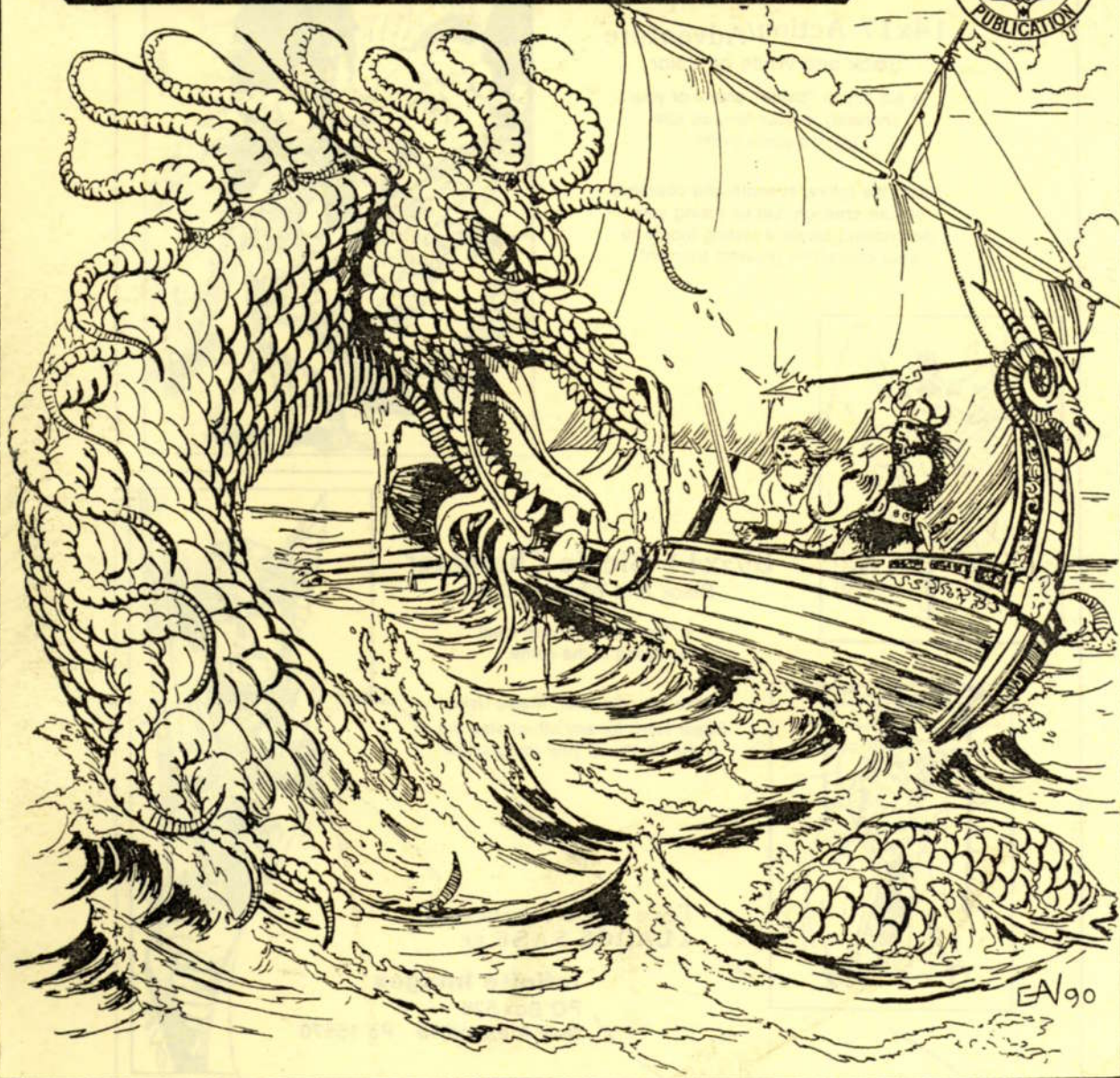
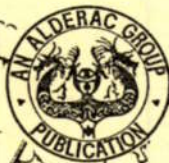


# SHADIS

*The Fantasy Games Magazine*

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# SHADIS

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# BACKROOM MURMURING

## EDITORIAL

**T**here's an old saying that a fool and his money are soon parted. If that's true then the typical fantasy role-playing character is surely part of a foolish breed.

Think about it for a moment. These poor brutes spend their troubled days crawling about foul dungeons and among ruins infested with all manner of horrors in their search for wealth. Our characters gather gold and jewels in any form, taken from anyone who happens to have them, then slip back into town to enjoy the fruits of their labors.

Then they freely dole out their gold to local merchants who are selling their wares at gold-camp prices. Soon, our characters find their pockets lightened and their bellies empty. Strapping on sword and armor, off they trudge to the wilderness to secure more riches. A hero's work is never done.

It never seems to occur to these slow-witted warriors to invest their money into their own enterprises. When they place their gold, which has been earned through blood and sweat, into the uncalloused palms of a fat merchant, it never strikes them that perhaps they could be standing behind that same counter and be bleeding some other poor sap of his own money.

Well, perhaps it's not the fault of our paper counterparts. Most fantasy role-playing games do little to encourage such endeavors and the Gamemaster has no guidance for which to set his players in the right direction.

There are exceptions. The Star Trek RPG has an excellent supplement on merchants which includes a stock-market simulation. GangBusters also has some very good rules for running various businesses. But the fantasy role-playing game

rarely includes such offerings.

Now I can't picture Conan running a pawnshop or Gandalf bartending his own tavern. The business world isn't for everybody and I'm not suggesting that all characters lay down their arms and hire accountants.

The great appeal of RPGs is that characters are limited only by the imagination of the players and the DM. The business world can be great fun and can offer an interesting sideline to a campaign when the players become bored with standard adventuring.

Over the years, I've had various players try their luck at a wide variety of business endeavors. In every case the campaign was enhanced by this sort of activity and the players' enjoyment was enriched.

Several years ago, during a campaign I was running in El Paso, I noticed that the players were beginning to show signs of disinterest. The campaign was reaching that precarious point where dungeon adventuring just wasn't going to cut it anymore.

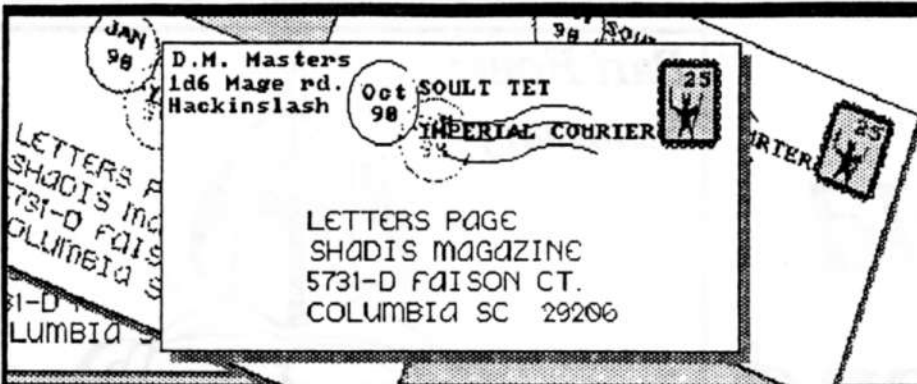
I responded as many DMs do. I decided to make the lives of my players a living hell! I devised a small island in remote waters complete with a castle and a massive dungeon system. To spice things up, I populated the island with Lizardmen tribes and infested the waters about the island with pirate ships and treacherous reefs.

I was really proud of myself. Chuckling as I poured over my preparations, I foresaw my poor players sailing for weeks to reach the island, only to be confronted with a host of hostile creatures bent on their destruction. The plan was to force the players to spend months attempting to wrestle control of the island from its inhabitants. During that

*Continued on page 62*



# THE LETTERS PAGE



\*Note: Due to space limitations and the many 'long' letters we've received, some letters have been edited. While praises and 'atta boy' letters are greatly appreciated letters containing constructive criticisms, complaints or suggestions are more likely to see print in the Letters Page. We love the praise but it makes boring reading for other readers. At any rate keep the letters coming!

Dear SHADIS,

I love your new magazine and would very much like to subscribe. Keep up the good work and thanks for publishing such an interesting magazine.

Grant Booth  
The MountHaus  
St. Paul, MN

Dear SHADIS,

Issue #4 of SHADIS reached me today, and I have to say that it is at least as good as the other two that I have read.

If my advice is worth anything, then I have some to offer (the question of whether or not my advice is worth anything is still under consideration).

Caveat: Be very careful as to your inclusion of more fiction. I am aware that several of your readers have written to you asking for more fiction, but adding more fiction than you already have could cost you in the long run.

Admirers of fiction tend to be much more vocal than other groups, especially the die-hard gamers. A local group that I have shown the magazine to sent it

back to me with the note: "This isn't a gaming magazine, it's a novel." Ever wonder why the larger gaming magazines don't have much fiction? Now you know. It doesn't sell the magazine, it reduces the potential audience.

On the other hand, having no fiction is also just as exclusive. Personally, I feel as though you have a good balance right now, and I wouldn't go messing with it until you are certain that it will help your sales.

Ever thought about going 8.5x11? I know that it is easier to print on 8.5x14 and then fold, but a more standard format MAY increase your reception.

In any event, good job! I look forward to seeing your next issue. Keep sending them!

Devin Durham  
Rapport Games

\* We received several letters sharing your feelings. It appears that one of my answers to a letter in Issue no.#4 gave the impression that we were about to increase the proportion of fiction in the magazine. I was referring to the upcoming SHADIS ANNUAL which will be comprised entirely of fiction. The SHADIS ANNUAL is being offered to those readers who missed the early issues of SHADIS. This allow them to get all of the fiction with one purchase instead of having to buy six back-issues.

The balance of fiction to articles in SHADIS itself will not be changing.

Also the SHADIS ANNUAL is most likely going to be in an 8.5x11 inch

format. This is necessary because of the sheer bulk of material that is planned on being included in the annual. The annual will serve as a field-test to see if it would be feasible for SHADIS to transform to a similar format.

Our primary concern at this stage is to offer as much material as possible without having to raise our cover price. The smaller format goes a long way on keeping our costs down. It saves on mailing costs as well as printing costs.

Dear SHADIS,

Another fine issue. This magazine should really start taking off soon. I wanted to comment on your editorial in Issue #4 and you're comments on self publishing. Being the editor and publisher of SELF PUBLISHER! MONTHLY, a magazine with 200 subscribers and 1,000 copies distributed of each issue, you're right on the mark with your feelings toward this business.

I've been publishing for five and half years now and I've probably experienced all sides of the genre by now. From FANBOY TRADER to PRO-WANNA-BE to SMALL GUY AND PROUD OF IT, self publishing has been a process of learning about myself.

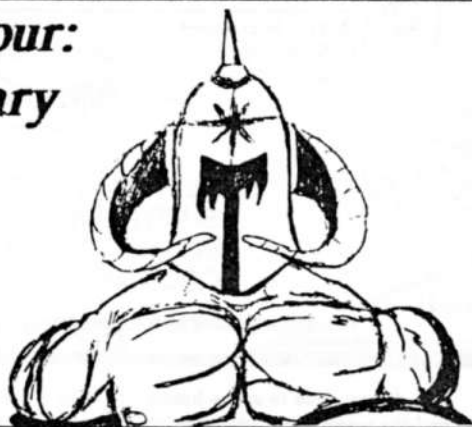
Keep at it and don't quit! Do it when you least want to, like you love it. In the end you'll always be proud you did and so will your readers. Keep up the good work in SHADIS!

Ian Shires  
Dimestore Stories

Continued on page 61

# The World Beyond 'HackandSlash'

## Part Four: Summary



By John K. D'Amato

Some of you may have questions regarding the subclasses, and whether their points should not be different from the main classes. For the most part, subclasses can use the same sheets. A Ranger, for instance, functions in most ways as a fighter. Rangers, however, do have some special abilities, and because I want Rangers operating as Rangers, I give them experience points for actions not found on the fighter sheet. Also I don't award as many points for other actions as I would for a straight fighter.

Paladins operate as fighters, but it seems they have a heavy religious/cleric base, as well. For those reasons, many of the points on a Paladin's sheet will reflect experience points for clerical activities too.

For those who wish to change their games to reflect characters acting as clerics, thieves, etc., instead of simply as a group of specialized fighters, the sheets are a valuable reference throughout the game.

For the DM, the sheets provide open-ended guidelines for the awarding of experience points. He/she knows Glendower the magic-user used a spell last session, which took 1 segment to

cast. Looking at the magic-user worksheet, the DM knows a 1 segment spell is worth 50 experience points.

### SUMMARY WORKSHEET

To keep track of the point totals, I've designed a summary sheet, representing all of the major classes. I normally fill one out after each gaming session for each character.

With experienced players, the DM can discuss with the players what they think their characters deserve points for. This method requires the DM to be firm but fair, since players will argue for the greatest amount of points possible for the simplest of accomplishments.

If the session hasn't involved a 'Monty Haul' dungeon, the points should be pretty minimal for a 1-4 hour session. Still, the players can see that they are either making or not making progress toward their next level. They will also learn quickly that the more they play their character as the class was meant to be, the more points they will amass.

Looking quickly at the summary sheet, you'll see that I award 20 points simply for sur-



vival. The points are minimal, and any character who lives through several hours of city, overland or dungeon adventuring ought to have earned something and gained some kind of experience, or I haven't presented a very interesting scenario.

Occasionally, someone can't make it to the game, and rather than cancel the session, I'll play their character for them. He/she'll be on the periphery of the action, unless absolutely essential, but the character is still involved in the scenario and earning points. To reward those who are actually playing their character and making contribution, I award another 20 points for furthering the plot of the adventure. The no-show player doesn't get these points.

I place a lot of importance on chosen alignments and adherence to the character's religion. As an added incentive to play one's alignment more accurately and for Clerics to perform actions in conjunction with their beliefs, I award 20 points for sticking within an alignment and 50 points to clerics/druids/monks who remember to act in accordance with their religion. (This is in addition to points awarded below for the same type of actions.)

The points for monsters, treasure and those awarded by class are explained in more detail on the class experience point sheets, and in preceding 'HackandSlash' articles.

Not listed either on the class experience point sheets or the summary sheet are the 250 points I call the 'Academy Awards for Best Actor/Actress'.

The name of this game is Role-playing, and as far as I'm concerned that means acting. The DM is simply the producer/director of a movie without a script. The DM sets the scene, the players extemporize the lines. To me, it is improvisational theater at its best.

What I want in a game is the best interaction among players as possible. The joy of the game is watching the players 'flesh-out' their characters and giving them life. And, if someone does

this, and adds to the game's enjoyment for everyone, I want to reward them.

Apparently there are some others who feel the same way. At a recent GenCon, several of the tournaments were decided not on points, but on which players delivered the most enjoyable and convincing portrayals of the characters assigned to them. No points! Just who was the best actor/actress!

In continuing adventures, where players are interested in moving up levels, points are still important, however, and I would not discard the experience-point system.

Instead, I award 250 points to the player who has delivered the best characterization during that session of play. With experienced players, I allow them to decide who did the best job of defining their character in session. Surprisingly, the players are usually unanimous in their choice.

If I'm the deciding factor, the award could be based on the character's telling a story, singing a song, or doing something a little out of the ordinary that made the character come alive and thus made the session more enjoyable.

After one or two sessions of watching someone else picking up 250 points for 'acting', the other players will get the hint and start competing for those points. They start to look for ways to improve their characterizations - new characters arrive at the table with eye patches, limps, distinct epithets, speech patterns or accents. Around the campfire, they talk about their pasts, sing a song, light up a pipe or write family members.

Hobbits suddenly start doing 'hobbit stuff' and elves take on an elfish flare - all because the players want those 250 points.

One caution: 250 points doesn't mean much when you're handing out 3,000 experience points per session. This strategy only works in low-level campaigns, or if you're a DM who's tough on the experience points you award.

For those of you who were not able to get the first several issues of SHADIS, and thus the ex-

## Summary

planations of my alternate experience-point system, the summary worksheets for the main character classes (Worksheets 1 thru 4) are available free of charge for the asking. Just send a stamped-self addressed-envelope and indicated which worksheets

you need.

That concludes the HacknSlash series. Try it out for a couple of sessions and let me know what happens.

Until then — good luck and good gaming. □



*Not realizing he just told the Orc-Chieftain where he can put his spear, Mark the Magic-User enters the Orc Camp*



# EXPERIENCE POINT SUMMARY

Name :   
 Date of Session :   
 Character Class :

NOTES:

SURVIVAL (20 pts max.)   
 ALIGNMENT: (20 pts max.)

CONTRIBUTION (20 PTS MAX.)   
 PRACTICE RELIGION (50 pts max.)

**ADVERSARIES:** Fighters as normal. • MUs - 50% pts unless adversary has special capabilities, then normal points; double points for adversaries with magical abilities • CLs - 50% pts unless adversary is exact opposite of cleric's alignment, then normal points. • Thieves - 50% points for those slain in normal combat. Normal points for adversaries that are avoided or negotiated through by cunning or trickery.

**TREASURE:** Fighters - normal pts. Double pts for armor, swords etc. • MUs - 50% pts, normal pts for objects with magical properties. • CLs- 50% pts, double pts for religious artifacts, books or items. • Thieves - 50% pts for treasure gained through force; normal pts for other circumstances; double pts for treasure stolen or gained through devious means.

**COMPLETION OF MISSION:** Fighters - 2x character's level. • Magic Users - 3x character's level. • Cleric - 7th thru 11th level refer to mission-type. • Thieves - based on Guild.

## FIGHTERS ONLY

Lead party thru danger:   
 Discover-trip traps:   
 Learn new weapon or type of combat:   
 Man-to-man duel:   
 Sea/undersea combat:   
 Act as rear-guard:   
 Take damage from trap, monsters or single handedly save others from death:   
 Save NPC, King, prince, 9th level or higher:

## MAGIC USERS ONLY

Each 3 days spent studying magic or experimenting:   
 Newly acquired spell:   
 Successfully cast spell:   
 Half-hour exchange with another MU on magic:   
 Encounter with magical creature, device or trap:

## CLERICS ONLY

Touch source-of-power:   
 Visit temple of faith:   
 Conduct rituals/prayer:   
 Turn Undead/  
 Eliminate Undead:   
 Successfully cast spell:   
 Converts to religion/  
 lessons taught:

## THIEVES ONLY

Pick Lock/  
 open lock:   
 Each ten-feet span of wall scaled:   
 Form band of thieves:   
 Find trap/  
 Disarm trap:



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# The Bones of Ruin



By Jolly R. Blackburn

## Part V Tooth and Nail

*"Never has the sweaty-brow of man accomplished anything of worth. It is only by the will of the gods that these mortals prevail. Why do they struggle so against the yoke? It is the great mystery, that a man will flee all the days of his troubled life to evade the will of the gods, knowing that as he draws his last breath, we will be waiting."*

*Zelaur speaking to Benyar  
From the Menus Kai*

Day 240 Year 108

The main sail of the small Yarpan<sup>1</sup> snapped violently at its riggings as it was hoisted skyward on the ship's single mast. A shower of broken ice rained down on the crew and rattled across the deck as the long jagged icicles which had formed on the ship's riggings overnight suddenly dislodged.

Scav and his two shivering companions lay huddled in the prow of the ship trying their best to escape the bitter cold beneath the weight of several heavy furs.

It was early morning, the sun had barely set the horizon on fire as the Yarpan's five-man crew hurriedly made preparations to get under sail. They had spent the night anchored in the protective waters of a deep inlet. A rough storm had risen the pervious night which had threatened to sweep them

away.

Scav peered over the edge of his coverings, his teeth rattling. Everything on the ship was carpeted with a thick frost, including the beards of the crewmen. He watched the crew in wonder as they performed their tasks with faces stung red by the bitter wind. He now knew why they had been so reluctant to set sail in the season of the 'Bear' as they had called it. These were rugged, seasoned men, but they had been fearful to hire out their ship. Only the promise of a substantial sum of gold had prodded them into finding their nerve.

It had been Falsnare who had concocted the idea of buying passage on a ship. He convinced Scav and Brantar, that an attempt to reach Soult Tet overland would have been a foolish venture and extremely dangerous. He suggested making the two-day ride to the coastal town of Fallen Oaks which lie northeast of Talert. There they could easily buy passage on a barter-ship he explained. From there they could sail south to the mouth of the Soult River and find passage on a river-barge upstream to the capital city. Instead of arriving with blistered feet, boasted Falsnare, they would reach the city of Benyar in good spirits and with less the wear of travel.

Scav could find nothing wrong with the suggestion and wholeheartedly embraced it. Much to their dismay, however, they found themselves hard-pressed to find a captain who would risk his ship. The Aludian Ocean was notorious for its savage winter-storms. And though winter had not yet

## Fiction

fully arrived, most of the sailors they approached scoffed at their proposal. They were weary from a long summer of voyages along the eastern seaboard and were now eagerly looking forward to a long winter boarded up with their womenfolk and strong mead. Finally, after diligent badgering, they found a crew willing to set sail.

The Yarpan suddenly lurched sideways as the strong northerly wind surged. Scav felt his stomach heave. They had been on the seas for four days and during that time he had emptied the contents of his stomach over the side of the ship a dozen times. Falsnare and Brantar were unaffected, only complaining about the cold and the stale bread.

Quickly, Scav rose to his feet and made his way to the railing. He leaned over and heaved again but there was nothing in his stomach to expel. "Falsnare and his brilliant ideas," he thought to himself.

He heard laughter and looked to the stern of the ship. Two crew members were watching him with much amusement. One placed his hands on his stomach and made a heaving-motion, mocking Scav. A great toothless smile stretched across his face as his comrade laughed again. Scav looked away from them. He had tired of their heckling and jokes, just as he had tired of the cold and the rough seas.

The captain of the ship, Yibar, had told Falsnare that they would be arriving at the small coastal town of Pleem by noon that very day. There, they would take on supplies and lay over for a day before continuing on. Scav was glad for it. One night in a warm inn would do wonders for his spirit.

Scav's thoughts were suddenly disturbed by a resounding slap across his shoulders. Greatly annoyed he turned to find the ship's captain, Yibar smiling.

"If you'd work, you wouldn't be so sick! The best cure for the sickness is hard work."

Scav shook his head, "I'd only be in your

way, I assure you. I'll be all right."

Yibar stepped up beside him and leaned over the ship's rail. He smiled and pointed to a pair of dolphins slicing the water a few yards off the ship's bow.

"The god of the sea, Marlog is with us," he explained, "Wherever the dolphin goes, the blessings of Marlog soon follow. So my father has told me."

Scav nodded. His own father had worshipped Marlog on occasion. More specifically, he worshipped the dolphin-steeds of Marlog, Yroman the bringer and Frulman the taker. The two dolphins were responsible for bringing in the tide and taking it out. Before his father's fleets would set sail, he would summon a priest of Marlog to offer sacrifices to the two gods so that the tides would be favorable.<sup>2</sup> Frulman also was the god who claimed dead sailors and took them to the realms of Marlog, deep beneath the waters.

"A man could live a thousand lives on firm soil and never taste life like this," commented Yibar. He pounded his chest with his fist, "The ocean makes a man hard. My father lived to see 103 years! When they tried to bury him in the soil, he made a horrible fuss and wouldn't stay buried. Finally, they gave his body to the sea and he was at peace."

"I've known men who have lived that long, and they weren't sailors," remarked Scav. He had become resentful of Yibar over the past few days. The old captain was constantly belittling him and hinting that Scav and his comrades were of an inferior breed.

"Then they must have been born to be sailors," laughed Yibar.

Scav looked to the horizon at the rugged coastline they had been hugging since leaving Fallen Oaks. Yibar called the region the great Nefra, which was an old Forcaran word for 'wall'. Stretching for two hundred miles south of Fallen Oaks as a line of sheer limestone cliffs. There was not a single location between Fallen Oaks and

Pleem where a ship could make land-fall. The Ne-fra was an area surrounded with terrible stories of ship-wrecks. The crews of such unfortunate ships would either drown, or be bashed to death against the rocky cliffs in their attempts to climb to safety.

"What's this town Pleem like?" asked Scav.

Yibar smiled and put his arm around Scav. "Like any town you've been to most likely. Plenty of young women and strong drink to take your coin and lift your spirits. That's all that really matters isn't it?"

"I'd give all my gold for a warm room and a blazing fire right now."

"Aaah, you let the cold bother you so much. You and your friends make yourself sick with grieving over the cold. We all grow cold when we die. You must get angry at the cold and fight it! Hard work is the cure."

Scav looked at Yibar a little annoyed. "I'm not a sailor and I have no designs to become one. Quick passage to the Soult will suit me fine."

#### Day 242 Year 108

Traction Sagavar sat on his white stallion and looked down on the ruins of what once had been the military outpost Emberton.<sup>3</sup> The abandoned outpost lay nestled in the narrow valley below him, nearly hidden from view beneath the canopy of a new forest.

For the past two months, since taking command of New Emberton, which lay five miles south of its namesake, it had been Sagavar's habit each morning to ride up the mountain pass and climb to the summit of Farver's Hill. Here, he gathered his thoughts and sought escape from the rigors of command.

He found the ruins of Emberton revitalizing to his spirit. Gazing down on the burnt timbers and broken walls, he was reminded of the failures of his predecessor.

It was here, over nine years before, that

the Grevan warlord Rang Taw achieved his greatest victory over the Ragean Empire. After weaving an elaborate trap, the Grevan warlord lured the majority of the Imperial soldiers who were garrisoned at Emberton far to the north. Their commander had been acting on rumors that Rang Taw's force-in-mass was waiting out the winter in the open plains. If the rumors had been true, the Grevans would have been annihilated in one swift blow. Rang Taw knew his opponent well. He knew that the ambitious Varnen-Patrell<sup>4</sup> would not be able to resist the temptation. Once the Imperial troops were well on their way, the trap was sprung. Rang Taw's men emerged from the mountains and swept down on Emberton. The token forces left behind to guard the outpost and its inhabitants could offer little resistance. Emberton was quickly taken, burnt to the ground, and its people murdered. The billowing smoke that rose from Emberton on that day, cast a far-reaching shadow that sent shock waves all the way back to the Emperor.

It was a devastating blow to the Ragean Empire's pride. It had been over a hundred years since a Ragean Outpost had been taken. The Ragean troops attached to Emberton were regarded as the best soldiers in the world; masters of the art of building defenses and holding ground. They were hardened-veterans who had furthered the influence of the Emperor Sageem with force-of-arms countless times before. At Emberton, they had been charged with defending the mountain pass which had historically been the major invasion route of the Grevan barbarians.

Later, the red-faced Commander of Emberton was summoned to Soult Tet, where he was promptly berated before the Bin'Parta and executed. So great was the Emperor Sageem's anger, that thirty officers who served under the commander suffered the same fate.

In the ensuing years the famous Varnen-Patrell Duvian Jantes had been assigned to Emberton to guard the mountain pass. Immediately upon taking command after the massacre, Jantes decided



to relocate the outpost to a new site further south. The new location was deemed to be more favorable to defense, but even more importantly, it distanced the Ragean troops, a superstitious breed, from the cursed ground where their brethren had fallen.

New Emberton was larger than its namesake and of better construction. The best masons and war-engineers had been brought to the remote mountain pass to put their skills to work. One of their many projects was the construction of a temple to the god Benyar, prominently situated in the center of the outpost. Jantes had decided that Emberton had not met its defeat at the hands of Rang Taw, but by the will of an angry god.

Traetian Sagavar kicked his horse in the ribs and rode down the slopes toward Emberton for a closer inspection. Though he was only twenty-five, the young Commander was entrusted this vital interest of the Ragean Empire. His appointment had created quite a stir in New Emberton. When Duvian Jantes had decided to retire and return to Soult Tet, he turned command over to Sagavar, until the new Varnen-Patrell arrived in the Spring. For four months, Traetian Sagavar was to be in command.

The temporary command was Jantes' way of repaying an old debt to Sagavar. A score of older officers had their pride severely wounded when they were passed up in favor of a 'boy' who had far less experience. They considered Sagavar an upstart and somewhat of an oddity. Eight years before, he had arrived at New Emberton as a freshly-recruited cavalry officer. With uncanny consistency, he had managed to always be in the right place at the most opportunistic time. In the thinking of his fellow officers, the young Commander was a hero made up of happen-stance, good fortune and a little manipulation.

Six months after joining the Eighth Varnen-Caras,<sup>5</sup> Jantes had reluctantly entrusted Sagavar with command of a scouting party. By sheer luck, Sagavar's party had stumbled across a Grevan-raiding party that had been returning across

the borderlands to their native territories heavily laden with ill-gotten treasure. The spoils of their raids on numerous country estates along the frontier bulged in their saddlebags. After a short battle, Sagavar returned to his Commander with the bodies of the Grevan raiders and their treasure in tow. That chance meeting won him an immediate promotion and earned him the respect of the Varnen-Patrell.

A year later, Sagavar had followed Jantes out into the Grevan Plains, on what was to be a massive sweep to rid the territory of the Grevan threat for good; a retaliatory strike for the disgrace laid on Emberton two years earlier.

It had been a frustrating campaign. For the entire summer, they sought out the Grevans with little luck. The Grevans as usual refused to be drawn into battle en masse. They preferred to have the initiative and element of surprise and always withdrew or fled at the sight of the approaching columns. Ambush and trickery were the tactics of the Grevans.

Having failed to engage any sizeable Grevan forces during three months of campaigning, the Varnen-Caras turned south to march back to the safety of the Ragean Empire before the winterstorms would set in. In a narrow stretch of woods, near sunset, a large Grevan force ambushed the Ragean column and began to inflict heavy losses on the surprised soldiers.<sup>6</sup> A sizeable portion of the column abandoned their baggage and pack-animals and fled into the forest, where Grevan archers cut them down. The Varnen-Patrell, mounted on horseback, attempted to rally the remnants of his calvary and form them up for a counter-attack. Sagavar was busy himself, trying to cutoff the fleeing soldiers and route them back toward the battle. Upon returning to the column, he observed Jantes leading a cavalry charge into the woodline and immediately sped his horse to join in.

As they entered the woodline, Jantes caught a Grevan arrow in the chest and was dismounted. Wounded, he crawled among the roots of

an ancient elm and drew his sword for defense.

As the cavalry charge swept the woodland and reentered the open grasslands, Sagavar noticed the Jantes' absence. Upon frantic questioning, he learned of Jantes' predicament and immediately ordered another charge to rescue their leader.

Another officer of superior rank stepped forward and announced that he was now in charge. He countermanded Sagavar's orders and gave orders to withdraw from the woodland into the open plains where the cavalry would have the advantage.

Sagavar insisted that they go back into the forest to rescue their fallen leader. He was severely chastised for questioning orders. "Besides," explained the older officer, "Jantes is a dead man. There is no reason to rescue him."

"Then we rescue his corpse!" answered Sagavar.

The officer, shocked at Sagavar's apparent rebellion asked, "Are you refusing to follow my orders?"

Pulling back on the reigns of his horse and turning toward the forest, Sagavar called out as he galloped away, "No sir, I'm refusing to follow a coward!"

Shamed by this act of bravery, a dozen other soldiers fell in with Sagavar's second charge. As a result of Sagavar's actions Jantes was located and taken to safety. Though badly wounded, Jantes mounted a borrowed horse and rallied the remainder of his forces.

If Jantes had been impressed with his young officer before, he was now both greatly endeared and indebted to him.

As the years passed, it was no secret at New Emberton who was the favorite with Jantes. Sagavar was endowed with promotions and honors that few men his age had ever been privileged to hold.

But Sagavar soon learned that his military achievements were making him an outcast. Outside of Jantes' shadow, he had few friends or admirers among his peers. The rank-and-file seemed to re-

spect him well enough, but the officers despised him.

When Jantes handed over command of New Emberton at the culmination of a great feast, there were many hushed voices of disapproval in the crowd. New Emberton had become a source of great anxiety for Sagavar in the two months of his command. He felt as though he were an exile among his own men. Even though his orders were followed without complaint or hesitation, he felt an ever-growing tide of resentment rising up within the outpost walls. It was an atmosphere of tension that he sought to escape on his morning rides.

As Sagavar rode through the first outlying ruins of Emberton, he halted his horse and dismounted. Tying his horse to a small twisted sapling, he began to walk down what was once the main street of Emberton.

He made his way along a familiar route, working his way toward the center of Emberton where he soon came to the ruins of the town's former Commander's Residence. Here, over the intervening years since Emberton's destruction, a strange ritual had arisen. Grevan warriors seeking to win victory over their enemies would make their way to the ruins in secret and build crude shrines to their gods of war. From his daily visits, it became obvious to Sagavar that these rituals were being carried out frequently, as many as three times a week.

As he arrived at the Commander's Residence he stepped over a great fallen timber and stood surrounded by charred brick walls. There on the northern wall of the ruins, the ever-growing shrine greeted his eyes. Each visit by a Grevan warrior, added to the assortment of offerings left at the wall. There were dozens of bear skulls, wolf fangs, feathers of great birds of prey, weapons and other items sacred to the Grevans, lying before the wall in meticulous order. On the wall itself, a montage of images had been painted. Some were obviously renditions of events that had happened on the day of Emberton's bloody demise. Others seemed

to represent various gods and spirits.

One image on the wall, however, gripped Sagavar's mind and refused to let go. It was the image of a great war-chief mounted on a horse. In the warrior's neck was lodged an arrow. Great rivulets of blood flowed over his chest. As the blood dripped from his leggings onto the ground, a great army rose at his feet. Sagavar knew that this man was Rang Taw.<sup>7</sup> He ran his hand over the image and smiled. He thanked the gods for Rang Taw's birth. What greater opponent could they have chosen for him? If Rang Taw was the greatest among the Grevans and the most dangerous threat to the Empire, who better to bring him down than Sagavar? Such a prize would catapult Sagavar into legend. Any command in the Empire would be his for the asking. His fellow officers might not believe in his military genius but Sagavar most certainly did. The officer had the highest possible ambitions.

Sagavar noticed the broken remains of a fluted column lying across one wall of the ruins and seated himself. Studying the images on the wall, he was just about to lose himself in thought when he heard a noise.

It was a faint rustling at first which gradually grew louder. He suddenly realized that someone was approaching. Jumping to his feet he unsheathed his sword and removed his cape so that it would not impede his movement.

Holding his breath, he started to poke his head out the doorway to investigate, when a giant form filled the archway. Sagavar leapt back from the door and readied his sword. The figure silhouetted against the morning sun was obviously not one of his own men. He could smell the Grevan and could feel a pair startled eyes sizing up the situation.

Sagavar quickly surmised that he was in a very awkward position. His only way of escape was presently blocked by the large barbarian before him. Sagavar resorted to a tactic which had saved his life a dozen times in his short career. He robbed

his opponent of the initiative. Screaming the name of his patron god, he lunged forward and sunk his sword full to the hilt into the Grevan's abdomen. The dismayed Grevan groaned in pain and fell into the room with a loud thud. The large battle-axe he had brandished slid across the floor to rest among the collection of shrine-offerings.

The young officer immediately grabbed his cape and ran outside. He nearly ran down two more Grevans who had not yet recovered from the sight of their comrade's sudden death. Sagavar attempted to dodge them, tripped and tumbled across the ground several times. Regaining his footing he began to run for his horse.

It only took a moment for him to realize that he was being closely pursued. After running for about fifty yards, it was apparent that his pursuers were gaining on him. Halting and spinning to on his heel to face the Grevans, Sagavar readied his sword for combat.

The pursuing Grevans stopped a dozen paces from their young prey. The two barbarians smiled at each other and then slowly started to move away from each other in an attempt to out-flank their prey.

Sagavar shifted back and forth trying his best to keep his back away from the Grevan warriors. Again he decided to take the initiative and charged the one which was less impressively built. The amused Grevan raised his short sword to throw off Sagavar's blow and immediately countered with one of his own. The young officer tumbled across the ground, feeling the Grevan-blade slice into his left shoulder.

He quickly resumed a standing position and readied himself. The Grevan who had wounded him was now laughing and approaching Sagavar with the utmost confidence. When he was almost in striking distance, Sagavar hurled his sword at his opponent. The Grevan attempted to deflect the missile but failed. The blade impaled the Grevan through the belly and he quickly sank to his knees; a look of profound disbelief in his eyes. Sagavar



leapt on the barbarian and used his knee to shove him on his back. At the same time, he retrieved his sword and turned his attention to the other opponent.

Leaping swiftly to his feet and readying his sword, Sagavar caused the large barbarian to halt his charge. The Grevan took a few steps back, his eyes studied his youthful opponent.

The two stood at bay for several moments. Finally the Grevan in broken Forcaran began to speak.

"Young pup, I salute you! A she-wolf must have borne you. Are you so afraid of dying that you must fight like a madman?"

Sagavar shook his head. "I've been charged with defending this pass against all enemies of the Emperor. I will gladly die to uphold that charge!"

The Grevan laughed, his laughter echoing off the valley walls, making himself all the more annoying to Sagavar.

"These lands are Grevan lands! We come and go as we choose. We burn your villages and leave your dead unburied so that they may feed the death-birds."

Sagavar was about to hurl an insult at the large Grevan when a set of strong hands closed about his throat. Another set of hands disarmed him and brought him to his knees. As his hands were being bound behind his back with leather thongs, he cursed his stupidity. The Grevan had been stalling him until his comrades could come to his aid. "Coward!" Sagavar thought to himself. The animal could not fight his own battles.

His captors shoved him back on his haunches and Sagavar saw that there were five Grevans standing around him.

"What should we do with him?" asked one.

Another one answered, "If he's with New Emberton, Rang Taw will want to question him."

Sagavar arched an eyebrow. He indeed hoped they let him live long enough to see Rang

Taw in the flesh. Perhaps he could at least achieve his destiny by killing the bastard with his last breath.

One of the Grevans reached down and took Sagavar's cape. He eyed it with appreciation and folded it up. Another Grevan quickly ripped the chain-of-rank<sup>8</sup> from his neck and held it up to the sun. The gold medallion at the end of the chain signified Sagavar's position as acting commander of New Emberton. The Grevan seemed only impressed by its content of gold and stored it away in a pouch.

For several minutes, Sagavar was subjected to the humiliation of having his possessions, including his boots, stolen by his captors. At long last, they drug him to his feet and prodded him up the main street of Emberton to the north. After several minutes they came to a group of horses hidden in a small grove of trees. Here, they mounted up with the exception of Sagavar and headed north.

Sagavar, now barefooted was prodded to the front of the group and forced to walk. Apparently, the barbarians had not detected his own horse. With great regret, he scanned the mountainous terrain ahead of him. Once they had cleared the mountain pass further north, the land would open up into the Grevan plains, the heart of Rang Taw's power. It occurred to Sagavar that the gods might have abandoned him. Had all his designs to put Rang Taw to the sword led him to this? His fate was now in the hands of the very man he had sought to destroy.

Dantor Broutfar<sup>9</sup> entered the Great Hall briskly and headed for his place at the head of the table. The other Rader-Keem rose to their feet, filling the marble hall with the unsettling sound of chairs scraping across the mosaic floor.

Dantor seated himself and quickly scanned the faces of his subordinates. He frowned and furled his brow. One of the judges was missing. "Where is Estar? Everyone was to be present for these proceedings."

## Fiction

The judges gave each other dumbfounded looks and shrugs. Finally, Velnar Curstain spoke up, "My Lordship, Estar Greban was dispatched to Abos only three days ago by your own orders. His presence there was of the utmost importance."

Dantor nodded. "Oh yes...I'd forgotten. Well, we'll have to excuse him and proceed."

At that moment two slaves entered the hall bearing great silver-trays laden with fruits, bread and drinks. Dantor motioned them away. "We have no time for such luxuries tonight!" he snapped.

The red-faced servants pardoned themselves and quickly left. A wall of disappointed faces sat around the table and looked to Dantor with great annoyance.

"All right, I've called this session because news of the utmost concern has just reached the Emperor's ears. The Arden'Vas of the Benyaran Temple is dead!"<sup>10</sup>

There was a round of startled gasps and denials.

"No, No, Listen to me! It is true. What is worse, there are rumors that someone else has been administered the rites and has assumed the role of Arden'Vas."

The hall exploded with angry shouts and disbelieving gasps.

"The Emperor Sageem has been betrayed! I was personally present when the Arden'Vas agreed that our Emperor was to succeed him as the new high priest," Dantor bellowed. "Now, please quiet down and listen to me. We are faced with a terrible situation and Sageem has turned to us to crush this treachery."

Curstain felt a lump forming in his throat. Was the Emperor actually going to go against the Benyaran Temple? He had hoped that not even Sageem could be so arrogant.

"Steps are being taken to arrest this new Arden'Vas who defiles the temple of Benyar and bring him to justice before us. Now, understandably the common rabble cannot be expected

to understand what has happened here. Undoubtedly there will be a portion of the citizenry who will attempt to stir uprisings. Gentlemen, we must crush these seeds of discontent before they have a chance to sprout."

One of the other judges, Bartian stood to his feet, "My lord,

I can't believe what I am hearing! This is an outrage. Are you asking us to choose allegiance between the Emperor and the gods? Never has this assembly been called upon to meddle in the affairs of the temple. Even the lowest initiate falls outside the realms of our powers. The priesthood has always managed its own affairs and dealt out justice for its own."

Broutfar shook his head in frustration. "I assure you, I would be the first to agree with you. But the unspeakable has happened. Treachery has breached the walls of the great temple. We have sought to have our questions answered and we are refused entry. The gods are crying to us to cleanse the temple!"

Curstain wrung his hands beneath the table. The Var'Rader-Keem and the Emperor had obviously discussed the matter at great length. They were planning on murdering the new Arden'Vas and would then use the Rader-Keem to suppress the outrage of the people. He knew it would do little good to argue against such action but he must try.

"My lord," he suddenly said, "I am fastly loyal to the Emperor and to you as well. But it occurs to me that perhaps we are assuming much on little information. It appears we have decided that a treachery has indeed taken place when in fact, by my own way of thinking, it is entirely unclear what has happened. The ways of Benyar have always confounded me. Isn't it quite possible that the new Arden'Vas was chosen by the gods themselves?"

He had tried to phrase his words very carefully. Dantor was volatile and his contempt for Curstain was well-known. Curstain leaned back in his chair and braced himself.

"Do you not have ears?" said Dantor in mock astonishment, "Did I not say that I was personally present when the Arden'Vas gave his word that Sageem was to assume the high-priesthood upon his death! The Arden'Vas himself, whom we know is the embodiment of Benyar said this. I would think that there could be no doubt that treachery was involved in this matter. The death of the Arden'Vas was only made known yesterday and it has been nearly two weeks since he died. Further, the new Arden'Vas has refused to grant anyone an audience, not even to answer my questions and to possibly put this matter to rest."

Curstain looked away from the Var'Rader-Keem's piercing eyes. He seriously doubted that any such meeting between the high judge, the emperor and the Arden'Vas took place. There was indeed treachery to be found in these proceedings.

Dantor looked satisfied that he had shamed his subordinate into silence and continued his oration, "Now, it is imperative that in the coming months we stand firm. The Emperor has informed me that the Arden'Vas will be arrested in the coming weeks and brought before us. He will be dealt with as any traitor to the Empire. Is that clear?"

There was several moments of awkward silence. Finally the Rader-Keem began to nod their heads in agreement. Curstain felt the blood drain from his face. It was obvious that Dantor had no idea who had assumed the role of Arden'Vas. He shook his head as he pictured the eight-year old girl, Jesmar, standing before this rabble.

Dantor continued, "As soon as the news of the Arden'Vas' arrest becomes known there will be some unrest in the city. This will be our primary task at hand. We must swiftly crush anyone who voices protest. The Tandor's axe will swing night and day if need be to silence those disloyal to the Emperor. Now of course, I don't want to see this happen, but we can prevent such bloodshed if we make it clear from the outset that dissent will not

be tolerated in ANYONE."

With that final emphasis, Dantor looked directly at Curstain and half smiled. It had the desired effect. Curstain was noticeably affected. Just how much did Dantor know about his involvement?

Curstain recalled with deep regret that last meeting with the Arden'Vas before his death. The old priest had extracted a final solemn promise from Curstain in those hours, charging him with guarding Jesmar's life. Somehow, by the wild twists of fate, or by the trickery of the gods, Curstain had been cast squarely in the middle of a tempest. If he acted to uphold his pledge to the frail, crippled child who now called herself Arden'Vas, Curstain would be placing his own life in extreme peril.

As he sat listening to Dantor pour over the details of what he expected from his judges, Curstain suddenly felt terribly alone against the world.

Sagavar fought against his bindings, the leather-lashings cutting deeply into his wrists. He had arrived, with his captors at a Grevan-camp early that morning. Taken to the outskirts of the camp, he was tied with his hands behind his back, to a large weathered post that had been sunk into the ground. A Grevan woman had been sent to sew his wound, which she did hastily, and without regard for any pain she might be inflicting on her patient.

Ten yards away, there were a dozen war-dogs tethered to a similar post; vicious animals that strained at their leashes yearning to investigate the new stranger in camp. Their fierce growls and barking made Sagavar uneasy. He hoped their restraints were as strong as his own.

From his vantage point Sagavar had determined that there were nearly three-hundred men of fighting ability in the camp. There were scores of children and women as well, but primarily the camp was comprised of warriors. It was a significant observation for the young officer, because the



## Fiction

Grevans normally wintered with their families far to the north and to the east of their present location.

From the various insignias and motifs he had seen emblazoned on the warrior's shields, Sagavar was quite sure that this camp was comprised of the fighting men from a single clan. If this were true, then there was also a possibility that many similar camps belonging to other clans, were scattered throughout the immediate area. It was typical of Grevans when converging for their spring raids, to set up their camps in such a manner.

Was it possible that Rang Taw's entire force was gathered in this area?

Sagavar's thoughts were interrupted when he noticed two Grevan warriors approaching him. One pulled out a dagger and cut his bindings.

"Get up, pup!" he growled.

Sagavar stood to his feet and staggered. He had been forced to walk a full day's journey on his bare feet and they were badly bruised. The other Grevan shoved him toward the camp and Sagavar was obliged to cooperate. They made their way to the center of the camp until they came to a large, crudely made building of unhewn logs daubed with mud. A door flap of wolfskin was pulled back and Sagavar was shoved in.

Falling to the dirt floor he strained his eyes in the darkened interior. There was a small flickering fire in the center of the room and about it four men sat on the ground with their legs crossed.

The officer stood to his feet, studying the mysterious figures.

One of the figures spoke, "Sit here by the fire. I have many questions to tell."

Sagavar moved toward the fire and sat across from the figure who had spoken. Across the flickering flames, Sagavar strained to see the man's face. His sudden realization that this was Rang Taw sent his emotions across the spectrum from joy to deep dread.

"If you answer these questions you will be spared from death. Food, drink and women will be

given to you in great abundance. Then you will be sent back to your people where you can live to be an old man."

Sagavar tensed. He could easily guess the nature of the questions. "I would have to hear these questions. Perhaps I am not able to give you the answers you seek."

Rang Taw smiled and nodded. "I know that you are a scout from New Emberton. Tell me, are you loyal to the Patrell Jantes?"

Sagavar's mind reeled. Rang Taw was not aware who his prisoner was. Further, it would appear that he believed Jantes was still in command of New Emberton.

"To the death!" answered Sagavar.

"Oh, I see," said Rang Taw. "I am told that you fought like a caged badger to uphold your orders. This is a good thing. I would have killed you immediately had I been told otherwise. I hate the cowards and despise traitors, among my own ranks or among that of my enemy." Rang Taw looked to his companions and spoke something in Grevan which Sagavar did not understand and then looked back toward him.

"Tell me Badger, how many men are at New Emberton for the winter?"

Sagavar was amused by the nickname given to him by the Grevan warlord. He tried to think clearly, his life was in a precarious balance.

"What a terrible position you have put me in. If I do not answer your question, I will be put to death and yet by your own words, you hate traitors. If I answer your questions, you will be compelled to kill me as well."

Rang Taw smiled, "and given the choice in your manner of death, you would choose to die and retain your honor rather than die a coward?"

"Exactly!" answered Sagavar.

"Then it is like the Riddle of Harphas. There are no answers.<sup>11</sup> You shall live Badger. I still have use of you. You will take a message to your Patrell."

Sagavar's heart raced. It could not be pos -

sible that Rang Taw would let him go.

"If the old man pays me a tribute of eighty-hundred-weight in wheat, then I will not permit my men to enter Sageem's lands for one year."

Sagavar's hopes were swiftly rising. He understood the Grevan warlord far better than Rang Taw could suspect. The message was designed to be both an insult to Jantes and a declaration that Rang Taw was in a position to make demands. To be sure, the Grevans could use valuable grain especially during the harsh winter months in the barren steppes. But it was a forgone conclusion that such a tribute would never be paid. Rang Taw was seeking to wound his enemy with insults, something he had done countless times in the past.

"I will carry your message to New Ember-ton," answered Sagavar. He then decided to push his luck. "Could the Lord of the Grevan people provide me with a mount so that I may hasten my journey?"

Rang Taw laughed and his comrades joined in. "A Grevan horse would never allow Ragean scum to mount."

And then, the smile on Rang Taw's face was gone and a sinister expression quickly replaced it.

"You have drawn Grevan blood. I must exact payment from you for this crime before I let you go."

Rang Taw reached to the fireside and picked up a small stone. He tossed the stone to Sagavar without warning. Sagavar quickly raised his right hand to catch it.

Rang Taw nodded in approval. "You favor your right hand. This is the hand which has drawn Grevan blood."

Sagavar nodded. He was confused as to the importance of this fact.

Rang Taw barked a command in his native tongue and two warriors burst through the flaps.

Forcing Sagavar to his knees one of the

Grevans grabbed his right hand and held it firmly by the wrist. The other Grevan drew a short sword and looked to Rang Taw.

The Warlord nodded and the Grevan delivered a swift, well placed blow to Sagavar's hand. The blow severed Sagavar's hand just below the wrist. One of the Grevans reached down and picked up the hand, tossing it into the flames.

Sagavar lay writhing on the floor applying pressure to the stump which only moments before had borne a healthy right hand. He bit his lip, drawing blood, in an attempt to resist the scorching desire to scream.

"Death is too merciful! It eases pain and soothes the sufferer. You Rageans have never learned this lesson. For many years your heart will burn with hatred for me. I feed on the hatred of my enemies. A dead enemy brings a stench to the nostrils, but a tormented enemy; that's what makes the Grevan people flourish."

Sagavar looked into his enemy's eyes, trying his best to conceal the pain. The Warlord motioned to the two Grevan warriors.

"You will be taken back across the river. I give Jantes three days for his answer."

The warriors dragged Sagavar to his feet and out through the wolf-skin flaps. His escorts shoved him roughly toward the edge of camp. One of the warriors took a long strip of leather and tied off Sagavar's bleeding stub.

"Take care you don't bleed to death before delivering your message Badger!" said the Grevan.

Sagavar was beginning to believe the impossible. Rang Taw, thinking his prisoner was a common soldier, was giving him his freedom.

As he walked away from the camp he thanked his patron god. He now knew that the gods had not abandoned him. They had embraced him and turned their backs on Rang Taw. Traetian Sagavar was about to forge the first victory of his career. And it would be a victory that every Patrell in the Empire would both envy and curse him for. He would return with the soldiers under his com-

## Fiction

mand and bring Rang Taw to his knees.

Day 251 Year 108

Curstain dropped heavily into his favorite chair. He brought a hand to his forehead and gripped it as if he were trying to wring the pain and frustration from his it.

He had nearly fainted from shock at the revelation he'd just confronted. He reached for the small bottle of wine on the table and drank deeply of its precious contents.

He gazed across the room toward the fireplace and shook his head in disbelief. Someone had found the secret chamber behind the large marble fireplace and emptied it.

He placed his hands over his face and fought the urge to weep. "What is happening to me?" he said to himself.

Normally he safeguarded only a few hundred Serti and some important documents to the hidden chamber. But lately he had been hiding something much more valuable within; a sword named Thornbrim and Scav Sagenthor's treasury.

The Arden'Vas had entrusted Curstain with both, shortly before his death. Now, some clever thief had removed them and Curstain knew he had little chance of recovering them.

What could it possibly mean? The oracles were vividly clear that the new Emperor was to be ordained with Thornbrim. There was no other possible interpretation of the Kaba Troth.

The treasury could be replaced, Curstain told himself. If he had to, he could sell his own villa to replenish Scav's gold. But the sword?

Some damned thief not knowing what he had stumbled across would probably sell the sword for a few hundred Serti to anyone who would have it. What possible chance would he have of ever recovering it?

He took another long drink from the bottle and emptied it. Dropping the bottle to the floor he gazed into the flames flickering in his fireplace and drifted into a troubled sleep. The gods were playing a cruel game with him. □

Next Issue: *Revenge Wears a Dark Cloak*



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# SHADIS

## INTERVIEWS

**Y**ears ago, when I first started to play role-playing games I noticed a very interesting book at my local game store. It was a small booklet on ancient weapons. It was crammed with impressive art and game stats on almost every conceivable weapon. On the cover was the the strange word, *Palladium*. That's my first recollection of *Palladium Books* and it made a tremendous first impression. Since that time, *Palladium Books* has come a very long way. Over the years, they have given the hobby some of the finest offerings available, from *PALLADIUM FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME*, to *TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES* to *ROBOTECH* and their current mega-hit *RIFTS*.

The driving force behind these games is *PALLADIUM*'s founder and president, Kevin Siembieda. We managed to pull him away from his busy schedule long enough to answer a few questions.

**SHADIS:** What did you do before *PALLADIUM BOOKS* was formed?

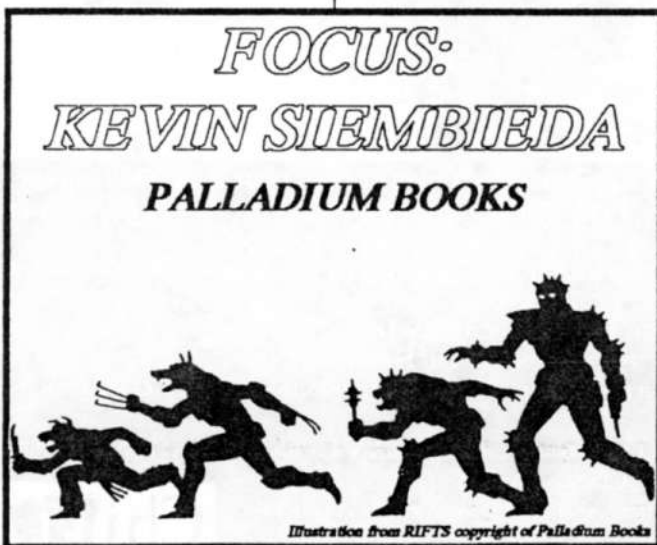
**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, I was mostly a bum

I guess. (laughs) I had always wanted to be a comic artist since I was ten years old. And up to the late seventies I was working very hard to achieve that goal. At that time, the market was very bad. Creator rights really stunk too. The comic companies had a turn-of-the-century mentality. The publishers retained the original artwork, the pay really stunk and you had to relocate to New York if you wanted to work in the business. You got no percentages and hardly any recognition for your own creations.

I suddenly discovered that the comic business wasn't what I thought at all. I'm a big proponent of artists' rights. Since then, the pay has moved up and creators' rights have really come a long way.

So, I decided, that since the comic business wasn't for me, I would do some freelance work for some

commercial advertising. I did some things for such companies as *Steve Jackson Games*, *Game Designers Workshop*, and ironically I was considered to do the artwork for *BattleTech*. But they



couldn't afford my rates so they quickly dropped me before the project was even begun.

I did a wide variety of things, box designs, logos, etc. I was doing all right. I was making about 15,000 dollars a year which isn't a great deal of money, but I was doing what I loved to do. I also fooled around with putting out my own comic and some other things that would help me later.

I had a lot of artistic freedom which I enjoyed. It was enough to pay the bills. For a single guy, it wasn't bad money and I was involved with the things I liked to do. It got rough at times though. At one point I was doing a wide variety of things just to get by. For a while I was even a bartender, which is really strange because I don't even drink.

I was a salesperson at an art supply store. I was also a keypunch operator for credit card authorization for about four months. I was one of those little twerps who punched in the numbers to give you the authorization when you pull out your American Express card. It was a terrible job with lousy pay and I hated it.

I guess one of the things I'm kind of famous for in the role-playing industry is for being one of the really good artists at **Judges Guild**. Among my various freelance jobs, I worked at **Judges Guild** for about four months. Everyone seems to think I worked there much longer because I did so many illustrations for them. I had to knock out about 75 illustrations a month, 15 of which were supposed to be full page works, about 30 half pages and the rest were quarter pages. It was a hideous amount of work. The pay was atrocious, I think I was getting paid something like 10 bucks for a half-page illustration, twenty bucks for a full page; really terrible pay. Needless to say, I was really just cranking this stuff out. Some of it was really nice, but in my opinion, a lot of it was really bad, although my fans seemed to like it.

Everyone thinks I worked for **Judges Guild** for a year or two. It only seems like that because they reprinted my artwork so many times, as

many as 26 times for some of them. (laughs) Seriously, I counted once and came up with 26 reprints for one of my illustrations. A typical illustration would be reprinted during a three year period at least a dozen times. So all the fans of **Judges Guild** were being exposed to my work pretty heavily. During my time with them, I did something like 340 pieces of art. I had help on some of it though. My brother Brian did some pencil sketches and I had Bill Lobes do some pencil sketches and inking for me. Alex Marcinisyn did some pencils which I inked so that it looked more or less like my style. Everyone got a piece of the action on those. But the pay was so terrible that at the end of three months I told them "I quit." And they said, "Please, give us just one more month!" So, I gave in and said "Ok, just one more month pal!" (laughs) It was a pretty wild experience.

**SHADIS:** *So how did PALLADIUM Books as a company come into the picture?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** I started to write and publish my first work in the middle of 1981. How I got to that point was that I had been running a **Dungeons & Dragons** campaign and I found that I was changing many aspects of that game with my own rules and enhancements. It quickly evolved into something that was very different from **AD&D**. Over the years, as we played this campaign, the game evolved into something entirely unique and my players kept urging me to publish it.

I tried to market it through several of the existing game companies that were out there, but with very little success. Finally, I decided to publish the game myself and start my own publishing company.

Now my problem was that I had very little money, I had \$3,000 when I started out, half of which was borrowed from a friend. I came out with the **Mechanoid Invasion**, which was the first thing I wrote and it was printed in November of 1981. As each book was released we were able to produce a little more, with a little more quality and so on.

**SHADIS:** *You seem to have quite a pool*



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*of talent at PALLADIUM. How did you get these people together?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, because of my work in the comics industry, I had been involved with a lot of different people, most of whom were in the comic-book field themselves or simply friends. I was also very fortunate in that I helped form a role-playing game club called the **Detroit Gaming Center (DGC)**. I helped organize DGC along with about eight other people, one of which was Erick Wujcik. Erick and I became good friends and he's become our ace game designer here. He's extremely talented and has zillions of ideas in his head. The trick is getting him tied down to work on one project and getting it ready for publication, because he's usually working on twenty things at a time.

So, I met Erick through the Gaming Center, where I was to form a lot of my gaming ideas and opinions. It was there, that I was able to see a vast amount of our competitor's products in action, which gave me a very solid idea on what the gaming market was like and what players liked to play.

The Gaming Center was quite large in those days, we would have anywhere from two to four hundred people come by in the course of a week. That's as many people as attend many small conventions, so I was very fortunate to have that kind of exposure.

I also met people through my affiliation with comic books. I had been collecting comics since I was a little kid and my earliest aspiration was to be a comic artist and/or writer. I worked toward that goal for years. I ghosted on *Defenders* for a couple of issues and did some stuff with Mike Gustovich on his *Justice Machine* and some other odds and ends. Alex Marcinsizyn and I published, what was considered at the time, to be an underground comic in 1977. We did five issues of a Black-and-white, sixty-four page comic called *A Plus*. There was no such thing as alternative press back then, so we were mostly relegated to the underground comics even though we weren't that par-

ticularly rank or sex oriented. The book didn't do that well and by issue number five we were about \$4,000 in the hole. It took a year or so to pay off our debts.

The comic-book connection helped me to meet a lot of people in the business. So, when **PALLADIUM BOOKS** began to grow, I was able to hire many of these people to work for us. For me, it was a real kick to be able to afford to hire some of the same people who were my idols as a kid; People like, Richard Corben, Steve Bissette and others. That's how we were able to tap into the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles so early.

**SHADIS:** *That was one of our next questions. We saw the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle role-playing game years before the current craze started. What prompted you to pursue the rights to the Turtles when no one had heard of them?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, what happened was that I saw a lot of ads for issue number one of the Turtles in the **Comics Buyers Guide** and I thought they looked really cool. For some reason, our local comic shop didn't carry the first issue, so I didn't get to read it. Eventually, I was able to grab up a copy of issue number two and thought it was just great.

A week later, a free-lance writer called me and asked if I had seen the Turtles' comic. I said, "Yes". He came back with, "Wouldn't it make a great game?"

I immediately answered, "Yes, I was just telling my wife that I thought it would."

He said, "Well, let me take a crack at making it a role-playing game under your **Heroes Unlimited** system."

So I tracked down Eastman and Laird and talked to them. By the time the contracts were ready to be signed, I had already come up with some strange ideas to include all sorts of mutant animals as part of the game; A system where you could generate any kind of mutant animal. I also decided to make it a game that could be played with **Heroes Unlimited** or as a game in itself.

Well, the free-lancer fell through and I called up Erick Wujick about jumping in on it. I didn't have the time to work on it and I told him all my ideas, which really got him excited about the project. By this point, issue four of the Turtles was out. Eric banged out the game in about a month and a half and well, the rest is history.

As far as I know, we were the first licensee of the Turtles. In fact, I guess I was inadvertently responsible for a lot of the mass-marketing that came to the Turtles. Their marketing agent has parleyed this craze into a multi-million dollar product line which now includes a line of toys, T-shirts and even air-freshners. (laughs) The person who is largely responsible for this marketing and promotion is a man named Mark Freedman from a company called Surge Marketing. Now, this was back in 1986, the Turtles game had already been a run-away hit for us. The comic was up to issue nine or ten. The comic was a mega-hit, in the sense that it was the first alternative press black-and-white comic to sell over 60,000 copies. The Turtles comic sales were already at 100,000 copies for an initial press run and climbing. This was unprecedented.

We had sold something like 20,000 copies of the game at that point and it had only been out for about a year. We never dreamed it had that kind of potential, and I'm sure the creators didn't either. By this time, we were going after another licensing, for **ROBOTECH**, which later became our second mega-hit game. So the guy we had to work through to get the license for **ROBOTECH** was Mark Freedman. And he wanted to see some of our products before making a decision. So we sent him our books, along with **Justice Machine**, which was another licensed product. And along with the books, we sent the Turtles game.

He got the books and saw the Turtles and called me immediately. He said that these turtles were just insane. He went on and on about them, They're funny, bizarre, who thought of this?. Well, everyone now has heard of the Turtles and they know who they are so they've grown on us a little

bit. Now, you don't think twice about their ridiculous name, *Tecnnage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. But in the early days, whenever someone heard the name, they would chuckle and raise an eyebrow. It was the kind of thing that got a laugh from everybody who saw them. It didn't matter if you were a mom, a truck driver or a little kid, you saw something in these Turtles. And that's the kind of reaction we always got from the Turtles products. So Mark was planning on leaving the company he was with at the time and he kept asking me about the Turtles. Did I think it was marketable as a toy, would it sell? What about an animated series?

Finally, I told him, "Hey, I'm only a licensee. You need to call Eastman and Laird and discuss this with them."

Well, he called them and they pounded out a deal almost immediately. It took about a year and a half to get the TV series off the ground and get the toys out in a test-market. And Boom! Three years later, we have Turtle-mania.

So yeah, my interest in comics just put me in the right place at the right time and I was able to grab onto something before it sky-rocketed. Since 1985, we've sold about 130,000 copies of just the basic Turtles' game. We've sold 40,000 copies just this year and will probably break 50,000 by the end of the year. Each of the supplements have sold between 20,000 and 50,000 copies, depending on how long they have been out. So, we have been doing just fantastic with this line.

*SHADIS: Who were some of the people who inspired you the most?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, again, because of my comic book background my earlier heroes were in that field, Jack Kirby, Wally Wood, Neal Adams, Richard Corben and other artists. They were all major influences in my artwork.

I guess I don't really think of myself as a game-designer so it's hard for me to answer this question by pointing to just a few people. I think of myself more as a story-teller. I love stories and I like to discover them in comic books, novels,

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movies, plays or whatever. So, of course I was influenced by all of these mediums.

In the movies, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas are among my favorites. Certainly, David Ogilvie the advertising genius was one of my heroes and a big influence. Ogilvie is a god. (laughs) If you are thinking of getting into this business you need to grab a copy of his book.

In the early days, my greatest ambitions were to just rise out of poverty. (laughs) I realized to do it right, I would have to do it full time and let my freelance work go. So in 1982 and 1983 my gross income was about \$6,000 dollars. I was literally living on macaroni and cheese. If my parents didn't offer me three dinners a week I ended up eating cereal. To this day, I can't stand the thought of eating macaroni and cheese. So I had a lot of motivation to make this company work.

Going back to the original question, I also loved H.P. Lovecraft, Robert E. Howard. I suppose I was just the typical kid. Give me an Errol Flynn movie or a good science-fiction thriller and I was happy.

I've always been a fan of history and real-life subjects as well. For example, the *Compendium of Weapons Armour and Castles* grew out of this interest. To do that book, Matthew Balent went through hundreds of volumes of books in his research. He has a degree in library sciences, which really helped him. By the way, Matt was another talent I met through the *Detroit Gaming Center*. I must have went through about 150 books myself.

I love to read about myths and legends, bits of history, natural phenomenon and so forth. I like to take the material I've read about and weave it into a pseudo-scientific plausible scenario and build something around that.

I think I've been successful in doing this because so many fans write or call me and say, "Gee, it's so realistic."

I'll say thanks, but really many of our games have such a ridiculous premise. But so do

many movies and books, especially when you get into areas of magic, the supernatural and monsters or so forth. All we've done at **PALLADIUM** is weave these crazy notions into a plausible world.

Erick Wujick makes me look pretty bad when it comes to research. This guy must read a thousand books a year; he's phenomenal. I don't have the time to do as much reading as I used to. I've gotten caught up in the business end of **PALLADIUM**, getting projects finished and managing. But I love to do that too, so it's not all bad.

*SHADIS: So how has success taken away from the things you really like to do? We've noticed you still write a lot of the material PALLADIUM puts out.*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, a lot of people claim that I am a workaholic. I don't really buy that because I love to take time off from work to enjoy myself for a week or two. From my understanding, most workaholics can't stand the thought of taking off from work.

I find my work really exciting and I love it. I find as much pleasure in cutting a big deal or in developing a new package for one our games as I do in writing.

I put in about forty hours during a slow week, but mostly I put in anywhere from 70 to 90 hours a week. There were two months there when I didn't even have a life outside of work. I would work constantly. Someone would shove some food in front of me and I would eat then go back to work. Basically I was just eating, sleeping and working. It can get pretty gruelling. A lot of people don't realize how much work it can take.

*SHADIS: What is PALLADIUM Books most popular product?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** That's a good question. Obviously the Turtle stuff is extremely popular thanks to the current mania caused by the cartoons, movie and other merchandising. That's a real hot item for us and by sheer numbers it would have to be the largest.

As far as some of our other games,



**ROBOTECH** has always been a hot item for us. And our latest game, **RIFTS** is selling phenomenally. We sold out the first 10,000 copies in less than three weeks. And it's one of our more expensive books, so those figures are even more staggering. I'm so glad **RIFTS** is doing well because we busted our butts getting it out. There was so much work involved in that game and an incredible amount of artwork to pull together. So I'm really proud of that project. We tried to cram so much material between the covers that we were looking at a book that was going to run 310 pages or more. We decided to reduce the print size from what we normally use and that allowed us to cut the size of the book down nearly 50 pages.

**RIFTS** was a risk for us to put out. It's such a strange concept that it was impossible for us to know if it would be well received. We loved and enjoyed playing it, but would anyone else?

***SHADIS:** If you had to pick, what product are you the proudest of?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Gee, that's a tough one. We put so much of ourselves into each game, I'm not just saying that, I mean it's really a tremendous amount of work. When you finally get one finished and to the publisher, you're really proud of it. It's hard to pick a favorite. But my sentimental favorite would have to be the **PALLADIUM Fantasy Role-Playing Game**. That's the game that made us. I have a lot of fond memories of play testing that game and developing it with good friends.

Now, **ROBOTECH** I consider as my best game. It's a very simple and clean set of rules, very easy to learn and understand. Yet it captures the TV show very effectively.

**RIFTS**, of course, being our latest release, really excites me. In many ways, it's the culmination of our *Mega-verso* and ties a lot of our other games together. It also is our first game to feature color artwork.

***SHADIS:** We noticed that **PALLADIUM** has always released their games in simple soft-back book form. For years, the trend was to split*

*an RPG system into two or three books cram it in a box with some dice and send it to the stores. Now the trend seems to be heading toward the single unboxed book.*

**SIEMBIEDA:** One of the things **PALLADIUM BOOKS** had going for it when we started was that we were so poor. We had to be very cost effective in everything we did.

So, I sat down and looked at costs. A box similar to those used by the other game companies would cost anywhere from \$1.00 to \$2.00. We just couldn't afford to go that route.

Because of my comic background I had always loved the trade paperbacks. They are real common and inexpensive. For some reason the game industry wasn't interested in using this format, which seemed strange to me. I couldn't understand it. Why should I do a hardbound book or a box that would add several bucks to the cost of producing the game? I decided we could do it as a trade paperback and pass the savings on to the reader. That \$2.00 I save on each game could also go toward buying higher quality artwork and so forth.

Think about it for a moment. How many gamers do you know who carry the game-box around with them when they show up to play the game? You always dump the box or throw it on the shelf, shove the books in your back pack and off you go. I don't think the gamers were demanding that RPGs come in a box.

As far as the gaming industry goes, we really pioneered the concept. In fact, one of our distributors told us not to go soft bound because, "Gee you have such a nice company going here. I would hate to see you destroy yourselves."

And now, it's the norm for this industry.

***SHADIS:** We've been working on gathering information concerning bad-press and other assaults on RPGs. We also get a lot of mail from gamers who are concerned about the subject. Has **PALLADIUM Books** been targeted for such assaults? And what are your personal feelings on the*

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*matter?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** Well, it really saddens me to hear those kind of accusations. We get a lot of that type of mail also. A lot of fears and misconceptions about RPGs are floating around out there.

I was on a local radio talk show recently, and I was confronted with such questions. As a matter of fact, our Turtles game was targeted as being too violent.

You've probably noticed we put disclaimers on some of our material. It's my feeling that rather than avoid subject matter which older gamers are demanding, it's best to put a warning on the package stating that it's not suitable for younger players. And that's where a lot of the problems arise. There's this misconception in the media and in the minds of many parents that RPGs are targeted for young kids.

These games weren't designed for eight to ten year olds. Primarily role-players are high-school level and college kids.

But these are the misconceptions people have; that the game is played by younger children; that gamers dress up in costumes and run around in sewers. And a lot of people insist that the use of magic in RPGs is based on some sort of satanic rituals or that the magic is somehow 'real.'

So, I always try to destroy these misconceptions by pointing out the truth; that roleplayers are normally a bunch of high school or college friends sitting around mom's kitchen table having a good time. About the only concern for mom is that her son is guzzling too much pop or eating too much junk food. (laughs)

But it amazes me, that people can seriously believe that the magic in RPGs could possibly be real. We even have some players who will call us up and say, "Geez, you had a character summon up a demon in that last adventure. Isn't this promoting devil worship? I believe in God and I don't want to be drawn into the occult."

So, I have to tell them basically, if it really bothers you, don't play the game. I also try to ex-

plain to them that this stuff is not real. We've made this stuff up, we didn't go to the library and study a book on Satan or anything. Casting a spell in an RPG is not going to summon up a real demon on the gaming table. It's not devil worship and we don't promote it.

It's a very frustrating issue for us but I don't really know how to best combat it. It's hard to combat the wild rumors that are floating around, especially when these rumors are so groundless.

**SHADIS:** *Is there anything that gamers can do themselves to combat these misconceptions?*

**SIEMBIEDA:** One thing they can do is that when confronted with these accusations they should keep their cool. You're going to get very offended and very angry when someone calls you a devil-worshipper or says you're strange. But, you need to present your arguments very rationally, and whatever you do, don't attack anyone's religious beliefs. That's just going to make things worse. Just accept the fact that people have varying beliefs and that sometimes they are just not able to see your point of view. That's fine, you've done what you could.

The lowest common denominator of RPGs is that they are fun. Remember these are 'games' and the only thing you can demand from a game is that they are both fun and entertaining.

There may be some nice added benefits. For example, you are inadvertently educated while playing most RPGs. I've learned about both ancient and modern arms, geography, cultures, you name it. I really enjoy that little extra benefit. But the bottom line is 'FUN.' When I design a game, my goal is allow players to have wonderful adventures and have a great time. I want them to kick back after a session and have all these wonderful experiences they can share.

A lot of people will pull out their psychology books and say, "well, roleplaying promotes social activity, it relieves stress, it helps to build teamwork and teaches people to work together."

Yeah ok, those things are all true, but that's not my concern. I want people to have fun playing my games. It's nice that there are a lot of positive side-effects, but that's not my focus.

**SHADIS:** Before we close, are there any plans for the future you would like to reveal to our readers?

**SIEMBIEDA:** Yeah, we have a lot of things in the works right now. *Boxed Nightmares* is nearly finished. It is a supplement for *Beyond the Supernatural*. No, it does not come in a box! (laughs) The title is derived from the cover art on the book which shows a Tasmanian Devil in a packing crate.

We have a new Turtles' Supplement coming out in November called *Mutants in Avalon*.

I really wanted to get the first *RIFTS* sup-

plement out before the end of the year but it looks like it won't appear until January. We get about two calls a day crying for a *RIFTS* supplement and we realize there's a big demand out there already. It's going to be called the *RIFTS Source Book*. It has more monsters (almost two dozen), new Robot OCCs and NPCs, new weapons, details on the Coalitions etc; a lot of neat stuff. The nice thing about this book is that it will be almost entirely source material. The first book of *RIFTS*, understandably had to devote a lot of space to game mechanics and rules. Now, we can really dig into this new world we've created.

Other than that, we hope to have new supplements out for *ROBOTECH* and the *PALLADIUM Fantasy RPG*. □



*I'm sorry Mr. Herring, Your Dexterity is too low to be a thief. Your Wisdom is much too low to be a mage. And I'm afraid you have no experience points to speak of. You could always be a fighter.*





# Tales from the Parched Frog

By Barbara A. Blackburn

*Greetings fair Listeners! Welcome back to the Parched Frog. I am Nica, lowly bard from Rigid Crest island. I have just returned from a splendid journey and have many new tales to relate to you. On cold, wintry nights, a few of us sit here in front of a roaring fire and entertain ourselves. Great tales are shared and draughts of ale are quaffed. Come, join us and warm yourselves. And don't forget to leave a few coppers in the hat on the way out.*

*(Tonight's tale is based on an idea by Joel E. Bozell.)*

ment east of the Ginge.

Soon, all manner of fighters, mostly boys brandishing shiny swords and high hopes, flocked to challenge him, dreaming of the glory that would be theirs if they succeeded.

Weary of fighting, and even wearier of killing, he made his way to Abos. There, he did his best to blend in with the populace, hoping to become lost to the rest of the world and its furor.

There, he met a woman of some beauty who admired this strong, yet deliberately gentle man. After a modest ceremony, the two settled in a comfortable country villa and produced four fine young boys. Ryja was happy, more content digging in the soil than he had ever been carving a name for himself with a sword.

Still, intruding on his happiness, ghosts from his past haunted him. Shrewd fighters, still hungry for glory, tracked him down. And, though he always came away from such duels unscathed, his mind was at the breaking point. His wife had become distant, not recognizing the gentle man she had married in this warrior who spent his days gripping a blood-soaked sword.

One night, after the rest of his household slumbered peacefully in their beds, Ryja walked out under the night sky and cried to whatever gods were there to listen. And though he had never been a devout man, he had seen too many unexplained things in his travels to completely discount the presence of the gods. Now, in despair, he knelt on the soft, wet grass and made a horrible petition. "If some god, any god, will grant me what I wish, they may have anything I own, they may even reap my

**W**elcome back to the Parched Frog, fair listeners! I, Nica, tale teller, verse singer and merry maker extraordinaire, would like to welcome a guest to our gathering. And though it has been several long months since last we came together for a quiet evening of legend lore and liquid refreshment, I'm sure you will appreciate this young man's gift. I present to you, Edril of Melet.

Thank you, my fair lady. After such a kind introduction, I feel compelled to present to you one of the most spellbinding tales that I have ever come across. It was told to me by an ancient gentleman who had spent much of his life trapping in the Iron Mountains and claims to have witnessed some of the strange events I will relate.

Many years ago, a man named Ryja was a fighter of renown, traveling about, defeating strange beasts and powerful enemies. After a time, he had amassed a modest treasury as well as a wide-spread reputation as the most skillful oppo-

soul after death. I cannot bear this life of violence any more."

Hearing a rustling sound, he raised his head and saw a shadowy form moving through the grass. An unearthly voice split the night with its ethereal reverberation. "My son, what you have asked is in my power. I, an agent of the dark god, will grant your wish as you ask. In return, as you offered, my master will require the relinquishment of your soul. At a time when Yi'Gor sees fit, he will send me back to drain your life and reap your soul. Now what is your request?"

Trembling, Ryja muttered his desperate plea. "Make me anonymous. No one must know who I am. I want to live in peace."

"From this night on, not a being on the face of Alderac will know your countenance. Rest now, and in the morning you will be a new man. But remember, your soul is no longer your own!"

An eerie laughter filtered away into the sky as Ryja sank to the ground unconscious.

Dreaming of a life of peace, surrounded only by the love of his family and the beauty of his estate, he did not awaken until the sun shone down hotly on the back of his neck.

Sitting up, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes and gazed at the horizon in satisfaction. Hearing his wife's dainty footsteps approaching, he turned and smiled at her.

Screaming in terror, the woman ran back into the house.

Puzzled, Ryja approached the door and tried to speak to her.

"Darling, what is it? You don't have to be afraid. I'm a new man, no longer the killer. I'm free to love you as you deserve to be loved."

"Go away! I don't know who you are, but if you don't leave, I will awaken my husband. He's the greatest fighter who ever lived. He'll kill you if he finds you here."

The woman's screams brought four blonde-haired boys to her side. Seeing their father at the door, but not recognizing him, they too cried and

hid their faces. "Get away from us!" shouted the oldest boy. "Leave my mother alone or I'll thrash you!"

Hanging his head, Ryja turned and walked away. It was obvious that not only had he gained freedom from enemies, he had lost that which was most precious to him.

Ryja wandered the wilderness after that, living off the land, trapping and fishing. After years of this, he built a cabin in the Iron Mountains and contented himself with solitude. And there he waited...waited for death.

Then, one frosty fall evening, a knock sounded on his rough wooden door. Jumping to his feet in surprise, Ryja greeted his visitor with trepidation. He cringed as he recognized the familiar voice that addressed him.

"My son, I have come to collect a debt from a fighter named Ryja. Do you know him? If I don't find him, there will be hell to pay. I know he lives somewhere up in these mountains. He's tall, with blonde hair, blue eyes, long beard..."

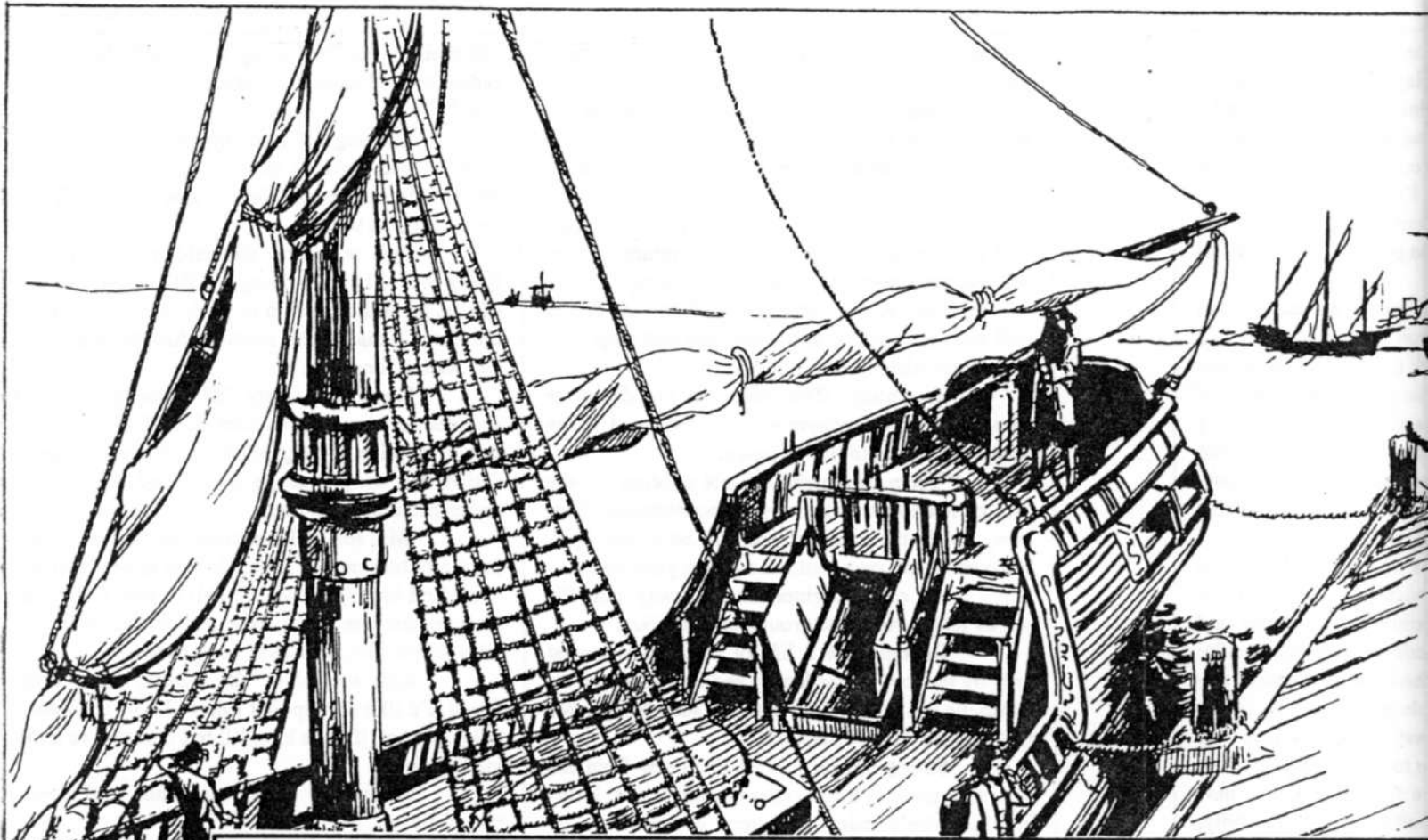
Ryja smiled at the visitor, "I'm sorry friend, I'd like to help, but I don't know the man. I tell you what, if I see him, I'll tell him you're looking for him."

The visitor wrung his hands and slowly turned away.

Seems anonymity has its advantages.

So, my friends, that is the tale of Ryja and how he beat Death. Yet, for his triumph, he still lives in those mountains alone, unable to enjoy his long life. So, remember, if ever you travel amid those desolate peaks, any stranger you meet, might be the man who cannot die. And, pray that you don't resemble the famous Ryja, for Death is still searching for the one that got away, and Death doesn't like to lose a soul. □



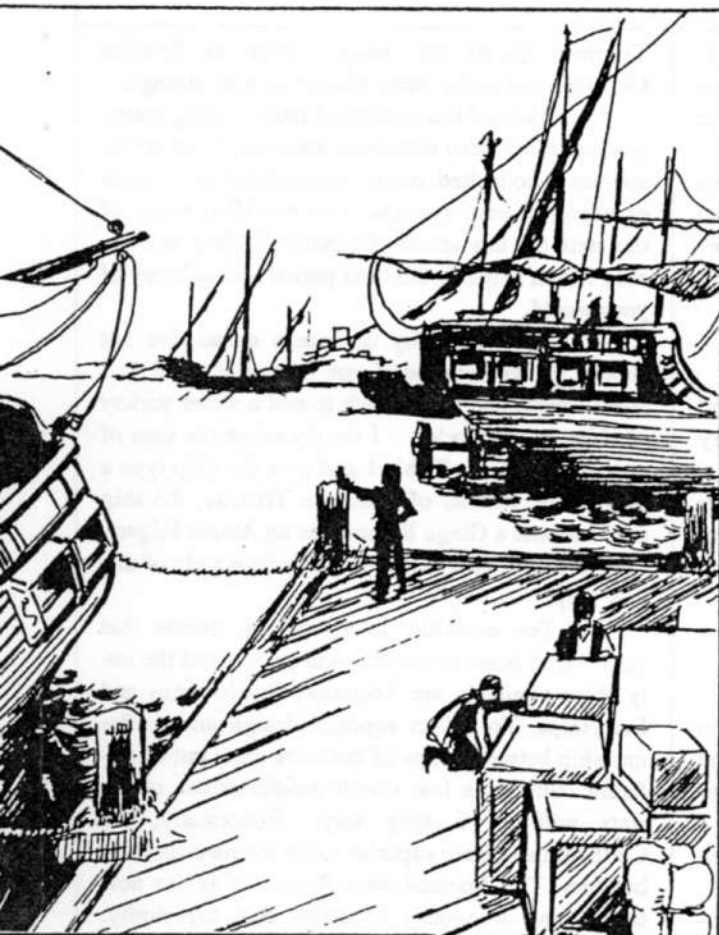


# *Plying the Trade Waters*

*Good Fortune rides the wind.  
It takes a tall ship with an iron crew to catch it.*

*By Jolly R. Blackburn*





# Waters

ind.  
ew to catch it.

R. Blackburn



**B**olin looked through the ledger with dismay and shock. The figures before him didn't lie. He was broke. Everyone had warned him that the trade routes to Raga would drain a man's gold quicker than a Sarlangan whore and they were right.

Three years earlier, tired of the rugged life of a soldier, he gathered the gold he had hoarded over the years and bought his first ship, a worm-eaten galley unworthy of even bearing a name. After riggering and scraping up a ragged crew comprised of sailors no one else would hire, Bolin set sail for Raga where he spent the last of his gold weighing down his vessel with valuable amber and fragrances. These he took on the long and hazardous voyage to Kal Dez Amarnca where they were always highly sought. There he bartered and traded for fine porcelains and alabaster which he returned with to his home port and sold for good, hard gold. With each voyage he increased the size of his purse and with it bought more ships to repeat the process.

Things had been going well too. With his revenue Bolin decided to run a route to the north into Ginge territory. It was a risky venture complete with pirate-infested waters and storm-wracked coasts. Many questioned his sanity. But his gamble began to pay off handsomely, at least in the early months.

Then the setbacks occurred. One of his finest ships, the Iron Fist, laden with precious hard-woods and wine went to the bottom of the sea after catching fire during a freak storm. On that particular voyage he had been carrying a shipment of silver on commission for a powerful Senator from Sault Tet. To save his hide he was forced to reimburse the official from his own coffers. It was a staggering blow that forced him to sell two ships to make up the difference.

But ill fortune was not through with him yet. Less than a month later, a Ginge pirate ship rammed and sank another of his ships. The vessel had been riding low in the water, filled to the gills with valuable metals. This disaster had caused him irreparable damage, sending his business spiraling. Later, another of his ships disappeared with

## Feature

*the crew, hijacked he suspected, and probably cutting a trade route further south in Kal Dezian waters under a renegade captain. That had been the death blow to his business.*

*Bolin closed the ledger and shook his head. He turned to the new owner of his last ship and smiled. "Perhaps luck will shine more favorably for you my friend!"*

**T**his article will present a system that allows players to participate in maritime trade; picking up goods in one port and taking them to far off places where, hopefully, they are in higher demand and will earn a profit.

The system I've given here is largely generic and can be easily lifted and set into any world or game system with a minimal amount of work.

### Getting Started

As the Dungeon Master, you've been charged with choosing or designing a world and preparing the campaigns and adventures that are to take place within it. As such, it's going to take a little ground work on your part to put this system in place.

Besides creating a new avenue of adventure for your players, you'll reap some added benefits. In return for a few hours of enjoyable work, you'll further develop your world and in the process, come to have a better understanding of it.

### SHIPS

Your first task will be in deciding what type of ships are available in your world. Study the ship descriptions in the *DM's Guide* and *Player's Handbook*. The thumbnail sketches provided should help you decide what ships best fit into your world. Choose a tech-level for your world and try to stick to it. Avoid the temptation to include all of the available ship-types in your world. Roman

Triremes plying the same waters as Spanish Galleons will strike many players as a bit strange.

**Table I** is a combined table of Ship statistics compiled from numerous sources. Most of the sources I consulted either contradicted each other or used different systems. I've modified many of the stats for this article. Examine **Table I** and decide which ships fit the time period and cultures of your world.

This list is by no means exhaustive but should get you started if you care to expand it. I use a simple and useful trick to add a wider variety of ships in my world. I simply adopt the stats of another ship from **Table I** and give the ship type a new name. Instead of a Roman Trireme, the ship may become a Ginge Rammer or an Alanic Frigate. I adjust a few stats to reflect the unique style of this new ship.

For example, let's say you decide that your world is set in the classical period and the only ships available are Triremes, Quadriremes and Longships. To reflect superior design and craftsmanship between ships of the same class but of different cultures, a few simple modifications of the stats will go a long way. Historically, the Carthaginians were superior to the Romans as ship-builders. The Romans were forced to devise new tactics and weaponry to offset this superiority. This fact had a tremendous impact on both cultures. If my campaign were based on the Roman world and I wanted to capture this imbalance, I would raise the seaworthiness stat for Carthaginian ships by 5%. A Roman ship of a similar type would retain the normal stats. I'd also raise the base speed of the Carthaginian ship slightly to reflect superior seamanship and shipbuilding skills. Simple modifications such as these add a flair to your maritime world. Tell your players that a Trireme is approaching on the horizon and you might get a few raised eyebrows. Tell them that a Carthaginian Trireme is approaching at ramming-speed and you'll have characters scrambling about the deck in panic.

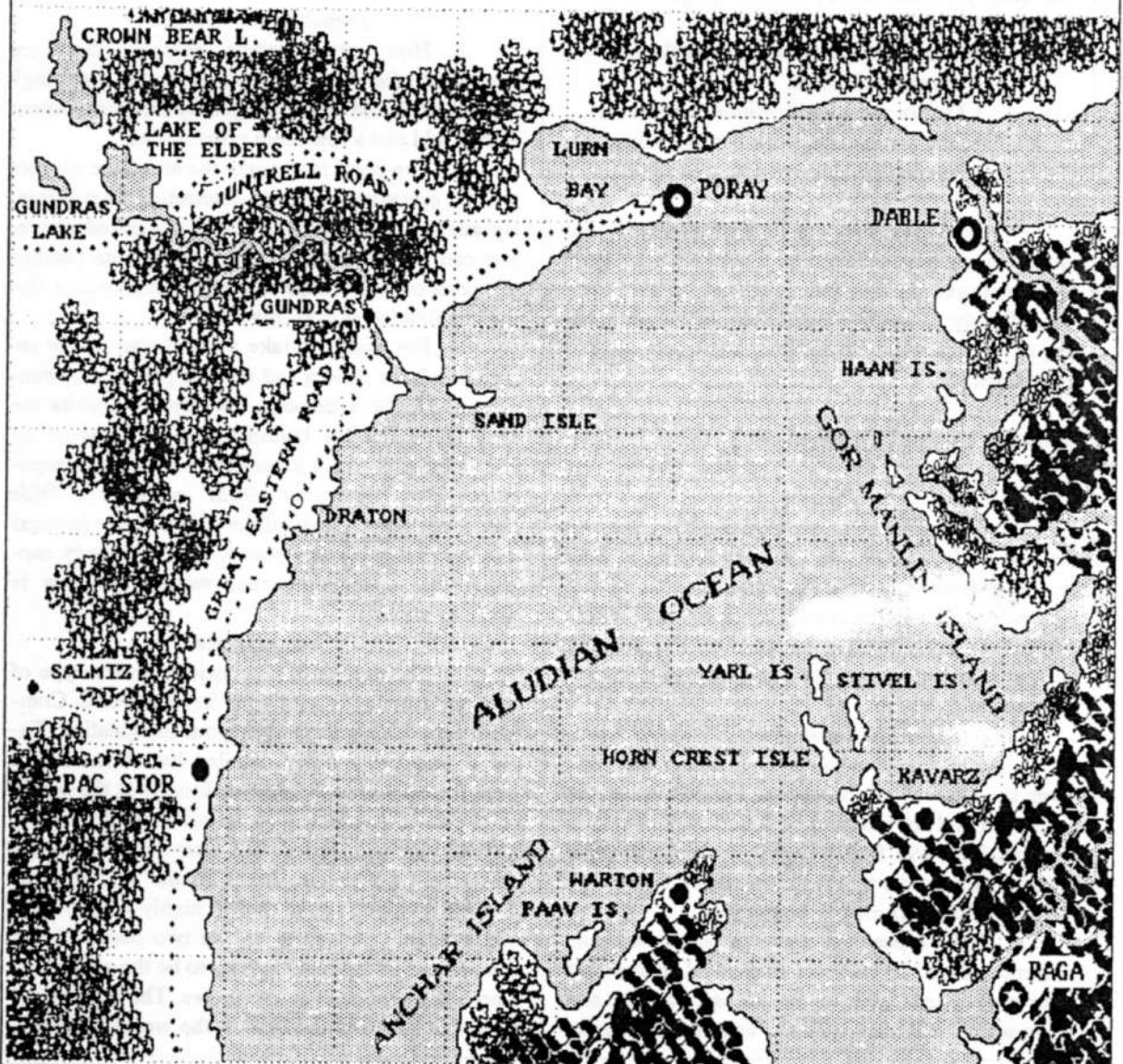
Selecting a Starting Point

Next, you'll need to pull out the maps to the campaign world you will be using. You should select an area that has at least eight good-sized port

cities.

To illustrate the processes described in this article, we will be using a small area of coastline lifted from my own milieu, Alderac as an example. Figure I shows the area we have selected to

Figure I



## Feature

start with. This is a very small area, measuring just 250 miles wide by 250 miles across. The players will eventually want to venture beyond these waters, that's fine. But for now, this area will be large enough for several sessions. We can expand the area as the need arises.

Select an area in your world that will offer the most potential for a good campaign. Look for areas with;

- A lot of coves and bays to explore.
- Numerous islands.
- Two or more nationalities or cultures.
- Large rivers that ships can sail inland on.
- Potentially dangerous waters. (Reefs, Whirlpools, Pirates etc.)

Such qualities will create adventures and make things more interesting. Figure I has many of these features. In addition, it almost forms an enclosed body of water. This makes for natural trading routes and will help confine the players early in the campaign.

## Fleshing Out and Development

### Pirates

Wherever commerce takes place, you can be sure to find pirates and thieves hoping to cash in. Sit down and look at the region you've chosen to develop. Study the coastal areas closely. Where are pirates likely to base themselves? Small island groups in remote areas make good havens for such cutthroats.

### Monsters

Pull out your Monster Manuals and look over the lists of sea-monsters. Perhaps some are territorial and are likely to be found only in certain regions. You will find it useful to construct some Random-Encounter tables for the region chosen.

### Currents and Tradewinds

Take a pencil and sketch out some ocean currents. Give the currents individual names that your players can pick up on. Ocean currents and trade-winds will vary with the seasons. If you are

energetic, you could easily develop tables to decide how and when the currents fluctuate.

Figure 2 shows our updated map. Major ocean currents, named the *Ederling Currents*, race up along the coastline toward the north. These cut travel time for ships riding them to the north, but impede the progress of those ships fighting it by attempting to move southward.

### Treacherous Waters

How about some regions that are renowned for being treacherous to shipping? Jagged reefs and areas ravaged by frequent violent storms add just a few more possibilities.

The point is to make the area your players will be operating out of as interesting as possible. By adding details such as those suggested above, you can transform those large empty blue patches of ocean on your maps into real places which fire the imagination of your players.

For example, take a small area of the region you have chosen and make it particularly dangerous. Maybe a dreaded sea-serpent inhabits the area. Mark out the boundaries of this region on your map and give it a name that conveys its reputation. The '*Waters of Death*' or '*Give a Wide Berth*' are names that sailors might apply to areas that are extremely dangerous. If a fool-hardy captain orders a ship into such waters, the crew is likely to revolt.

### Commodities

The next thing to consider is what type of commodities are being traded in your world. Commodities are only limited by your imagination. Table II includes a fairly detailed list of items that were traded within the Roman Empire at the height of its power. Again, it is by no means complete, but it should get you started. Use your imagination and add your own unique items to the list. Perhaps there is a 'black spice' that is highly sought after and available only from one or two ports. Maybe that remote island just happens to be the only place where the *Sarentian grape* grows. The wine made from that grape is the best in the world and very,



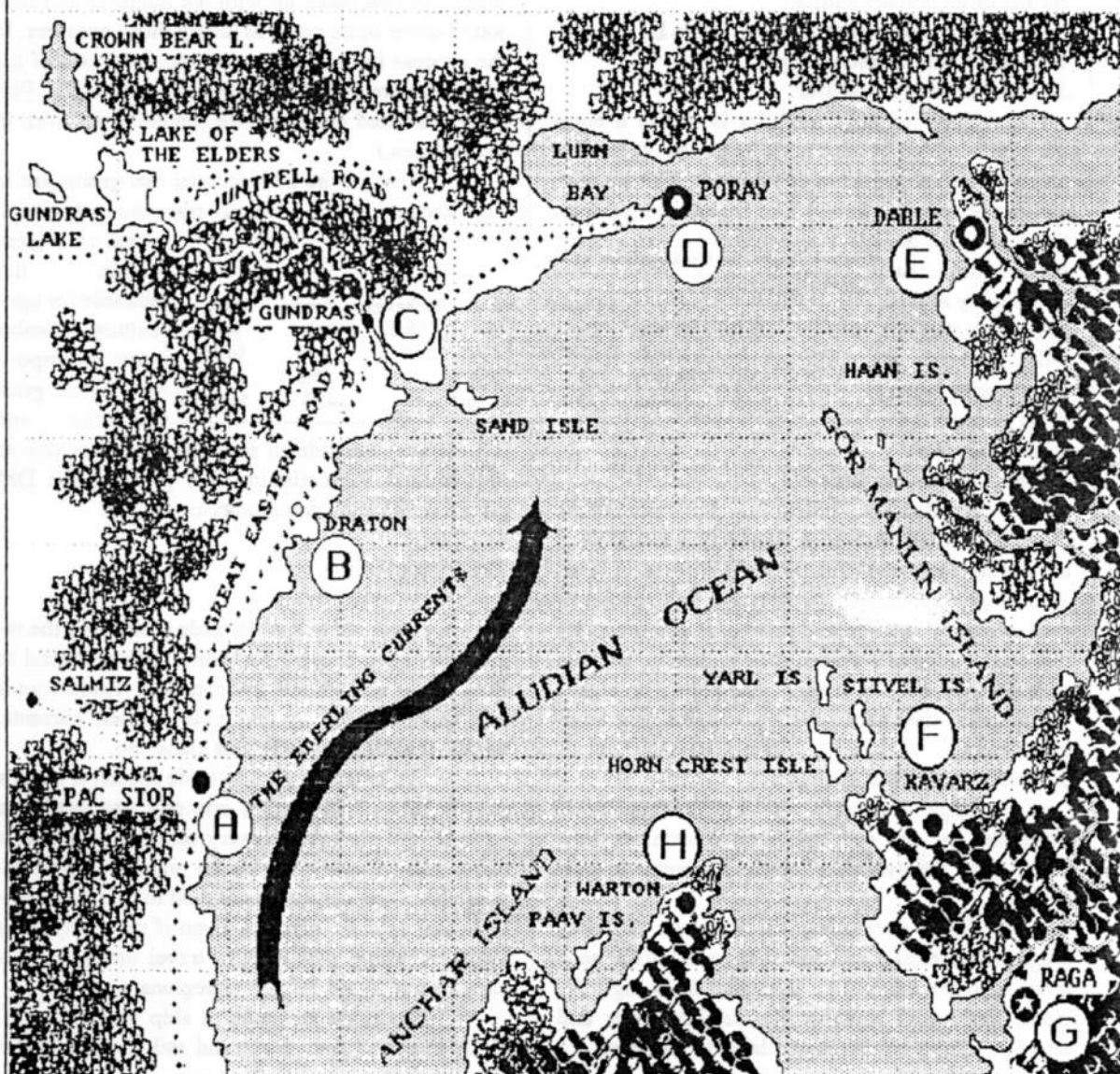
very expensive. Suddenly we have a new bit of information about our world.

Now that we know what commodities are being exchanged, we need to know where these items originate and where they are in demand.

Make several copies of Table II. You will need one for each port city in the region you've selected.

Study each of these port cities closely. Go through the list of commodities and consider what

Figure 2



## Feature

products might be produced at that particular city or brought to that city from nearby regions. What items would not likely be produced in that city?

You will need to fill out a Commodities Table for each port city that you anticipate your players will frequent. After developing five or so cities you could save time by using the same data for the cities that are similar.

For each commodity on **Table II**, you will need to determine three things;

### 1. The Exchange modifier.

The Exchange modifier is simply a number that is added or subtracted from the Value Determination Table (Table IV) die roll. This number can range from -3 to +3. The higher the number, the higher the demand for that commodity at that port and thus it will demand a higher price when it is bought or sold in that city.

### 2. The Availability Index

Availability Index is the percentage chance on 1d100 that the commodity is available at all during the week the player's ship is in port. This helps to reflect the widely varying market as well as supply and demand factors. If your port city lies on the edge of a desert, then grains might be in high demand and not readily available. The higher the number, the more readily available that commodity is.

### 3. Number of Units available.

Units Available. If the commodity is available, the die roll indicated determines how many units are available for the character to purchase.

When developing the numbers for each commodity, remember that they will effect each other to some extent. An item that is in high demand could have a lower Availability Index and thus fewer units would be available to purchase.

The following is an example of a Commodity Table already filled out. Raga is a very large capital city and a major trading center. The DM considered several things when filling out the table for Raga. For example, marble is quarried right outside the city of Raga and is therefore readily available in large quantities at a fair price. (Actually the DM came up with the numbers and then jotted down some notes to justify those numbers. In the process he learned something about one of his cities that could be useful in later campaigns. Perhaps convicted criminals are sentenced to work in the quarries.)

Grains; the DM decided that grains are in high demand. Raga, a heavily populated city, is situated on rugged terrain unsuitable for agriculture. Grains must be imported from great distances and

Figure 3 Example Commodities Table  
Table II City: Raga

Code	Product	Weight/ Unit	Price/ Unit	Exchange Mod.	Avail Index	Units Av.
A.	Marble	1000 lb	25 gp	0	60%	1d100
B.	Pottery	50 lb	05 gp	+1	85%	3d100
C.	Grains	50 lb	01 gp	+2	45%	5d100*10

not always available in sizeable quantities due to the demand. Continuing this process, the DM goes through each commodity on the list.

## Trade Routes

Now we will work trade routes into the region you have chosen. Maritime trade will tend to flow along established trade routes. These routes will be influenced by numerous factors; currents, winds, coastlines, treacherous areas, etc.

In developing these trade routes, it's not a simple case of starting at one city and getting a straight line distance to every other city from that point. Most fantasy worlds do not have the compass, therefore, sailors would tend to hug the coastlines during their voyages. Even if the compass is available, ships will tend to travel along various currents and avoid dangerous regions.

Thus, on our map, a ship would be unlikely to depart from Raga and sail straight for Po-

ray. The seasoned captain would choose to hug the coast along Gor Manlin Island to the city of Dable. Then cut across the channel to Poray. This adds travel time to the journey but the captain avoids the open ocean in favor of the safer waters.

When you work on your tables, put yourself at the stern of the ship about to embark on the voyage to the various cities.

You are now ready to complete Table III by plugging in your port cities. Using the routes you've determined, you must calculate the mileage between each of your cities if a ship follows an established trade-route. Work in the trade-winds and ocean currents you identified above. By decreasing mileage in one direction and increasing it in the other, you can simulate these factors on your routes. Later you may want to do seasonal tables which reflect the changing patterns of ocean currents during the course of a year. But no need to get that involved at this point.

You will plug your cities into Table III by listing them in alphabetical order down the left-hand column. These are the cities departed from. Next list these same cities in the same order across the top row. These are the destination cities. By cross indexing two cities on the completed table, DM will find how many miles it is to a ship's destination. Next, you will calculate the mileage and fill in the appropriate blocks. You may find it helpful to label each city with a letter and plug these letters into your table. (See figure 2)

Keep in mind that you should adjust the mileage on the table to reflect your trade routes.

For example, looking at Figure 2 we see that the city Pac lies along the Ederling Currents. A ship departing Pac Stor and riding the currents north would be able to complete the distance to the city of Poray much faster than a ship departing from Poray could arrive at Pac Stor. The DM would keep this in mind when completing Table III for this region. By simply increasing the mileage for ships departing from Poray for Pac Stor you have simulated the effects of fighting the cur-

rents south.

### Conducting Commerce

Ok, we've set the stage and painted our backdrop for the campaign. We now have a better picture of a small portion of the world. We now know what commodities are being traded, where the currents are and how they benefit or impede trade. We also have an idea where hazards to shipping lie.

Let's run through an example of how maritime trade can be handled.

Let's assume we have a party of players who have already acquired a ship and have a modest amount of gold to invest.

The party announces that they are hitting about the waterfront of Raga, in an attempt to negotiate a bargain in some type of commodity.

Things unfold as follows;

1. By a random roll of the dice, or as predetermined in the scenario, the DM announces the party finds a merchant who has a large quantity of spices for sale. If the players had stated that they were looking for a specific commodity, the DM would have rolled on the Availability Index for that commodity.
2. By consulting the Commodities Table for Raga the DM rolls the indicated number of dice under Available Units for that commodity. He determines the merchant has 700 units of spice available.
3. Next, the DM rolls on Table IV to determine how much each unit is being sold for. The DM adjusts the resulting die roll by the Exchange modifier listed on the Commodities Table. Optionally, the DM could apply modifiers for any bargaining skills that the negotiating player demonstrates.

The DM determines after some stiff haggling that the merchant finally stands firm and offers to sell his spice for 80% of the listed value on the Commodities Table. The Raga Table lists spice

## Feature

as being worth 15 gp per unit. Some simple calculation reveals that the players can buy the spice for 12 gp per unit.

4. The player's ship has a cargo capacity of 175 tons. A unit of spice is listed as 50 lbs. Therefore the ship could carry a maximum of 7000 units of spice. A ton is 2000 lbs., 40 units of spice would equal a ton. (A 175-ton cargo capacity x 40 units per ton = 7000 maximum number of spice units that could be carried.)

5. The party decides to buy all 700 available units and load them onto their ship. The purchase costs the players 8,400 gp. (12 gp per unit x 700 units) They have just purchased 17.5 tons of spice. (700 units x 50lbs per unit / 2000 lbs = 17.5 tons)

Although the players still have plenty of cargo space remaining, they are tapped of hard gold and decide to set sail to the north and try to make a profit on their venture.

6. The party opts to sail for Poray because rumors indicate spice is bringing a good price there. The DM checks Table III for the estimated mileage to Poray and calculates arrival time based on the ship's base speed. During the voyage, the DM makes appropriate Encounter checks.

7. After arriving at Poray the players hit about the docks trying to find a buyer for their spice. A wealthy merchant finally seeks them out and offers a price. The DM rolls on Table IV and adds the Exchange modifier listed on the Poray Commodity Table for spice. He determines that the merchant offers 120% of the standard price for spice. The players sell their spice for 18gp per unit. A total of 12,600gp is collected from the merchant (18gpx700units) The elated players have made a profit of 4,200 gp. This can go to buy more commodities and the process can be repeated.

The above example was a very simple, no-frills illustration of the basic system. By adding one or more of the following suggestions, the above scenario could have been greatly enhanced.

## Port Fees, Tariffs etc.

Running the trade-routes can be expensive. Most port cities have officials who monitor activity at the docks. Docking fees are administered. Imported commodities may be taxed or possibly banned. Some ports may have laws that forbid a crew from on loading or off loading their ship themselves. Instead, local laborers must be utilized.

These hidden expenses can break a company short on hard cash.

The DM can roll on Table V to determine these fees randomly or jot them down on each City's Commodity Table.

## Crew Wages

Most ships require large crews to operate them to full capacity. Crewmen will either work for a set weekly wage or for a percentage of any realized profits.

It will be up to the players to negotiate wages with their crews. I normally use 5gp per week as the standard wage for a deckhand, 10-15gp per week for an officer or crewman with navigation/mapping skills.

## Maintenance

Operating a ship has its own inherent expenses. A typical voyage can wreak havoc on a ship's rigging and equipment. Oars may snap, masts will splinter, sails tear.

At the conclusion of each voyage, roll on Table VI to determine damage to the ship that must be repaired. The results will list an amount in gold pieces. This is the amount that must be paid to a local shipwright to repair the damage. Also listed is the number of percentiles that the ship's Seaworthiness Factor is reduced by. This reflects damage to the ship's structure. Damage to a ship's structure is not covered under the gold-piece expenditure to repair damage. It costs an additional 250gp to raise a ship's Seaworthiness Factor by one percentile. A ship's Seaworthiness can never be raised above the maximum for a ship of its type.



Ship owners who neglect to maintain their ship on a regular basis will soon find themselves with a rotting hulk on their hands.

During a voyage, a DM should check for the possibility of the ship sinking after each storm encountered or similar events that would place the ship in jeopardy. Treat the ship's Seaworthiness as a saving throw. If the ship fails its Seaworthiness throw, it takes on water and sinks.

You may allow any appropriate proficiencies/skills possessed by the crew to modify the saving throw.

### Conclusion

Well, that's the nuts-and-bolts of the system. A book could be filled with additional enhancements and adventure ideas, but sadly space restraints in this magazine will not allow me to continue. As always, if there is enough feedback, I will be more than glad to present the rest of my material within the pages of a future issue.

This system has been successfully used in my own campaign and proved popular with the players. It also has been used as a Play-by-mail system with interesting results.

In a typical campaign, using this system, the players begin with one ship and bounce from port to port. Once in port, the ship normally lays over for a few days and the players participate in the normal variety of adventure in and about the city. An occasional rumor may draw them away to a dungeon or ruins and then the party returns to the ship and sails for the next port.

If the party is successful in their dealings, they will eventually buy more ships and hire NPC crews. The players often open an office on the waterfront of a large port city and place an entrusted NPC or retired Player Character in charge. From this base of operations, the party keeps their treasury and pays out wages to crews. I've even had players buy warehouses and store commodities until a more favorable price could be obtained.

This system does have one drawback. On-

ce your players get a taste of the business world, there will be no holding them back. They will start to expand their ambitions. They will want to corner the market on certain commodities.

Let me know how your campaign is going if you decide to use this system. Good Sailing!

*Sources of information for this article included; page 126 of 2nd Edition AD&D Dungeon Master's Guide, page 70 of 2nd Edition AD&D Player's Handbook, and page 44 of Wilderness Survival Guide. Also of tremendous help was Margaret Foy's article High Seas in Dragon #116. All of these sources are copyrighted by TSR.*

*Recommended reading would include Palladium Book's Adventures on the High Seas. Also Salamander Book's Classical Warfare which is a sensational book and highly recommended to Wargamers and Role-players alike. □*

# Star Song

A Quarterly Magazine of  
Fantasy, Science Fiction & Horror

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We Have Tomorrow's Stars  
Today  
Submissions Welcome

# Plying the Trade Waters

**Table I: Ship Data**

Type:	Base Miles /24 hours	Seaworthiness	Cargo Tons	Crew*	Cost
Caravel	96	70%	175	35	13,000
Coaster	72	50%	100	25	5,000
Cog	72	65%	200	19	10,000
Currach	50	55%	05	07	500
Dromond	48	40%	75	200	15,000
Galleon	72	65%	130	500	20,000
Great Galley	72	45%	150	130	30,000
Knarr	96	65%	40	14	3,000
Longship	120	60%	50	50	10,000
Trireme	72	65%	65	180	5,000
Quadrirème	48	55%	320	240	25,000
Ginge Yarpan	75	65%	60	08	8,000

**Table explanations:**

**Type:** Basic ship type/design, **Base Miles:** The average number of miles a ship can sail in a 24 hour period under normal conditions. **Sea-Worthiness:** As explained in the DM's guide. **Cargo:** the available cargo space on the ship. **Crew:** Number of crewman required to run the ship under normal conditons. **Cost:** Basic cost for a new ship of a particular class.

**Table IV Value-Determination (3d6)**

00.....	20%
01.....	25%
02.....	30%
03.....	35%
04.....	40%
05.....	45%
06.....	50%
07.....	60%
08.....	70%
09.....	80%
10.....	90%
11.....	100%
12.....	110%
13.....	120%
14.....	130%
15.....	140%
16.....	150%
17.....	160%
18.....	170%
19.....	180%
20.....	190%
21.....	200%

**Table III Mileage Table**

		DESTINATION									
		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
D E P A R T U R E	A	NA									
	B		NA								
	C			NA							
	D				NA						
	E					NA					
	F						NA				
	G							NA			
	H								NA		
	I									NA	
	J										NA

**Table V Port Fees (1d10)**

01.....	A
02.....	A,D
03.....	B
04.....	B,D
05.....	A,E
06.....	C,D
07.....	C,G
08.....	B,E
09.....	B,F
10.....	A,F

**NOTES:**

- A: Docking Fee: 1d100gp
- B: Docking Fee: 100+(1d100)gp
- C: Docking Fee: 200+(1d100)gp
- D: Must hire local laborers to on/offload ship: (1d100gp per ton)
- E: Tarrif: 10% of the Standard Value of all Cargo aboard ship
- F: Tarrif: 15% of the Standard Value of all Cargo aboard ship
- G: Tarrif: 20% of the Standard Value of all Cargo aboard ship

# Charts & Tables

**Table II Commodities Table**

City:

Code	Product	Weight/ Unit	Price/ Unit	Exchange Mod.	Avail Index	Units Av.
A.	Marble	1000 lb	25 gp			
B.	Pottery	50 lb	05 gp			
C.	Grains	50 lb	01 gp			
D.	Wheat	50 lb	01 gp			
E.	Oil	10 lb	01 gp			
F.	Wine	10 lb	03 gp			
G.	Spices	50 lb	03 gp			
H.	Textiles	100 lb	05 gp			
I.	Silk	50 lb	25 gp			
J.	Timber	500 lb	05 gp			
K.	Papyrus	25 lb	05 gp			
L.	Slaves	150 lb	50 gp			
M.	Horses	750 lb	50 gp			
N.	Cattle	900 lb	35 gp			
O.	Wild beasts	100 lb	70 gp			
P.	Hides	50 lb	15 gp			
Q.	Furs	50 lb	20 gp			
R.	Purple	10 lb	02 gp			
S.	Lumber	500 lb	08 gp			
T.	Rare Woods	500 lb	25 gp			
U.	Ivory	50 lb	60 gp			
V.	Gems	varies	varies			
W.	Meat	50 lb	05 gp			
X.	Fruits	50 lb	05 gp			
Y.	Vegetables	50 lb	05 gp			
Z.	Paper	100 lb	10 gp			
AA.	Gold*	100 lb	1000 gp			
BB.	Silver*	100 lb	100 gp			
CC.	Copper*	100 lb	10 gp			
DD.	Tin*	100 lb	10 gp			
EE.	Iron*	100 lb	10 gp			
FF.	Amber*	25 lb	2500 gp			
GG.						
HH.						
II.						
JJ.						

**Table VI DAMAGE TO SHIP (1D12)**

	COST TO REPAIR	DAMAGE TO S-WORTHINESS
01	00GP	00%
02	50GP	-01%
03	75GP	-01%
04	100GP	-01%
05	125GP	-02%
06	150GP	-02%
07	200GP	-02%
08	250GP	-03%
09	300GP	-03%
10	400GP	-04%
11	500GP	-05%
12	600GP	-06%
13+	800GP	-08%

**MODIFIERS:**

+1 per storm/reef encountered during voyage

+2 If ship is rammed by another ship or object.

**NOTES:**





# FROM THE SCROLLS OF GREYTAR



By Jolly R. Blackburn

**G**reetings young students,

If you've already devoured this issue's offering of fiction, then you have undoubtedly stumbled across numerous footnotes. I placed the footnotes in order to make some clarifications and comments which I felt would be interesting to the reader. The explanations to the footnotes are found here in this column.

## Footnotes

1. The Yarpan is a small single-masted ship used for maritime-trade along the eastern coast of the Ragean Empire. The Yarpan was originally constructed by shipwrights on the Ginge Islands. Migrating craftsmen later began to build the sturdy ships in Ragean ports. While having a very low cargo capacity (50 tons) the ship is renowned for its seaworthiness and ruggedness.

2. Since Scav's father once commanded the Emerald Fleet it would be essential for him to adhere to such religious ceremony. Even if Relnus did not hold such rituals of much importance, the sailors who served under him would demand their practice.

If Marlog has been appeased, then his dolphin steeds deliver blessings to a ship and its crew. If in disfavor they can also bring storms and hidden reefs to the ship's path.

3. For more information on Emberton's destruction see *Of Embers Born*, issue#1.

4. The Varnen-Patrell is a military title. In the Ragean military the legion is called Varnen-Caras (varnen, meaning 1,000 and caras, meaning best) Patrell is the Forcaran word for captain or commander. Thus Varnen-Patrell is the commander of a Varnen-Caras or legion.

5. The Eighth Varnen-Caras is one of sixteen legions maintained by the Ragean Empire. The Eighth Varnen is attached to the provincial capital city of Holgen, and defends the northern borders of the Empire. The Eleventh Varnen is also attached to Holgen as a reinforcement against recent Grevan hostilities.

The Eighth Varnen routinely sees more military action than any other Varnen in the Empire. As such, it is comprised of the most experienced and best trained men in the Empire.

6. This is the famous Battle of Wilderwoods. Varnen-Patrell Jantes made a tactical blunder and allowed his men to be ambushed in a typical grevan trap. He further jeopardized his situation by trying to launch an offensive. This blunder nearly caused Jantes to be relieved of command. However, Sageem who was facing a major crisis at Soult Tet, refrained from taking immediate action. Later, at the Battle of Broken-Forge, Jantes re-

## From the Scrolls of Greytar

deemed himself and regained favor.

7. For more on Rang Taw, refer to issue #1 Of Embers Born.

8. Politicians and Military Officers in the Ragean Empire wear chains-of-rank to signify their position. When a command or position is transferred, the chain-of-rank is also physically transferred. Typical chains-of-rank are gold medallions, approximately four inches in diameter, suspended on a medium-sized chain.

9. Dantor Broutfar is the Var'Rader-Keem (High Judge) of the Ragean Empire. (See issue no.#1 Bones of Ruin for more information.) He is extremely loyal to Sageem and works toward achieving the aims of his Emperor. Dantor is also a bitter enemy of Velnar Curstain. The ill-feeling between the two judges is traced back to their days in the military, although the exact circumstances are unknown.

10. The Arden'Vas is the High Priest of the Benyaran Temple. See issue# 4 Bones of Ruin and Scrolls of Greytar for more information.

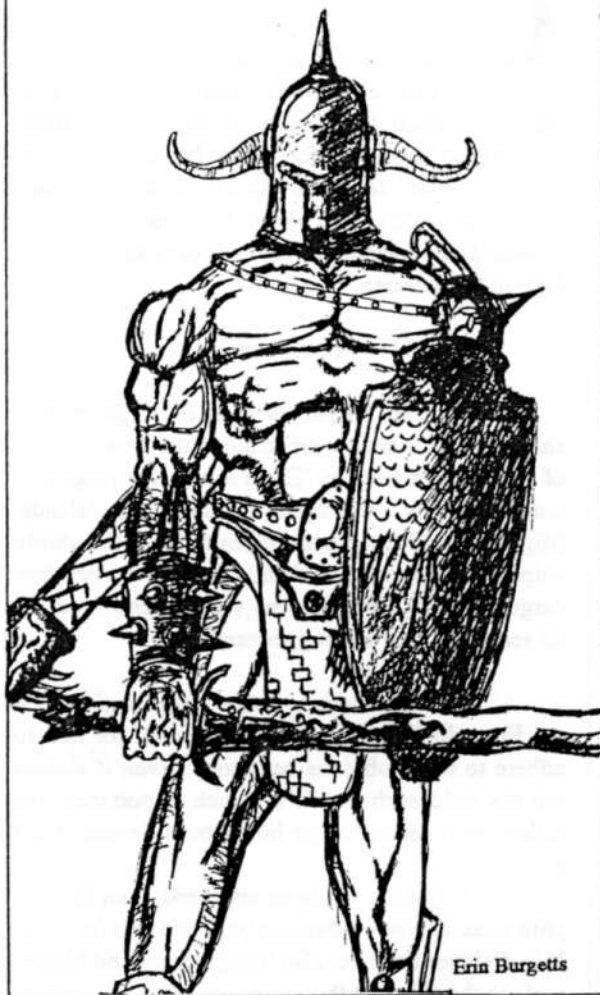
11. Riddle of Harphas. Rang Taw was referring to a popular Haagan folk-tale. As the story goes, Harphas was an evil-thief who had a habit of ambushing lonely travelers along dark forest trails. Harphas always wagered with his victim. If the victim could answer his riddle, then he could keep his gold and go on his way. If the victim failed to provide the proper answer, then he must forfeit his life as well as his treasures. When the victims failed to provide the proper answers, Harphas would cut their throats and steal their gold. There are various endings to the story with various heroes outwitting Harphas and slaying him.

12. Sarentian Wine is a very expensive wine made from the Sarentian grape. This rare

grape grows only on Yarl Island off the coast of the Ragean Empire. Attempts to grow the vine in other locales have failed miserably over the years. On Yarl Island the grape refuses to grow anywhere but on the volcanic slopes of Sarentian mountain. Velnar Curstain, inherited Yarl Island from his father-in-law. His shrewd management of the island estates has earned him the fortune he now enjoys.

Well, once again I've been allotted a miserly amount of space, so I close.

Until next issue. □



## NEWS FROM AFAR

### NEW PRODUCTS, RUMOURS, ....

#### Sci-Fi Channel to make its debut

Early in 1991, sci-fi fans will have a cable television channel devoted to their favorite genre. The Sci-Fi Channel will be much more than just a lot of Star Trek reruns and 1950's vintage Bug-Eyed-Monster movies. A long list of new programs will be offered. The list includes, Issac Asimov's Universe, Captain Planet, programs covering new books, movies, TV shows, Computer software and technology, animation, special effects and so on.

John Davis, of Fan Clubs Inc., has been chosen to publish a bi-monthly magazine called Sci-Fi Channel Magazine. Besides listing programming schedules for the TV channel, it will also stand alone as a general-interest publication. Davis plans to offer the magazine via news-stands as well as through subscriptions.

The magazine will also offer two or three pieces of fiction, cartoons, nonfiction articles, and regular columns.

Sci-Fi Magazine is still in the design stages so Davis has put out a plea for Sci-Fi fans to let him know what they would like to see covered in the magazine.

I would urge SHADIS readers to write to Davis and insist on a Sci-Fi RPG column. Davis has hinted that columns and material that is well-received in the magazine may be crossed over onto the television channel. Send suggestions and inquiries to John Davis, Box 111000, Aurora, Colorado 80011

#### Mayfair Games

Mayfair has released a new adventure for their DC Heroes RPG. *Come On Down!* is an adventure for four to six characters and centers around members of the Justice League International. It is described as the sequel to *Exposed!* the adventure included with the DC Heroes Second Edition. *Come On Down!* is the first full length adventure to be released that is specifically designed for use with the second edition game.

Also from Mayfair is the CHILL Accessory Pack. This includes a Chill Master's screen, a 22"x34" player map and a 32-page adventure called the *Isle of the Dead*. \$13.00

#### TSR

TSR continues to support its AD&D line with a fever pitch. (Seven new products for October and eight scheduled for

a November release.) A partial listing includes;

- *Feast of Goblins*. Designed for use with the boxed Ravenloft set, this adventure includes a DM's screen for the Ravenloft rules. \$10.95

- *DragonLance saga Classics, Vol I*

The first four DragonLance modules (DL1-4) have been updated for use with the 2nd edition AD&D rules. \$15.00

- *Draconomicon A Forgotten Realms accessory*. A source book on Dragons. Includes background on dragon magic, treasures, lairs, etc. \$15.00

- *Boot Hill Wild West Game 3rd Edition*.

Boot Hill has been given a new lease on life. This old favorite has been revised and updated. Players can portray Indians, Shepherders, cowboys etc. \$20.00 (Incidentally, I noticed the other day that *GangBusters* has been re-released in a 3rd Edition. The game's a personal favorite of mine.)

#### B.A. Felton discovers the illusive Two-sided Die!!

B.A. Felton announced recently that after six years of research he has finally designed a two-sided die. B.A. was quoted as saying, "What this hobby has needed for quite some time was a 2-sided die. Gamers were fed up at this oversight by the dice companies!"

B.A. utilized an Atari 400, his uncle's old slide-ruler and mind-expanding drugs to achieve his hard won victory. "I was really perplexed about the whole thing," explained B.A. at a recent press conference. "I knew a 2 sided die could be developed. They said the 100-sided die was an impossibility until Zocchi finally produced one. But I couldn't get it down. It looked fine on paper but once we went to production we always met failure. Then one night I was watching a football game and the camera zoomed in on the coin-toss. It was like a bolt of lighting! I worked throughout the night and by the next day I had a working two-sided die."

B.A.'s two-sided die closely resembles a standard poker chip. On one side is a large numeral one in florescent red paint. On the obverse is a numeral 2. Playtesters have attested to its ability to produce consistently random numbers ranging from one to two. No announcements have been made as to when the die will be available. Patent Pending ■

# Of Embers Born



FICTION

By Frank R. VanHoose

## PART V

Day 275 Year 108

Everyday living presents enough challenges for most men, but a few men need something more from life. But, Anselm, a thief and professional assassin working secretly for the Emperor Sageem, was happy if he lived long enough to spend the gold earned on his latest job.

Now as he rode his weary horse along a shadowy forest trail, several days' ride northeast of Soult Tet, he felt confident that he had escaped with his life. He would be safe as long as he never allowed the Emperor to learn of his whereabouts.

He could never go back to Soult Tet while Sageem lived. But there were plenty of other places in the world where he could make use of the gold and gems which caused his saddle bags to bulge and his horse to complain of its weight. Anselm grinned as he thought of his deceit. But it was a fleeting grin for in truth he was in serious danger. If the death of his last victim was ever connected to Anselm, there would be no place beneath the sun where he could find refuge. He had assassinated the Arden'Vas of the Benyaran Temple. Sageem had tired of waiting for the old man to die and so he hired Anselm to help him along.

Sageem had given him half his payment in advance. The remainder of his payment was to be given upon confirmation of the Arden'Vas' death. Anselm wisely decided to depart without collecting the balance of his fee. He knew that Sageem would never allow him to leave Soult Tet alive. Secrets had a way of becoming known and confidants had a tendency to betray. Besides, Anselm had more than made up for the loss. His hand moved to the hilt of his newly acquired sword which hung at his side.

He would love to have lingered around Soult Tet long enough to see the look on old Curstain's face when he discovered that someone had emptied his household treasury of its contents.

Anselm had done very well for himself. He had found a fortune in gems and gold in a secret chamber behind the fireplace in Curstain's bedroom. Besides the treasure, Anselm had found an extraordinarily well-crafted sword and some interesting documents.

When Sageem first contacted Anselm about his desire to see the Arden'Vas slain Anselm was quite confident he could pull it off.

However, after several weeks of scouting out the Benyaran Temple, he realized that the temple was a virtual fortress. Even with his great skills



he was hard-pressed to get past the multitude of guards and sentries which guarded the Arden'Vas. To make his job even more difficult, the Emperor had demanded that the death should look ordinary. There was to be no doubt in anyone's mind that the Arden'Vas had simply passed away naturally. Nothing else would be acceptable to the Emperor and he made it very clear what the results of failure would be.

Late one night while watching the main gate of the Temple from a safe distance, Anselm was surprised to see the Rader-Keem Curstain making his way up to the gates. The old judge was promptly allowed to pass. Apparently Curstain was a frequent visitor. A few nights later Anselm again detected Curstain entering the temple. Four times he witnessed Curstain making his late night visits. Always, Curstain carried a small bottle of wine when he entered. When he departed he no longer had the bottle.

Anselm concluded that Curstain was bringing wine as a gift for the Arden'Vas on his visits. He could make use of this ritual. He had heard a rumor once, that the Arden'Vas was very fond of Sarentian wine. A very expensive wine which incidentally, Velnar Curstain had built his fortune on.<sup>12</sup> The Rader-Keem had a virtual monopoly on the wine in Soult Tet.

A plan formed in Anselm's mind. He may not be able to enter the temple but he could easily gain access to Curstain's wine-cellar.

A few nights later Anselm used his skills to break into Curstain's winery. The cellar was laid out in near military-fashion. Finding the appropriate rack of Sarentian wine was easy. He smiled with approval as he noted that four bottles were missing from the rack from left to right. These would be the bottles Curstain had taken to the temple. He chuckled at his own cleverness.

Taking the next bottle in line from its slot, Anselm carefully opened the bottle. The aroma was enticing. He was tempted to indulge himself but decided he could wait. He took out a small vial

from his belt-pouch and dropped five drops into the wine bottle. He resealed the bottle and put it back in its place.

The poison he had selected was a very rare and expensive mixture. It was known among his circle as 'withering-blue'. It caused the imbiber to weaken slowly. The victims of withering-blue always appeared to have died of some dreaded disease or of old age. It could be administered in a large dose which caused death in a few hours or days. Or, and this was much more effective at creating the illusion of a natural death, it could be doled out in small portions over a period of time. In this manner the victim would weaken and draw pale. Despite the remedies of the best physicians, the victim would expire after several weeks and none would suspect foul play.

Withering-blue had the notorious characteristic of being addictive. Once several small doses had been administered the victim would crave to have more. Normally, whatever food or drink the poison was delivered in became the object of that craving. Anselm considered administering doses to all ten remaining bottles. It would make his job easier but he decided against it. It would not do to have Curstain take the poison by mistake. Anselm decided he would have to return each night and poison one bottle at a time.

For the next ten nights, Anselm broke into Curstain's wine-cellar and performed his sinister art. Curstain, the unsuspecting accomplice, dutifully carried the tainted wine to the High Priest.

On his last visit Anselm poisoned the only remaining bottle of wine and smiled with pride. Nothing could save the Arden'Vas now. Since he had to return to Curstain's villa each night to apply his poisons, Anselm had been very careful to keep his visits undetected and resisted the temptation to explore Curstain's villa.

A few nights later Anselm returned to Curstain's villa to satisfy his curiosity. Now that his work was finished it was safe to do a little pilfering. The well-to-do judge should have some

## Fiction

very interesting treasures.

Since he didn't plan on collecting the remainder of his fee from Sageem, Anselm hoped he could make up the difference from Curstain's own pocket.

He quickly located the secret chamber hidden behind the fireplace. Such hiding places were all too common and Anselm had thanked the gods many times that so many wealthy men believed their valuables to be safe in such places.

Anselm's knees had nearly buckled beneath him when he first laid eyes on the contents of the chamber. Two large urns of gold coins and precious gems greeted him. But the item that caught his interest was the sword. For some strange reason it had been carefully wrapped in strips of linen. Upon unwrapping the sword, Anselm immediately appreciated its splendor. It would bring a very good price. As his hand gripped the sword's hilt something compelled him to slide it into his belt, replacing his own blade. He wrapped his ordinary sword in the linen strips and placed it in the now empty chamber. He laughed. Curstain would explode with rage when he discovered Anselm's handiwork.

Anselm's thoughts were suddenly snapped back to the present. In the shifting shadows on the road ahead he detected the solitary figure of a man walking. Though his garb was tattered and soiled with trail-dust, it was clearly an Imperial Guard uniform. Anselm's hand moved to the hilt of his sword. As he overtook the Ragean soldier his curiosity was aroused.

No single man, not even an Imperial soldier could strike fear in Anselm's heart. He had never met his match and doubted he would find it in this weary figure before him.

As he overtook the traveler, the man heard him approaching, stopped and turned to face him.

**D**reams die hard. They live on for years with little encouragement, surviving purely on the energy of their own existence. Yet, sometimes a person will awake to realize that his dreams have

died. He's not exactly sure when or how but he knows that they have died.

Yartan's dreams died when he witnessed the battered body of his childhood hero, Raven-thorpe\* bounce limply from rock to rock as it was cast from the Sulyan cliffs on Yistain hill. He watched Raven-thorpe's body tumble on its way into the Soult river which waited hungrily below. As the corpse disappeared beneath the waters so did Yartan's dreams.

The dreams of a high-ranking position in the Bin'Parta were suddenly ripped from his grasping hands. Yartan never bothered to return to the Imperial barracks for his belongings. He just walked down the cliffside trail and kept walking. Sometimes when dreams die, dreamers follow.

Yartan was tired in mind and spirit as well as body. Trudging along the unfamiliar trails everyday, his journey was interrupted only long enough to earn an occasional meal at a roadside inn or at one of the countless farms he came upon. He had no destination yet he kept moving. Whichever direction he happened to be facing when he started out each morning dictated which direction he traveled. Now as he heard a horse and rider approach he turned to investigate.

Anselm was fastly approaching and he extended his hand in greeting. Yartan couldn't help but notice the stranger's other hand resting on the hilt of a sword. Yartan was still trying to decide how to react to his fellow traveler when he suddenly heard a beautiful singing voice which seemed to be floating on the morning breeze.

Anselm raised up in the saddle and cocked his head, scanning the woodline. He apparently heard the singing also. The rider turned back to face Yartan and smiled. He paused and the two listened to the singing for several moments. The beautiful feminine voice was compelling.

"I've many dusty miles ahead of me. And at the end of the day a lonely campfire awaits me." Anselm smiled again and looked toward the forest, "Or, I could spend a pleasant afternoon of song and

good company. A difficult choice to make eh?"

He turned his horse toward the forest and rode off. Having nothing better to do, and to satisfy his curiosity, Yartan followed.

Anselm wondered about the Imperial Guardsman alone on the road so many miles from Soult Tet. Glancing back over his shoulder he could see the stranger following him into the forest. As his horse broke through into a small clearing, Anselm got his first look at the source of the music.

There, lying on her back in a bed of grass, lay a woman; her ankles crossed and propped up on a fallen log. She was playing a small, stringed instrument and gazing into the morning sky, singing her song.

Anselm halted his horse as if he had suddenly confronted a large obstacle. He was very taken with the sight of the beautiful female. Yartan finally caught up with him, dismounted, and stood silently beside his horse, awe-struck at the sight before him.

Anselm and Yartan were not the only ones drawn to the small grassy clearing. Standing in the shadows not far away, three Sadok thieves watched the gathering with great interest. However, their attention was not drawn to the woman, as beautiful as she was, but to the large bulging saddle bags on Anselm's horse.

Seeing that Anselm and Yartan were completely entranced by the young beautiful woman, who was still unaware of her audience, the Sadoks saw their opportunity. After plundering the horse and its cargo, they planned on spending a delightful evening amusing themselves with the woman. But, first things first.

The leader of the 'doks motioned for his companions to ready their bows. He, also drew his sword and stepped into the clearing.

The Sadok leader was quite confident that he and his men had the situation under control. He was a braggart at heart; his one great weakness. So, instead of using the element of surprise to their advantage by shooting down their prey from a hid-

den location, the leader burst into the clearing with a war-cry.

At the first utterance of commotion, Yartan turned and stared blankly at the three thieves swiftly approaching them. Anselm reacted instantly. Years of living on the edge had honed him into a creature constantly ready for anything. In his line of work hesitation meant death. He drew a dagger and threw it with his left hand. At the same moment, his right hand threw a matching weapon with precise accuracy. The first dagger found a home; hilt deep in a Sadok's eye socket. The second dagger sank solidly in another 'dok's throat.

The two mortally-wounded thieves fell to their knees, releasing arrows that zinged harmlessly into the forest depths.

The sight of his two companions sinking limply to the forest floor caused the Sadok leader to halt his attack, staring in disbelief. Confidence suddenly took flight, as did the thief, seeking refuge in the forest depths. But, as he turned and bolted toward the cover of the vegetation, he ran straight into the woman.

Her face had a look on it that the Sadok leader had rarely seen in one so beautiful. It was the look of someone about to draw blood. As Anselm dismounted to come to the woman's aid, Yartan drew his sword and followed.

He attempted to push his way past the woman to make his escape. Suddenly, there was an agonizing pain in his abdomen. He gazed blankly into the woman's face as she twisted the dagger and shoved it deeper.

The Sadok leader took several more steps before he sank to the ground and the area was suddenly quiet as the three strangers stood in the clearing studying each other. The woman was not so sure if these two men were any less a threat than the thieves had been.

Anselm was just about to introduce himself when a coarse laugh echoed about them.

Spinning on his heels and raising his

sword, he scanned the area in the direction of the laughter. He blinked twice and shook his head in disbelief.

There at the edge of the clearing lay the body of a small child, surrounded by a strange aura.

As the three strangers watched in astonishment, the aura rose from the child and formed into the shape of a human which stood by the child's side.

"Greetings Anselm!" came a voice from the glowing apparition, "I see that you still live by your wits."

Anselm suddenly drew pale. What sort of sorcery was this? How could this be happening? How did this ghostly figure know his name?

"What god has come to taunt me?" he cried out.

The figure chuckled, "God? Well, perhaps. But you knew me once when I still bore flesh and walked among men. Have you forgotten me so readily?"

Anselm suddenly recognized the voice. There was no doubt in his mind.

"Auros! Damn you! What new spell is this that you have concocted? I thought you went up in flames in Soult Tet. The news was all over town, how..."

Laughter echoed through the forest. "You heard about my that spell that went awry; I created quite a stir didn't I? It was my folly I suppose that almost did me in. I craved power, much as you do, old friend. I drew together more magic than anyone has ever dared before. As a result I was freed from my mortal body. Yet, now I am weak; I lack the power I strived for."

The woman and Yartan had stepped a good distance away from Anselm and his strange vision. They stood open-mouthed, transfixed on the spectacle before them.

Yartan suddenly caught sight of the child stirring on the ground by the figure's side and moved toward it. He eased forward and placed a

large palm on the child's forehead. The child was covered with streaks of smoke and sweat; his arms were bright red and covered with blisters.

Anselm looked to the child and shook his head. "If you intend to treat the child's wounds, there are some salves in my pack." He turned back to Auros. "So, now you use your magic against children? Is that how it is now?"

"No, I have not harmed this child. He was about to die in a great fire far away. I heard a cry for help and was drawn to him. I had to expend all the power I had left, but I managed to save him. I was not able, however, to save his companion. He is alone in the world. That is why I am here. I had few friends in life Anselm. You must help this child, I've no one else to turn to. The boy has a great destiny to fulfill, although I do not yet know what it is. For some reason, however, our destinies are intertwined. All I know is that it is of great importance that this child reach manhood and fulfill his mission, whatever that may be."

Anselm shook his head in disbelief, "Is this your attempt at revenge against me? You know me all too well you old... You might have found a way to rid yourself of a body, but to me you're still the same cruel bastard who worked his illegal magics in the lower quarter. You won't pawn off your bastard child on me. I've got my own problems to contend with. We'll tend to his wounds, then you can take the brat and be off!"

"You must do this thing for me Anselm! I lived many years in the most dangerous part of Soult Tet. I saw a lot of men fall victim to the evils of that city. But you were the best I've ever seen. You're good. I'll need your skills to protect the boy. It's true I can't force you to help me, but I warn you Anselm, though I've lost some of my powers, I've gained new ones. They're strange powers that I don't yet fully understand, but, I'm learning, and can feel their immense power.

"I can read all your thoughts as though they were my own. I know what each of you are running from and I can always find you no matter



where you hide, just as I found you today. But, help me in this matter and I will use my powers to reward you and your friends."

The figure turned to Yartan who was gently wrapping the child in a blanket and wiping the sweat from the helpless boy's forehead.

"You are Yartan! I know your name and I know of your confusion. You've suffered great loss. You dreamed of bringing justice to the world in your service to the Empire. Yet, you have found that there is no justice. It is within my power to bring justice. If you search for justice, then follow me. I need messengers with hearts like yours."

The figure then moved toward the female and paused, "you are Arlora the singer of tales. Your dreams are as simple as a child's. You seek to forge new tales which can be told long after you are dead. I can show you the way to the boldest of adventures. You can be the first to sing of such glory. Your name can live throughout the ages."

Finally he turned back to Anselm, "and I can give you what you most thirst for Anselm, Power! It is what I once valued more than life itself. Do what I ask of you and I will put great power within your grasp. The three of you have been given new destinies which have now merged into one glorious destiny."

Anselm shook his head, "what are you talking about Auros? It's going to take more than a few amusing spells to convince me that I should rear your bastard pup. Even if I did agree to help, I wouldn't need the aid of a harlot and a renegade soldier!"

The form ignored Anselm's arguments and began to slowly fade, receding into the forest's edge. As Auros filtered away, his voice echoed through the sky, "you deceive yourself Anselm!"

Anselm ran toward the being he had once known as a corrupt wizard and shouted his protest, "Hey, what? You take this damned child with you! I won't be responsible for him!"

Auros' reply left Anselm with little chance of refusal, and one last suggestion.

"You have no choice Anselm! Your destiny and the child's are one now. And I would advise to you find yourself a new sword."

Anselm found himself staring dumbly into the forest. After a few moments, he spun around and eyed his new-found companions. Arlora was gathering up her belongings and Yartan was now holding the child in his arms, rocking him gently and humming an old Ragean lullabye. Anselm smiled and shook his head.

"Well, I suppose I should introduce myself" he said, "It appears we're going to be traveling together for awhile."

The woman pushed past him, "the name's Arlora. Might as well lift these Sadok's of their possessions, they were going to take ours anyway."

She moved to one of the dead thieves and cut a pouch from his belt. Looking back over her shoulder, she smiled at Anselm and said, "by the way, I'm not a harlot. There are easier ways to get money from a man. She wiped the blade of her dagger on the dead man's sleeve to emphasize her meaning.

Anselm sighed. He liked this woman. "Well, we might as well set up camp here for the night and decide what's to be done." With that, he quickly made his way to one of the corpses and staked his claim to part of the spoils.

### Day 316 Year 108

On the northeast edge of the Kalinor forest, a large group of Grevans sat on their horses and watched a growing wall of fire hungrily eating its way through the forest from the south. They laughed, joked and made wagers on whether the two injured and bleeding Sarlangans whom they had driven back into the forest, would try to escape or be consumed in the flames.

A few hundred yards into the forest, in a small clearing, Orric was gathering wood and hastily building a funeral bier. Seychelle, the young Sarlangan who had borne his child, lay life

less beside the ever-growing pile of dry wood. A half-dozen arrow shafts still protruded from her limp form. The great man was badly injured too, and was bleeding profusely from several huge holes in his chest and side. His wounds were enlarged as he ripped the arrows from his body.

Smoke belched from the clearing as the roar of the approaching inferno increased. Finished with his task, Orric lifted Seychelle's body and gently placed it on the funeral bier.

He drew a massive sword from his belt and drove it into the ground in front of him. This was the sword he had forged in Seychelle's village and wielded for many years. It was the sword he had hoped would be in his hands as he struck down the ruthless Rang Taw. And, though the blade had not tasted the blood of the man that had hurt him so, it had helped him rip the life from countless other Grevans.

Overcome by blood loss, Orric dropped to his knees, leaning heavily on the sword driving it deeper into the ground. His huge hands grasped the sword by the hilt and he lowered his head. As his blood trickled down the sword blade, it formed an ever-widening pool before him.

As Orric's life ebbed from his body, his mind drifted to the past; to the village of Emberton. He thought of the Grevans and the fire that raced with them through the streets. The raiders had destroyed Orric on that day, taking the woman he loved most forever from his grasp. Before the raid, he had been gentle and content. Since that time, he had been seeking vengeance at Seychelle's side.

Orric's dying thoughts now raced to his father-in-law, Reman and his stepson, Gicha. He knew the fires must have consumed them as well.

Orric's last act was to draw upon the hatred within him, hatred that was still strong, though the body that carried it was almost gone. He focused his last energies on saying a prayer to Yi'Gor, the one god he knew to thrive on hatred and vengeance.

Some say that at that moment, the blind

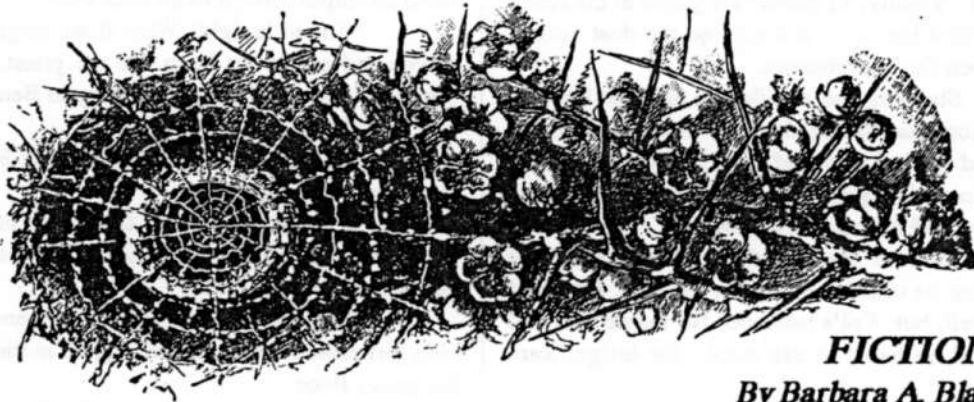
god Yi'Gor stirred beneath the land and shook the mountains above. He had heard a plea for vengeance and sent an answer.

The clearing, now nearly consumed by flames, contained the charred bodies of a blacksmith and a Sarlangan mother. But Orric's faithful sword began to glow as if it had just emerged from a smitty's forge. The blade gleamed unnaturally, being infused with Orric's boiling blood.

Days later, when the fire had died and the smoke had receded, nothing remained in all of the Kalinor but ashes and charred timber, with the exception of one place. In the center of what once had been a grassy clearing, stood the blackened hilt of a sword. □



# The Shriek of Soult Tet



FICTION

By Barbara A. Blackburn

## PART V

Day 263 Year 108

**P**yra stood motionless, flanked on two sides by heavily-armored guards. The color drained from her face as she stood before Sageem.

Sputtering in incomprehensible flurries of rage, the emperor looked as if he was about to explode, and Pyra knew that she would bear the brunt of such a blast. Her informant had failed, and now she would pay the price for his failure. He had been smart enough, it seemed, to flee the city and the agonizing death that awaited.

Her mind withdrew from the terrors of the moment as she prayed to her god. She asked not to be delivered, for she knew that was impossible, she asked only to become numb, to be oblivious to the pain that was ahead. Such stoicism would rattle Sageem, who loved to see his subjects cower before him. It would be sufficient revenge to deny him such satisfaction.

But at the first blow from his rod, her composure melted into fury and she began to deride him.

"You're mad! Nothing but a s-street b-bully! Adorja will be your god, you are his servant!

Evil! You are...evil! Benyar will never have you, he despises you! And soon Scav Sagenthor will take your place here, delivering the people from...your...your cruelty! L-long l-l-live th...Sagentho..."

Pyra fell, bleeding, to the floor and Sageem, exhausted, teetered and fell beside her. Guards knelt to help him to his feet and as he gazed into the battered face beside him he shuddered at her frozen smile.

Regaining his footing, he growled, "Get this trash out of here! Throw her from the rocks. May she be damned forever!"

As the guards drug the body from the room, Sageem staggered toward his ivory throne. He plopped into the cushioned seat, stared at the bloody rod in his hand and muttered, "the weight of command is heavy."

He let the rod fall, clanging, to the marble floor. He followed the rod with his eyes as it rolled. Blood splattered the floor beneath his feet and as he watched, a pattern formed. There, in a puddle of innocent blood, he saw his own face peering back at him. He swiped savagely at the image with his foot, and as he obliterated it, he laughed in triumph. Once again, he ruled, but his mind was not a very obedient subject, he knew not when it would

rebel.

Kol sat within the walls of the Tharlflax mansion. "Finally, all mine!" He gazed at the finery which filled the room and noticed the dust settling thick upon the bookshelves.

Standing, he decided to inspect his new possession. Sauntering through the halls, he was surprised to find a locked case in the master bedroom closet. Tugging at the gold lock, he became frustrated and his curiosity grew.

He tore through the house looking for something he could use to open the case. He could use a spell, but, Kol's tolerance for magic was still weak and he hated to use magic for insignificant chores.

Finally, he found a meat cleaver and ascended the marble stairs to the master chamber.

Being a powerful man, physically as well as mentally, Kol opened the lock after just a few swings of the blade. Relishing the moment of triumph, he sat down on the soft bed, took a deep breath and slowly lifted the lid.

In shock, Kol sat still as a stone, unable to move, eyes frozen upon what lay within.

Gar and Draya had been inseparable in the months since their encounter with Humoz Naril. And, even while living among the rats and trash, hiding from the world and its perils, their love had grown.

They had grown accustomed to the odor that permeated their lair and did the best they could to clear a space where they could live.

Still, Shindar, who had never been strong, was starting to pale and sicken.

And, though she tried to keep her cheerful disposition, it was obvious to the others that she was in pain.

"I say we go back to the mansion," Gar suggested.

"That's crazy! I've got contacts in the city, I can find us somewhere to hide. It might take me a few weeks, but I can do it!"

"We don't have a few weeks, look at her! She looks like a phantom! No one would think we'd be stupid enough to go back there."

"Stupid is right! What if we disguise ourselves and sneak her in to see the priest. He has powers, he can heal her, he can pray to Benyar."

"No."

The two jumped at the sound of Shindar's weak and raspy voice.

"I'll not set foot in the house of a false god. Dreltar has kept our family safe for eons. I'll not question her will now."

As if that were her last burst of energy, the pale girl closed her eyes and slipped motionless to the grimy floor.

That made their decision final, they would have to take her to the mansion.

That night, Sageem called a covert meeting of his remaining aides.

The floor of his throne room had been scrubbed clean of Pyra's blood, yet the stench of death lingered.

And as the officials entered the chamber, the ruler smiled magnanimously. To Ulior, who had raised Pyra after her parents had been killed in a freak accident and who had taught her the delicate work of diplomacy, Sageem looked like a smiling Sturm wolf, waiting to devour a broken-legged doe.

Joining Ulior was Sageem's treasurer and Burnok, manservant to the ruler.

Sensing the tension in the room, Sageem called for a servant-in-waiting to bring drinks and sweet meats. He then moved the men and their discussion into the intimacy of his council room, where they could talk undisturbed by the ghost of the realm's latest traitor.

Ulior would not be comforted by such ploys. He was on the verge of becoming very undiplomatic, yet restrained himself out of fear for his own life. He could no longer help Pyra, what good would it to for him to join her in death?



He dreaded Sageem's questions. He knew that the leader suspected something was happening at the temple and was eager to move into the role of Arden 'Vas.

Ulior could not bear to see such an event take place. Though he had sworn allegiance to Sageem years ago, he was not the same military genius he had once been. And over the years, Ulior had grown to respect the devout worshippers of Soutl Tet's patron deity. He was appalled by Sageem's growing insanity and would rather have seen a Sadok in the temple than the madman that now faced him.

"So? My good man, Ulior, you old fox. What have you heard of temple events? There are rumors of powerful changes taking place within those walls. Tell me when I may take my rightful place among the gods."

Ulior swallowed hard and tried to avoid Sageem's iron gaze. Fumbling for something to say, he blurted out inane sentences.

Sageem's face grew dark. Ulior trembled and was about to fall to his knees and beg for mercy when the ruler slapped him on the back and roared with laughter.

"So, a bit late for you is it old man? I suppose it is a bit late. Please, stay here for the night. In the morning, we will talk."

Ulior gasped, "M'lord! I need only my own bed. Trouble yourself not on my account. I am

indeed old and tired and beg your indulgence. I shall return as soon as the sun peeks over Yistain Hill."

"Nonsense, there's a soft bed just across the hall. I insist!"

Ulior knew what was happening. Sageem wanted to question him further but didn't want to scare the young treasurer that waited eagerly to give his report. Sageem was controlling the situation entirely.

That night, Ulior lay in the soft bed as if he were sleeping on a cot of nails.

Gar and Draya had made the journey from the pits to the Tharflax mansion with little difficulty. Shindar did not regain consciousness however, and the two of them rushed up the stairs to lay her in the master bed.

When they saw the large, red-robed figure sitting on the bed, they were so shocked they dropped Shindar to the floor.

"He's not moving. Is he dead?"

"I don't know, it looks like his chest is still moving. What's that on the floor?"

As Draya reached for the box, she felt a foot grinding into her hand.

"Leave that!"

Kol was now glaring down at Draya like an angry god.

"What are you doing in the Tharflax estate?" Draya shot back, "You're rather well dressed



for a thief."

Laughter echoed through the house.

Kol hadn't talked to anyone but Sageem in so long, he had forgotten what a sense of humor was.

"My girl," he sputtered and attempted to regain his composure, "I was given this estate. What are you doing here? You not only look like a thief, you also smell like one."

Gar, who had struggled to lift Shindar off of the floor, now interjected, "This is OUR house. Who had the authority to give it to you?"

"So you are the young Tharlflax's that have given this city such grief. As an employee of the realm, this house and the contents herein, were paid to me for services rendered."

Red-faced, Gar rebutted, "But this house is ours, it was our uncle's, and now that he's dead, it belongs to us. At least that's the way things work where I come from."

"Boy. This is not where you come from. I earned it fair and square and I aim to keep it."

Draya interrupted the argument, "Listen, I don't care who owns the place, this girl here needs to lie down, she's awful sick."

Kol gazed at Shindar's porcelain face and his heart leapt. Unused to such feelings, the wizard grasped his chest as if he had been wounded and sighed, "Never have I seen such loveliness. Here, lay her down on the bed, let me have a look at her."

Gar hesitated, eyeing the flashily dressed man with distrust. Draya, however, took hold of Shindar and lowered her gently to the bed.

"We'd appreciate it if you could help her," mumbled Draya. "Are you a healer?"

Shindar mumbled, thrashed and screamed in feverish dreams. Kol, Gar and Draya took turns wiping the sick girl's brow with cool water. With each gaze Kol grew more entranced. Within, he was fighting himself. He wanted to make the girl well, but such a spell would take much energy from the magic pool and he had been saving him-

self for the next Flur'mar. He wasn't even sure he had enough stamina to endure the strain of such a spell.

Still, Kol was starting to become obsessed with Gar's sister. And, it appeared she was getting worse, she might even die.

So, when Gar and Draya were both sound asleep, he snuck into the girl's bedroom and began to prepare the spell.

He had completely forgotten about the contents of the case that he had opened earlier, something that he would have never done before.

With great concentration, Kol made an attempt to heal Shindar. Though he was not a healer, his father had been, and he had learned some basic, simple spells that would at least stop her fever and arrest the progress of her illness.

It was several hours before Kol collapsed to the floor in a pool of sweat. There, he slept until awakened by shouts.

"Gar, look! She seems better, she is awakening."

Kol sat up and smiled weakly, "So, the angel is recovering."

The next morning, Sageem arose early. He stretched, smiled and dressed quickly.

He scurried to the room where Ulior had retired the night before. Motioning to the guard that had been placed there, he bade him open the door. Sageem, astonished by what he saw, stumbled back and grabbed the guard's arm to catch himself. Dangling before him was the corpse of his former religious advisor. "Damn him! How could he do this to me!" cried the ruler who began to pummel the corpse in fury. "I'll wring the truth from him yet!" Burnok scurried after his master, it was his job to keep Sageem from looking like a fool and after this latest event it wasn't something he was sure he could do.

Draya, although grateful for what seemed to be Kol's help in healing Shindar, began to distrust

their new benefactor. After all, he did say he worked for the realm to gain claim to the mansion.

She kept a close eye on him. She was surprised at his interest in the sickly country girl. He was attentive to Shindar's every whim and he was repaid for such acts with sweet, unhindered affection.

Gar made no secret of his distrust and even dislike of the man he considered an intruder.

Kol was indeed stricken by the girl's beauty, yet he wished the other two would leave. He was torn, if he turned them in, he would be a hero. Sageem would probably give him whatever he asked. Yet, Shindar would hate him. And Sageem would not like to let the girl live, he was too paranoid. Kol didn't want to lose Shindar, for he coveted her like a prize jewel which would crown his wealth with grace and beauty.

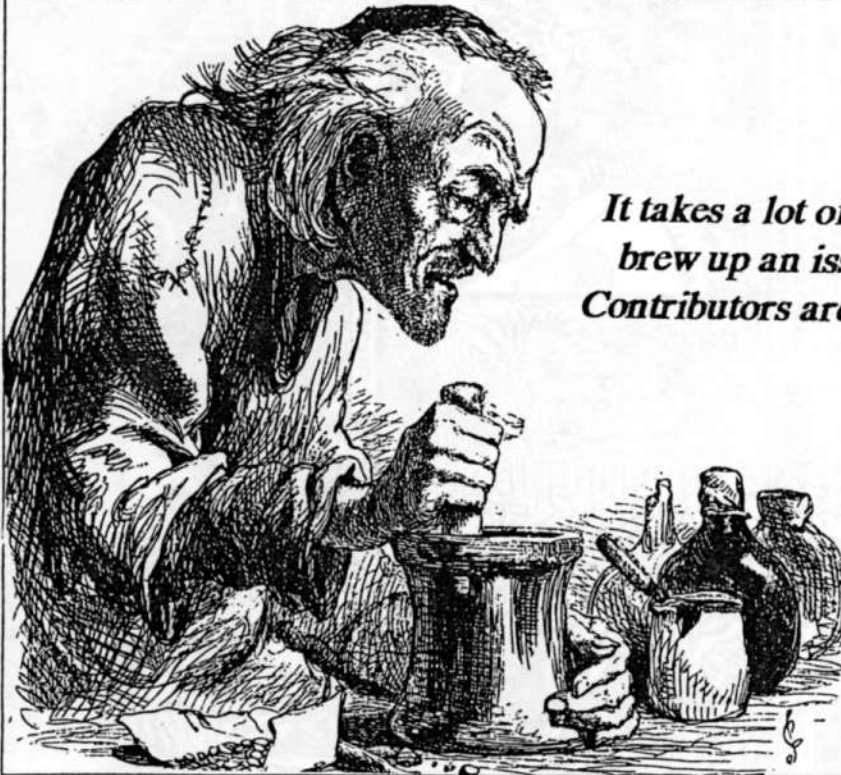
As he sat at the foot of her bed, he pon-

dered his dilemma. Shindar lay sleeping, undisturbed by the turmoil within him. As he sat, from the corner of his eye, he caught sight of the case that had astounded him so.

"How could I have been so addle-brained as to leave this lying around?" he asked himself as he reached for it.

Scooping up the case and its contents, he now fondled an engraved dagger. Kol recognized the type of dagger and that is what had astonished him so. The dagger was the type used by the outlawed Adorjan cult to perform human sacrifices.

Engraved on the handle was the name of the owner, and the name on that particular knife was one, that, if known, would rock the very foundations of the empire. The name, carefully and clearly etched in the polished bone handle read, SAGEEM. □



*It takes a lot of ingredients to  
brew up an issue of Shadis.  
Contributors are welcome here!*

# POOR PEOPLE

FURTHWANGLED AND PARAZZLED, AVERSE TO JOIN IN TRAVEL, OF CHANCE SO SUPERN JUST ARRIVED, LOST AMONGST THE CUSTOMS RITES, WHEN WAIT HOUR MAGIC PIV AWAIL, SO TO TAMERIE HAD AEN PREWAIL, REKDND MIK CRY FOR BOI A DOC, FRIGHTER KEEL FOR THE TRAVELD.



"AREY THERE I N'NAME'S MARGINDA-HERE WITH A CHANGE O LANES,...."

"LIKE MANY I'M SURE"

"I SEE THAT THEY'VE ESCAPED & THAT THE GATE IS WITH THEM. IF THEY LOOK FOR A WAY OFF- WORLD THEY WILL FIND THE 'ZOOK-NOS WIZARD' HE CAN'T HAVE THEM USED BY THE 'ZOOK' SO WE SHALL FOLLOW THEIR PROGRESS WITH OUR 'NEW-IMPROVED MINDLOK-K-SHAMBBER."



"ALL OF WHICH GIVES ME A SPLITTING 'HADRANACHE' ... GOT ANY QUESTIONS?"

"ST JUST ONE- I'M TAPED, QUIT WHENSONY, COULD I BURN A SMOKE?"

"DON'T EVEN THINK ABOUT GOIN' HOME - A LITTLE NEWS ITEM ABOUT KILLER-BOTS FIT YER VISAGE - I AND I FOLLOWED YOU ODD-BALLS, NOW YOU FOLLOW."

"ZUT! A MERE TRIFLING G-DOMBA ... BAD WJGGUM-HOOPIA, I CAN FLY!!"

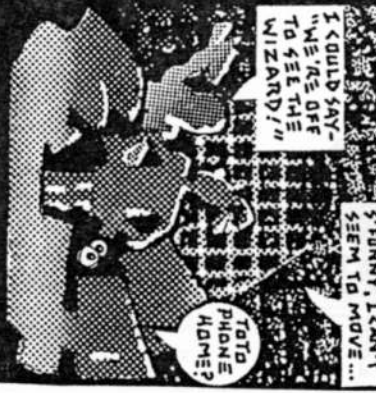
"YES/NO-WHY, WHERE ARE WE GOING? WHAT PURPOSE LIES HERE? IS THIS AN AIRCAR? CAN I DRIVE?"



"... AND FANTASIS CREATE MIRROOR REACTIONS, THEY HOLD SWAY OVER THE 'VANSQUET GARDENERS' SO I LACKED ZOOK - I'M SURE HE NOW HODS THE KEY BUT IT MAY BE 'MINTS' ROBBS' TOO"



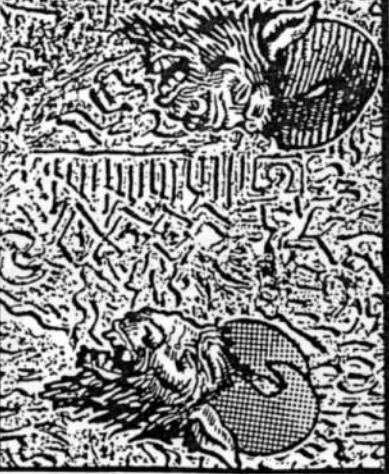
"THE SUBURBS - GROWTH AND PROGRESS!"



"I COULD SAY- 'WE'RE OFF TO SEE THE WIZARD!'"

"'TOTO PHONE HOME?"

"SUNNY, I CAN'T SEEM TO MOVE..."



"THESE GUYS I REMEMBER - THE TWO ROGUE BOTS FROM SCANTER - 'TEE' - TOASTED LOOPLES, BUT PERHAPS I COULD USE THEM! ..."



## Letters Page Continued

Dear SHADIS,

From all of the letters that have appeared in SHADIS through issue four, it would seem that the only criticism my fellow readers and I could come up with up to now was "not enough, give us more!" However, on page 63 of issue four, I came upon something that has forced me to stop recommending SHADIS to friends. What soured my enthusiasm? A pejorative that appeared in a classified ad.

If the word had appeared in a piece of fiction in a quote from a character, I wouldn't have thought twice about it. It would have been an effective way for the writer to illustrate a prejudice of the character. However, outside of a literary context, I would have thought that the editors of any publication but a KKK newsletter would maintain a policy of not accepting ads and copy that are patently offensive (whether intended or not) to minorities. And please, before you write your 'first amendment' response, honestly ask yourselves whether or not you would be making the same argument if the word used had been 'nigger' instead of 'fag'.

Richard Donnelly  
Rockville, MD

*\* Ouch! Well, all I can possibly do is apologize for the oversight and promise to be more careful in the future. I'm not here to offend anybody and I truly regret having done so. The Market Platz is primarily the reader's area for posting personals and announcements. As such, in the past I have not bothered to submit material placed in the Market Platz to the same proof-reading and editing sessions the rest of SHADIS goes through. In the future all material in SHADIS will go over with a little more discerning eye.*

Dear SHADIS,

I caught the newspaper article about SHADIS and its staff in the LEADER. Good Show! At last some positive exposure with something to do with role-playing.

The article mentioned that you had a master timeline for the Alderac Milieu that the writers used to keep in sync with each other. I would love to get a copy of it. Any chance?

Thank you for bringing us Gary Gyax. I'm so tired of reading other people's opinions of the poor guy. How refreshing to finally hear some of his personal views and plans aside from AD&D. Gary commented that he thought maybe he did a 'good thing' with D&D. Come on Gary, take a little credit. You did a GREAT thing with AD&D. Regardless of what various game designers will admit, they ALL owe a hell of a lot to AD&D and to you.

Tom Hall  
Elgin, SC

*\* The Time-Line I referred to is included in the*

*Alderac Compendium and eventually will be made available to those who care to have it.*

Dear SHADIS,

Good job with no.#4. I am constantly amazed at improvements you manage to integrate into SHADIS from issue to issue. The new logo is sensational.

The artwork is really commendable. George Vrbanic's covers are a real treat and I look forward to seeing what he will come up with. The new guy Dixon is good too. I would urge him to do some more cartoons. Has he ever done any for Dragon magazine? If not he should really submit some.

I enjoy Daniel Gidding's art. I am a struggling artist and can appreciate the amount of time and effort his drawings must take. Daniel's *Pozos & Logo* strip is beautiful. I have a little trouble understanding the storyline but that's just me. I never figured out what 2001 the movie was all about either. I was always too embarrassed to say so because everybody else seemed to know something I didn't so I just applauded and pretended I did too.

Now to the real purpose of my letter. I've been using the *Greater-Magicks* system and I'm starting to get into it. The article states that a mage who possesses mother-stone can cast spells regardless of the magical-pool's strength.

I noticed in the *Bones of Ruin* story that the Dragon Salamar'tey owns two of the tablets (which are made of mother-stone) and yet his magical abilities are weak. What's up?

Tony Sanders  
Augusta, GA

*\*As mentioned in the Magic article, Salamar'tey has been driven insane with his obsession with magic. Salamar'tey is required to sleep for seventy-years between his rampages because of his Dark-Mage status. He uses such great quantities of magic when he is awake that his life-forces are drained. It takes an enormous amount of time for him to replenish those energies.*

*So his weakness was due to his past spell-casting and not to the present level of the magical-pool. His reference to 'someone selfishly hoarding magic' is characteristic of any Dark Mage who considers all other mages as enemies. Salamar'tey was upset to see that someone else had been utilizing great quantities of magic. Magic which he regards as his own resource.*

*Hope that clears things up. This would have eventually been revealed in the fiction in the course of things but you suckered me into revealing all. ☐*

**KEEP US IN TUNE!  
WRITE TO THE LETTERS  
PAGE!!**

*Editorial Continued*

time they would be forced to constantly return to the mainland to buy their supplies and find reinforcements. Bored were they? I'd show 'em.

The campaign was running pretty much as I had planned. The players had a renewed interest in the campaign. Besides, they were not about to abandon the island as long as a single piece of gold was to be had.

After one session on the island, the party took a heavy beating from a Lizardman ambush. The party decided it was time to withdraw to the mainland and regroup. So they set sail for a large port city where they hoped to raise a small army to help dispense of the annoying Lizardmen.

Upon reaching the city, in a totally random encounter, I determined that an NPC sailor confronted the players and struck up a conversation.

One of the players noticed the sailor had a full coin purse and commented, "You must do pretty well for yourself."

The sailor winked and nodded. "Aye, I just come off the Ederling Route, takin' amber to Raga. Easy money in tradin' amber. I'll retire young and rich, ya just wait and see if I don't."

With that, the NPC departed, with a player-character thief following not far behind. So ended a random encounter, or so I thought.

A few days later, when the group met to play, it was obvious they had put their heads together and come up with a new plan. The apparent leader of the group smiled and announced, "we've decided that we're not quite ready to take the island. We're going to need an army and that's going to take a lot of gold."

I arched an eyebrow, wondering where this was heading.

"We've decided to invest our gold and start our own business!" he continued. "We want to buy a ship and travel the trade routes for awhile and see if we can make some money. We're al-

ways bumping from port to port, so we might as well haul along some trade-goods and make a little money on the side."

With that suggestion, I was forced to work out a crude system to allow players to participate in the maritime trade of my world. What started as an experiment evolved into the major backdrop of the campaign. The players became so involved in their new business that contracts were drawn up stipulating who the partners were and what percentage of profits went to who. Profits were pooled into a treasury which could be used to expand the business. More ships were bought and NPC captains and crews were hired.

The business had a tremendous impact. The campaign that had been in its death-throes only weeks before, was suddenly jumping again. The business became a thread which bound all the characters together. If the business was in danger, everyone was concerned and anxious to help. If an NPC crew stole a ship, the players would drop what they were doing and go to deal out justice.

Long after the campaign ended, the shipping business was run as a game in itself. That campaign was ran over six years ago. About four months ago, I received a letter from one of the players in that campaign and I hadn't heard from him since that campaign ended. What did he have to say after all these years? "How's the wife?" or "How are you doing buddy?" No, he simply wanted to know how Iron Fist Enterprises was doing and what his shares were currently worth.

The feature article in this issue, "*Plying the Trade Waters*" was inspired by that campaign. In the words of an old Ginge salt, "May the tradewinds push yer ship quick and steady, and may luck find a home in your purse."

Jolly R. Blackburn  
October 1, 1990

# THE MARKET PLATZ

## CLASSIFIEDS

*Hedley & Brick eat road-apples.  
Dredger*

Zaran is a mother's bad dream! Not only is he a coward but he's a 'whining coward'. This ad paid for by the Drexel Coalition

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*Lead Miniatures, (fantasy, military)  
made prior to 1980.  
Send List and Prices. Please List  
manufacturer's name if known.  
Mark Aimes 1507 Lisbon  
Evansville, IN*

### • WANTED •

*Green Hornet items. (TV)  
Comics, toys, books etc.  
Send list c/o SHADIS magazine.  
Also looking for mint copies of RPGs  
published prior to 1982.  
Pirates and Plunder, Bunnie and  
Burrows, En Garde! etc.*

### • WANTED •

*Artists & cartoonists to practice their  
magic on the pages of SHADIS.  
Also need little twerps to do my  
laundry.  
Contact this Magazine.*

### • WANTED •

*Talented gamers who would be  
interested in creating and developing a  
new RPG system based on one of my  
comic-book series.  
Contact: Ian Shires P.O Box 40391  
St. Petersburg, FL 33743-0391*

## OTHER RAGS

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P.O. Box 40391,  
St. Petersburg, FL 33743-0391

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Newsletter devoted to new game ideas.  
Features articles and rules on 'game  
philosophy'. Matrix-Games, Miniatures, RPGs etc.

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A quarterly magazine of fantasy,  
science fiction and horror.  
Send \$18.00 for year's subscription or  
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Larry D. Kirby, III  
Rt. 2 Box 260-B  
ST. Matthews, SC 29135

• If you know of any self-published/small press magazines dealing with fantasy or RPGs they can be posted under 'Other Rags' free of charge. •

The Market Platz is a meeting place to pass along information, barter, trade and gossip. Readers are invited to place classified ads, announce group meetings, seek other players etc.

Subscribers may place classified ads free of charge with a limit of one ad per issue with a maximum of 25 words. Non-subscribers can place ads for 10 cents per word with a limit of 25 words.

Convention announcements, group meetings and public service notices can be placed free of charge.

Ads will be placed on a first-come-first-serve basis.

## GOOD READS

Read a good book lately that would be interesting or useful to role-players? Pass along a good tip to Good Reads.

### GERMAN PLACE NAMES

by Harry Davis, Atlantic-Books Publications.

A fascinating work on the origins of German place names Very useful for a DM faced with naming hundreds of locations in his fantasy world.

### EATERS OF THE DEAD

by Michael Crichton, Ballantine Books. This book originally published in 1976 as a hardback has finally been re-released as a paperback. Any FRPger would find this story of Vikings and the strange 'wendol' worth their time.

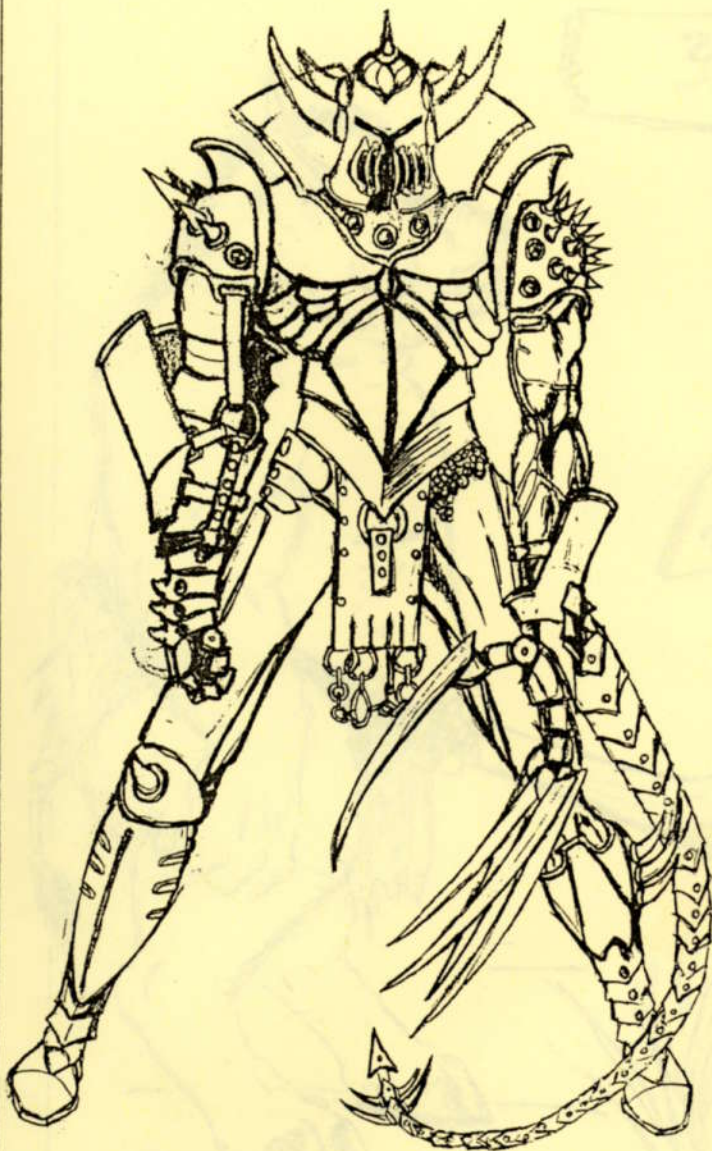
# Knights of the Dinner Table

By Jolly R. Blackburn





# "ENLIST OR DIE!"



Erin Burgetts

Join our Legions of High  
Adventure.

See the world with a  
Twelve-month enlistment.

Under the  
weathered-banner of our  
realm you will sail strange  
waters and tread dark  
forests.

As an enlistee, you will  
enjoy numerous benefits;

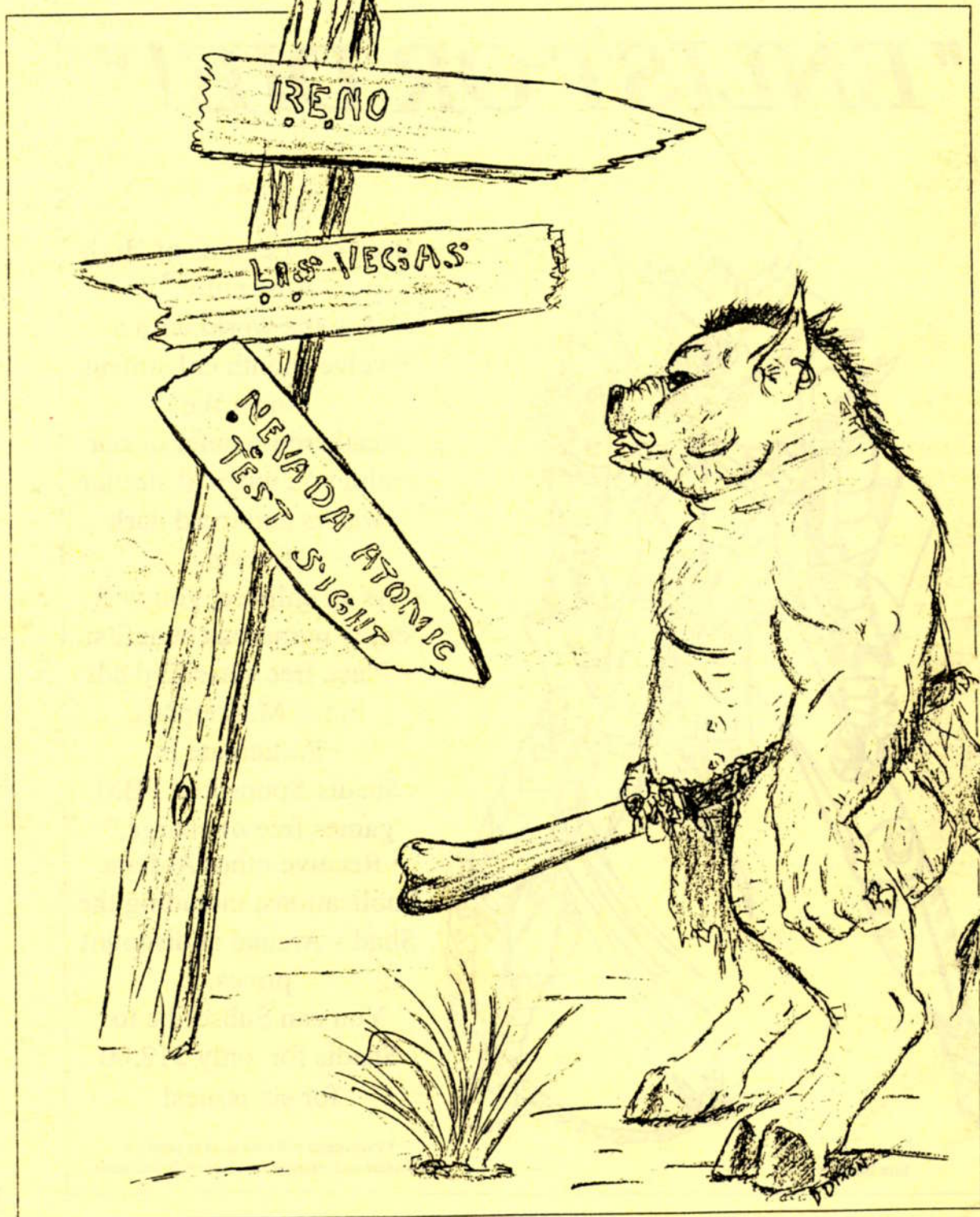
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RENO

LAS VEGAS

NEVADA ATOMIC  
TEST SIGHT