creator, "so we came up with hit points. Saving throws were universal rolls for protection against spells, dragon breath and weapon attacks against the player's characters. Armor class grew out of that. Rules were invented as the need for them arose, creating one at a time as we bumped into problems. In late 1974, we finalized a set of rules that would become *Dungeons and Dragons*."

E. Gary Gygax, who had met and become friendly with Arneson through their wargaming organization, contributed heavily to that set of rules, and in fact, Gygax's *Chainmail*, 2nd Edition, was employed therein to resolve combat and magical confrontations. The rules were bound, somewhat crudely, into three small volumes which soon found their way into hobby stores in an off-white box labeled *Dungeons & Dragons*. The system continued to be used in the development of both *Blackmoor* and its companion world, *Greyhawk*.

"Gary's *Blackmoor* and *Greyhawk* are Gary's worlds--mine are my own," Arneson explained of the discrepancies in the various materials released on the two campaigns. "In the beginning, as we were separated geographically, it was established that both pairs were parallel worlds held apart by thin dimensional layers. As our commications slowed down, we stopped coordinating the single campaign. Our maps became different, events altered our histories so as to make them exclusive of each other. Gunpowder, for example, is used on my worlds."

"They didn't like dying on the roll of a single die, so we came up with hit points."

--Dave Arneson, 1987

A longtime opponent to the use of gunpowder in *Dungeons & Dragons*, Gary Gygax has flatly stated on many occasions that firearms would not only be undesirable in a fantasy milieu, but would seriously upset the balance of the game to cause its inexorable collapse. TSR continues to make this a policy in all *D&D* and *Advanced D&D* releases.

"Gunpowder is used in my campaign, but it is an unreliable element. It is not an omnipotent weapon," counters Arneson. "It was an element I threaded through the manuscripts which TSR edited out. They said that maybe we could introduce gunpowder in the next module. Obviously they edit heavily in-house...."

"Sulfur, carbon and potassium nitrate are three elements which, when mixed together with a few other ingredients can be almost completely unpredictable in the hands of a novice. It's part of what makes my campaign fun! Any thorough research into the historic aspects of gunpowder will reveal that early applications would always have to be backed with hand-to-hand combat. Swords, and not guns, are the prime weapons on my worlds, gunpowder or not."

With two partners, Gary Gygax formed Tactical Studies and Rules, Inc. in 1973. Dungeons & Dragons would be their first major release, but, according to Dave Arneson, he was never asked to join the company which would come to be known as TSR, Inc. A few years later, however, Arneson did find a job there:

"I moved to Lake Geneva (Wisconsin) in the February of 1976, to take position as Director of Research. I left the following November. They wanted me to sell them all rights to the Dungeons & Dragons name. Even then it didn't take a consultation with a lawyer to figure that doing so would not be a good idea. That was the only period of time I was an employee of TSR."

For the next few years, Arneson freelanced with the **Judge's Guild**, a company which specialized in the creation of supplements and campaign pack classics such as **Tegel Manor** and **Dark Tower** designed and approved for use with D&D and AD&D by TSR. Along with the likes of Palladium Books' Kevin Siembieda, Arneson produced some marvelous, if rough hewn gaming aids--many of which weaned novice players and found their way into thousands of unique player worlds through to the Guild's demise in the late 1970s. **The First Fantasy Campaign** is now a rarity and a collectors item, and now that it has such a strong nostalgic appeal, it may certainly find its way back onto hobby store shelves yet.

Arneson's departure from TSR and his subsequent "D&D" work for other companies left ambiguities which placed his and Gary Gygax's interests at odds. Gygax authored the **Player's Handbook**, the first in a series that would take the fantasy role-playing game from the success it already was to the phenomenon it became. Amidst curiosity, and then controversy, Gygax became a media figure, usually credited as the inventor of the game. From 1977 to 1978 Arneson's differences were resolved once and for all in a lawsuit with Gygax regarding the creation and royalty rights for D&D. Now, legally, both Gygax and Arneson must be acknowledged as co-creators of Dungeons and

Dragons. Arneson has since received royalties on some but certainly not all of the D&D related products sold by TSR.

As the computer gaming industry boomed into the last years of the decade, Arneson had much success with **Battle of Britain**, a 4-D Interactive Systems game program released in 1978. He also worked with Coleco in its computer hey day as a designer, "Computer games and other genres in gaming are both enjoyable and logical points for me to reach as a game designer. I like D&D and always have, but I can do a lot of other things. I wanted to come back to it, and in 1978 I did. As a freelancer I did some modules on Blackmoor for TSR and I've been generally more satisfied with those than not. After my latest module work, however, I'm not inclined to do more D&D type stuff elsewhere. I'm willing to be a consultant on the new D&D revisions TSR is working on, though."

"...very few Game Masters out there will use only a single system to run their campaigns..."

--Dave Arneson, 1987

Arneson is currently working with **Game Designer's Workshop** on a project called **Challenge 2000**, a development in the **Twilight 2000** game universe to be released this winter. The game is, for the most part, combat oriented, and Arneson notes that there is a difference between the approaches used combat gaming and role-playing games:

"I really don't like the policy of naming a game that features tactics, weaponry and combat a role-playing game. I have seen many excellent combat game systems, but role-playing has developed so much over the years that I now believe there is a distinction between the two. In fact, very few good Game Masters out there will use only a single system to run their campaigns. The age of 'system snobs', and I was one in the early days, is over. Adaptation and evolution are a must if the hobby is to thrive."

Dave Arneson is well aware of the importance and impact his contributions to gaming have had upon millions of young people. Indeed, the controlled frenzy of the vast convention around him at the very least had some root in that Saturday afternoon mixture of popcorn, Conan, Monster Movie Weekend and Dave Arneson.

"Dungeons & Dragons taught kids to think and use their imaginations--millions of kids. Their marks in school rose; mother's wondered why. Well, because they were reading more! They were doing math! It's important for modules to leave a lot of organizational qualities to the players. Getting them to think and not necessarily to be mystified by the rules and instructions is very important," he said as he scanned the huge dealer room. "The game has, in fact, quite often affected young players, especially intro

"No game, movie or comic book creates problems like those, though people who search for simple answers to tough problems will disagree with that."
--Dave Arneson, 1987

verted ones, in good ways. When that kid disappeared a couple of years ago, and that incident was somehow linked with D&D, I was upset. However, I now understand that the young man went to college while still quite young. He was having a difficult relationship which was beyond his years, and was under a lot of stress and strain. He was exploited, suicidal to begin with, and under psychological treatment shortly before he vanished. D&D had very little to do with those problems. No game, movie or comic book creates problems like those, though people who search for simple answers to tough problems will disagree with this. With role-playing games, players are first required to interact with a small group of people. Next, they learn to interact with a world. A lot can be learned from that."

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Good Morning, Amerika! a fleeting look at *Year of the Phoenix*

Jonathan Frater

The player gapes, dumbfounded, dropping his imaginary flight helmet onto the invisible runway pavement with a silent thud, not wanting to believe what he's just heard: "Russians? In South Dakota?"

"That's what he said," declares the irate Game Master. "What's the matter, is my NPC's accent too out-rage-ous for your Amerikan ears?!?"

"We're dead!" gurgles the player, "we've sat down fifteen minutes--the pizza's not cold yet--and the Russkies have taken over a Dakota! We're dead!"

"Ah-ha-ha-ha-ha!" cackles the GM and the Russkie at the same time, "Not yet you aren't. Not yet!"

Indeed, in the world of **Year of the Phoenix**, a new science fiction role-playing game designed and written by Martin Wixted, the Russians have occupied America for over a century. You see, the players start out sanely enough as the members of a crack astronaut commando unit in the year 1985, on their first near-orbit mission in space. All fails to go well, however, and the players' shuttle crashes to strand them in the war-ravaged world of 2197, a place that

few men dare to call home. As I mentioned above, the Russians now control approximately sixty percent of what was once the free world, and seem to be bent on taking whatever is left piece by piece, until the Motherland encompasses the entire planet. Fun, huh? It doesn't stop there, though, because the players are still bound to the good old U.S. of A., and are sworn to defend her in any and all ways, or be killed in the process.

Interestingly **Year of the Phoenix** can be played straight or for light-hearted mayhem; the system for character generation is understandable, if a little intense, and you can tell just by looking at the combat rules that Mr. Wixted intended for a lot of fighting to take place in one form or another. Ah, but such things should come naturally--to Americans. The package, by Fantasy Games Unlimited, is colorful, complete, and the rules are written with style and humor.

All things considered, **Year of the Phoenix** is a fun, easy to play (though perhaps not so easy to deal with on the sanity scale), RPG that should provide anything from a new approach to hack and slash, to a full-scale (and soon to be well-supported) campaign system.

FORWARD, INTO THE PAST!

Introducing Traveller: 2300

Jonathan Frater

Ten years ago, Game Designers Workshop came out with **Traveller™**, the science fiction adventure in the far future. Since then, that game has been called many things, not the least of which is 'the original science fiction role playing game', which given the time of its release, was probably true. Well, who knows? Sci-fi has seen a lot of exploitation in the past, with games like **Gamma World**, **Space Opera**, **Star Trek:the Role Playing Game**, and **Metamorphosis Alpha** among the better known ones. There were also some games that didn't do too well in the open market while still being worth their trouble, like **Other Suns** (I happened to like that particular one). In any case, Traveller remains a standard in the science fiction genre and will probably continue to be one for years to come, especially with the huge amount of support that GDW gives it annually. Well, as good as it is, now there is something that while not actually better, is certainly different.

Introducing **Traveller: 2300**, the sci-fi adventure in the not-so-far future. Mankind discovers the stars is the theme of this brand new Traveller variant, which as the title suggests, takes place in the post holocaust world of the Twenty-fourth Century. The game itself is worth a look at; the boxed set comes with a player's manual and a referee's game book; dice, a sample scenario, and a complete adventure module that deals primarily with the eighth wonder of the world: a beanstalk, which in its simplest

form of description is a miles-long elevator that extends from the planet's surface to orbit. Wild, huh? There is also a beautiful **Near Star Map**, showing in spooky detail every star within fifty light years of good old mother Earth, complete with trade routes, and an accompanying pamphlet that shows each star's planets and position in the sky relative to the others. According to those who designed the thing, it is the most accurate map of that particular territory ever produced anywhere as well as being really nice to look at.

The Past

But, back to the game. The state of the world is as follows: the years 1997-99 see the end of the world as the human race has known it for thousands of years, and what is left for Homo Sapiens to do? Live. That's right, there are no miracles of deliverance for sci-fi fans, even in the future, and the next fifty years or so are spent in a constant struggle for survival by those who somehow managed to escape the global nuclear carnage. On the other hand, this does serve to open up the door of opportunity for many of those nations that were previously considered harmless, or mild nuisances by the superpowers, and major and even minor powers. The Twenty-first Century saw the world-wide acceptance and use of the first true alternate energy sources of hydrogen and solar power, as well as the establishment



of **The French Peace**, that period of time in which France, being the only European country still whole after the bombs fell, managed to use its various resources and influence in foreign lands in order to re-establish a commercial interest in peaceful trade and calm international relations. Finally, came the signing of the **Melbourne Accords**, which essentially redefined exactly what uses space would and would not be put to by those countries that wanted to exploit it. Certain orbits were demilitarized, power satellites were judged to be civilian targets (as opposed to military ones) and the other planets of Mercury, Mars, and Jupiter were declared open to colonization by all.

The major event of the twenty-second century, indeed of the human race, was the development of a workable star drive, which was something that every nation on the planet was quick to capitalize on. Within decades, nearly all of Earth's major national powers (and more than a few of the minor powers as well) had either found planets around



nearby stars that were suitable for colonization, or were looking for them. Those few garden spots that were fairly close to Earth sprouted many national colonies while the ones that were farther away were able to support one or two major settlements by one country. By this time, the global power that French rule had enjoyed was already starting to noticeably decay, and by the 2150's had all but collapsed. The space race between the major star-faring countries for the choicest plots of land was extremely intense, with open fighting taking place far beyond the confines of the Earthbound governments.

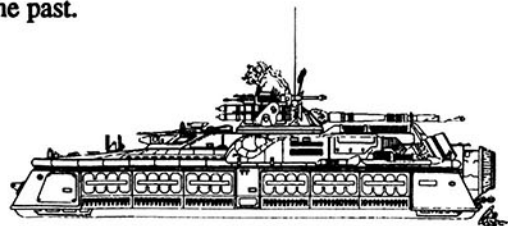
The twenty-third century, called the **Second Age of Commerce**, was dominated by a tremendous resurgence of trade, both international and interstellar. Colonies produced a variety of raw materials that were unobtainable on Earth and in return received the needed finished products that made life a little easier, a little more self-sufficient, or

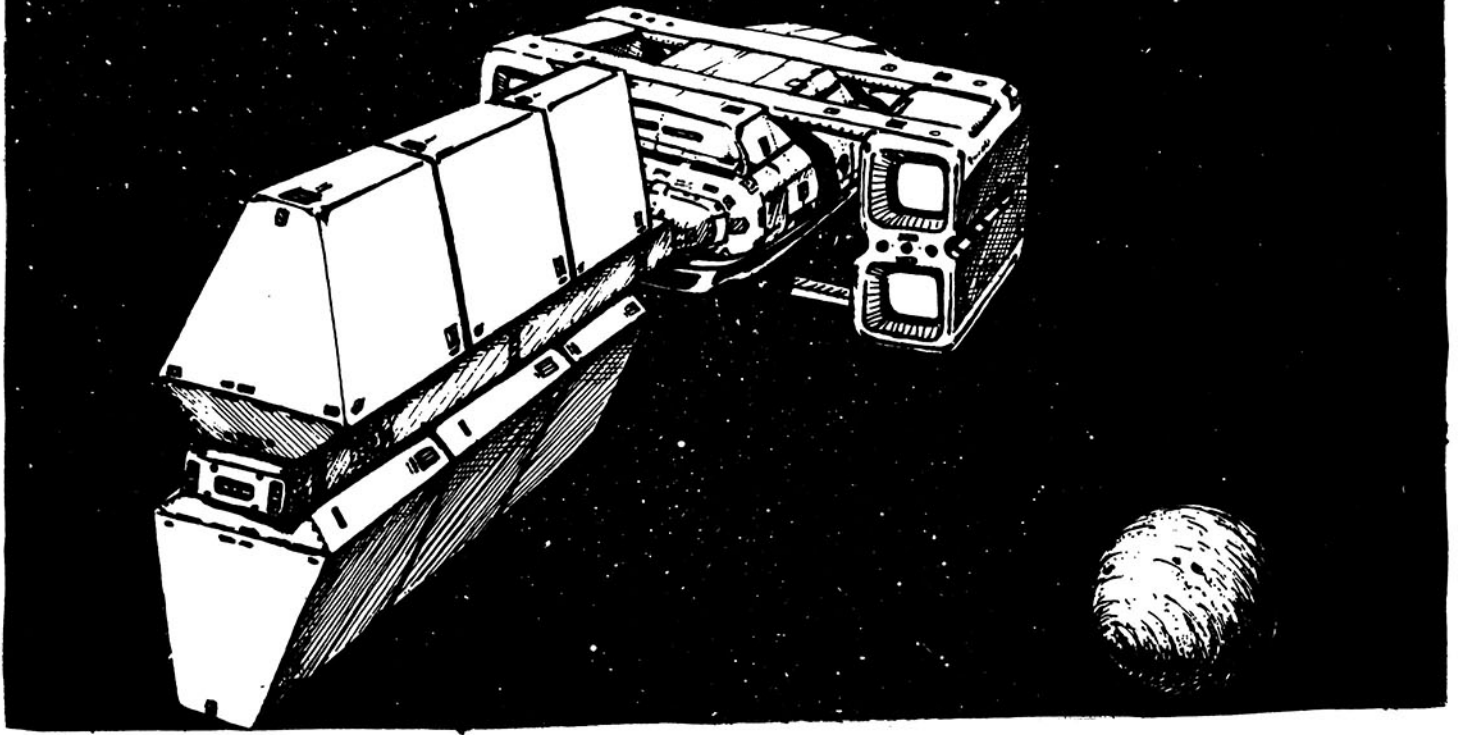
even a little more interesting for the settlers. Life at home hardly stood still however, and while many new nations were flexing their newfound political and military muscles, France began to re-exert its strength in selected areas like Africa, the Pacific, and the Mideast, and slowly but surely regained much of the power that it had lost. Mankind contacted its first extraterrestrials, which created a huge demand for information and alien produced products back on Earth. Unfortunately, this century was also plagued by the oldest sport known to man: war. As old nations fell and newer, stronger ones rose up in their places, it was inevitable that someone, somewhere would get just a little overexcited, or angry, or jealous, and the outbreak of major wars (bigger than Vietnam or Korea, but smaller than WW1) was not uncommon for those first three hundred years.

The Present

Welcome to the Twenty-fourth Century! The political geography of the world has changed more than one might suppose, but not too much; most of the changes have to do with pre- and post-war animosities and alliances, and there were a few rebellions here and there, but it's all very understandable. There are far too many countries for me to include here, but suffice it to say that if they exist today, they are probably in the world of 2300 somewhere, in some shape or form.

Technology however, has advanced in leaps and bounds, and is now capable of, well, almost anything you can imagine. As I mentioned before, star travel was theoretically suggested and after decades of research, experimentation, and heartache, a workable star drive was finally completed. Now, all major governments have fleets of the things roaming from one side of the known galaxy (which ain't much by Traveller standards) and into parts of the unknown as well. Genetic engineering has found ways to grow better crops, which can be altered to any planetary environment (including plants that actually thrive on airborne pollution, of all things), ways to eliminate hereditary diseases and cancers were developed, and organs can be grown from the patient's own tissues in case of disease or loss. Medicine had progressed to a point where lifespans have increased noticeably (average life expectancy is now 100 years), aging can be slowed or even stopped, and automated computerized medical treatment has become cheaper, efficient, and reliable (there can never be enough doctors to go around, even in the future). Computers are better, faster, and more powerful than ever before (introducing the fabulous Macintosh 1000 and the PS 12). New and better sources of energy and more efficient modes of transportation have combined to make inter-city and even inter-continental travel safer and more enjoyable than at any time in the past.





The Game

In my opinion, few fans of *Traveller* would have any difficulty dealing with this new incarnation, but even a hardened veteran of the game will have to admit there have been some major changes. Not that they detract from the new game in any way that can't be corrected with a few personal touches on the GM's part, but it is a very different universe in which the gamers find themselves. First of all, everything is much more detailed than in the original game, which is so easy to use primarily because of its 'generic' structure, i.e., most of the details in the game are left up to the GM anyway, so the basic *Traveller* is informative and interesting, but vague. Also, *Traveller: 2300* has something that I do not believe I have ever seen in a game before, which is a strange aura of potential for growth, as if what was displayed in the game in terms of starships, equipment, weapons, even humanity, was certainly fantastically advanced, but simultaneously strangely limited in scope. I felt as if those of us who knew and loved the original game were being given another insight into the development of mankind from planet of origin to interstellar empire. Whether or not this was done intentionally I have no idea, but if the authors wanted this effect, then I think they have succeeded quite well in its accomplishment.

Unfortunately, an inevitable side-effect of detail is of course, complexity, and while still good, *Traveller: 2300* has a somewhat disturbing bent towards that factor. The simple *Traveller* combat system has given way to a more detailed system which is less vague but rather confusing the first few times you use it. Character generation is

more interesting than before, since you now have the option of choosing what the environmental effects of your homeworld had on your character's body. Also, no longer is the player forced to choose from five or six military or pseudo-military options as previous careers as in *Traveller*; instead, the game provides fourteen different careers, all of which are literally filled with more potential than a simple list of available skills might suggest. Careers such as the Wet Navy, Air force, Space Force, Alien Contact teams, Colonists, Administrator, Journalist, and Interstellar Trader are all possible, and while I am sure there are those out there who will read this and say, "Well, *Traveller* has those same things, so what?" I think that the wise will pause for a moment to consider that these so-called "*Traveller* classes" were designed, indeed redesigned with a more primitive (forgive my use of the word) view of the universe in mind. There is no Vilani Imperium yet; the Solomani Confederation has yet to be born. The human race has no knowledge of the Hivers, the K'kree, or the Zhodani. In short my fellow SF enthusiasts, GDW has in effect made the universe much more exciting, interesting, and difficult to in which to live, simply by turning the clock back a few millennia.



Role-playing on the Subway

Play-by-mail games follow you wherever you go!

Nicky Palmer

"I've been playing in **Midgard** for a while now. Great game."

"Yeah? Never heard of it. Besides, I can't tie up any more evenings with role-playing anyway."

"I generally do it on the subway or at lunch-break. Or I fit in an hour before going to sleep."

"Huh? On the subway?"

"Yes. Mind you, it can get a bit bulky. Here's the chart of the **Temple of Miralba** that I got yesterday. And here's the list of the 47 players in the **Banner Faction**--that's the fanatical religious cult. We're trying to take over **Midgard**, see, and we've got this interlocking alliance with the **Roder Family** faction and a non-aggression pact with the **Ring**, and I'm **Grand Inquisitor for Chelm** and I've got to persuade the **Town Council** to build the biggest cathedral of the area..."

"Wait a minute! A 47-player faction? Charts? Alliances? And you play this on the subway, right?"

"Right!"

This fictional conversation illustrates the charms of role-playing by mail (PBM) with a professional gamemaster (GM). The basic idea is simple: you send instructions for your character(s) to the GM, at the same time as dozens or even hundreds of other players are sending theirs. The GM (with colleagues as necessary) carefully examines your instructions, assesses the interaction with other players, and sends you an individual report of what you have seen and what happened to you. If you are interacting with other players, you will obviously see a lot of their results too, but players outside your view will be hidden from you, so you may have a

deadly enemy plotting against you in the next village, and you won't find out till his fiendish plans start to unfold. You can send messages to other players via the GM, and gradually build up friendships and alliances to help your character achieve his goals.

The advantages of PBM are:

- You aren't limited by physical constraints (the number of role-playing friends you have, the size of your living-room): fantasy worlds with hundreds of active characters are not only feasible but common!

- You are free to play when and where it's convenient for you. Many PBM'ers carry around their latest report, fishing it out for another look and some jottings on next plans whenever they feel like it (yes, even on the subway). The games can fill in otherwise tedious waiting periods. If the supermarket has a line of fifteen people, that's perfectly OK: I can think what to do about the **Archpriest's** outrageous proposals. Of course, you do want a bit of time at home to write down your instructions, but you don't need to spare a whole evening.

- The GM is paid to design and run the game for you (about \$3-\$5 per fortnightly turn as a rule). Since each turn should give you hours of enjoyable reading and planning, this isn't unreasonable, and it means that he

is much more committed to keeping up the game through thick and thin. The oldest role-playing PBM game started in 1971! Of course, the players change, with old players finding other pursuits and their characters moving into the swarm of non-player characters run by the GM (with a good GM, it can be hard to tell which characters are player-run), while new players join and start to make their mark.

- You acquire friends all over the country and, if you wish, overseas (some games have many foreign players). I could travel to most parts of the world without paying hotel bills, since (for example) there's always that guy I met in **The Keys of Bled** whom I helped in his quest for the intelligent eagles and who then told me to come and stay next time I was passing his way. There are far more people in the big games than you will have time (or postage/phone money) enough to contact, but gradu-



OUT TIME DAYS



Ever want to be a character in the books you've read? Or help rewrite some of the chapters? Here's your chance! You are a Time Traveler thrust into a world that you know little about, using all of your skills and contacts to make alliances with the inhabitants, watching out for spies, assassins, false rumors, and those Time Travelers who have chosen to join one of the 'other' sides. Of course, you will have your ever-loyal band of followers to help guide you through this new world. With the right information and some good timing, you can change history to your benefit.

OTD is a role-playing game played through the mail. To begin writing your part of the story, send \$15 for a rulebook, start-up, and first five turns (or \$2 for just the rules) to:

TWIN ENGINE GAMING, 3254 Maple Leaf Ct., Dept. 121, San Jose, CA 95121

ally you will build up a range of contacts with whom you feel comfortable—congenial types who exchange information and prove to be trustworthy in their game dealings. In the more competitive games, of course, you may end up warring with each other, but that doesn't stop the fun of comparing notes afterwards!

PROBLEMS OF PBM

Of course, PBM play has its drawbacks too. You don't have the instant reactions from other players (though you may get anxious phone calls as you prepare for the more fateful decisions in the games). And you have to accept the idea of the game unfolding over a long period: in your biweekly orders, you can advance the action only so far, and to make a big impact with your character you may have to gradually work away for a year of play. It doesn't supply instant gratification, but the pleasure of seeing your plans subtly working through to fruition can give a deeper

thrill that you will remember for years.

A more difficult problem is the range of games available, some of which have excellent, dedicated GMs, while others are frankly somewhat half-baked in conception. The two ways to tackle this are to join one game and ask other players to recommend others, or to read one of the magazines specializing in PBM reviews and ratings. As editor of *The Flagship of Postal Gaming*, the quarterly read by most active PBMs, I'm biased in favor of solution B. If you would like a sample issue of this magazine, see my note at the end of this article.

If you'd like to plunge straight in, though, here are some good options. Just don't miss your stop!

Midgard, from *Time Space Simulations*, 5304 Crossfield Rd, Virginia Beach, VA 23464. You are the leader of a small band of devoted adherents in a faction-ridden medieval-

type society. You can try and rise to fame and fortune in one of the (religious, political or commercial) factions, or you can take the dangerous course of independence, and try to make your way alone amid the whirling cross-currents of Midgard life. Huge rulebook, dedicated GM, enthusiastic players, but turns slower than average (about monthly). \$15.50 get you the rules, setup and two free turns (one more if you send a Flagship coupon when you apply); thereafter, turns cost \$4.

Out-Time Days, from Twin Engine Gaming, 3254 Maple Leaf Court, Dept 307, San Jose, CA 95121. In this inventive game, you are a time traveler, using your skills and contacts to make alliances with the inhabitants of a thoroughly unfamiliar world, watching out for spies, assassins, and rival time travelers. You have a band of followers to help you change history. The GM is noted for his preference for role-playing and

They WERE here!!! And recently too! Scotch Bottles and Midgard papers ever where!!!



character development rather than military conflict: this is not one to try if you see yourself as a budding general, but it is probably the game with the strongest role-playing 'feel'. A great game for budding and advanced role-players. \$15 gets you rules, start-up and five turns, or you can get rules alone for \$2.

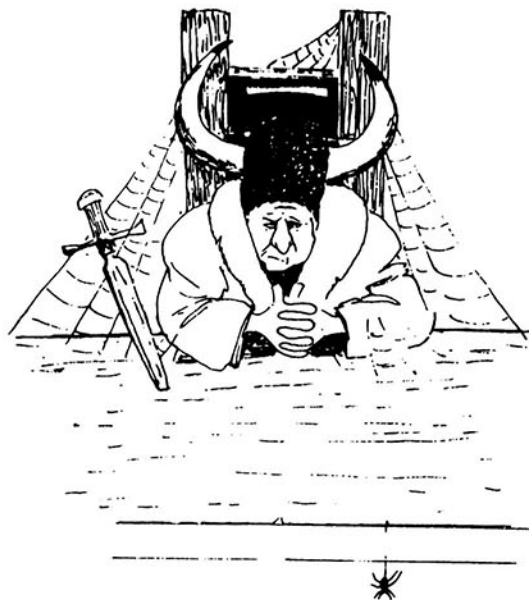
Rimworlds, from Palace Simulations: player applications to Craig Davis, POB 820, Cardiff-by-the-Sea, CA 92007-0800. The best of the many SF space operas around. You are the captain of a space-ship in a cluster of worlds on the galactic rim. You choose between alternative species and affiliations (professions) to belong to: you can be a trader, a law-enforcer, an explorer, an organizer for

the Union of Spacefarers (very controversial job with many non-union ships to organize!), a feline mercenary, or an alien invading the area. The game is noted for its superb gamemaster, and generates tremendous player involvement—even Craig Davis is just a player, who has set up the Ja Nz Star fleet Academy to train new pilots! \$1.50 gets you the introductory rules; there are more rulebooks to get as you need them, and turn fees of \$5.

Crasimoff's World, from KJC Games, POB 11, Cleveleys, Blackpool, Lancs FY5 2UL. The best of the overseas games, if you'd like to meet some foreign players. You and a party of friends are trying to survive and flourish in a medieval world with

strange gods, magic and a complex society. \$7.50 gets you startup and 3 free turns (4 with a Flagship coupon), after which it's \$3/turn. Excellent, lengthy text replies from the GM.

If you would like a sample issue of **The Flagship of Postal Gaming**, it costs \$4 from Flagship, 5453 Forest Path Court, Stone Mountain, GA 30088-2928: subscriptions (unmailed issues refunded if disappointed) cost \$15/year. We offer a list of virtually every PBM game available, with ratings, costs, addresses, and numerous reviews and feature articles, as well as discount coupons which save \$3-\$5 in many games.



Extract from GM report in **THE KEYS OF BLEED**. The player has ordered his people ('The Friendship') to move rapidly NW during winter to reach a rendezvous with a force invading the adjacent region. As morale is low, he has ordered his cavalry to display their skills to the people. Note that the reply gives more detail than these instructions require, adding to the role-playing 'feel'.

As the **FRIENDSHIP** people hurry to the north-west they are encountering heavy snowfalls. This is making it difficult for your scouts to carry out their job properly, but at least you are comforted by the thought that it is the same for anybody else in the area. Your scouts report that you appear to be travelling through an area of open grassland, uninhabited, but the woodland to the south suggests that the area ahead may be of quite a broken nature.

Your messages are bearing fruit, and one has been answered by the **CUZA** people. Your people have made the extra sets of body armour you ordered, cavalry skills did not impress your people, buffeted by snow and concentrating on the hard journey.

The Red Dagger Inn

By: Charles and Sydney Barouch

This is a special RDI column devoted exclusively to the software created by the **LucasFilm Games Division**. This group of programmers and creative artists have brought six games to the market as of this writing. We will be talking about all of them and about two presently unreleased projects. We think all of you will be particularly fascinated by the final review in the set. That review, and the attached interview with designer/programmer Chip Morningstar, will introduce you to a truly wild idea for good role-play. Without further ado, let's grab a mug of ginger ale at the bar and listen to the reviews.

The first four LucasFilm games (**BallBlazer™**, **Koronis Rift™**, **Rescue on Fractlus™**, and **The Eliodon™**) were put out under the Epyx label and all had several things in common. Each was centered around a piece of hi-tech transportation, each had dazzling graphics, excellent "feel" and quality, and each received good reviews.

Unfortunately, they all also had another common feature; they all quickly became boring to play. Epyx has discontinued sale of these games and passed a great deal of inventory to liquidators. At the liquidation prices (around \$30 for the set of four in some ads) they are worth the purchase for their beauty and programming excellence.

If this was the limits of what LucasFilm Games Division could do, we wouldn't be giving them a full column, so read on, and we will tell you about the more recent projects.

Labyrinth™ represents a number of new ideas for LucasFilm Games. First off, it is not a self-contained story, but rather is based (and dependent) on the movie of the same name which starred David Bowie and a cast of Muppet monsters. It is less a video game than a home computer game. It also includes a very clever text parser (the word wheel), and a few awful puns. This game only has two flaws but they are quite severe.

The first is that the movie and the book did not do well enough for the average person to know them well while playing. This is a deathblow for a game that ties back to the story as tightly as this one does. Fans of the movie, particularly if you have the videotape or the book, will find this no obstacle.

The second flaw is the pun-laden humor. While you are able to complete the game without appreciating the jokes, most of the things that make the game less tough

and more playable are tied to the jokes. Normally, I'd applaud the idea of humorous solutions, but here too much of the humor seems to fly over the player's head.

There are several things that recommend this software. The primary of these is the quality of animation and the sheer complexity of it all. If you measure game value by the hours you spend with it, this game is for you. We spent more time playing it than any of the others.

PHM Pegasus™ is something new in the recently overcrowded field of simulators. It is new because, unlike most, we could play it without reading a huge manual and still get the feel of a real craft. The craft in question is a **Patrol Hydrofoil Missilecraft (PHM)** named **Pegasus**. While we can't vouch for its realism as an actual Hydrofoil simulation, we can tell you that it is fun and gripping to play. Do read the manual (or at least skim it) before diving in; it is blessedly short and gives you some good information. Also, be sure to try it with the joystick option. It takes some practice but you can pilot with one hand on the keys while running the gun /missile sights with the joystick in the other. The visuals are less exciting than in other LucasFilm efforts, but the sound and playability make up for that. One last hint; the faster you go, the more useless the radar becomes. At top speeds, you will encounter enemies faster than radar can report them.

The next two games are unreleased as of now. The first is due out about the same time as this issue hits the stands. The other is still a work in progress. Refill your tankards and prepare for a pair of amazing tales.

Dr. Fred and Nurse Edna are rumored to be still holed up in **Maniac Mansion™**, a spooky old house on the hill. Dave, our hero and main character fears that these two elderly villains have snuck out and kidnapped his cheerleader-girlfriend Sandy Pants. Being a normal teenager, Dave reacts as would any of us (if we lived in a Grade-B movie) and decides to sneak into the mansion with two friends and rescue her.

From this wild premise, we are led through a roarily fun adventure that is filled with monsters, sight gags, movie clichés and a number of clever puzzles. This game is so movie-like that LucasFilm will be selling movie posters. We have a copy and we find that tacking it up by the computer really gets you into the **Maniac Mansion Mood**.

We should note that to get the movie effect, you are

occasionally treated to "cutaways"---scenes that a movie audience might see that don't contain any of the characters you control. Additionally, you can freely switch perspective between your three characters, but beware! By splitting the group you can cover more ground, but the action doesn't stop for the characters that aren't with you. Leaving a character unattended too long risks capture by Nurse Edna, Dr. Fred or perhaps one of the other dangers in the mansion.

The animation is excellent and seems to use the same process as we saw in Labyrinth. Especially nice is the original music score in the Commodore 64 version.

The final piece of software in this review is unusual in a number of ways. Firstly, it is designed to be played over the phone by modem. While current plans indicate that it will only be available to Commodore users (via the **Quantum Link** telecommunications service), Quantum has recently announced plans to start an **Apple II** family system called **AppleLink**. While Quantum would not confirm this, I think a small letter-writing campaign by Apple users could put things into motion. (How about it, all you Apple users?) Below is a fascinating interview that discusses and describes this new form of computer role-play. A form where people from all over the country can sit down in their homes and simultaneously walk the streets of **Habitat™**.

LucasFilm is a company known for innovation. One of the most fascinating projects in progress is an interactive computer role-playing game called **Habitat**. We invited **Chip Morningstar**, primary architect of **Habitat**, to give us a few details. **Quantum Link** will soon be providing this game as a special service for its subscribers.

GW: How would you describe **Habitat** to the average computer gamer?

Chip: It's like a graphic adventure game, except that the other characters that you encounter are controlled by other real people out there in Telecommunications Land. Also the graphics are better than the typical graphic adventure game.

GW: Where did the idea for this project come from?

Chip: There were a lot of inspirations. Notable among them were the story "**True Names**", by Vernor Vinge, and the whole tradition of **Hacker SF** stories going way back.

The specific genesis of **Habitat** itself came from a basic design problem that we were debating here at **Lucasfilms**: the art of creating a convincing automaton just isn't that advanced yet and certainly not something you can buy for \$150 at **K-Mart**. I took the position that I wasn't even going to try to create such a thing. What I would do instead would be to create an interesting environment and let the beings that you interact with be actual people on the same link with you.

GW: Isn't the idea of creating convincing automatons the same problem that **LucasFilm Games** attacked in **Maniac Mansion**, with a different solution?

Chip: Not really. **Maniac** applies a slightly different idea; that of storytelling. **Maniac** adopts a cinematic approach to storytelling. The advance in **Maniac** that may have led you to believe this, though, is that you control more than one character, and many of the puzzles require "cooperative" action between these characters in order to solve them.

GW: Okay, back to **Habitat**. So this was your brainchild that **LucasFilm Games** nurtured. When did **Quantum Link** get into the picture?

Chip: Well, we had this proposal sitting around that my office-mate, **Noah Falstein**, and I had written for a slightly different variation which we were calling **Lucasnet**, when we were contacted by **Clive Smith** of **Commo-**



dore, who wanted to know what interesting ideas we might be sitting on that might go well with some of the projects he was promoting. One of these projects was Q-Link, so what came to be called Habitat was a good match. Clive played matchmaker and put us together. We let the lawyers and business types yell at each other for a few weeks, and then we cut a deal. The rest is history.

GW: What is your position in Habitat's actual creation?

Chip: I am in LucasFilm Games organizational jargon the Project Leader. I am the principal designer and architect, and I have had my hand in programming some parts of it. Most of the programming I've done is in tools for folks behind the scenes, but I have had my fingers in just about everything.

GW: Now that you've told us what it is and where it came from, how does one play Habitat?

Chip: Habitat is played with a Commodore 64, a joystick, and a modem. It will be run off the Games menu in **People Connection** (an area on *Quantum Link*-authors). When you enter the Habitat world, you will see a display that consists of a graphic image that covers half the screen, with a text area above it. The graphic depicts a scene in the world that is the place (in our jargon, "region") that your character, or **Avatar**, as we call it, is currently located in. On the screen you will see your Avatar, as well as those of any other players who are in that part of the world with you. You control the movements and actions of your Avatar using the joystick, and you can communicate with others there by typing on the keyboard. The things you say appear in a "word balloon" over your Avatar's head.

Anything that the other people do or say is also displayed in the same fashion. The graphics display looks like a Saturday morning cartoon, or as close as we could get in on a C64. Any objects that you see can be interacted with also. You can pick up things and carry them around, manipulate them in various ways, and so on. You can also travel from place to place, encountering other Avatars and various puzzles, adventures, activities and the like that we have put into the world to amuse you.

GW: You said that Habitat is made up of screen-sized regions. How many regions make up this world?

Chip: Right now there are a couple of thousand, but the numbers will grow quite a bit.

GW: Tell us a bit about the other people who helped with Habitat.

Chip: Randy Farmer programmed the telecommunications stuff, the C64 disk Database stuff, and ALL the miscellaneous everything else all over. Basically, if I don't tell you otherwise, it's probably safe to assume that Randy wrote it. He's really the Habitat Ace Programmer. He's also created the first few adventures that the testers will encounter in the world.

Aric Wilmunder wrote the graphics code and a bit of

the miscellaneous stuff. He also worked on a bit of the user interface. Gary Winnick, our staff animator/illustrator *par excellence*, created almost all of the graphic imagery that you see on the screen, including the fully animated Avatar figure. Ken Macklin, another of our talented art crew, also contributed to the graphics, mostly doing the Avatar heads. Right now, we have about 150 different styles of heads, with more arriving every day or so.

GW: Isn't Ken known as a comic book artist?

Chip: Yes, Ken is quite known in such circles. [*Ken Macklin has done covers for Alberdo™ (Thoughts & Images) and Critters™ (Phantographics) as well as interior art on The Dreamery™ (Eclipse) and his own book Contractors™ (Eclipse)-authors*]

Other people that were involved were: Chris Grigg, who did all the sound effects. Unfortunately he didn't have much room to exercise his considerable musical talents, given our sound effects driver, but you can hear some of his work in Maniac Mansion. He and Dave Lawrence did the music for Maniac, which I think is some of the best music ever done for the C64. Janet Hunter was the main programmer at Quantum, and wrote most of the underlying system on the Q-Link end, including all the weird Stratus System stuff that I can never figure out. Randy and I wrote the object specific stuff (the code that makes all the different things in the game world do what they do), but Janet wrote the rest.

GW: Anyone else?

Chip: The rest of the crew here at LucasFilm Games contributed to one degree or another. We have a very collaborative, synergistic way of working, in which everyone gets his hands dirty in everyone else's projects!

GW: If you can give one brief pitch to someone who was curious about Habitat, what would you say to intrigue them?

Chip: I sure wish I had some sort of pithy slogan; then I could get the marketing types to stop bugging me for one! But let me give it a try though:

Imagine a world that is similar to our own in many ways...but one in which you don't have to work for a living. Where your main job is---having fun! Add a touch of magic, and a dash of adventure. Mix well, put it in a computer and that's---Habitat!

Pricing:

Labyrinth (With Activision)-\$27.95
PHM Pegasus (Electronic Arts)-\$25.95
Maniac Mansion With Activision-\$34.95
Maniac Mansion Movie Poster-\$4.00
Habitat-To be announced

To find out more about Quantum Link call 1-800-392-8200 or look for the Starter Kit in your local software shop.

The Vampyre!

in Myth, Literature, Film and Illustrated Adventure

Laura Antoniou

"It Will Have Blood"

William Shakespeare, Macbeth

Vampire! What other legendary creature could excite, thrill, terrify and inspire so many millions of people all over the world, throughout centuries and across every culture and society? The image of the vampire is part of nearly every ancient culture found in our history--Babylon, China, India, northern and southern Europe, Asia, Africa, ancient Greece and Assyria, even Australia has its own version of vampire. Yet, unlike similar mythic monsters, the vampire has survived (as it were) to enter the modern age as a symbol of the lonely, tormented nature of evil, the twisted yet vital drives of the predator, and most importantly, the ultimate, passionate demon lover, who seduces almost without intending to, captures the hearts and desires of its victims, and torments their less sensual loved ones back home by taking what the good and pure hero was so patiently waiting for. The vampire was a figure that women could desire yet be repulsed by, and a figure that men could unabashedly loathe and envy. No small wonder that vampires remain a steady draw at the box office and wander their way through best-seller lists even through the super-technological eighties.

Role-playing games provide a number of ways to meet up with vampires, yet these encounters tend to be limited to direct combat plotlines wherein the players are supposed to eventually meet and stake their nemesis. This is further broken down to the "Vampire is Undefeatable Yet Has One Weakness" (he's usually depressed), and "Vampire is Unseen and Pretty Mindless" categories. And what a shame that is! Vampires are much more than Dracula, (Frank Langella notwithstanding), and a good vampire story can be just the thing on a chilly Halloween night or a long winter's campaign. Taking a look at the historical, mythical, movie, literary and comic-book vampires will certainly enable a GM to add a touch of genuine horror to any game, and be guaranteed full interest and fascination...if the vampire is played well. So let's take a brief look at the many variations in theme and form that the bloodsucker takes throughout legend and lore.



"I myself am of an old family..."

Dracula

Vampires and similar bloodletting creatures exist in almost every recorded culture with only the most superficial variations in their characteristics. In Greece, the *Lamia*, *Empusa* and *Strige* were ancient forms of vampiric menace. The first two were more like succubi, tending to be female and sexual in nature (although the *Lamia* had a tendency to turn into a snake from time to time). The *Strige* had the ability to turn itself into a large, shadowy winged bird that would suck the blood of its victims through a long and narrow beak. The classic European-style vampire is called the *Vrykolaka* in Greece, and can be of either sex.

In ancient Assyria and Babylon, souls of the dead who had in life broken a sacred law or taboo, were forced to wander the earth tormenting the living and stealing their life force from them. They were called the *Ekimnu*, and although drinking blood is not specifically mentioned, their victims would often be found as dried husks, drained of everything. In Imperial Rome...the *Lemures* played the role of earth-bound tormentors. In old Ireland, *Dearg-duls* would haunt places of non-ritual violence and challenge Druids to deadly combat, after which they would drain them of blood. The Indian cult of *Kali* has its share of bloodletting, but a mythological creature known as the *Baital* is a corpse reanimated by a demon of the same name, which can sometimes turn itself into a giant bat. Chinese vampires, some made when a cat leaps over a dead body, can usually turn into cats. The *Ch'ing Shuh* demon also reanimates bodies, and alternately drinks the blood of the living and eats the dead. It is said to be the most frightening monster in Chinese mythology, so horrible in appearance that men were known to die from the sight of it.

On the other hand, Malaysian vampires were usually beautiful wom-

en, who would tempt unwary men from their loyal wives and then destroy them in the peak of their pleasure. They go by different names, the *Langsuir*, *Pontianak* and *Penanggalan* being the most common. African vampires are mostly male, being the spirits of dead sorcerers and medicine men. (Most common: *Asbanbosam*, *Owenga*, and *Otgiruru*.)

But it is the western vampire, the Christian, European vampire which remains the most recognised around the world. This creature, a dead person, whose corpse awakens at night to wander the earth in one of several forms, who has sharp fangs intended to break the skin and draw blood, who fears religious symbols and running water, this is what most people would recognise as a vampire. A very brief listing of its names throughout different cultures will just begin to give you an idea of its proliferation in literature and society. I already mentioned the Greek *Vrykolaka*.

In Bulgaria, the *Obour*; in Romania the *Strigoi* and *Moroi*; in Hungary *Pamgri* or *Vampir*; in Russia *Upir* and *Oupir*; in Serbia *Vlkodlak* and *Vampir*; in Germany *Vampyr* or *Nachzehrer* and sometimes *Nosferatu*; in Mexico, Italy and Spain, *Vampiro*, and sometimes, in Spanish speaking countries, the *Ciutateo*. And there are many more! Just check any encyclopedia of the supernatural (many libraries will have one), and gaze at the pages of vampire lore and information from all over the world. It will astound you.

For the purposes of this article, I'll give you a run-down of the general characteristics of that vampire, the "Classic" creature of the night. First

of all, he will be a corpse, unbreathing, unable to salivate, sweat, excrete, procreate and generally do all the things that living men do to survive. They do not consume anything but blood, and will then prefer the blood of living human beings, usually of the opposite sex. This vampire sleeps during the day in a state very close to that of a coma, very often with their eyes wide open. Their condition is best described as newly dead, for they will bear the evidence of their last meal, having color in their cheeks and being slightly bloated with other people's blood. They will have two



fangs, usually the canine teeth, and they will be razor sharp and very pointy. Their usual method of claiming a victim is to hypnotize or otherwise convince the victim to invite the vampire into their home (for this breed cannot enter any home uninvited), bite them on the throat, and drink the blood as it comes from the wound that they have made. Sometimes, the vampire might cause the victim to drink of their own blood, thus making that victim into another vampire. This is not always consistent with legends which say that even one bite from a vampire might be enough to turn a person into one, but it is an enticing image.



The classic vampire will fear crosses, holy water, the Host, and other symbols of a Christian church. They will avoid mirrors (because they have no reflection), silver, garlic and sometimes wolfsbane or white roses. (Also an interesting image.) In some parts of Europe, vampires have an unexplainable urge to count grains, so peasants would spill a pile of coarse grain over the grave of a suspected vampire in the hopes that by the time he counted them all, it would be dawn, and he would be forced to give up his wandering for the night. This vampire is unable to cross running water, save when he is confined within a vessel such as a large ship. Sunlight may burn him, and fire will destroy him. Also handy too would be vampire slayers? Purists argue over silver bullets, but a wooden stake is generally agreed upon as the definitive vampire stopper. Preferred woods include ash and hawthorn, but any type of wood will do in a pinch. Regardless of what you stake the vampire with, it is always recommended that you also cut their heads off, preferably with a sexton's spade, but again, any sharp instrument in a pinch. Placing a cross, or a piece of the Host on a suspected vampire's chest upon burial is said to confine them to their resting place, but some sources in the Balkans recommend tying the corpse's

toes together and burying them upside down. (Hey, I'm not making this stuff up.)

The Vampire in Literature

"I would like to tell you the story of my life, then. I would like to do that very much." --Louis, Interview With the Vampire

Just as oral tradition carried tales of vampires, so did the talents of authors, poets and hacks. Ancient Greek tragedies mention vampiric horrors, and Indian tales much like the Mid-eastern "Arabian Nights" may often revolve around a brave prince who is detained and entertained by the bloody tales of the *Baital*. But mainstream literature, available to large numbers of the general population, avoided the basic vampire tale and flirted with various poetic images of the seductive and possibly deadly charms of sexually unearthly women.

It wasn't until 1819 that a vampire appeared in a novel, and it was under the most amazing circumstance. In the previous year, Lord Byron, romantic poet and great literary figure of his day, summoned a small group of friends together for a week-end at his Geneva chateau. The group consisted of Byron, his mistress Claire Clairmont, the famous poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, Shelley's wife Mary Wollstonecraft, who was at that time a feminist and budding novelist, and Byron's personal physician, Dr. John Polidori.

Their chief form of amusement on those cold wintry nights was to tell each other ghost stories. Being a few of the most creative minds in Europe at that time, their tales were said to be of the most fantastic and horrific sort, and certainly the ones which made it into print were. For Mary, her tale of a man who had flirted with creation became one of the finest examples of horror literature in the world...the story of *Frankenstein*. But Polidori, inspired by nightmares

with a slightly erotic bent, spent the next year working on a lengthy novel which was to take the literary world by storm. It was called, simply, *The Vampyre*. It was so good (at least to the reading public at the time), that critics accused him of stealing it from Byron, or at least getting Byron to write it for him. In fact, some early editions had Byron's name under "author" because no one believed that Polidori could have written it! History revealed that Byron had outlined a similar story, but since the poet denied ever having anything to do with the books creation, we must leave it at that. Whoever wrote it, it turned public attention toward the horror story, introduced the first slightly pitiful vampire lead, and established a genre novel that would remain without equal until almost thirty years later. Its bloodsucking major character was Lord Ruthven, a nobleman who would "... (gaze) upon the mirth around him as if he could not participate therein..." He had heavy, dull gray eyes, like polished tin, and ended the novel by slaying the sister of the the major breathing male character. This strange ending was never to be repeated in vampire literature, as the evil vampire actually got away with everything he had intended to do without even the threat of danger!

The vampire as Literature suffered a great blow when a sensational



(in the worst meaning of the word) novel...no, not a novel, but a gigantic (868 pages) *graphic novel*, complete with moody, hurriedly drawn sketches, hit the bookstalls of England in 1847. It was so amazingly popular, that in 1853, it was reprinted--chapter by agonizing chapter--in a series of cheaply made monthly "magazines" called "*Penny Dreadfuls*". We don't exactly know who was responsible for **Varney the Vampire**, but most historians put the blame on Thomas Prest, the author of the well known

Yes, **Varney the Vampire**, right down to his melodramatic suicide (he throws himself into a live volcano), was the comic book of the day. But it was a good comic book, and introduced the first half-sympathetic vampire, who would often stop at the last second before biting some helpless female, and ponder the horror of his life style. Then, of course, he would come out with some great line like, "Well, it can't be helped!", and dive in. In lurid detail. And so, Varney held the public eye

the novel close to lack-luster reviews. He would hardly know what an impression he had made on millions of readers around the world by writing a short novel which would someday be translated into over 20 languages. He was Abraham "Bram" Stoker, the year was 1897, and his novel was **Dracula**.

Dracula may be called the most influential vampire novel in all of history. Inspired by a nightmare brought upon by some bad crab meat, written in clumsy first person narrative, released to poor reviews and shoddy distribution, it was to completely overshadow all previous horror titles and almost immediately grasp the public interest. A reading of **Dracula** today reveals that details are mixed up, characters are shallow, and whenever Stoker did try to give them some form of personality, he ended up making them into crude caricatures, stereotypical and often unintentionally funny. Van Helsing, for example, the world's most knowledgeable expert on supernatural lore, has an accent so ridiculous that it makes his passionate monologues hysterical when read aloud. He is also prone to making awful sexual jokes in front of Mina, (the world's most tormented victim), sometimes so offensive that she faints! Another terrible error--under Van Helsing's direction, and with another medical doctor present, the brave heroes attempt multiple blood transfusions on the women who Dracula has bitten, well before the science of blood-typing was even discovered. It is a wonder that they survived as long as they did.

Yet even despite all of these (and many more) errors, inaccuracies and faulty writing mistakes, the novel remains a work of great strength. It is highly visual, and well worth trudging through in order to get to the scenes probably already imbedded in any horror movie lovers soul--**Dracula**, scaling down the walls of his castle, sleeping, bloated and young, his eyes snapping open to send poor Jonathan Harker reeling in terror.



Sweeny Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street. With chapters entitled "*Midnight--The Hail Storm--The Dreadful Visitor. The Vampire.*", **Varney the Vampire** was no great and meaningful examination into the romantic or philosophical nature of vampirism. It was a pot-boiler, hard and true, and the British ate it up. They loved it, and swamped print-shops on the days it would arrive. They saved issues, purchased back issues, and treasured them behind their "normal" books. Hmm, this sounds like a pattern forming...

until a big Irish bookkeeper, whose first work was entitled **The Duties of Clerks of Petty Sessions in Ireland** came to the literary battleground that was London and vanquished all the previous horror novel sales records. Yet when he died, the **London Times** noted that "his chief literary memorial will be his **Reminiscences of Henry Irving**", a book which remains rather unheard of and rare. While he lived, he heard his vampire story called trash, lurid and creepy, and not worthy of note. He say a play made of

And who can forget the horribly seductive image of Lucy confronting her husband, fanged and voluptuous, a sexual creature that thrilled and terrified the characters in the novel with the same intensity as she fascinated the Victorian public?

Dracula deserves a new look in this age of high-tech vampires, a look that will reveal what really made them so interesting to begin with. No one can think of the term "Vampire" without drawing on Stoker's elements. (Borrowed, of course from previous literature, but used to greater effect.) Vampires are nobles, they live in seclusion, they are warriors, they are educated, crafty, sexy, and cruel. They sleep during the day, in coffins, they control rats and moths and wolves...every "classic" vampire image is there. A note to those daylight purists, though---Dracula is seen twice during the daytime, once wearing white kid gloves. He may have slept through many a sunny afternoon, but was hampered in no way if he really wanted to take a stroll.

As the century turned, images on the screen took over the role of the vampire novel, and it was to see a dry period lasting until after the Korean war. The sixties brought in television, and the only televised vampire worth a mention here---Barnabas Collins. Why worth a mention? Because he was the first American vampire, a native of Main, and a born Yankee. True, he and his whole twisted Collins family (and there were a lot of them!) were wealthy, but it was obvious that it was just so the writers could have the freedom to bring werewolves, mummies, man-made monsters, witches, ghosts, and assorted other supernatural beings to the set of the longest running horror soap opera, *Dark Shadows*. The show spawned a seemingly endless stream of short novels which further explored the tragic life of the saddest and loneliest and just the darn nicest vampire in all of history. Barnabas, wolf's head cane in hand, was the first true vampire he-



ro, and the melodramatic novels can serve as great idea generators for any type of horror campaign. (Hint--the ones where he teams up with Quentin the werewolf are the best.)

Things looked up for vampires during the middle and late 70's. Chelsea Quinn Yarboro released a series of excellent vampire tales introducing a new vampiric lead to the market--le Comte Saint-Germain. That of course is only one of his names, but regardless what he is called from book to book, the Saint Germain books are not to be missed by any serious vampire fan. His history as a character goes back to Babylonian times, and his adventures in ancient Rome (*Blood Games*), the far east (*Path of the Eclipse*), eighteenth century Paris (*Hotel Transylvania*), pre-revolution Russia (*Tempting Fate*) and fourteenth century Italy (*The Palace*) are exciting and historically fascinating. You could do much worse than look at history through this vampire's eyes.

At about the same time, Fred Saberhagen, better known for his science fiction *Berserker* saga, was finishing off a vampire series of his own, now sadly rare. Recently reissued, however, is the first book of his series, *The Dracula Tape*, a hilarious look at the events outlined in *Dracula*, as told by the Count him-

self. You will howl with laughter when you read his petulant complaints about clearing away Harker's dirty dishes, making fun of his Dutch opponent, and pretty much explaining all of the inconsistencies from the novel. The popularity of this tale led Saberhagen to write a series of sequels, having *Dracula*, the poor, hounded but essentially nice vampire meeting up with Sherlock Holmes (*The Holmes Dracula File*), bringing him to the twentieth century in *An Old Friend of the Family* and *Thorn*, and having him go back in time to deal with Arthur and Merlin in *Dominion*. An enjoyable series that can be used to balance a deadly character who has high personal morals and the ability to act on whatever he feels is not right with his world.

Finally, to round out the seventies and usher vampirism into the eighties, Ann Rice gave us *Interview With The Vampire*, and *The Vampire Lestat*, a pair of sexually charged novels that tell the stories of two vampires in search of meaning in their own lives. If you like melodrama, suspense, action and hot Louisiana nights, take the first. If you are looking for the origin of vampirism, want to see a vampire have a good time with his powers, challenge authority, duel with his mother and then join a heavy metal rock group, take the second. The books offer a new look at the physical nature of vampires, but lack many strong female characters. In the first book, the horrifying image of a child vampire is made real, and the readers are left to wonder about the supposed morals of the vampire "hero". They do make a good read, and everyone always seems to have a screenplay in the works, so it couldn't hurt to know them before the eventual movie comes out.

Vampire Flicks

I do not intend to touch, even

briefly, on every vampire movie ever made. There are hundreds of them, not even including the dozens of Mexican vampire serials. But to any gamer, GM or player, there are a few movies which should be seen to understand and be able to recapture the imagery and sheer spookiness of a good vampire tale when caught on film.

The first step is to go back to the beginning and see the first real vampire film, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu*. Yes, it is a silent film. Yes, it is in black and white, and generally not in excellent condition. But these days, your local Public Broadcasting System might show it during Halloween, you might catch it at the library, a classic film festival, or, if all else fails, you can actually rent it out on video. I would recommend that, because the film is long, and there are many scenes which seem to have lost any meaning in this modern world. But linger on the character of Count Orlock, and watch what caused thousands of theatergoers to faint and scream at his every move. A truly scary movie, and a good start.

Of course, the logical follow up will be Tod Browning's *Dracula*, starring Bela Lugosi, a classic which shattered any resemblance to the novel and set a formula for hundreds of vampire movies to follow. It's worth it just to see the character of Renfield played with gusto.

The British gave the sixties a newer, sexier vampire in the form of Christopher Lee, and in a series of six pictures, worked through every vampire myth and cliché. Hammer Films, the studio which made a steady stream of horror films up through the seventies, splattered blood all over the screen, shocked audiences with bared breasts, and had sex and violence become part of standard horror movie fare. A strange note is that Hammer created an entirely fictional German-like country for their vampire movies to take place in, and never mentioned London, Roumania, or any other location from the novel.

Vampire movies entered the eighties with humor rather than horror, and several attempts at funny films have been mild successes. Of course, last years *Fright Night* and this summers' *Lost Boys* have dropped vampires in our laps again, living next door and coming out for a drink, so we may yet see a return to the real vampire tale, a story that might not depend on the amounts of gore splashed toward the audience.

Illustrated Adventures

Otherwise known as comic books, and there aren't that many. Horror comics have always used vampires in their anthologies, but rarely have vampires starred in their own books. The best known example of not only a long-running comic, but a good long-running comic is Marvel's *Tomb of Dracula*. Run, don't walk, and grab a few back issues, and you'll see why. After a shakey start, artist Gene Colan and scripter Marv Wolfman teamed up to form one of the greatest long term teams at Marvel---or any where else. They grew to know, appreciate, and experiment with their lead character, and their labor made Dracula one of the most complex characters in the entire Marvel Universe. His adversaries were no less complex, and their love-hate relationship inspired some of the most literate and thoughtful letters ever printed by a thirty-five cent comic book.

Tomb of Dracula is unique because it was a story with an ending, and issue 70 re-

ally ended the tales, tying up all loose ends, and bringing the series to the only natural conclusion. But there are many thrills along the way, not the least of which is Dracula's epic battles with *Dr. Strange* and the *Silver Surfer*! Really---it works, and works well.

A recent vampire book on the market is Apple Comics' *Blood of Dracula*, mostly written by Rickey Shanklin. This new series is actually three stories in one, as each issue contains a "classic" Dracula story, a strange, haunting dream sequence tale, and a post-apocalyptic, futuristic episode. The art improves with each issue, and there may be something in these two new visions of Dracula. Another new vampire is J.M. DeMatteis' *Blood*, the story of a vampire who goes in quest of his identity, his place in society, and any meaning in his life. It is very violent, but also very beautiful, and will add to the ever-growing wealth of vampire literature.

Varney would be proud.



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-Time Magazine, January 26

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PLATOON

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Gazing into the Abyss

Harken to the Call of Cthulhu!

Greg Sherwood



As I approached the decrepit mansion, it was no great task for me to feel a tangible presence; death was a familiar scent on the air that surrounded me. It was waiting for me in the tower, calling to me, challenging me to continue on. Like the fool I sought not to be, I pressed forward, pistol in hand, wishing desperately that I could find another manner in which to dispel the evil that inhabited the place. I opened the front door and started to climb the stairs, realizing too late that I had been trapped like an animal in a cage. For at the top of the landing, was the thing, the horrible, shapeless monstrosity, that had forced me to come here against my will. It moved with a sickening lurch, making slurping, smacking sounds as it shambled forward, the translucent slime coating its body glistening in what little light entered the house. I stood there, rooted to the spot, my pistol ineffectual against its massive bulk, unable to act, even to think...

The *Call of Cthulhu*[™] game brought to you by Chaosium (the hard-bound new edition sells for \$24.95) is primarily based upon the ideas, mysteries, and settings that are most frequently presented in the works of H.P. Lovecraft. The game itself is set in the United States, circa 1920, which is the general time period for the game, but it does allow for a few years difference either way. With a little work and some imagination, the time period may be brought forth to a more modern setting or pushed back to a more ancient one.

The player in *Call of Cthulhu* takes the part of the Investigator, who follows (or sometimes, blindly stumbles across) clues that lead him into mysteries involving the secrets of the *Cthulhu* mythos. The GM in this game is known as "the Keeper of Arcane Lore", or simply, "the Keeper". It's his job to set up the campaign, and then arbitrate as his players stumble over the obstacles set in their path as they work through the scenarios he has set up for them. Those that survive these adventures will gain experience directly through the use of their skills, from the reading of ancient tomes and scrolls, and the actual combat of the nasties that inevitably attack at the least opportune times. Characters continue to advance in skill until they retire

(which may be due to injury, insanity, or common sense) or die (not a rare occurrence). Since *Call of Cthulhu* has a high mortality rate if played true to the mythos, players are advised not to get too attached to their characters.

Creating a Character

The *Call of Cthulhu* character has eight primary rolled stats: Strength (STR), Dexterity (DEX), Intelligence (INT), Constitution (CON), Appearance (APP) Power (POW), Size (SIZ), and Education (EDU). Furthermore, there are several secondary stats, derived from the primary: Sanity (SAN), which is the character's POW x five; Hit Points, which is the average of CON and SIZ; and Magic Points, which is equal to the POW score.

SIZ and INT are rolled on 2d6+6, while all other primary stats are rolled on a straight 3d6 roll (except for EDU, which is rolled on 3d6+3, which indicates that the tall, quick-witted investigator is a likely character for player to initially roll up). After the stats have been determined, the player must choose an occupation for his Investigator from among the listings provided in either the *Call of Cthulhu Rulebook* or its companion volume, *A Sourcebook of*





the 1920's. Examples are as follows: Author, Doctor, Gangster, Lawyer, Parapsychologist, and Politician, among others. As other sourcebooks come out there are usually a number of new occupation types open to the players.

Your choice of occupation is very important since this choice dictates in which area you will "spend" the greatest portion of your development points. *Call of Cthulhu* is set up on a percentile die resolution system--in order to perform a successful action you must roll versus the rating in the applicable skill, the lower the better. In the skills listed with your choice of occupation your development points (your $EDU \times 10$) are used to increase your success percentage in those skills.

Skill Categories

The skills are based on six major and three minor headings and then are broken down into more specific skills under each heading. The major headings are: Knowledge, (encompassing reading, writing, the law, the sciences, etc.), Perception (for such skills as Spot Hidden Object, Listen For Noise), Manipulation (example: machine operation, driving), Stealth (pickpocketing, hiding), Communications (Oratory, Fast Talk), and Agility (Climbing, Dodging). The minor skills are Attack, Parry and Damage--pretty self-explanatory, except for Damage, which is a basic skill that is related to

how much extra damage a character can do due to his combined SIZ and STR .

To further develop your character you are given the sum of your $INT \times 3$ to use as development points for your Knowledge skills; the sum of your $POW \times 3$ to divide amongst your Perception skills; the sum of your $DEX \times 3$ for your Manipulation skills; your $APP \times 3$ for your Communications skills; and your $STR \times 3$ to divide up amongst your Agility skills. The character then gets the number of points equal to his SIZ subtracted from 21 times 3 ($21-SIZ, \times 3$) for his Stealth skills---thus, the smaller a character is, the sneakier and less conspicuous he or she is capable of being. Finally, you are allowed to distribute the sum of your $INT \times 5$ amongst any of your skills for more playability. (A couple of extra points in First Aid, Shoot Gun and Occult may come in handy.)

The Mythos

Lovecraft once wrote: "All my stories, unconnected as they may be, are based upon the fundamental lore or legend that this world was inhabited at one time by another race who, in practicing black magic, lost their foothold and were expelled, yet live outside, ever ready to take possession of this earth again." This statement gives the Keeper the overview that the Great Old Ones held.

--Rule Book; *Call Of Cthulhu*, page 28.

The deities of the *Cthulhu* mythos are extremely powerful alien beings, some of whom may be of extra-cosmic origin. They range from the all-powerful *Azathoth* (one of the Outer Gods), to great *Cthulhu* himself (one of the Great Old Ones), down to the lesser servant types, like the Deep Ones and the *Byakhee*.

The Outer Gods are the rulers of the universe and have very little to do with humanity (lucky us!). They appear to be almost true gods, as opposed to the alien horrors of the Great Old Ones.

The Great Old Ones are alien entities of unimaginable power who are worshipped much more frequently in the *Call of Cthulhu* game than the Outer Gods, usually by a secret cult (more likely than not the backbone of any enemy faced by the *Call of Cthulhu* Investigators).

The Greater and Lesser Races that inhabit the *Cthulhu* mythos are the agents of ancient evil that the Investigators are most likely to encounter in their adventures.

Magic

"Gaze ye not into the abyss, lest thou becomest unto like the monsters contained therein."---Nietzsche

Magic in *Call of Cthulhu* differs from that of most fantasy role-playing games. Here, the spells primarily deal with the summoning and binding of demons and other extraordinary creatures. Spells are learned



through various tomes of ancient lore, or through coercion of a demon. Both experiences more often than not cause the researcher to lose SAN points at the same rate as his *Cthulhu* mythos Lore skill percentage goes up, because of the horrific alien knowledge that is contained in such lore. Most magical items will work the same way. Magic is a two-edged sword that cuts both ways in *Call of Cthulhu*.

Role-Playing

Call of Cthulhu is a more complete system than most others because it is set in a place that we all know—our earth! The geography we are pretty familiar with, and the history is a trip to the library anyway, not to mention that the *Cthulhu* aspect of the game is some of the best horror genre reading available.

Tell the truth: how many players do you think have wanted to open up on the descending horde of zombies with a tommy-gun, or get rid of that pesky werewolf with a silver .45 slug to the chest?

Extras

The *Call of Cthulhu* game does not exist in a vacuum, however, and new supplements are consistently available:

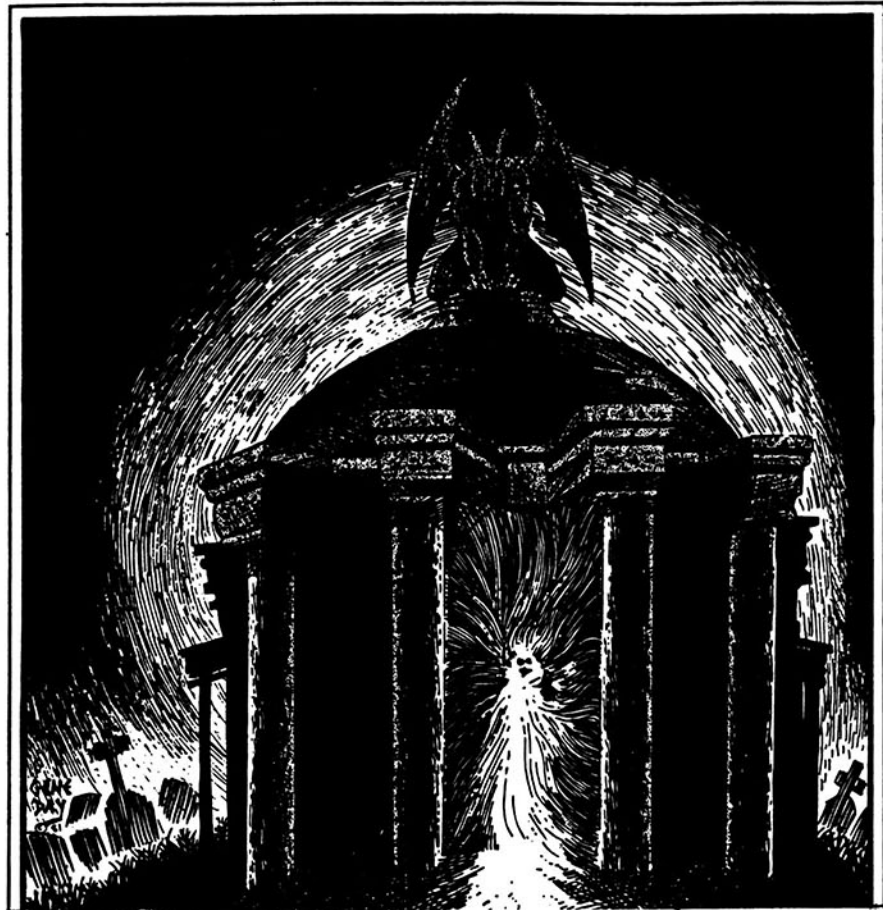
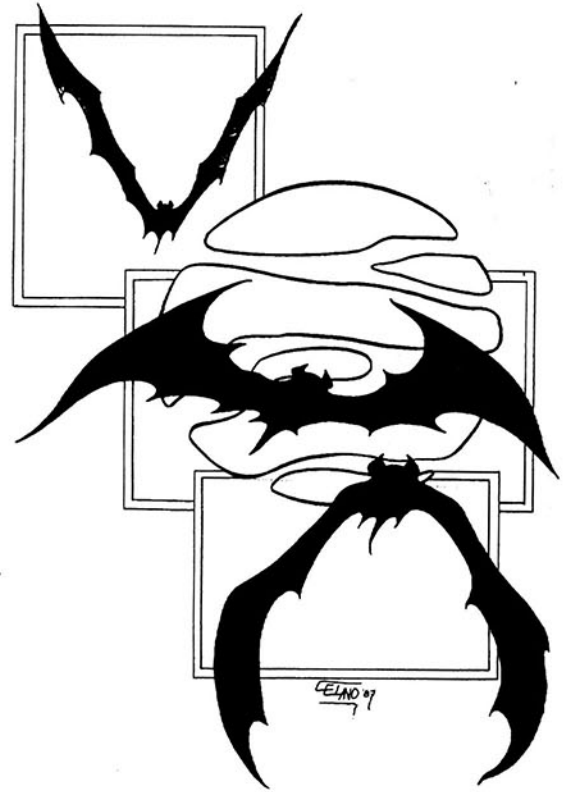
Dreamland: Nearly one third of Lovecraft's best, and spookiest stories took place at least in part in that other world, the one where reality is frequently something that can be twisted and warped beyond all human comprehension, because we know so little about it. This softcover campaign book tells all about that dream universe. \$17.95

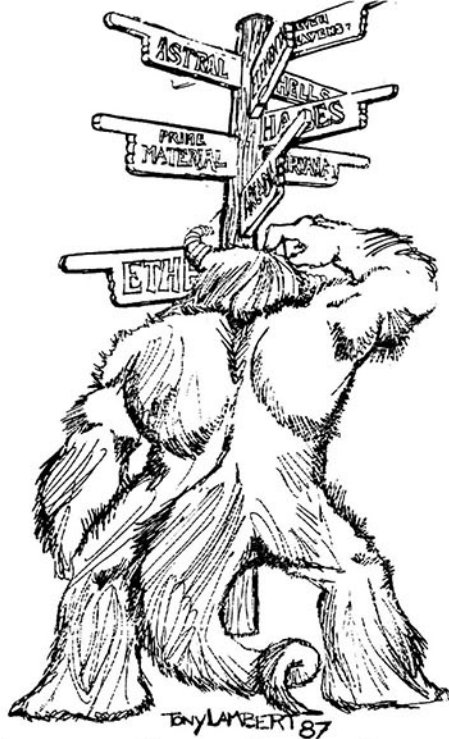
Cthulhu by Gaslight: For those players wanting to adventure in a Victorian setting, this supplement is full of everything that an aspiring gothic horror nut could ask for, including the history behind (and use of) the most realistic and dangerous hallucinogenic drug ever created by man. \$17.95

Masks of Nyarlalotep: Centering around the 1930-40s, this epic soft-bound book represents the ultimate Lovecraft nightmare (and he certainly had a few weird ones!). The players have only one task to perform: the Elder Gods are about to dominate the earth. They have many human (and non-human) allies, and work and dwell in different parts of the world. The investigators must use everything in their power to stop them before it's too late! A full scale campaign. \$17.95

Arkham Horror: A board game that attempts to combine fast paced action with Cthulhu-oriented adventure, taking place on the Arkham University campus. \$24.95

Cthulhu in the 1980s: Just released. Investigations in high-tech, contemporary times. This one promises to be simply spectacular, and will receive in-depth coverage right here, quite soon!





Vacationing in the Planes:

A Review of TSR's Manual of the Planes

Patricia Travis

Well, this is more like it. After months of wading through various survival guides, TSR has finally released a hardcover book on a topic long and unjustly ignored in the adventure game world. And that's what it's all about, isn't it? Adventure! Books on survival imply that surviving is the main thrust of an average role-playing game. Hey, we know better than that. We're in this for the excitement. And this book...is exciting.

What is it? *The Manual of the Planes*, by Jeff Grubb. Yes, it is a new, expensive book, and yes, you have been warned about volumes in the series of rule-books which you don't need to play the game. But this book is not only a useful guide to GMs who are looking for new places to send their players to, it happens to make for some fascinating reading. I got a clearer notion of inter- and intra-planar travel than I've had in the 10 or so years I've been playing, and believe me, that will make a difference in future games. Any player who rejected an adventure because he/she had no knowledge of the outer or inner planes and every GM who never scripted a journey through them because they just didn't understand how the whole system worked should run out now and get this book. As they say in the *Prego* commercials, "It's in there!", and it's about time.

Each plane has a chapter devoted to it, detailing the physical nature of the area, the effects of different types of spells, the natural inhabitants, frequent visitors, and any

gods or god-like beings who make that plane their home. A brief Overview discusses general knowledge about the plane, and is followed by modes of transportation which can be used to get there. For the players, there are tips and facts concerning the physical nature of each plane, including time and movement variations. Yet Grubb's light prose never bores even the casual reader, making what could have been dull figures and charts into information that really interests and entertains you. Visuals are scarce, but very evocative and moody. Some of the illustrations are rather inspiring.

For the GM, there are some very nice encounter tables, separated according to their respective planes. Encounters can be with aspects of the environment or with the inhabitants and visitors within the plane. I know that the task of making up charts like these has stopped me from embarking on a full scale tour of the planes before...now I'm just about ready to pack my bags.

Honesty forces me to admit that you do not need the *Manual of the Planes* to play AD&D. But your understanding of one of the most fascinating and challenging adventure backgrounds in the realms of fantasy role-playing will suffer without it. For the first time in a very long time, TSR has published a reference book and adventure catalyst which is both an excellent expansion of the AD&D game system and a suitable addition to any fantasy role-playing universe. I'd put this book on my "highly recommended" list.

LONE WOLF AND CUB UPDATE:

The mystery of the missing sequence has been resolved! Last issue (*Gateways* #6: *Samurai Rising*), it was stated that the notorious sequence in which Lone Wolf *Itto Ogami* discovers his son still connected to his slaughtered wife by the child's umbilical cord--and separates them with his katana--was not shown to American readers of the remarkable First Comics' series.

Publisher Rick Obadiah has since told *Gateways* magazine that the scene will appear in the sixth issue of the comic, to be released in October, 1987. The shocking event will be part of the origin story of *Lone Wolf & Cub*, exactly as depicted in the very first run of Koike and Kojima's epic in Japan.

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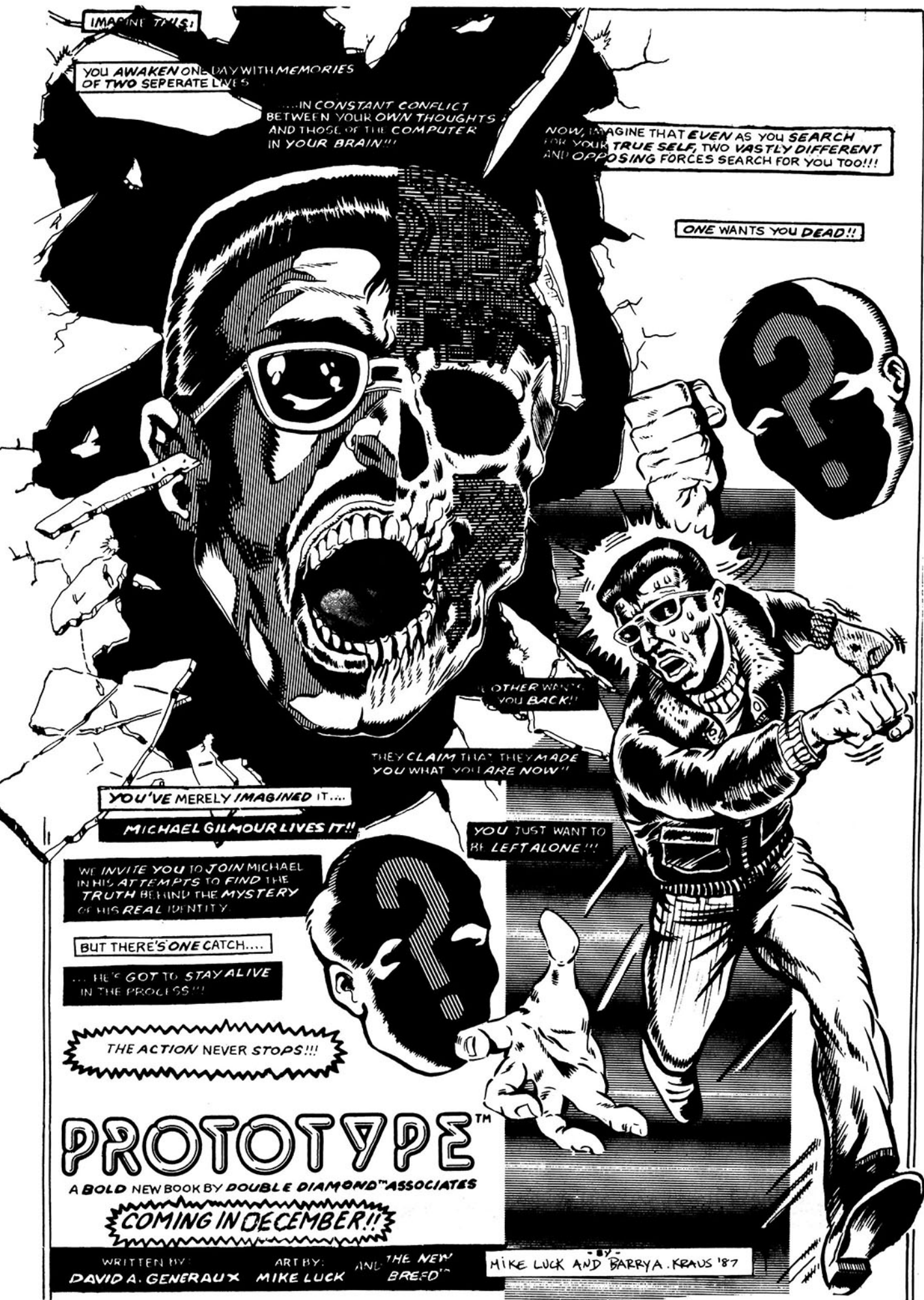
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Gateways Classifieds

Gateways introduces a regular feature for fantasy role-players, Game Masters and all fans of the Genre...Gateways Classifieds! Every issue, on this page, you may insert or peruse messages which will reach gamers throughout the known world. It's very simple! Find the category your message belongs in, write your words down, mail them to us, and we'll print them! And remember--to help gamers keep in touch, Player/Game Master Wanted Ads are free!

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And remember, Gateways Classifieds are cheap! At one dollar per twenty words, this will be an offer limited to our earliest issues. Take advantage of it while it lasts Write to: Gateways Classifieds, JAF Box 065, New York, N.Y. 10116.

Note: The price for Gateways Classifieds will rise in issue #7! Get your ads in now!

WANTED: Writer knowledgeable in rock music, science fiction, fantasy, and adventure games to collaborate on an article for Gateways--*Rock and Role-playing*. Artists too. Write Don, 355 8th Ave. #1B, NY, NY 10001.

WANTED: Premiere pilot movie of *Private Eye*, the Yerkovich rocker. Will pay reasonable price. Important! Write Barbara, 139-42 231st St. Laurelton, NY 11413.

WANTED: DRAGONLANCE PLAYERS Gamer/Author is looking for first hand knowledge of TSR's Dragonlance series. GMs especially welcome to express their views on the hottest gaming series of the past several years. Is this the future of gaming? Does it work? Was it fun? Can the series be played with other PCs? Does it have a good ending? Selected views will be used in a giant Dragonlance retrospective which will appear in Gateways. Write to: Dragonlance Retro, 61-26 160th Street, Flushing, NY 11365.

PLAYERS WANTED:

Experienced GM wants experienced or talented novice players for either: High quality Marvel Superheroes campaign or romantic-style AD&D variant game, both with heavy emphasis on role-playing and emotionalism. Should be 17 or above and able to travel to Queens, NY on a regular basis. Write to Serge Clermont, 134-20

218th Street, Laurelton, NY, 11413, or leave a message at (718) 353-4881.

MERCHANDISE AVAILABLE:

Private collector is selling off large accumulation of Dragon magazines, role-playing and war-gaming related items. Send SASE to receive list of sale items. Please specify role-playing and/or war-gaming list(s). Write to: Timothy Stabosz, 45 Country Manor, Orland Park, IL 60462. Or phone (312) 361-2999.

PERSONALS:

What would you do if it were in your power to save the world at the risk of offending God?

Helterdammerung.

Twilight of the Heroes.

The cast and crew of Dortrum all bid Ozru Thudd good luck on her new wilderness campaign. (How's living in the country, Margaret?)

Dave. You're dead, Dave.

"Drac"---Fangs for the memories!

Por Jenny y Jessie en Kendall--amor con muchos besos. Sus hermanos.

I didn't ask to take the Staten Island Ferry...I wuz kidnapped!

Sloane....River.

Serves you right! Who told you to go looking in there? Now we have to go and clean that up!

To the Trainman: An interest in Pink Floyd is A Momentary Loss Of Reason.

The Mark of Cain---no, it's not a game with Juggernaut in it!--Irate GM

To the Gang--Thanks for being there in tuff times---Amado

Sherface---A Pacifist?!

Wise man say---Think before you fall in love.

He has a one-track mind--- That many?

The Shadow watches you from above---the Hangman

Who's Bad? Not you, Jack.

The Wolf's at the Door, Baby Girl.

I cannot stand censorship! Blankety-blank! @\$%&

I'm taking my own way out of this nightmare!!

Chimer, you've always looked in my eyes and saw through my brilliant disguise--Quigley Academy Class of '87.

Adele Greyslick and Elenishtar

The Cosmic Streetcorner

Just like on any other sidewalk in the world, you can run into trouble on the Cosmic Streetcorner. Sometimes the situation can get so bad, ya feel that you've been shoved back against a wall, and your choices become fewer and fewer. Something bad is going down, and it's coming down on you or someone you really care for. Once in a while, you've got no choice but to fight. With your mouth, with your fists, with your soul if you have to; if harm is being done to you or your people, then you've got to stop it.

In fantasy and science fiction, evil is often concrete. It's armored, has scales or fangs or both, boogers ooze from its maw, it can even be cool enough to wield a crimson light saber. The point is that the hero can really lock in and duke it out with evil, grappling with the bad guy to the bitter end, and usually kicking butt. We read the books and smile, we stand on sticky seats in neighborhood movie theaters and cheer because we've been shown without a doubt that the slimebags have done wrong and therefore deserve to be stomped and punished by Arnold or RoboCop. Bet it's kind'a different on the streets of your hometown, isn't it?

If you've been treated maliciously, if someone's forced you to do something that you know is wrong, if you've been judged because of things you have no control over, or even if someone has stopped you from speaking your mind--heck, I couldn't blame you for wanting to treat those people the way tough heroes in comics, movies and games treat their villains. But hold up a sec! Most of us are not above the law; we don't have operating light sabers or hundreds of pounds of solid muscle, let alone titanium battlesuits. So what's the alternative?

Well, while a part of ourselves may growl and tighten up and want to slam into the bad guys with all we got, there aren't altogether that many villains in every day life that need to be defeated with a battle to the death. Evil in life is certainly insidious, but it is much more subtle. So we've gotta stay on guard--be aware. It may not be easy to decide exactly what is right, but it's easier to tell what is clearly wrong: censorship, not letting people say what they want to say; racism, judging other people by their nationality and skin color instead of by what's in their hearts and minds; addictions, any substance or behavior pattern that causes it's user to become dependent on it to the point where it makes them alone, isolated from family, friends, and the rest of the world. (An evil addiction is one that, if you squint your eyes and look carefully under the "coolness" or pleasure it gives you at the moment, really is only hurting your mind or your body. You would know



whether it was by looking honestly into yourself.) Finally the ultimate evil, the one which, if you think about it stands at the base of all other evils known to humanity, is the lack of constant, patient communication.

Still, it can be frustrating. How can we be prepared? How can we fight evils like these? Slaying dragons is so much easier, many people would love to do that forever. Well, when things get complicated, as they did for Luke at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, where a light saber alone would not do the trick, we've got to rely on the powers we were born with. We've got to be strong in mind, body and spirit. Role-players, storytellers and artists are inherently sharp kind'a people. We'd all sooner say, "Ah, how interesting!" than, "This doesn't have a right to exist!" even if we've never seen or heard anything like it before. Because we're always looking out for new ideas, new ways of seeing things, we can't afford *not* to keep our minds open. Open but well guarded, I always say.

Taking care of our bodies is just as important, and it's hard to realize that after a certain age our bodies will no longer take care of themselves. Staying as fit, clean and healthy as possible, and even knowing how to physically defend ourselves should it come to that, is more important than you can know.


Spirit's my favorite. It's the part of ourselves that watches out for others, that keeps on going even when it looks like there's no way out. Spirit takes us passed the point where our minds and bodies have long ago given out. It makes people heroes in times where there are few, if any, dragons left.

So now we're equipped to go out adventuring in the every day world. That's going to be a story so big and grand that bits and pieces of it will find their way into the things we create for our comics, books, and game adventures. And in the end, even though at times it can be tough, that's the reason I hang out on the Cosmic Streetcorner.

Jeffrey Gomez
Publisher



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