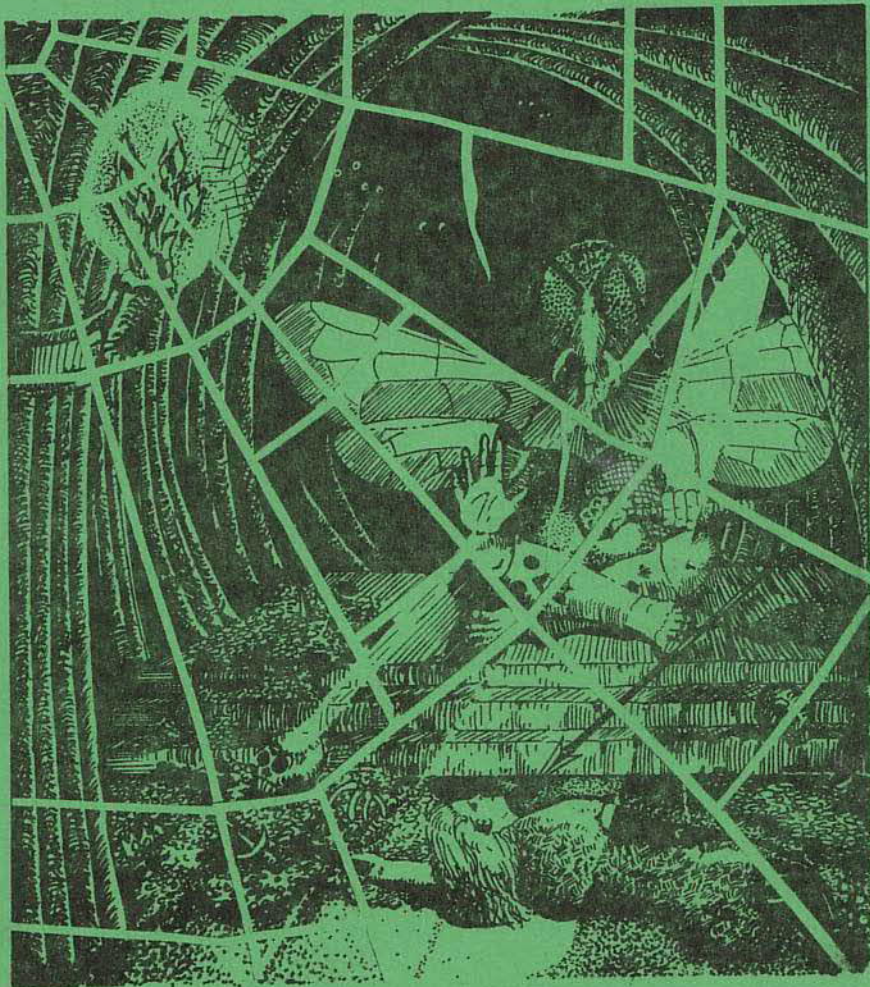


# THE BEHOLDER

ISSUE

no 17

45p



# EDITORIAL

Hopefully out in time for Dragonmeet III this is yet another issue of "The Beholder", an amateur British D&D 'zine. D&D (Dungeons and Dragons) is produced by T.S.R. Hobbies Inc, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin 53147, AMERICA. Their British subsidiary is T.S.R. (UK) at The Mill, Rathmore Road, Cambridge CB1 4AD. TBH is the creation of:-

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If you're reading this at DM III why not come and see us, you'll find us somewhere.

Recently there's been quite a deluge of new magazines coming onto the market. Most of them are okay (although a couple most certainly aren't) and TBH seems to be getting "the sincerest form of flattery". Well, if these others can bring out 17 issues, monthly, on time the best of luck to them. Just don't be too suprised if they fold around issue 3.

This issue we print the results of Q&A, many thanks to all of you who sent in replies. The GCC prizes will be awarded next issue, the delay is due to an influx of really good material just recently that we feel shouldn't be disqualified for being a few days late.

More back issues news. Several shops have requested (and been sent) back issues and this has harshly depleted our stock. In fact after DM III we probably won't have any at all! However the good news is that TBH8 to 11 will more than likely be printed for Games Day '80. Please don't send any money for them yet, there'll be more announcements on this subject next editorial.

To all those subbers who had the stamp on their TBH in the bottom left hand corner (!) last issue all we can say is: Whoops!

At the moment, what with the GCC and all that, things are quite chaotic here. It's hoped that there'll be a chance to clear the backlog of mail that has been building up and if you haven't received a reply yet many apologies.

There seems to be some worry about TBH15 so let's try and clear it up. When TBH15 was printed 60 copies too few were done. This means that even now (12/7/80) some people still haven't got copies. Never fear, they will arrive because a reprinting will be started as soon as this issue is completed. Sorry, but the situation is out of our hands really.

Guy and Mike.

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# DON'T PANIC-

## it's THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY

This article is about the hilarious game that fits snugly into your nose:

### COSMIC ENCOUNTER

By GRAHAM STAPLEHURST

For those of you poor unfortunate readers that have not yet had the experience of playing CE, this article will be utterly boring and useless. I suggest the only possible way to keep your consciousness and intelligence above the level needed to play D&D is to go out now and buy CE.

Having established a beautiful and simple set of rules, the general idea for expanding CE is to invent complex, silly and even sometimes interesting new aliens. Already 50 official aliens exist, ranging from cooing Amlsoebas to immortal Zombies. Before adding to this list, other aliens of my own device, I would like to thank Jim Ashdown and 'Harty' Clarke for ideas, and all the rest of the club for playing some great games.

**VOGON: REDUCES ATTACK CARD VALUE & DELAYS EDICT CARDS.**

**POWER OF POETRY:** When involved as offensive or defensive player in a challenge the Vogon player may recite poetry. Due to nausea, the attack card of his opponent is halved (round up). This option may be used after attack cards have been played. However any compromise card played by an opponent may be nominated instead to be a value 16 attack card as the opponent makes a desperate attempt to rid the galaxy of Vogons. This card is not halved in value, naturally.

**POWER OF BUREAUCRACY:** The Vogon player is able to delay any edict card played (except a cosmic zap against himself) until after the present challenge is over. (This is the effect of red tape, filling in forms etc.) The power is used at the Vogon's discretion. NOTE: a cosmic zap annuls both powers of the Vogon.

**BIROIDS: WRITES OWN CARDS.**

**POWER TO WRITE:** Each turn, the Biroid player may write one card (of those useable, naturally) if he wishes. He may not write any card he has written before (but may write two 20's during the game etc.) Also, the writing of an edict card or attack card of over 19 in value means that one of his refills runs out and he permanently loses one token.

**MAGRATHEANS: BUILDS NEW PLANETS.**

**POWER TO BUILD:** Each time his turn comes round the Magrathean player may build a new planet and place it in any solar system along with 1 to 4 tokens of his from any of his bases. If this is someone else's solar system this acts as a base, but if the Magrathean does not invite 1 to 4 of that player's tokens also, that player may immediately challenge that base (cf. Timegash). NOTE: The parasite may automatically get on such a base if placed within his system. This planet acts in all ways as an ordinary planet from then on. The Magrathean may make deals involving cards, tokens etc with a player in return for inviting him on.

**CLOAKER: USES HIDDEN MOVEMENT.**

**POWER TO CONCEAL:** The Cloaker has 5 small boxes, 1 for each home planet. He distributes his tokens amongst them, and only reveals how many are in each box when that planet is attacked and after attack cards are revealed. He has a sixth box-if he is the offensive or defensive player in a challenge his tokens use this box and are not revealed until attack cards are revealed. Allies of his should remove 4 tokens from the board and then consign however many they wish to the box, keeping the others hidden.

**KAMIKAZE: SELF-DESTRUCTS TOKENS & PLANETS.**

**POWER TO SUICIDE:** The Kamikaze player can never compromise. If he plays a compromise or Emotion Control is played, then a) all allies go back to bases, b) all but 2 of the Kamikaze's tokens go back to bases if he was attacking, c) if he only had one token involved, he must bring another in immediately and d) the 2 attacking tokens or all defending tokens of the Kamikaze are destroyed, along with the planet involved and all the opponent's tokens. The planet is now totally unuseable.

**COMPUTER: ANALYSES & COUNTERS ALIEN POWERS.**

**POWER OF ANALYSIS:** Each time the Computer is involved in a challenge, even as an ally, he may analyse the opponent's power. If, thereafter the power is used against the Computer he may counter it (cf. Cosmic Zap). A Cosmic Zap played against the Computer will completely disrupt his memory banks and all previously analysed powers may not be countered until re-encountered.

**BLOB: TAKES OVER PLANETS.**

**POWER TO SPREAD:** Any planet on which the Blob has a base may be completely taken over by the Blob instead of an attack. All other tokens are automatically removed from the planet and go to the warp. This constitutes a successful attack.

**MISSIONARY: CONVERTS DEFEATED TOKENS.**

**POWER TO CONVERT:** The Missionary player uses upside-down tokens. If he/she wins a challenge, any opponent's allies go to the warp as usual but the opponent's tokens are reversed and stay on that planet, joining the Missionary's attacking tokens. A Cosmic Zap releases all tokens of the player playing it, and they must all immediately go back to existing bases.

**DISEASE: REDUCE OPPONENT'S EFFECTIVENESS.**

**POWER TO INFECT:** When the offensive or defensive player in a challenge, the bacterial colonies of Disease may infect opponent's tokens and reduce them to half value. This applies to allies of the opponent as well (round fractions up). NOTE: if the Plague is played against it the effect is reversed; the Disease may take three tokens from the warp and 3 cards from the deck.

**ECTOPLASM: MENTALLY BOOSTED BY HOME PLANETS.**

**POWER TO BOOST:** The Ectoplasm uses mental combat. It always puts from 1 to 4 tokens into the warp as usual, but each token is boosted by the non-combatants on home planets. If all 5 planets in the home system have bases on them each token attacking is worth 4 tokens. If 4 planets have bases each token is worth three. If only three are held, each token is worth two. If less than three are held, the power is lost and each token's worth 1.

**THIEF: STEALS EDICT CARDS.**

**POWER TO STEAL:** Each challenge, the Thief may steal an edict card from either of the two players involved. They must give him an edict card if they hold any. If more than one edict card is held then the card to be taken is picked randomly by the Thief.



MIMIC: COPIES POWER OF OPPONENT.

POWER OF MIMICRY: Whenever involved in a challenge he may use the power of his opponent, but when the challenge is over, stops the Mimicry. NOTE: If his opponent is the Silencer, both are silenced. If his opponent is the Changeling, the Mimic must change.

LEVIATHAN: MOVES PLANETS

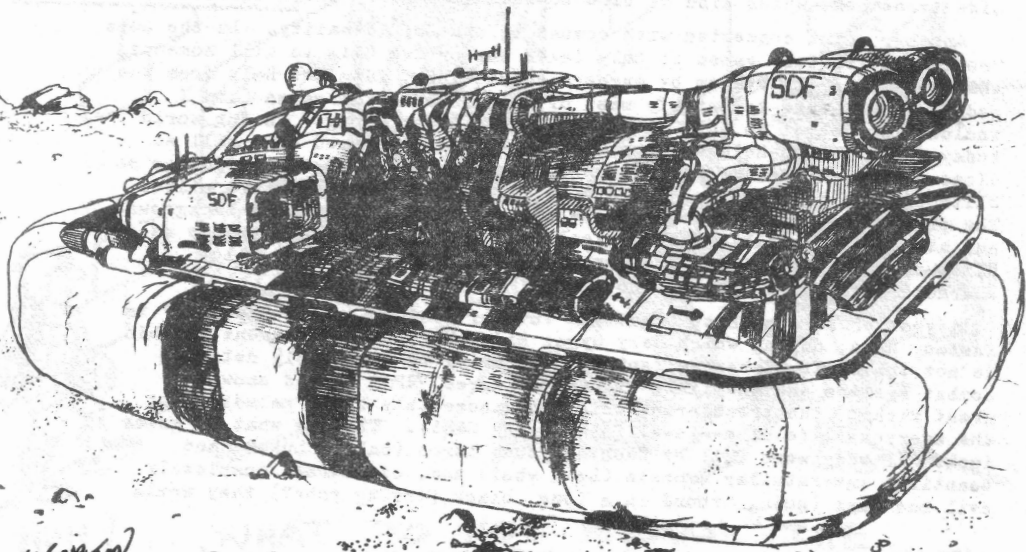
POWER TO RAM: Whenever involved in a successful attack against any planet, even if only an ally, the planet is bumped out of that system and moves to either the system on the left or the right, as chosen by the Leviathan. It is there permanently unless once more rammed. Note that a player automatically loses his power if 3 planets are bumped out of his home system.

MESH: ALLOWS ALLIES TO USE THEIR POWERS.

POWER TO MESH-IN ALLIES: When the offensive or defensive player, the Mesh allows (at his discretion) his allies to use their powers against their opponents, even if they could not usually do so, such as Laser etc.

DELATRON: PLAYS MUSICAL CHAIRS (do not use with Dictator).

POWER OF MUSIC: On his turn, the Delatron draws a stardisc from the destiny pile and then changes places with the person of that colour, swapping power, tokens and colour but retaining cards. He then begins to sing/hum, and all other players proceed to run round the table until he stops when they must sit down in the nearest seat. Players keep only their cards. This happens after the Delatron has made his challenge(s) for that turn, and play proceeds normally, passing on to the player on the Delatron's left etc.



# THOUGHTS ON RPGs

As far as I am concerned AD&D is the best RPG around at the moment, although Runequest and MGC's new "In the Labyrinth" aren't far behind. RPGs covering recent to future times are okay for a while but have at least one very serious drawback: that of player/character knowledge. In your typical medieval fantasy setting it is easy to come up with ideas and plans as our everyday knowledge can be used, e.g. we take the door off its hinges and use it as a bridge across the pit, or we prod the ground in front of us with a pole to set off any traps/doors. However this cannot be done in Traveller, for instance, because of the technology present in that game. Do you know how to crack a safe, deactivate an alarm system, fly a starship or repair a warp engine? Of course not, but your character that you are playing in the game probably does! How then do you measure his success at various tasks? By die roll, normally compared to one or more of the character's ability scores. Where is the fun or playing skill in this?

One of an RPGs most important features is a good combat system. To my mind this is somewhere that AD&D tends to fall down when compared to other RPGs in its sphere of interest. The others all bring in at least a little player skill as part of combat, with C&S and ITL showing this most plainly. This is a great thing to have in a game because combat happens often, and players like to have some effect on what is going on, rather than just sit there and roll dice. Top Secret (reviewed elsewhere this issue) brings in choice of attack/defense modes for its HTH (hand-to-hand) combat, but then as with all other modern/future RPGs its gun combat system is purely on a die roll. I well remember how dissatisfied I was with the "Traveller" gun combat system, and my many (futile) attempts to bring some form of player skill into it. It seems just about impossible though. When you analyse gun combat all the character does is point his weapon (be it shotgun, SMG or laser disintegrator) and pull the trigger. Compare this with your standard knight in armour who has to choose which side to attack, which kind of blow to use, if a parry would be better, etc.

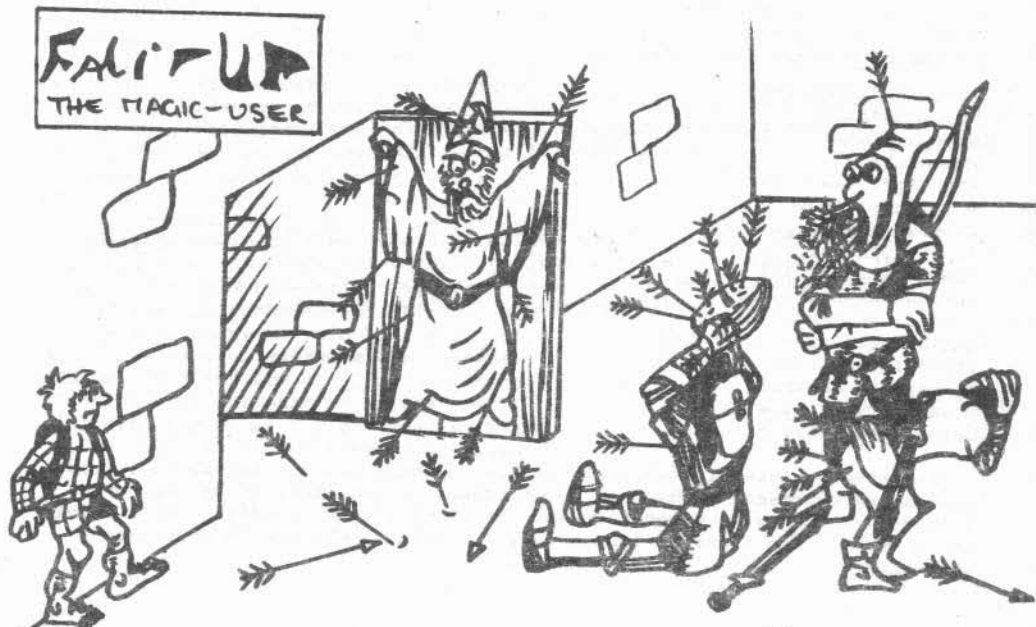
Another point connected with combat is that of lethality. In the more "realistic" fantasy games it only takes one or two hits to kill someone. AD&D qualifies its system by murmurs about "luck, fate and help from the gods", which seems to satisfy most of us. Then the SF games (and I include Top Secret in this category), again, seem wrong. In the world today we have hand-held weapons which are almost assured of a kill at close ranges, so for SF characters to survive blasts from such things as blitz cannons is, surely, just a game device to keep characters alive. The problem is luck and god-sent help don't fit in with an SF background and although incredibly fast medical aid is reasonable such things as "life-restoring machines" just are not. Put simply SF RPGs allow characters to get away with too much.

A year or so ago White Dwarf was full of discussions on "reality" in fantasy RPGs, during which Gary Gygax made the immortal comment "...this is not the stuff of heroic fantasy", referring to incredibly detailed combat systems and the like. I have to agree, RPGs should show the great wizard, the treacherous thief and incredibly brave paladin, not the everyday life of medieval folk (sorry C&S!). This is what SF games lack. If they were full of dashing young heroes (called Luke?) and beautiful interstellar damsels (Leia who?) and, of course, completely evil bad-guys (going around in a long, black flowing robe?) they would



have a lot more attraction and be more fun to play. Unfortunately Traveller, in particular, has picked up what I call "seedy SF", concentrating on future down-and-outs and with almost everyone being a criminal type. What I would like to see (and I'm working on it at the moment) is an SF RPG based quite strongly on "pulp" SF of the Star Wars or Battlestar Galactica type. If players are running amazingly heroic characters it is quite acceptable to give them a combat system bias, how many times was Luke Skywalker hit while dashing about the Death Star? The fact that he was virtually a country yokel and the people shooting at him were highly-trained storm troopers is irrelevant, he was the good guy so he was going to survive. In an RPG this survivability can be fairly easily translated into bonuses to hit and incredible dodging ability (or perhaps a form of klutz system for anyone shooting at him). Obviously characters must not be invincible, because this would make for a very boring game, but if they are nearly, it would enable the GM to put them into what would normally be impossibly dangerous situations, and that what heroics is all about: facing impossible odds yet still winning through in the end.

CALLING SF GAMERS: As I mentioned above I'm presently working on a new SF RPG, but I could do with some help. If you are dissatisfied with "Traveller" or would just like to put forward your views or opinions then please write to me (address in the Editorial). I'm especially interested in combat systems (HTH, gun and ship-to-ship), ideas for technological items, character design systems and good SF artwork. If you do write please put SFRPG on the bottom left-hand corner of your letter. With a little luck we should be able to put together something that'll knock Traveller for six!



HUH!... WHAT DO YOU MEAN "THE  
CORRIDOR WAS EMPTY WHEN I  
CHECKED IT?"

# MONSTERS

## LIVING WALL By Rich Clifton

Frequency: Rare  
No. Appearing: 1  
Armour Class: 3(body), 6(ropes)  
Movement: 2"  
Hit Dice: 5-8  
% in lair: 95%  
Treasure Type: Nil  
No of Attacks: 5-8 and 1  
Damage/Attack: 1-4/5  
Special Attack: Digestion  
Special Defenses: Nil  
Magic Resistance: standard  
Intelligence: Very  
Alignment: Neutral  
Size: L (5-8 sq feet)  
Psionic Ability: None

The "wall" is a thin (one inch thick) slab of tough (AC 3), rubbery flesh. It lies in wait attached to a wall in some underground or lightless place, having previously eroded a 1" deep niche of its own size. Into which it works its way using suckers (which also hold it in place) and where it lurks in wait of prey. Coiled up inside the body are from 5-8 rope-like tentacles (number of ropes is directly proportional to hit dice). These can be ejected up to 20' in 3 segments, if they hit a victim they will grab and constrict for 1-4 damage. Each rope is AC 6, and can take 8 hit points before being sliced off. In melee as well as constriction the ropes drag the victim 5' per rope attached towards its "face". There digestive juices

are secreted onto the victim doing 5 damage per melee round.

Often, when prey are looking the other way, it will shoot forth tentacles at ankle height, and attempt to trip victims, making it easier to draw them to the juices. When travelling, the Roping Wall rolls itself into a ball using a type of radar (like bats) to 'see'.

Severed ropes re-grow in 2-8 days. Blunt weapons cause no damage to the Wall, neither do poison or acid.

## LIVING COIN By Rich Clifton

Frequency: Uncommon  
No. Appearing: 25-1000  
Armour Class: 0(singly), 8(group)  
Movement: 0"  
Hit Dice: see below  
% in lair: 100%  
Treasure Type: J, K, L, M, N  
No of Attacks: 1  
Damage/Attack: 1-4  
Special Attacks: Nil  
Special Defenses: Nil  
Magic Resistance: standard  
Intelligence: Non-  
Alignment: Neutral  
Size: S (see below)  
Psionic Ability: None

Living Coins are small, fungoid creatures that have evolved to resemble, almost perfectly, actual lead, copper, silver, gold and platinum pieces. A very young 'Coin', 1-3 years old looks like a lead piece and has  $\frac{1}{2}$  of an hit point (ie. four are killed by 1 hit point damage); a young one (4-8 yrs) seems to be copper with half a hit point; mature coins (9-15 yrs) seem silver and have 1 hit; an old coin (16-20) seems golden and has one and a half hits (2 are killed by 3 damage) and a venerable coin (21-23 yr) looks like platinum and has 2 hit points.

Upon casual examination from about 2' or less there is a 1 in 10 per person chance that the fraud is noticed.

The armour class of 0 per coin is due to their small size, so in a group the rating decreases to 8. Due to poisonous juices secreted by the coins they do 1-4 damage to exposed flesh. If wiped off the secretion start again in 10 turns. The treasure type is not the coin itself but is found alongside them.



**NEMESIS** By Nicholas Clifton

Frequency: Very Rare  
No Appearing: 1  
Armour Class: See below  
Movement: See below  
Hit Dice: See below  
% in lair: 0%  
Treasure Type: None  
No of Attacks: See below  
Damage/Attack: See below  
Special Attacks: See below  
Special Defenses: See below  
Magic Resistance: 80%  
Intelligence: Genius  
Alignment: See below  
Size: M  
Psionic Ability: See below  
Attack/Defense Modes: all/all

had 4-sided dice for determining HTK, the Nemesis would have d6's etc). It has twice the number of attacks as its victim and damage done if it hits is a fixed amount, three times the victim's level. Its alignment is that from which the victim deviated, or neutral if it is on one of the other types of mission. The Nemesis will only have a psionic ability if its victim has one, and even then its strength for attack and defense will only be one more than that of the victim (it has no disciplines or sciences). The Nemesis is immune to all attacks from anyone or anything other than the victim, and will always have a saving throw of 5 even if it is not normally entitled to one. It is immune to the effects of any artifact or relic. Finally, it has the following spells which it can use once a day if it thinks they are really necessary: Teleport, (any distance with no chance of error), Locate Object (again with any range and also on any plane), Plane Shift, Quest, Geas, Anti-Magic Shell, Finger of Death, Regenerate, Reincarnate, True Seeing and Imprisonment.

From the above it is easy to see that a person will be exceedingly lucky if he defeats his Nemesis, but since there is only one for each person, if a person does defeat his Nemesis then he will be free of it for ever.

**AND NOW:-** Here's YOUR chance to get an article in "The Beholder"! We've generously left a blank space below especially for YOUR work. Congratulations! You've made the big time!!! (Spacefiller? Wot spacefiller?!!!!!!!)

The Nemesis is a being created by the Gods for three purposes:  
1) To punish alignment breakers,  
2) To return those people to the dead those who the Gods would prefer to see dead.  
3) To exact revenge on those who have tricked the Gods with foul play.

It appears as a large, red, glowing shape, about 5' in diameter, with a distorted face of the victim shining in its center. Its characteristics depend mainly on the victim: its armour class is 5 better than the victim's; its movement rate is 2" more than the victim's (over any medium); its hit dice are 4 more than the victim's, and also one type better (ie. if the vic-

# CHRONICLE: fiends and foes ...

by G. Duke

Being the fourth part of the chronicle  
A playtest through the streets and wilds of the CITY STATE (Judges Guild)

Featuring: Aresthusa (alias Wily Wilma) elven thief  
Tuffnik human fighter  
Peebinga human M/U  
Stroller human ranger  
Malmo human cleric

The east wind, chill and strong, howled in the ravine. In the eerie moonlight the demonic statue stood immense and frighteningly lifelike. The harsh cries of battle-lusting orcs tore through the bitter air as the adventurers hurried to defend themselves. From three sides, the grim-faced fiends closed on the horrified party, behind whom lay the deep ravine.

Orcs of the Black Hand were these cruel beasts; many shuddered and weakened merely at hearing that cursed name. Clothed all in black, their skin was dark as ebon; glowing red were their eyes, dull red their sharp claws and wicked scimitars. Many rode on viscious fanged wolves of great size. Spinechilling was the clamour that arose from those hoards.

As this evil company approached, a sudden burst of sparks and flashing colours erupted around the statue, dazzling the onrushing beasts. Many orcs fell, covering their eyes, to the ground; wolves turned tail, flinging their blinded riders from their backs. But the rout was short-lived. Peebinga could not maintain the brilliant spell for long and even as the last sparks fell to the ground, a second rank of orcs rushed forwards. Hand to hand combat was joined; four men against fifty vile orcs and voracious wolves. Aresthusa was nowhere to be seen.

Swords flashed in the moonlight and the company defended valiantly with their backs to the ravine, a long drop, behind them. Orc heads rolled to the ground, a wolf yelped as a stinging blow caught it between the eyes, but the adventurers were pushed ever backwards. Peebinga fell motionless to the ground and their evil adversaries leapt forward sensing victory.

At that moment, there was a crack of lightning. It shot from the heavens, striking the great moonlit statue, and there came a simultaneous deafening thunderclap. With that there was a roar and flames leapt up from the awakened demon. The huge hell-beast stepped from its pedestal swiping at the petrified creatures around him. The orcs, in despair, flung themselves at the remaining adventurers desperate for some spoils, and brought Tuffnik and Malmo to the ground. Stroller, jumping backwards to avoid their grasp, lost his balance, toppled on the brink and with a cry, fell over the precipice.

The orcs fled, carrying their two captives with them as the demon rampaged, smashing the forest and trampling on stragglng orcs and cowering wolves. Only when all lay dead at the scene of the battle did it return to the pedestal. Then the bitter wind died down and a black cloud passed over the moon; the demon moved no more.

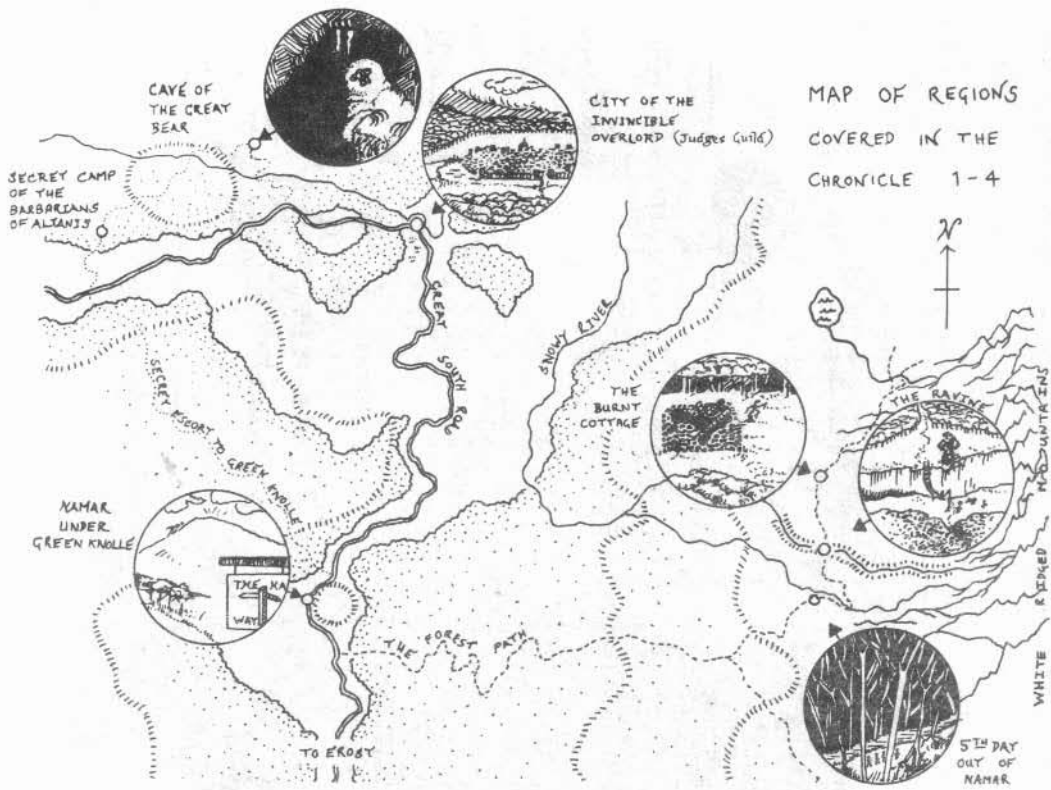
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With the first light of dawn, Aresthusa reappeared on the scene, climbing out of the forest among the fallen trees; damp with dew she warmed herself in the morning sun. Moving quietly and warily out towards the statue she suddenly sighted a familiar figure resting beneath it. She called out. It was Peebinga.

Greeting one another with relieved surprise, they recounted all they knew. The magician told of how he'd escaped by feigning death, the elf of how she'd climbed to safety along the cliff-face and observed the rest of the melee from the relative safety of the forest. It was with sorrow that she informed Peebinga of Stroller's fatal fall, and of the capture of their other companions.

+ + +





By noon, the two had rifled through the garments of all the dead orcs and had collected a handful of coins and a silver, jewelled dagger. Coming across the fallen sword of Stroller, Aresthusa took it to the edge of the ravine to throw it to its fallen master. Reaching the precipice however, she almost fell with surprise for there, not thirty feet below, on a narrow ledge lay the ranger himself. He was just recovering after his short fall.

+ + +

Thus there remained but three adventurers. However, Stroller was resolved to try and rescue his captured companions and nothing Peebinga or the persuasive Wilma could do would make him change his mind. They had little choice but to go along with him. Thus it was that the next morning found them back at the clearing of the burnt house.

This time they entered the clearing with more care, but if there was any foe there, he kept well hidden. The wide, open areas now frightened the adventurers and they hurried through once Aresthusa gave the all-clear. Taking the northern path back into the dense forest, they travelled, winding from side to side but maintaining a general north-easterly direction, for some three hours till noon. The company were gloomy and their mood was reflected by the steady drizzle that started.

After a brief rest, they carried on. The path was now some ten feet wide and had cart ruts in it. There was much evidence of a large company having passed along it and Stroller could make out the foot-prints of the orc hoard and their prisoners. He guessed that they'd been moving at a fast pace.

"We are a good thirty-six hours behind," he told his demoralized companions. "We must press on before the tracks are lost."

Five times that afternoon, they passed through clearings or by way-side cottages. At each there had been burning and looting. At one, an area of forest had burnt leaving barren, blackened trunks.



by Phil Alexander

Towards evening, the party came to a junction. A narrow path dipped off to the right between high rock walls; the tracks, now barely visible with the obscuring rain, ran down this path.

+ + +

By the next morning, the drizzle had stopped and the sky had cleared to allow fleeting sun rays to strike the forest. Rising refreshed, the three companions had snared and eaten a rabbit, then taken the right path. The way wound sharply this way and that for about a mile, the walls growing sheer and tall, covered in slimy moss.

"The perfect place for an ambush," thought Wilma and offered a quick prayer for sanctuary. After a while, the right wall fell away and the path became a ledge beside a slow-flowing, ominous green river. The ledge was of solid rock, worn by the passage of many feet. It was strangely quiet.

Rounding a corner, Stroller stopped dead in his tracks. There before him rising from the river was a monstrous creature. Atop its long, sinuous neck was a vile head; its eyes were deeply pitted and it bore long, sharp horns. The mouth was huge and equipped with terrifying fangs.

Higher and higher the beast rose out of the soupy waters and the stench was repulsive. Stroller reeled backwards, gasping, as the monster emitted a very disturbing gurgling, swallowing sound.

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Chronicle will return in issue 19

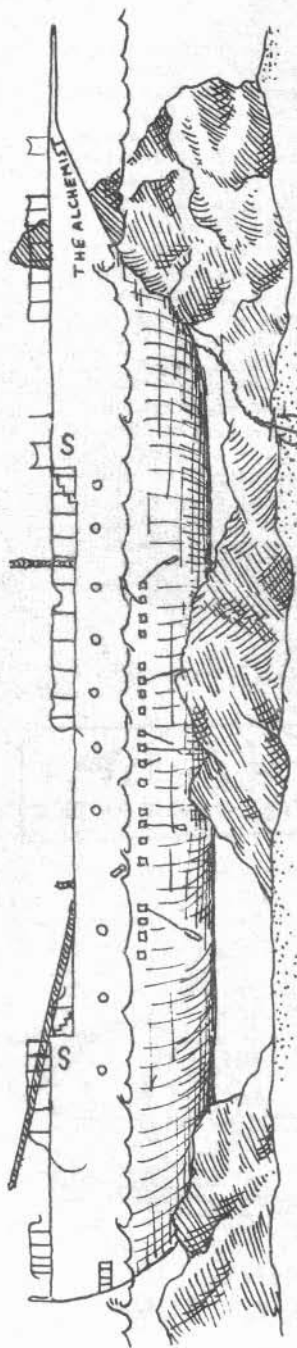
# INTRUDER

The American mini-games company Task Force Games continue to turn out excellent products. One of their latest is "Intruder", a game blatantly based on the film "Alien", which, despite some failings, is a good buy at £2.95. The game consists of a 16 page rulebook (but don't let this fool you: the game is quite simple), a map of the space station "Prometheus" (where all the action takes place) and 54 counters representing crewmen, equipment and the alien(s). The game is made for solitary play (although multi-player scenarios are given) and for this purpose the map is covered in numbers, which, combined with die rolls, show how the alien and various other non-crewmember counters move. These counters are all inverted, so you don't know which are harmless pets, dummies or ferocious aliens. As the game progresses the crew arm up with various weapons, and engineers get to work on flame-throwers and electro-prods, which are then used in attempts to kill or (if possible) capture the alien. However the alien's big advantage is that you don't know what special powers it's got until you meet it, so if everyone is armed with flame guns and it turns out to be fire-resistant you could be in trouble! Also, the longer the alien survives the further it progresses through its life stages. At the start (LS1) it is fairly weak and can often be controlled and caged, but by the time it's got to LS6 it's time to start panicking, especially if it turns out to have the 'clone' ability, which means you'll be facing several of the things rather than just one! Not a game for the faint of heart!



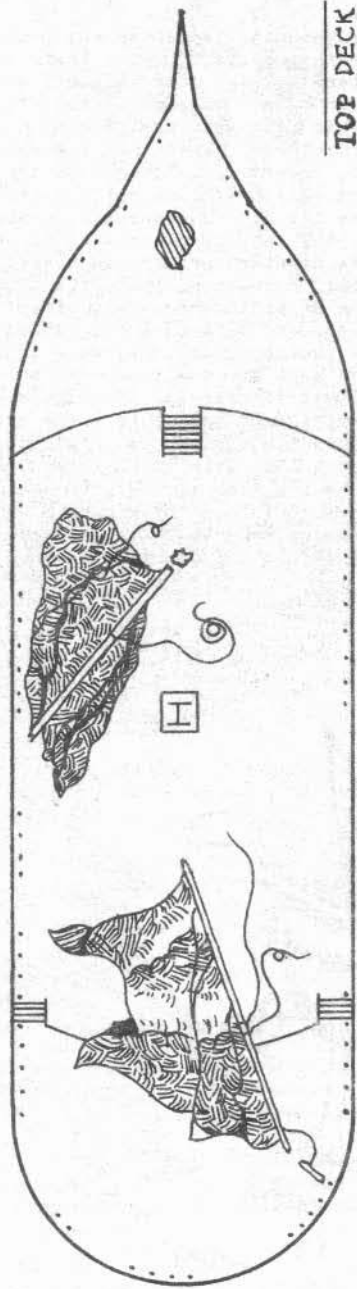
NOPE, IT DON'T SAY ANYTHING IN  
HERE 'BOUT GOBLINS HAVING SUB-  
MACHINE GUNS!



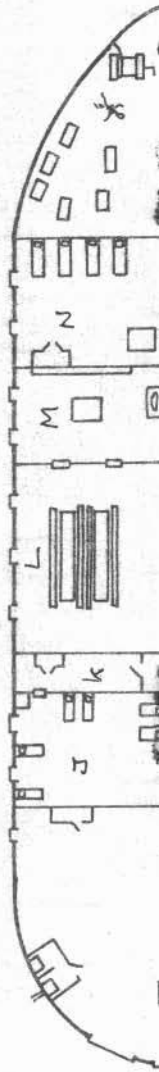


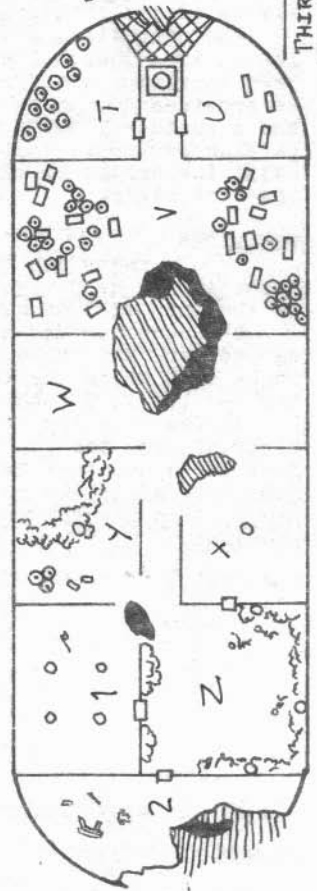
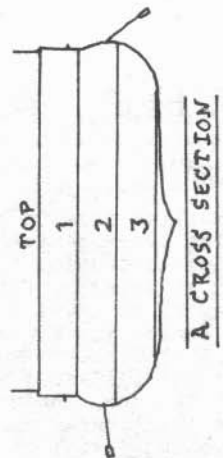
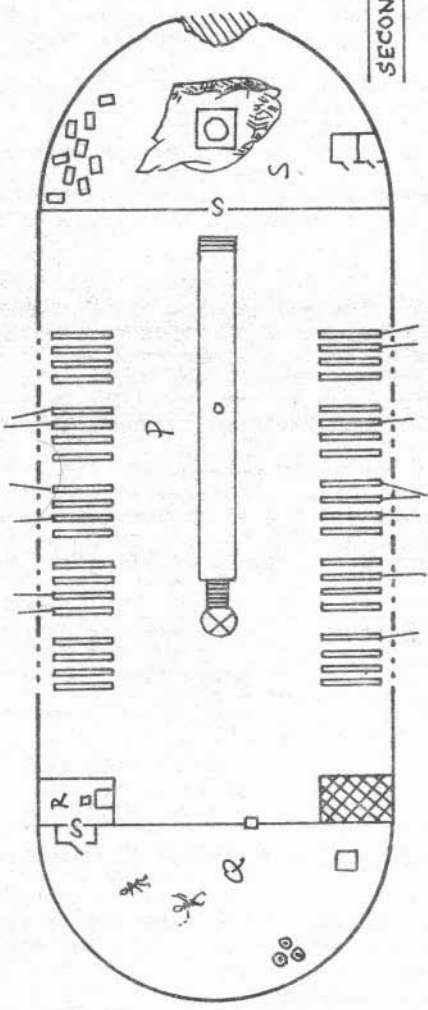
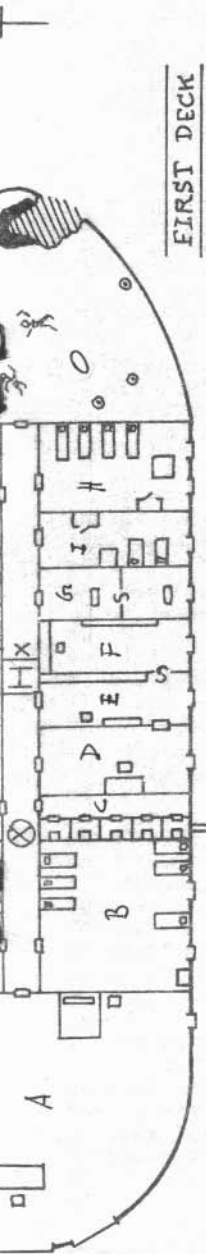
STARBOARD

# THE ALCHEMIST



TOP DECK





# THE ALCHEMIST

by Mark Allen

## -BACKGROUND

The Alchemist is a schooner some 220' long and 60' wide. In its sailing days it had the unusual function of a floating laboratory. The experimentation was made by the alchemist Sorogahn who was attempting to develop the immortalising drug 'Imortine'. The alchemist worked secretly for he required to use the illegal drug Morphine.

However, he never completed his experiments for one night during a violent storm, the schooner crashed on to the rugged rocks a hundred yards off the coastline, drowning all its crew.

Over the last four years, the wreck has been taken over by creatures of the sea. Access to the wreck from the land is by boat, or by swimming the hundred yards from the shore at low tide. However, the local fishermen will be loath to go near the vessel, being mortally afraid of its inhabitants.

The characters are employed by Logahn, the brother of Sorogahn. Logahn is a fourth level magic user and explains that his brother had been borrowing his first level spell book at the time of the wreck. He promises the party a payment of 500GP if they can return this book, and a further 300GP for information on his brother (with proof!). His parting advice is that the party beware of the bi-phibians which inhabit the wreck; he advises them to approach the vessel only under cover of night.

## -THE TIDES

There are two high tides and two low tides each day; it is important to keep track of the height of the tide for certain levels of the ship will be submerged at certain times each day.

The schooner has a top deck and three lower decks; the first deck, second deck and third deck (from top to bottom). The hull extends three feet below the third deck and rests on rugged rock outcrops. The sea bed is 10' below.

At low tide the height of the water here is 20' (ie level with the floor of deck two). From low tide, it rises at a rate of one foot per hour, to a height of 26' at the sixth hour (20' +6'). It then ebbs at a like rate, returning to a height of 20' at the twelfth hour. This happens twice per day, the cycle starting and ending at midnight.

Tide Table:

time	height	level on ship
midnight	20'	level with deck two
1 am	21'	1' above floor level of deck 2
3 am	23'	3' " " " " " "
6 am	26'	6' " " " " " "
9 am	23'	3' " " " " " "
midday	20'	level with deck two
6 pm	26'	6' above floor level of deck 2
midnight	20'	level with deck two

All of the above information is available to the adventurers.

## -CHANCE ENCOUNTERS

These are wanderers met on the way to and from the wreck; roll d6 per turn - a 6 = a wanderer. Roll a d8 between 8pm and 6am, a d4 between 6am and 8pm:

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1 = d6 barracuda | 5 = d4 lacedons                                   |
| 2 = a giant crab | 6 = d4 bi-phibians armed with javelins            |
| 3 = 3-6 dolphins | 7 = 2-5 buccaneers in a rowboat, AC 8 with spears |
| 4 = a giant eel  | 8 = a young griffon (5 hit dice)                  |

## -THE BI-PHIBIANS

These are a rare race found only on marine coastlines. They are humanoid in appearance but have slightly green skin, webbed hands and feet and small 'gills' at the side of the neck. They generally have a sea lair, going ashore only to trade; they have a reputation for smuggling.

Frequency: rare  
No Appearing: 5-40  
Armour Class: 7 on land, 5 in water  
Movement: 12" on land, 24" in water  
Hit Dice: 1d8  
% in Lair: 40%  
Treasure Type: variable  
No of Attacks: 1  
Damage/Attack: by weapon or d8  
Special Attacks: +3 to hit in water  
vs land creatures  
Special defense: +2 AC in water vs  
land creatures  
Magic Resistance: standard  
Intelligence: average  
Alignment: neutral (evil)  
Size: M (6' tall)  
Psionic Ability: none



Bi-phibians employ javelins, spears, tridents, daggers or short swords. They love gems and gold, and are fond of alcohol. A bi-phibian may attack with its webbed hands if gaining surprise, going for a strangle-hold. This attack is at -3 to hit, but if successful, the bi-phibian does 1-8 automatic points of damage per round.

All bi-phibians speak the common tongue and the basic language of dolphins. They may summon the latter with a 30% chance of success, and the dolphin will act as steed. However, no dolphin will fight for a bi-phibian, due to their conflict of alignment.

## -THE ALCHEMIST:

### Top Deck

This deck is very bare, having been wave and wind swept. The remains of two shattered masts and their torn sails lie across the tarred boards.

Four orcs patrol the deck between 8pm and 6am (5,6,6,8HTK, armed with spears) while during the day a single orc (8HTK, armed with axe and crossbow) keeps watch.

There is a single hatch in the centre of the deck. It is locked from below but will be opened if knocked by a bi-phibian at X on the first deck. Between 8pm and 6am, the hatch is open, and there is no bi-phibian at X. The bi-phibian is armed with a barbed sea-dagger (d3 +2 damage) and has 12gp, 5HTK.

### First Deck

A Illiain the bi-phibian leader: third level fighter, AC 3, 19HTK.

The room is shared by a female bi-phibian (0 level, 1HTK). In the chamber are a toilet cubicle, table and chair, double bed and cupboard. The latter contains robes, a +1, silver barbed dagger (d3 +3 damage) and, in the pocket of one of the robes, an ivory whistle (summons 1-4 dolphins if blown underwater). Hidden in the false bottom of the cupboard is an ornamented +1 trident, 250gp and a crate (8 small bottles) of "Blackbite", a very strong liquor.

In a small desk beside the bed are five ampoules of Imortine-a (each will let the drinker live one week without aging).



B Bi-~~phibian~~ dormitory: five bi-~~phibians~~ armed with short swords, 2, 3, 3, 5, 7HTK. There are six bunkbeds and a water pump. The off-duty bi-~~phibians~~ play dice and cards. The cards are cleverly marked and anyone knowing the markings (only one of the bi-~~phibians~~ knows them) will be able to win 90% of the time.

C WCs. There is a 50% chance that an unarmed orc will be caught 'with his trousers down'.

D An old study. Only a table and chair remain and a thin layer of dust coats the room. The table has two drawers, both empty, but the left hand one has a false back. Behind this lies a black 4" cube box. This contains a black bag within which is a clear crystal prism. Inscribed on the base of the box are the words "Hold portal twice, burning hands twice". If the prism is removed from the bag and held in the hand, it emits a faint glow. If however, the words 'hold portal' are spoken, a beam of light will shoot from the prism on to the nearest door (maximum range of 80') causing the door to be held (as spell) for 4 rounds. If the words 'burning hands' are uttered, the prism radiates great heat causing the holder to take four points of damage as if struck by a 'Burning Hands' spell! There are two charges of each spell effect.

E The library. The shelves bear books on the sea, books full of chemical formulae and complicated experiments. All are of little interest to the adventurers. However, slipped behind a row of books on the topmost shelf is a Libram of Self Defense. If this is studied for one month, the reader will be endowed with open hand combat and the effective armour class of a third level monk. The libram will disappear having been read.

Also in the room is a chair with a padded cushion. Within this is Logahn's slim spell book (his name is scribed on the front). It contains the first level spells 2, 3, 5, 7, 14, 17, 22 and 27 (PH numbers given).

F Secret laboratory of Sorogahn the Alchemist. It has been undisturbed since the night of the wreck, and there is a  $\frac{1}{2}$ " layer of dust over the room. On the north sideboard are an assortment of distilling tubes, conical flasks, glass tubes and oil burners. All liquid has long since evaporated. On the east shelf are nine, gallon, ceramic bottles. Each is marked with a letter. These are the nine constituents of Imortine-b (Sorogahn's nearest attempt at making a totally immortalising drug). If mixed in the right quantities, they will produce enough Imortine-b for a man to live 10 years without aging (see G II for these quantities).

G Antechamber to the secret treasure chamber. It contains a decoy treasure chest locked by a corroded padlock. This contains 85gp, 150sp and a -3 cursed longsword.

G II The north door is secret and locked (can be broken down in d4 rounds). The room contains a single chest, fixed to the floor by a pivot. The lock to the chest has three poisoned needles (d8 damage each). The chest must first be rotated 180° or its opening will cause a Magic Mouth to shout 'Intruders', alerting all on the first deck.

In the chest are: a box containing 5 +3 arrow heads

a tin of marine pills (10, each giving one hour of submarine breathing)

3,570gp, 5405sp and 3 pearls (3 x 100gp)

a set of ivory dice (Augury Dice (see TBH2) NB, no clues should be given as to their identity)

a list of bi-~~phibian~~ and orc names with their part of the treasure

a parchment giving the formula for Imortine-b (using the letters used in F to code for chemicals).

H Four gnolls live and sleep here. They are armed with morning stars and are 6,10,12 and 17HTK. The fourth has 17 strength (+1 to hit and damage). They are hired as professional torcherers (if any intruder is caught, the torcherers will drain the character's prime requisite point by point until he talks (points return one per day)) and as guards in case of emergencies. They each carry 2-20gp.

The room contains four bunks, a wardrobe and a table. The latter bears a water jug and torching utensils whilst the wardrobe contains various clothes. Stitched into the hem of a cloak are three topaz gems (worth 200, 300 and 800gp).

I Two orcs live and sleep here, but are often off on routine checks (see wanderers). They are armed with axes and are 3 and 5HTK. The former has found a wand (1 charge left) and is convinced that it is a Wand of Fire. He will threaten intruders with it, but should he press the button it will teleport him a mile in the direction he pointed it! Each orc carries 2-12gp.

The room contains two bunks, a wardrobe and a table. The four legs of the latter are hollow, containing a total of 40gp. The wardrobe contains various clothes and a broad sword.

J Bi-tribian dormitory: four bi-tribians armed with +1 javelins (one each), +1 to hit due to strength, AC 5, 10,11,11 and 12HTK. They are ranked above those in B and guard the armoury, K. There are six bunkbeds and a water pump.

K The armoury. If the starboard (south) cupboard is opened by turning the handle a trapdoor, marked by X on the map, will open dropping anyone on it 7' to the second deck (d4 damage) at the mercy of Youseff (see P). They will land at the point marked X on the second deck. The cupboard is actually empty! However, the north, locked cupboard contains 3 small shields, 10 short swords, 3 tridents, 7 javelins, 5 flasks of octopus ink (used as underwater 'smoke screens' (worth 30-40gp each), a box with three sleep darts (as spell but save allowed) and a coil of tripwire (99% invisible when used in a trap) 20' long.

L The dining room. There is a 10% chance that either the two orcs in I or the four bi-tribians in J will be eating, served by the cook in M. The room contains two long tables with benches either side, and has oil lanterns hung on the ceiling (full but unlit).

M The galley. Two female orc cooks (2 and 3HTK, AC 10) are preparing the next meal or serving in L. If attacked, they are quite handy with a carving knife (1-3 damage) but would rather flee screaming than fight. Under the starboard sink is hung a key to room N.

N Servants' room. There are four beds (four the two cooks and two maids), a cupboard and a table. On the latter is a jug of water and bowl of fruit. In the cupboard are many tatty clothes. In the pocket of a dress is a ring of keys to rooms O, Q, T and U.

The maids (both female orcs) will be working (see wanderers) or sleeping (60%) or talking (40%) in this room. Both carry a dagger, 2-12 gp and are AC 10, 1 and 3HTK.

O This room is pierced by the rocks and the floor is constantly damp. Old corpses lie decomposing on the floor, smelling somewhat high. For this reason, the door to this room is locked. There are three empty barrels and six cases of rigging, each nailed shut. There is a capstan in here with a chain passing out through the port porthole. This is the anchor chain. The capstan is rusted solid.

It is possible for slimmer adventurers to climb through the hole that the rock has made in the floor, to the second deck, room S.

### Second Deck

P The great rowing deck. Youseff the lacedon (sea ghoul) lives here. He is 16HTK and will fight anyone entering P to the death. This deck has twenty long benches each side. Attached to each bench by ankle chains are two or three skeletons, those of the drowned slave oarsmen. This deck is often covered by water (at high tide the deck is 6' below water) and this will hinder the adventurers (depending on the depth of water, the DM should give penalties 'to hit'). It is recommended that you read the section on Underwater Adventures in the DMs Guide).

Broken and rotting oars float around in here together with loose bones. There are a few oars still in their locks. It is usually quite light in here as the sun can flood through the oar-holes.

A raised walkway runs along the centre of the deck, some 2' above the floor. At the aft end of this walkway a steep flight of steps leads up to a trapdoor in the ceiling. This has a strong padlock on it. The trapdoor opens to the corridor of the first deck (marked by a cross within a circle).

The sternmost starboard bench is broken and Youseff has hidden his treasure beneath it. This consists of a silver crown (worth 450gp) that requires a lot of restoration work to remove algal growths.

'a' is a long, low oar hold. The lid is fastened simply by a peg. The hold contains water at all times in which float eight oars, a whip, twelve watertight flasks of oil and a branding iron with the letter S.

Attached to a pole in the centre of the walkway are two side drums which were used to keep the rhythm of the rowing.

Q This room at the very stern of the ship is completely watertight.

Decomposing bodies lie on the floor. It is very dark. The door from P is barred on the side of P and is sealed by wax. Depending on the amount of water in P, when this door is opened, the adventurers may be forced into Q with a rush of water. The door is also locked.

There are three barrels of by now well matured wine against the stern wall (each worth 85gp), a table on which are various torching devices in the starboard corner, and a cupboard in the port corner. This contains three suits of leather armour and, on a shelf, 6 silk packets of Dust of Appearance. This shelf is 4' high, so depending on the depth of water in Q the dust may be destroyed on opening the cupboard by in-rushing water.

There is a secret door in the back of the cupboard leading to R.

R In this room are a small writing desk and chair. Slumped in the chair is the barely decomposed body of Sorogahn the Alchemist, a gleaming trident (+2) stuck through his back. In his clenched right hand he holds a quill and on the desk before him is an unfinished letter:

"My dearest brother,

We are all doomed in this violent storm; the crew have mutinied, all is lost. If ever you should find this letter, here is the formula for the immortalising drug, Imor..."

This letter, together with the silver ring (worth 65gp) that the body wears, will warrant the 300gp reward from Logahn.

The desk is at a height of 3' above the floor, thus the letter might be destroyed by in-rushing water.

Beneath the desk is a small spy-hole through which room 2 on the third deck can be seen (however the view will be limited due to very poor light in 2).

S This forward chamber contains nine crates, sail cloth and two cramped cells. The latter are for solitary confinement and there is a skeleton with ball and chain attached in each. The cell doors are barred on the outside. The crates each contain 50' of rope. Beneath the rope in

the forwardmost crate is a black robe. In a pocket in the robe is a small tin containing 5 marine pills (each giving one hour of submarine breathing).

The sail cloth lies on the floor, hiding a trapdoor to the third deck (this opens at the point marked by a circle within a square on the third deck).

This room, like the one above it, has been rent by rocks and it is possible to climb up to the first deck, room O, through a hole rent in the ceiling.

#### Third Deck

T The old wine store. Like all rooms on the third deck, it is now permanently flooded. There are ten barrels in here, each full of sea water. This is now the lair of three kaolinths (sea hobgoblins) armed with spears, 3, 5 and 8HTK. They have just returned from ambushing a smuggler's boat and are counting up their loot; a total of 50gp and 320sp. They also have a bag of 100 small lead weights looking very much like platinum pieces.

U The old food store. The crates have long since been split open and their contents devoured, but the kaolinths now keep their catches of fish and their fishing net in here. There is a tripwire across the doorway that will alert the kaolinths in T. It is 60% invisible.

This room and all others on the third deck are poorly lit by a luminous brown alga which encrusts the woodwork. The water is murky and thus vision is restricted to 15'.

V This ballast room is filled with crates of rock and empty barrels.

A great rock has smashed through the hull, smashing the wall between V and W. There is no remnant of the doorway. It is possible to escape from the ship by swimming out through the hull here.

As the party enters this room, a shark (5HD, 28HTK) will enter through the hull; he is feeling particularly ravenous! He surprises on a 1-5 (d6).

W An empty room; there is a thick pole at either side supporting the ceiling. Part of the walls to X and Y have rotted allowing free access.

X There are fairly dense red algal growths in this room. Hidden among the weeds are two ixitxachtli (5HTK Cause Fear, 6HTK Darkness). In a hole in the projection of rock they have hidden their treasure; a shoddy ring (worth 1gp) and three small sapphires (worth 85gp each).

Note; if the Darkness is cast, the ixitxachtli will be unhindered, having excellent senses to substitute sight.

Y An old store-room containing barrels of tar, boxes of nails and rusted tools, bundles of sacking and broken nets. A dense band of large red algae grows around the central pillar and obscures the forward port corner of the room. Behind this dwell two lampreys, 6 and 7HTK, bloated on their last victim. They are not particularly hungry and will prefer to remain hidden.

Z All walls of this room are covered in kelps. Scattered among the normal kelps are specimens of strangle weed. There are three fronds on three of the walls in the patches marked by circles on the map. They are indistinguishable from the normal kelps. Each frond is 10' long (3HD).



The floor of the room is scattered with human skeletons, pieces of armour, fish skeletons and other assorted bones, especially around these strangle weed patches. At the roots of the starboardmost patch is a rotted sack with gold coins spilling from it. The sack contains 230gp, a small flask and a glass sphere (worth 5gp - it isn't a crystal ball!). The flask contains a Potion of Fish Control (see Animal Control), the word 'Fish' being engraved on the flask.

All the strangle weeds have a strength of 11.

1 Algae grow over all the surfaces of this room. A single axe lies half-hidden on the floor. There are four poles supporting the ceiling.

2 This large aft chamber has been pierced by a great rock. The rock is encrusted with coral polyps and has a large crevice in it. Within this crevice lies a huge moray eel fully 14' long and weighing some 50 pounds. It is 36HTK (all characteristics as for giant eel). Should the adventurers manage to conquer it, it is a great delicacy worth at least 2gp per pound.

Scattered around the room are various inedible objects including armour (rusted), weapons, broken flasks, rotted tables and chairs and algae covering most surfaces. Scattered around the floor (the eel has no regard for treasure) are 24gp, 456cp, 10sp, a platinum statuette of Neptune (worth 495gp), a golden gong (worth 55gp), two sealed metal cylinders, one containing ten sticks of rare incense (10x20gp) the other a scroll of Sleep, Shocking Grasp and Gust of Wind protected by an Explosive Runes spell. Both incense and scroll will be destroyed if the cylinders are opened under water. Also on the floor are three dead oysters, each containing a pearl (worth 100, 450 and 1000gp).

#### -WANDERING MONSTERS

##### First Deck

Roll a d8 every turn, an 8 indicates a wanderer. Then roll a d6 and consult the following table:

- 1 = Illiain (25%) or a bi-phanian from B (75%) visit the toilet.
- 2 = The orc maids in N sweep the corridor (day) or refill the oil-lamps in the corridor (night).
- 3 = Two bi-phanians from J go to G to check the decoy chest.
- 4-6 = Two orcs from I doing routine checks on all rooms.

##### Second Deck

Roll a d6 every turn, a 6 indicates a wanderer. Then roll a d4 and consult the following table:

- 1 = Youseff goes into room S to seek a victim.
- 2 = Two LHD barracudas enter via the oar-holes, 3 and 8HTK.
- 3 = A lamprey (8HTK) enters via an oar-hole.
- 4 = A lacedon (12HTK) comes to visit Youseff, entering at S.

##### Third Deck

Roll a d4 every turn, a 4 indicates a wanderer. Then roll a d6 and consult the following table:

- 1 = The kaolinths go to U for food.
- 2 = The 7HTK lamprey in Y gets hungry and leaves the wreck via the hole in W looking for food.
- 3 = Two rival kaolinths enter via the hole in V looking for a fight with anyone but preferably with the kaolinths in T they have heard about. They are armed with barbed spears (d6 +2 damage).
- 4 = Three bi-phanians from B swim under the hull and enter V via the hole to evict the kaolinths.
- 5 = The moray eel in 2 attacks a wandering barracuda (5HTK).
- 6 = A lost merman, armed with a trident, enters the wreck via the hole in W looking for help; he will flee from anything but another merman.

THE END

# INFO

The top American wargames company SPI have at last branched out into role playing. Their first offering is called "Dragonslayer" and should be on sale in this country in time for Dragonmeet III. The game is set in the typical D&D-style medieval period and is said to be designed primarily for the novice. Hopefully it'll encourage some of the hard-core board wargamers to give RPGs a try. If the game report in S&T (SPI's house magazine) is anything to go by the basics of "Dragonslayer" are very similar to In The Labyrinth, i.e. combat is carried out with counters on a hexagon map, magic is set around a spell point system and there are no character classes.

Anyone wishing to take part in a postal "Middle Earth" game contact Dave Davies at: 5 Thurstable Way, Tollesbury, Essex

As if you needed any telling Games Day '80, Britain's premier games convention, is getting closer. It will be held, as last year, at the Royal Horticultural Hall, Greycoat Street, Westminster, London SW1 on Saturday 27th September from 10am to 6pm. BE THERE!

If you want to vote in the "Games Day Awards" you should be able to get voting forms from Games Workshop, 1 Dalling Road, Hammersmith, London. Don't forget to vote for best games fanzine (subtle, eh?).

CONTACT: Dominic Barrington of 6 Houblon Road, Richmond, Surrey TW10 6DE (Tel: 01-940 0174) would like to find out about any D&D players or clubs in the Richmond/Kingston area. Someone must be there!



# A TO Q

Many thanks to all of you who sent in your replies to Q&A, our first questionnaire. There were a few surprises, especially with best/worst articles, but we'll come to that later.

1) & 2) Most people have seen nearly all of our issues, with No.s 8-11 being the exception. This is hardly surprising as those are the issues we haven't yet reprinted, so there are less of them about.

3) Far-and-away the most popular issue of TBH was No.11. Then came 10, 8, 7 and 5. Although we didn't ask for our worst issue it is interesting to note that TBH2 didn't get nominated once for best issue!

4) Our regular features were rated as follows (out of 10):-

1st: DM's Corner	: 7.48
2nd: Thoughts on....	: 7.41
3rd: Playtests	: 7.17
4th: Magic Jar	: 7.16
5th: Developing Campaign	: 7.09
6th: Monster Summoning	: 6.85
7th: New Spells	: 6.55
8th: Character Classes	: 6.26
9th: Reviews	: 5.91

These results are rather as expected, except for playtests which did better than we thought. Voting for that feature was polarised: either you love it or you hate it. Although we haven't had any playtests for a while we hope that "Chronicle" fills the gap. Although reviews came last in this section it still attained a very reasonable mark, so the odd reviews of new products will crop up now and again.

5) 87% of people thought the dungeon/wilderness was the best part of the mag, although many added "...there have been a couple of exceptions."

6) 44% prefer dungeons, 38% wildernesses and 18% either didn't care or liked the two mixed together.

7) Non-D&D articles in TBH? YES:-74% NO:-26%

8) It seems that our concentrating on Traveller for our "second game" was right:-

1st: Traveller :-	7.52
2nd: Runequest :-	6.09
3rd: Superhero :-	5.28
4th: C&S :-	4.82

Because of its relatively high rating we will be having a few Runequest articles in TBE soon.

9) Probably the most interesting question of all this was quite a close run thing, except for the top article which was way out in front:-

- 1st: Life after Death
- 2nd: Ring of Fire
- 3rd: Gorge of the Afterlife
- 4th: Legend of Leshy
- 5th: Variations on a Theme

Other articles which did well were: Fatigue, Brae Land & Wold, Magic System, Archer, Chronicle, Goblin Complex and Amazons.

10) You may be a bit suprised by the results of this one (worst article)!

- Worst: Life after Death
- 2nd: Way of Anubis
- 3rd: Amazons
- 4th: Expressing Alignment
- 5th: Archer

After these came a gaggle which included: Trickster, Loner, Comp Prog, Dragon Race, Death Test and Fatigue.

Well how about that then? Our all time best article is also our all time worst article!!! That's the way you voted it! Several other close runners-up in best article also were unpopular in other quarters, e.g. fatigue, amazons, archer and the magic system. Only goes to show you can't please all of the people all of the time! The only really useful info we can get from these two questions is that to please everyone TBH must contain a wide variety of material, so there'll usually be at least one article that each person really likes.

11) Subbers seem to get their copies of TBH around the 1st of the month.

12) Shops apparently get it a few days later, varying with distance from our "base" down here in Surrey.

13) TBH seems to have two advertising sources: our little ads in White Dwarf and D&Ders in general; at least 30% of people found out about TBH from a friend.

14) How could TBH be improved? To those of you who answered "It couldn't" or similarly, many thanks! For all the rest of you your ideas have been put on file, and will be discussed and used very soon.

15) Obviously this question was of special interest to us! (Marks out of 10)

- |                            |        |
|----------------------------|--------|
| 1st: The Beholder          | : 8.56 |
| 2nd: White Dwarf           | : 7.23 |
| 3rd: Demonsblood           | : 6.61 |
| 4th: Trollcrusher          | : 6.08 |
| 5th: Alarums & Excursions: | 6.04   |
| 6th: The Dragon            | : 5.32 |

No complaints there!

16) - 20) Those of you who answered these more "in depth" questions had some very intelligent and important things to say and although there were many disagreements (naturally) we'll be compiling a page or two of this stuff, and it'll either be somewhere in this issue, or the next one.



# TOP SECRET

With a blaze of publicity (and full colour adverts in WD) comes the latest product from TSR: "Top Secret". If you don't know already Top Secret (or, inevitably, TS) is an RPG set in modern day times covering the lives of spies: John Steed, James Bond et al. At £8.50 it is expensive, although reasonable when compared with other similar games. I can't help feeling, though, that a lot of the cost is due to the fancy box everything comes in. What do you get in that box? Well, not too much actually: a 72 page rulebook, a beginner's module and two really awful 20-sided dice. General appearance is good and the print size used throughout is very easily read, if a little large.

The best way to describe the basic rules of the game is to go through the rulebook, so....

After a bit of waffle you come to character construction. Abilities are rolled on 1d100, with adjustments to prevent anyone having too low a score in anything. These rolls are important because secondary and tertiary traits are based on them, and a character with poor physical strength may as well give up straight away. Experience levels are covered in a very basic way and could do with some adjustment. Equipment lists are good, but will doubtless be expanded on by players. Simple details of missions are given, but unfortunately many aspects are left almost entirely to a straight die roll. Payment for successful missions is briefly covered, and seems absurdly low (assassinating someone of your level, when you start out, pays at most \$1250, and possibly as little as one tenth that). Combat (HTH and projectile) is given 18 pages, and is one of the game's best aspects, although more explanation of martial arts would be welcome (there is no reason why an attacker shouldn't always go for the most deadly attack modes). There then follows a large section on miscellaneous rules (explosives, underwater combat, vehicles, etc) and optional rules (most of which should always be used). Then there is a list of "espionage-related organisations" for use by Admin (i.e. the DM) and some useful pull-out tables plus a very interesting list of "espionage-related terms".

Sometimes when I finish reading the rules of a new game it has managed to inspire me, and I'll get to work on a scenario straight away. But not this time. My first reaction was, how on earth do I design something for this? Some missions, e.g. surveillance or investigation seem non-starters to me, how many players will want to do these anyway, when there's skyjacking, bombing, blackmail, jail breaking, etc all available (and much easier for the Admin to cope with)? My present solution is to use a large-scale map of the Dorking area, meaning a whole town is at my disposal, I don't have to design it all. This is obviously one of the chief advantages of playing a modern day RPG. You may be wondering why I didn't use the beginners module included with the game. There is a simple answer to that: it's terrible!

When first playing the game it became apparent that players were going to be a problem. They all want to be James Bond from the word go, and expect to be going around in cars cum boats cum spacecraft (!!!), equipped with flame guns, equipment-packed briefcases, etc, etc, etc. Of course their characters must become very experienced before this sort of stuff is being handled out, and of course it isn't necessary for a good game. In the first mission I ran two amateur agents assassinated someone by crushing his car under several tons of beer, which they had in barrels on the back of a stolen brewery lorry! The only equipment they were given to start with was a Ford Escort for transport!

With the rules given here the game is excellent for covering a big operation, such as infiltrating/attacking the HQ of some evil genius. In these scenarios the whole playing area can be fully mapped out and detailed, much as a dungeon is in D&D. But these HQs will be heavily defended and characters must be quite high level to attempt anything like this. What the game could do with is a page or two of hints on how to design and run an out-of-doors type scenario. It is obviously quite impossible to map out a whole city, for instance, but you will often get agents visiting them and they're sure to want to look around. If this happens the only thing Admin can do is "wing it" and hope for the best, and if he is able to think quickly very enjoyable adventures can result, although it is also very easy to mess it all up by forgetting some small but essential detail.

All-in-all I would say that Top Secret just about justifies its cost. It has many faults and if you buy it you should be prepared to do a lot of work on it. It makes you realise just how complete AD&D is. Over the next few issues TBH will hopefully be featuring some articles on "Top Secret" which will help to clear up some of the game's bad points. We'll also give a couple of scenarios which have worked well here. As a simple example here's the first scenario I designed (in brief):-

#### TOP SECRET      MISSION 001

**Task:** Kill Harry Steinburg within one week. Make the death look like an accident if possible (double payment if this is achieved).

**Equipment:** Standard plus official issue .22 Beretta and car (Escort RS2000).

**Information:** Every day Mr Steinburg is known to drive along a certain piece of road, it is suspected under hidden protection. He uses one of three cars: Mercedes 450 SEL (01-40%), Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow (41-95%) or Ferrari Boxer (96-100%). When in the first two he is driven by a chauffeur. It is not thought that any of these cars have any special protection devices (bulletproof glass, etc). Even so they are all pretty tough, and can go very quickly if need be.

**Admin:** You will need a fairly large-scale map of an area, preferably one that you know well. A scale of 1": $\frac{1}{4}$  mile is just about perfect. Hopefully players will have their characters set up a small base somewhere on the map and then watch the road Mr Steinburg uses (something you should explain to them). Make up colours and number plates for the three cars so that characters will be able to recognise them. Roll as given above to see which car will be used and find the times that they will enter the map (9.30 +1d20am one way and 6.00 +1d20pm the other). If players are watchful they will notice that there is always a blue Transit van a short distance behind Mr Steinburg's car. This has a driver, and four others in the back. If anything serious happens to Mr Steinburg these people will come piling out to protect him. They are very alert and are likely to notice if this Escort keeps on appearing in their vicinity. If you think it is necessary add a few details to your map, such as some road works or other form of delay to give players more chance.

**Characters:** Use the details given in Admin File 001. Harry Steinburg is "The Silencer", his chauffeur is "Hidalgo" and the men in the transit are "Brandon", "K-101", "Sven" and "Kingbreaker". The Transit driver is Max Wheeler. They are equipped with switchblades and the following weapons (respectively): 9mm Luger, .357 Magnum, Uzi, 9mm Luger, .357 Magnum, .30 Johnson and .45 M3 ("Grease Gun").

**Playtest:** When I ran this two agents were used, which seemed about right. If the characters try to take on the bad guys in a firefight they're probably dead so if they rush into things they'll be suitably punished. Best of luck!



