THE LOG THAT FLIES

#6

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81 Washington St., #2
Malden, MA 02148

home: (617) 397-7958
InterNet: maranci@max.tiac.net

Premiering in this issue is a new feature: "The Gaming News" (parenthetically, if anyone can think of a better title, please send it in). Scandal and gossip have always been a part of the roleplaying hobby; Different Worlds magazine used to cover the subject extremely well in the "Letter From Gigi" column, long since lapsed (along with the magazine, unfortunately). "The Gaming News" will carry news and rumors of all the latest outrages and scandals of roleplaying.

"The Gaming News" will run whenever there's sufficient material to warrant it. Readers are welcome to send in material for the column, anonymously if they wish. Any material for "The Gaming News" will be much appreciated.

The Gaming News

TSR™ vs the Net

Possibly the biggest roleplaying story of the year is **TSR**'s decision to clamp down on the distribution of fan-created material over the Internet. Gamers have distributed original roleplaying material over the Net for years, for many game systems. The various RPG newsgroups are all extremely popular, serving as a forum for fans to post amateur scenarios, plot hooks, new character types, alternate rules, campaign writeups, and much more. Admittedly much of this is in rather chaotic form (particularly compared to the handsome and organized APA format ☺), but the sheer volume is enormous.

A great deal of game material is archived for Internet users at various FTP (File Transfer Protocol) sites. These are available to all Net users free of charge. Since **AD&D**™ is the most widely played system, it's likely that the majority of archived material is for that game.

It seems that until recently TSR was not aware of the existence of this **AD&D**™ material on the Internet; or perhaps they were aware of it, but underwent a change in corporate philosophy. In any case, TSR released an announcement on the Net just after Labor Day announcing major new restrictions. They have written to a number of FTP sites, requesting them to remove all files which includes reference to TSR-copyrighted material. They claim that such material can no longer be freely distributed on the Net. Instead it
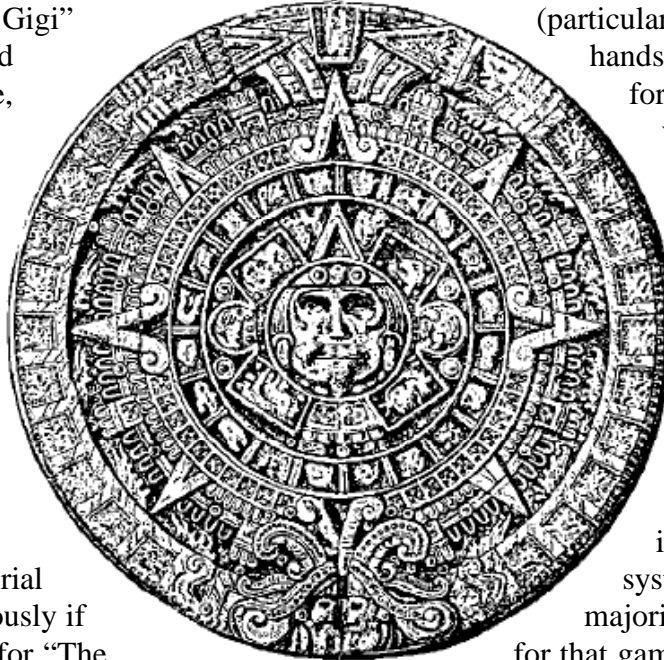
must be uploaded to a single FTP site, controlled by TSR. Every file must include a TSR-supplied disclaimer.

Since the posts by the TSR representative on the Net have been copyrighted, I cannot quote the exact wording here. However, the disclaimer states that the text attached is based upon or derivative of the copyrights of TSR, and that it may only be published through TSR and its representatives. This seems to give incredible power to TSR. It also indicates that TSR considers material posted on the Internet to be "published".

In fact, it turns out that TSR's standards are even more bizarre than could be expected. They consider conversation about games to be permissible, but only if logs of these conversations are not made available to the Net at large. TSR apparently also considers the words "armor class" and "hit dice" to be among their copyrighted properties. Interestingly, they also include "Drow" among their copyrights, although Webster's Dictionary lists the Drow as being a race of elves from Scottish mythology.

Ominously, the TSR representative has stated that any attempt by an author to copyright a work which includes a reference to a TSR copyright is void. There's no way to know exactly what TSR means by this, but one possible conclusion could be that TSR may consider any scenario or supplement which includes even a single use of a TSR-derived copyright to be unprotected by copyright law.

The posts from TSR have been somewhat uncoordinated, but have covered a multitude of issues. Disturbingly, they have repeated several times that they intend to supply game material over the Net; given TSR's corporate (rapacious) history, it seems likely that they intend to find some way to make a profit from Net material. The severe restrictions placed on amateur material on the Net have led some to speculate that TSR might eventually restrict distribution to pay systems only.

TSR has also indicated that they may consider some or all MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons, interactive computer games on the Net) to be in violation of their copyrights. Since the word on the street is that TSR is developing a MUD of their own, it would not be surprising if they were to try to eliminate potential competitors before entering the field. SPI comes to mind. For those unfamiliar with the SPI incident: a number of years ago TSR destroyed SPI, a popular game company, through some apparently legal but extremely unethical behavior.

Other disturbing points: The TSR rep has stated that some sort of editorial standard will be applied to material at the sole Net site. Since TSR has one of the most restrictive publishing codes in the business, this bodes ill for freedom of expression on the Net, at least as far as AD&D goes.

In one case, the TSR rep seemed to actually threaten an angry Net customer with legal action, warning him to talk to his lawyer before making any more "logical leaps".

There's been a great deal of anger among the gamers on the Net over the TSR announcements. At least some of them have announced plans to give up roleplaying as a result of TSR's high-handed behavior. It's unfortunate that the arrogance of one company should push gamers out of the hobby altogether, when there are so many other companies that treat their customers with respect.

All in all, TSR's handling of this matter has been rather inept. They've don't seem to understand the basic culture of the Net, viewing it instead as simply another market. Their bungling has caused much angry discussion over the last few days. None of this makes TSR look good. It seems quite possible that TSR may find itself losing more than it gains from this ill-advised affair…time will tell.

TSR vs. the Game Press

I'd hate to have anyone think that I was out to "get" TSR—but honestly, they're actually *doing* this stuff.

In issue #9 of The World Builder RPG magazine, the editor reports that he is unable to publish a column about TSR products. The reason? He claims that TSR has written a letter to a number of game magazines ordering them not to publish any sort of TSR-related material apart from product reviews. No scenarios, character types, plot hooks, new spells…nothing. Taken together with TSR's new Net

policy, an ominous picture seems to be taking form.

The Two Steves

My thanks to Steve Jackson for his permission to use the Net announcement printed below. I asked Steven Wieck, the other major participant in the disagreement, for permission to reprint his reply to the post; he did not answer my request, and so his response is not included here.

Subject: SJ Flames White Wolf For Bad-Faith Behavior

Date: 2 Aug 1994 23:17:37

Summary: we're mad as hell and we're not going to take it any more.

(If you dislike long semi-flames that reveal unfair dealings in the game business, mutual contempt between hobby personalities, and so on, this posting will not interest you.

I'm posting this only to rec.games.frp, and to the Illuminati Online conference io.games.sjg.gurps. I have no objection to its being reposted elsewhere, if this is being discussed elsewhere.)

Where's GURPS MAGE? What's going on between SJ Games and White Wolf? There have been a lot of questions. There have been denials from a WW employee and a non-employee "friend," who couldn't give any details but assured everyone that nothing was wrong. I've held off commenting on the net. But Steve Wieck, the president of White Wolf, has deliberately ignored every fax and message I've sent him, now, for more than a month. I caught him on the phone today—he called someone else at my office, and I just picked it up and said "Hi, Steve . . . " After talking to him, I don't think the relationship

between the companies can GET any worse, so there's no reason not to tell my customers what's happening.

Steve says that he "didn't think it was worth his while" to return any of my faxes or calls. This, despite the fact that the reason he called my office today was to personally demand a $15 late fee on the $1,000 check we just sent them for VAMPIRE COMPANION. Fifteen dollars. Important use of his time. Right.

When I asked him, specifically, why it wasn't worth his while to return any of my messages, he told me that he had spent enough hours talking with me already, and that he was satisfied with that, and with a fax they sent me on June 3. I replied (not exact quote) "Steve, my fax asks a couple of specific questions, and asks you to confirm in writing some things you told me over the phone. Since you have told me so many times that we have "misunderstood" your verbal approvals, it's not very cooperative of you to refuse a written confirmation when we ask for one." His reply (exact quote, I stopped to write it down) was that he was "content to sit back" without replying to any of my questions, and that we had "lost it" when I called him a liar . . .

"Lost it," eh? Verrrrrry professional, Mr. Wieck. This is the way a REAL company president acts, don't you think?

Flashback; let's fill in some background.

Apparently SJ Games won the "I Slept With WHO??" award, at this year's Silver Hatchet Ceremony at Origins, for making a deal with White Wolf in the first place. I can't argue . . .

There have been many, many problems with White Wolf since we started doing

GURPS versions of their books, and one of the worst boils down to: White Wolf changes the ground rules on us, over and over, and always in ways that hamstring our adaptations.

Some examples: When we first signed the deal, they told us that we could do "place" sourcebooks - Chris McCubbin did some good preliminary work on "Texas By Night." Then they changed their minds.

When we turned in the VAMPIRE COMPANION text, they refused to approve the adventure. The reason they gave was that it was set in a city and "they might want to use that city someday." So we published the book without the adventure.

When we first signed the deal, we agreed, verbally, that—since we could only do one follow-on sourcebook for each of the five main World of Darkness titles—we would do "sampler" sourcebooks that took interesting sections from different White Wolf releases. This would give us a good book that didn't duplicate any of theirs, and would whet the appetites of the GURPS fans, increasing White Wolf sales. But later, Steve Wieck said "You can't do that. We want you to pick just one of our supplements for each title, and adapt it."

From these and other problems, we saw that it would be prudent of us to get White Wolf's approval on each books' OUTLINE, so no time or work was wasted. They approved the outlines for both MAGE and WERE-WOLF COMPANION.

We had a problem with the MAGE cover. Initially we wanted to use the same cover design they did: big gold letters, and a tarot card on a dark cloth background. It's a great design. We contracted John Zeleznik to paint a new card, so it wouldn't look too much like theirs. But WW said they would not approve

any card John painted. They insisted that we use their card artist, or not do a card at all. The reason? "To keep consistency within the line." We pointed out that GURPS MAGE was not part of their line, and some distinction was a good idea. But no, Steve Wieck said that we had to use their artist or not do a card.

Then, researching Tarot design, we came to THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF TAROT, by Stuart R. Kaplan (Volume I, 6th printing, 1988). After examining its dramatic and original cover design, we decided that perhaps gold letters and tarot cards on a rich cloth background were not what we wanted for our book, after all. We did an entirely different cover. (We did not discuss the reason for our change with White Wolf - we thought it would only lead to further upset. But it sheds an interesting light on their attitude about the "originality" of our MAGE manuscript.)

So we thought we had all the MAGE problems ironed out. But when the final, laid-out MAGE pages went in, WW rejected it. Initially, the line editor, Phil Brucato, complimented the book. But then he sent us a letter, saying the book was rejected because - and I quote from Phil's 6-3-94 letter - "I cannot approve a book that reprints so much of our own copyrighted material."

This led to some long, stressed phone conversations. We pointed out that at the beginning of the very first project, GURPS VAMPIRE, they had surprised us by requiring that we write new chapter-intro vignettes. "Mark Rein-Hagen doesn't want his stories re-used." So Jeff Koke wrote all new vignettes, and they're very good. But Jeff and Mark had gone over the whole VAMPIRE book to decide which non-rules sections could be copied, and which would have to be rewritten from scratch. Wasn't it

unfair, we asked, to change the rules after MAGE was finished, when we'd done just what Mark Rein-Hagen had personally supervised on VAMPIRE?

Well, no. They didn't think it was relevant. Steve Wieck didn't want to admit that any instructions we had had from Mark Rein-Hagen affected the current question at all.

Jeff Koke and I pointed out that ALL our previous books had made extensive use of material from their White Wolf originals . . . that was the point of the license. "Not this much," was the reply. True. They'd been vetoing originality right and left, and approving duplicated material. MAGE contained more duplication than the earlier books, and with less internal editing by our writer; the MAGE disks they sent us were much more cleanly written than the sources they supplied for earlier books.

We pointed out that the contract REQUIRES White Wolf to supply us with the complete text of their books on computer disk, and they had done this for every book, including MAGE. "That's just for your reference," we were told. (And sure enough, the contract doesn't actually say we can USE any part of that computer text as it is, does it? It just says they have to supply it.)

We reminded them of incidents in which they had demanded that we follow their wording exactly. Apparently that was then, though, and this was now.

We pointed out that Bob Schroeck had discussed with Phil Brucato, the line editor, EXACTLY which parts of his outline would be rewritten and which parts would use the MAGE text. "Oh, that was a misunderstand-ing."

We pointed out that Steve Brown was hard at work compiling WEREWOLF COMPANION, and that he was following the exact same procedure. In fact, we'd chosen him, with White Wolf's approval, BECAUSE he had written so much of the original WEREWOLF material. "Oh. Well, that's under a different editor. And that's a misunderstanding, too. He'll have to rewrite it all, too."

We asked if, since they wanted our book to be different from their MAGE, we could develop some minor new material . . . some new Rotes, some new Paradox Spirits. Phil Brucato liked that idea at first, when he and I were talking. But later, with Steve Wieck on the line, Phil "explained" that it would "not be in the best interest of Steve Jackson Games" to include any new creations at all. "Not in the best interests of Steve Jackson Games?" There's a triumph of doublespeak.

I confess that I used the word "weasel" a number of times during that very last conversation, but at least it was always as a verb, and not as a noun.

We even offered, since they were so concerned about "their words," to change the cover credits of GURPS MAGE to mirror those of the original MAGE. I had Bob Schroeck's permission to make this offer. In fact, he welcomed it; he didn't think he should be credited as "author," but just as "GURPS adaptation by." But Steve Wieck rejected this compromise too.

And in the end, we had no good choices. We could violate the license and publish without approval, or we could take them to court and ask a judge to provide adult supervision. Or we could drop the whole project. Or we could rewrite the manu-scripts.

So we started rewriting. GURPS MAGE didn't make Origins. We didn't have an Origins release at all. I asked Steve Wieck if he cared about this. "No," he said. "We don't have an Origins release, either," he said.

No, I really don't know what is happening here. But since that last MAGE call, more than a month ago, in which Steve Wieck also said that all further discussion had to go directly through him, I've faxed him three times asking for clarification IN WRITING of some of the things he required, and WRITTEN confirmation of some things that he said—on the phone—would and would not be acceptable. (No, I wasn't recording that call, either.)

The fax went out first on June 30. Then on July 6. I got sick and missed a lot of work—so the next one didn't go out until July 21. No answer. Since then, I've been phoning . . . over and over. But I didn't get an answer until I surprised him by picking up the phone when he called someone else . . . and then the answer I got was that he wouldn't answer.

The next time a GURPS MAGE manu-script goes to White Wolf, it will be even better than the last one . . . the one that Phil Brucato said, on first reading, was "better than their version." There will be no quality issue. There will also be no issue of "using their words." If Steve Wieck never answers my questions, I'll just go by what he told me on the phone, on that call I wasn't recording, and we'll see if he's set me up for yet another "misunderstanding" and another delay of the book.

Current employees of White Wolf toe the party line without explaining, or keep silent. The calls and mail that I get from WW refugees, concerned about this issue, indicate that they think White Wolf will approve another manuscript for us when hell

freezes over. Steve Wieck, a month ago, angrily denied that he'd ever given orders to reject any manuscript before it came in, and told me that OF COURSE I couldn't believe anything I was told by anyone White Wolf had fired. "I don't lie!" he said loudly. "I don't tell lies!" He also asked, repeatedly, if I was recording the call…

It would be nice to believe that White Wolf wants these books to come out, and wants them to be good. But Steve Wieck told me, months ago, that he wished this license had never been granted. (No, I wasn't recording him, but I believe him.) There sure weren't any congratulations from Atlanta when GURPS VAMPIRE won the Origins Award this year.

The instructions that we now have from WHITE WOLF **seem** to boil down to: Base each of your books exactly on one of ours. Don't put in anything new. Except for the vignettes, which have to be new. But make all the descriptive sections the same. But don't use any of "their words." In other words, make everything completely the same, but make it all different.

But it's hard to know what the instructions really are, since the president of the company insists we talk only to him, then won't answer our questions or put his own statements in writing, and justifies it by saying he's offended that I "called him a liar."

(Now you're asking: Did I really call Steve Wieck a liar? Well, I sure put his nose out of joint. We were on the phone. He made a couple of very self-serving remarks, with the stilted, repeated phrasing and the tone of voice that I last heard from the Secret Service guys as they lied about raiding us. I pointed out that what he said didn't mesh with facts I possessed. He stormed "I don't like being called a liar." I

was amazed. All I could say was "Don't lie, then." In my experience, the louder someone tells you they're honest, the more you have to watch them. Honest people just don't lie, and everyone notices. Their reputations take care of themselves. On the other hand, sometimes a cool black shirt covers a really thin skin.)

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ASIDE: Personal to Steve Wieck, President and apparently God-King at White Wolf Game Studios . . .

Steve, here's a personal challenge, which I expect you will ignore. You told me today that White Wolf would give us no cooperation on this contract, and make every possible demand on us, because you, President Steve, got your feelings hurt. You gave me some really lame doubletalk, I challenged you, and this is how you're getting even. No, that's not a quote - I wasn't recording you - so don't weasel me on the words you used. That's what you meant, and you made sure there was no misunderstanding. You let me know this was payback, and I believe you were telling the truth, right then. Will you admit it in public?

In fact, Steve, if you can explain your behavior of the last two months without either lying like a rug, or admitting that you've been petty, jealous, childish and unprofessional, I will be damned impressed.

****

We'll see. Maybe White Wolf will approve the rewritten manuscript, in which case everyone will see a very good, clear, playable, well-organized, well-illustrated GURPS MAGE. Maybe they'll wait the full 20 days, and reject it with another surprising demand for changes. Either way, you'll hear—from us—exactly what happens.

I don't expect this posting to make Steve Wieck like me any better. I expect he'll get red in the face and gobble. But then, I don't think that the Archangel Michael could make Steve Wieck like me any better. I can live with that.

The point is that we won't bear this in silence. We won't mislead people by saying that everything's all right, and we won't let White Wolf get away with it either. Our distributors, and our retailers, and our players, will know exactly how White Wolf treats us in exchange for the thousands of dollars of our money - OF YOUR MONEY - that have already gone into their coffers on this licensing deal. (And we're about to write them yet another big check.)

GURPS MAGE is a damn good book, whether it's ever published or not. I hope you get to see it someday. If not, at least you'll get a play-by-play description of the professional way White Wolf is working with us.

And that's Steve Jackson's complete announcement. As I mentioned above, Steve Wieck didn't respond to my email requesting permission to print his response. However, that's not the reason that I'll say that I can agree with many other Netters concerning Mr. Wieck's response. It was little more than "PR-speak". His major point seemed to be that he didn't feel that it was appropriate or businesslike to discuss this issue in a public forum. He also urged gamers to check around the industry for an accurate assessment of both his and Steve Jackson's character.

Let me say here that I have no real axe to grind in this matter. I don't play **GURPS**, though I do have a few **GURPS** products; likewise, I don't play **White Wolf** games, though I did buy some copies of their magazine

several years ago. My only real involvement with either party was with a Stewart Wieck several years ago. He was then the editor of White Wolf magazine, and gave me quite a lot of grief over an article (see **Interregnum** #1, "Bar Wars"). But that was long ago, and in any case I must assume that Stewart Wieck and Steven Wieck are two different people (though something tells me that that they might be related…☺).

I can report that in the responses on the Net a number of folk spoke from personal experience with the major figures involved. They were virtually unanimous in their praise of Steve Jackson, and several spoke rather strongly against Steve Wieck and **White Wolf**. For what that's worth.

Topic: Humor
He Who Laughs Last…

I could write an article on the philosophy of humor in gaming, I suppose. I could say that there's not enough in most campaigns, but that too much can really screw up a deep-roleplaying campaign. Why bother? Here's a funny story.

It was a Paranoia module, which shouldn't be a surprise. I was the party's technician. I'd been issued a laser drill to fix a damaged 'bot. Unfortunately the laser drill projected a beam six

feet long, and my first step in repairing the 'bot was to take off the screws of the access plate. The laser drill was not well-suited for unscrewing. *Vaporizing* screws would get the cover off, but that would be Damage to Computer Property—and the rest of the team was just panting for an excuse to blow me away, as I was the only PC not to die yet. I stood there with the drill. The moment dragged on. And when I couldn't stall any longer, I yelled:

"Help! Mutant Commies are mind-controlling me!", and whipped that six-foot laser drill around into the party. Sliced a bunch of them in half before they got me, too. ☺

The World's Shortest RuneQuest Scenario

> **Introduction/Glossary**
> **for those unfamiliar with Glorantha:**
>
> **Storm Bull:** The god of berserk Chaos-fighting. His worshippers are violent, brutal, bloody, cruel, mindless, berserk, psychotic, and stupid—and those are their good points. They don't know the meaning of the words "retreat" or "fear". Actually, they don't know the meaning of most words. ☺
>
> **Sense Chaos:** A special skill possessed by Storm Bull worshippers. When followers of the Storm Bull sense Chaos, they become berserk killing machines—or rather, they become *active* berserk killing machines.
>
> Note that in RuneQuest, an attempt to use a skill may be a critical success (meaning that the skill-user does exceptionally well) or a fumble (the worst possible result).

I. Characters: All players begin as Initiates of Storm Bull. There are no NPCs.

II. Setting: The players have been told of a large hidden store of beer in a cave. As the game begins, they have entered the cavern in which the beer is supposed to be hidden. There is only one entrance to the cave.

III. Action! All the characters immediately fumble their Sense Chaos ability. The fun begins.

IV. OPTIONAL: If one of the PCs survives the battle, he eventually finds and drinks the beer. Unfortunately it is Troll beer, highly poisonous to humans (particularly injured ones). The PC must resist a poison with a potency of 30 or die.

V. Epilogue (optional): The NPC Trickster who gave the PCs the map to the beer comes by later to have a good laugh and pick up any saleable items from the bodies.

I Wonder Why

I've been talking about running a new campaign for ages. I even got to the point where I had the setting, the basic plot structure, the character types, the party genesis, the map, about 50 plot hooks and the advertising for players all ready to go. That was about a year ago. For some reason, the game stalled at that point before I even began gathering players.

It's finally time to begin the campaign. I'm rather pleased with the flyer I made up for it, so I'm including it here, at the end of my zine. But I can't help but wonder if it's overkill as far as advertising for a campaign goes—after all, we're not talking about a game system or any sort of tangible product. Still, one of the major problems that I've faced as an adult roleplayer is getting intelligent, sane, and imaginative new players. It seems that everyone and their brother considers themselves a "deep" roleplayer, but too often that seems to mean that they say a quick prayer before looting their comrades' bodies (and *that's* usually just to appease their god/GM). ☺

I'm hoping that the Wonder flyer will bring in a better class of gamer. Hmm. In a way, this could almost be a case study of roleplaying recruitment. I'll report the response, if it's interesting.

COMMENTS #5

Doug Jorenby: Regarding the art forms which could be compared to roleplaying, the process of *creating* a script for theater, TV, or film might resemble RPGs much more than finished product. Particularly when such scripts are produced by a team of writers.

Perhaps the key question is one of perspective. To an outside observer, a good roleplaying campaign might most closely resemble a continuing TV show such as Hill Street Blues, or (shudder) a soap opera. To the players, the closest analogy might be that of improvisational theater. Is any other viewpoint possible?

✹ Here's an idea: perhaps the best artistic analogy to roleplaying would be that of a conductor and symphony.

✹ Your definition of conflict is very broad. I suspect that Conflict will be a topic in **IR** before very long.

✹ Ah, Bakshi's Lord of the Rings movie. It's been a while since I thought of that abomination. I remember when I first saw it with a friend: we were stunned by the sheer incompetence of it. When the live-action figures became visible under the Rotoscoping, we groaned. And when the movie was over, without even glancing at each other, we both stood up and screamed "THAT SUCKED!!!" ☺

George Phillies: Glad to hear that another novel is in the works. I'm intrigued by the many publishers you've mentioned—how did you find all these companies? Have you considered getting an agent?

I've been told that it's much easier to get an agent for a novel if you've already had at least one short story published in a prozine. *Who Slays Satan* certainly deserves to be published in a prozine in any case—have you submitted it anywhere?

Gil Pili: *Beautiful* art, Gil. Top-quality stuff. I'd be tempted to sign up with America Online (which, if I recall, is your source) if I didn't hate hourly charges so much.

✹ I may have a sick sense of humor, but I have to admit that I LOLed at "Die, old people!" There are times when I've been stuck behind some insane octogenarian at 3 MPH that I've been strongly tempted to yell much the same thing…

✹ Your analysis of alignment was very good. One of the biggest problems with the concept is that it's simply too vague. Different GMs choose wildly different interpretations. I recall the time I played a Lawful Good Half-Orc cleric of a gentle Forest Goddess. Before I began an adventure with (among others) a Lawful Good Elf-Prince, the orc king (GM) called me in and commanded me to slay the elf. I refused, of course, and was informed by the GM that I'd lose permanent characteristic points every day that I didn't kill the elf. I objected, of course. Why would the goddess punish me for following my creed of Good, and not obeying the orders of the evil king? "Because he's your king, and you're lawfully bound to obey him" replied the GM.

I don't think too many people would agree with that interpretation of alignment. ☺

Curtis Taylor: Re your comment to Doug, I have to ask: what's a POG?

✹ The RuneQuest character sheet was very interesting, though personally I prefer the linear tracking method of hit point recording. It sounds as if you played that character for a long time?

✹ Though the ubiquity of **Magic: The Gathering** has sometimes put me on edge, you do have a good point; if you're having fun, it's worth doing. I wonder, though, when the fad will crest and fade. Any opinions?

In that vein, I wonder if **Jyhad** and **Spellfire: Master the Copyright**™®© are cutting into sales of Magic. If anyone has any solid information, I'd like to hear about it.

Andrew Howes: Welcome to **Interregnum**, Andrew! I enjoyed your zine very much. Did you draw the art? It's very expressive, and gives the zine a nicely different quality. Good stuff.
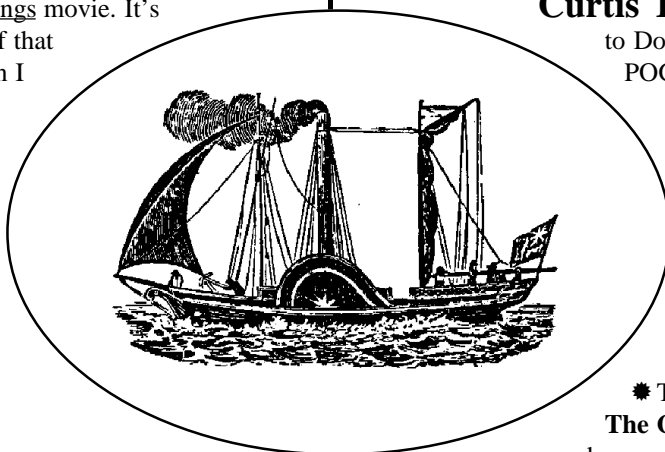
✹ The articles were lively and interesting—and a refreshing change of pace. I'll admit that I didn't guess why the characters killed the farmers rather than the chasee. Have you read the "Bar Wars" article in **IR** #1? It was party-forming of the type that you describe that drove me to write that.

✹ Re "…some game systems actually reward the good side of human nature"—how about some examples? Is this any more valid than rewarding evil? I'm tempted to suggest that a morally neutral GM might be preferable, but that would be facile. The moral stance of the referee is part of the "art" of the game, and as such can vary greatly. Unfortunately too many GMs give no conscious thought to their moral position as game arbiter.

That might seem a little vague. Let me explain: I'm thinking of The Lord of the Rings. That was a world with a clear underlying morality of Good and Evil. That moral basis provided the essential structure of the work; it's hard to imagine TLOFR without that quality of morality. **JRR Tolkien**'s religious background must have been a major influence on the books, though unlike **C.S. Lewis** he seems to have been focused on art rather than preaching.

On the other hand, many modern roleplaying games seem to operate from a nineteenth-century laissez-faire standard: "Get all you can while the getting is good, to the victor goes the spoils". Hmm. There's an article in this, I think; one might well compare PCs in that type of game to the Robber-Barons. They seem quite heedless of the ecological havoc they cause. No concern of safety seems to apply to NPC employees. In the end, it's each man for himself—not necessarily an invalid moral basis for a game (artistically speaking), but it has rather been done to death.

Dale Meier: Welcome to IR! An excellent
beginning. I was glad to see the material on Cyberpunk, though I don't play the genre myself; it was well written, very interesting. Excellent job on the adventure hooks.

✹ Regarding **White Wolf**, I suspect you've opened up quite a can of worms. But that's all to the good. I'd planned on writing an article or two on the points you raised, but must put it off for an issue or two. It's an odd

example of synchronicity that the **SJ Games** vs **White Wolf** situation should surface in this issue, I think. In any case, I'm sure that you'll get quite a few responses to your essay…

✹ Perhaps Religion will be a topic in an upcoming **IR**.

✹ Have you read many of the **White Wolf** supplements in question? When a local game store banned Clan Brujah on the recommendation of their distributor, I immediately went out and bought a copy. I react that way to censorship—yes, I know the term might not exactly apply, but in any case I consider such restrictions to be equivalent in kind. After all, in either case the result is that I can't read or buy what I like (and parenthetically, the store owner who made the decision to return the product had never read it, and has probably never read *any* RPG material).

It's really pretty tame stuff. Nothing you couldn't see in a PG-13 movie, believe me. One or two uses of the word f--k, a sprinkling of lesser profanity, and a couple of paragraphs from the perspective of a Nazi vampire. As for the art, that too was mild compared to much that's in the movies: as I recall, there wasn't even a topless woman in it, which places it above quite a few other roleplaying products (including certain publications by the oh-so-moral TSR). The worst thing, if you can call it that, was a picture of a vampire skinhead giving the finger.

I'd say that **White Wolf** desperately *wants* its "bad boys of RPG" image. While TSR chose long ago to appeal to a early-teen audience, WW is going for the more rebellious mid-to-late teens. From my limited observation it does seem that many of those who play **White Wolf** games tend to be young (emotionally, if not physically), and to be somewhat…affected, in the sense that Holden Caulfield used the word. They put on an act. The purpose is to shock, shock their parents, the public, each other, etc.

Nonetheless, the WW supplements are surprisingly innocent. If sexual titillation is the goal, there are a lot of more effective sources available even to children—and I'm sure that those who are interested see all they want to.

✹ Regarding religious figures getting involved against RPGs, it's possible that we're looking at a geographic difference. I believe that there were some attempts by

various priests and ministers to ban or restrict RPGs in Massachusetts, but that was long ago—if there's any such activity going on here today, I haven't heard of it. I hadn't realized that the atmosphere was that much more restrictive in middle America; I've only been west of the Mississippi once, and that was during a visit to Detroit (where they have more serious problems). It would be interesting to hear more about the situation out there.

✷ As for the danger of gamers becoming involved with the "real" occult…I can't really speak to that meaningfully. I will say, though, that from the little material I've read the "occult" contents in almost all gaming material is spurious—obviously the product of a writer's imagination, rather than being based on the actual rites and beliefs of the Middle Ages. Of course, much of it is very bad art. But it seems to me that the harm is aesthetic and financial rather than spiritual. As to whether or not "real" spiritual harm is possible…that's a question best left for a later time (the deadline's coming up fast, and I'm chicken ☺).

Since I view gaming as an art form, I don't believe that the triumph of good over evil—or Good over Evil—is always the desired goal. Nor need PCs be always good (not they they are, anyway ☺). Tragedy and darkness have their place. Look at **George Orwell**'s 1984; one of the darker works of English literature, and yet it's also one of the greatest. Most (probably all) "dark" roleplaying is on a much lower level, of course. It's true that most such games don't appeal to the best in human nature. But in my experience, neither do those games which purport to be "good". In both types the major activity is fighting and killing, and the attitudes of the participants are much the same.

The vast majority of gaming is "low" art, I fear; the equivalent of car chases and barroom brawls. As such, it appeals to a sense of sensationalism. I can't believe that it can evoke any quality of human nature which wasn't already present and active to begin with.

Scott Ferrier: You started a puzzle-type campaign without knowing the solution, Scott? That's pretty brave (some would say foolhardy ☺).

✷ As a player in the "Bomb Shelters of the Holy" campaign (or at least for the first part or it), I must say that I was totally unaware of the world as you describe it. It's too bad—it would have been interesting to discover all that history.

Project "Steroid Stallion"?!? ☺☺☺☺

Virgil Greene: Your analysis of the qualities likely to be possessed by intelligent species was very interesting.

I've heard it said that it's impossible to create an alien who is truly different from human beings—that any such creature will simply be a case of some human aspect enlarged beyond proportion. I'm not sure that's true, though obviously we won't know for certain until we meet real aliens. The question seems to come down to this: does intelligence have universal qualities, or not? Does human intelligence express itself in all possible ways, or are there truly alien qualities that our species cannot know?

I don't know.

Nextish:

Who knows? ☺

—>Pete

On a darkling plain, Someone is Dreaming…

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My name is Peter Maranci. I've been GMing deep-roleplaying and sheetless RPGs for more than ten years, as well as running more conventional systems. Call me at **(617) 397-7958** after 6 PM for more information about **Wonder**.