



THE LOG THAT INTERESTS

#9

© Peter Maranci December 1994

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This is the easy part of winter; the holidays are upon us, and soon after Arisia will provide a high point for January. I'm not looking forward to February, though...

That has nothing to do with roleplaying—or does it? Is there a “season” for roleplaying? Do games follow any sort of regular pattern through the year? I don't know, but it seems an interesting question. Perhaps winter is the natural season of gaming, since there are few outdoor activities to compete with.

Since everyone has to huddle inside anyway, it's possible that they spend that extra time gaming. Memory is no guide to the truth of that preposition, though.

In any case, my own game activity has been picking up lately. Which is the reason for an unofficial Log topic this month: the Wonder campaign.

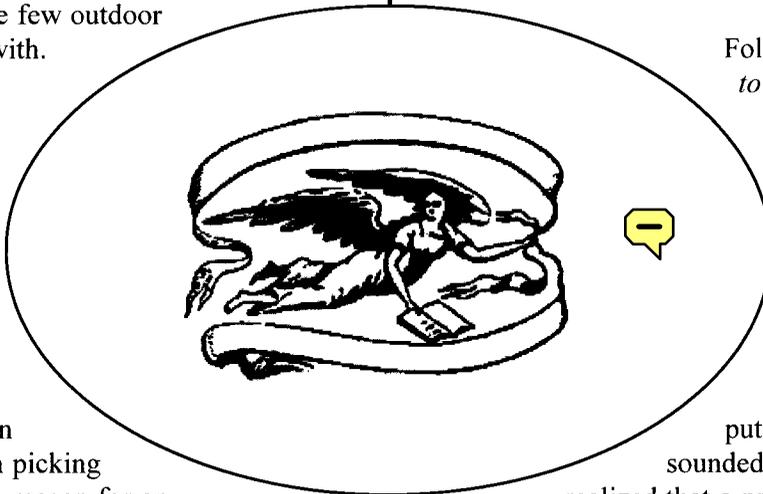
I Wonder As I Wander

I've been documenting the formation of the Wonder campaign as a sort of unscientific case study. Recruitment of players has been odd, to say the least; nicely laid-out flyers drew no responses for months, while a few announcements on the Internet drew many new players.

Recent developments have been stranger yet. I finally did receive a response to a flyer—from California! It seems a gamer was visiting the Boston area and saw my flyer in a game store. It

interested him enough that he emailed and asked for info about the campaign even though he can't play.

He's not the first person who can't play but wants to be kept posted about the game. Six or seven people have emailed to express interest in reading about Wonder, from as far away as New Zealand. I can't explain the reaction, but plan to set up some sort of Wonder alias for those addresses if possible (separate from the main alias for players).



Following is *A Short Guide to Wonder*, a sort of miniature player handbook. I'd decided not to bother with a campaign guide for two reasons: it was suggested (here?) that an overabundance of information could put players off (which sounded reasonable), and I

realized that a proper introduction to Wonder could be a very considerable writing project. Nonetheless, the questions of players over the Net made it clear that some sort of player's guide was necessary.

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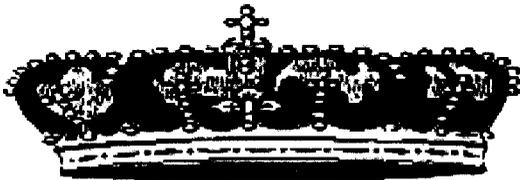


A Short Guide to Wonder

Two principles are universal in Wonder.

One is that Wonder is broken up into many small regions. There are no unifying organizations or beliefs that cover wide areas; no religion, school of magic, nation, or philosophy may be found throughout the land. Wonder is Balkanized, though not necessarily in the war-torn pattern of Earth.

The other principle is that of variety. Throughout Wonder, things are different.



GEOGRAPHY:

Wonder is big—far too big to be known by any one person. Though at some places the “edge of the world” may be found, in many directions maps end in unexplored territory. Parts of the geography of Wonder change, as well; cloud cities sometimes move (at varying rates of speed), and even major earthbound areas can undergo surprising alterations.

The game begins with the characters in the north of central Wonder—not on the dark frozen mountains of the Deep North, but among cool steppes, within sight of less-forbidding mountain ranges.

There are places in Wonder which resemble the “fairy tales” of Earth. Lands where dreams come true, and metaphor can become reality. That quality may be found almost everywhere in Wonder, and is not particularly remarked upon—a peasant returning from a hunting trip could tell his people that he’d encountered a talking tree and he

wouldn’t necessarily be disbelieved. Some would likely doubt him, but not on the basis that trees cannot talk (though they might argue that it would be unlikely).

The Sky

The sky of Wonder includes stars, constellations, the planets, and the Moon—much as are seen on Earth. However, travel to these bodies is possible, and may sometimes take place suddenly and unexpectedly. Astronomical distances are not necessarily equivalent to Earth measurements. In general, the night sky of Wonder is more dramatic than that of Earth—astronomical bodies are larger-seeming and more detailed. Strangely-colored mists and shapes may sometimes be seen among the stars.

There are legends of cloud cities that may be reached in strange ways—by climbing rainbows or low-lying clouds, for example. However, rainbows and clouds are rarely solid. Few people bother to make the attempt to climb them, in any case; the realms of the sky are said to be beautiful, but not necessarily without danger.

Beyond the Sky

Even stranger worlds lie beyond the sky. These are virtually unreachable for most who dwell in Wonder; only strange magics and rare portals give access to them, though there are legends that some may be reached by sailing off the edge of the world. These worlds are sometimes used by sorcerers as a source of strange and magical servitors.

The Underworld

The Underworld lies beneath all of Wonder, as far as anyone knows. The dead are often drawn there, either in spirit or in body; they find ways down into the dark that mortals cannot see. Some say it is possible for mortals to travel to the Underworld if they are lucky and strong enough. Returning, however, can be much more difficult.

The Underworld is said to be dark, vast, and for the most part terrifying. Stories tell of huge deserts of black sand in which nameless horrors burrow, and unending oceans filled with monsters, on which sailors and ships drowned at sea sail forever. Yet there are also said to be places of cheer and warmth.

Oceans, Seas, and Rivers

There are many bodies of water in Wonder, large and small. Central Wonder, however, is somewhat distant from the larger oceans. The closest is the Brizz't Sea, to the east.

SOCIETIES:

Wonder lacks the sort of large, organized societies that produce maps and Imperial Surveys—or at least, characters are unaware of such. Likewise, long-distance communication has not been highly developed or organized to a great extent (as far as characters know, in any case). Many of the inhabitants of Wonder know little of the world beyond walking distance other than from old wive's tales, books, and (in rare instances) dreams. Though dreams can lie.

There are many places where people live together in Wonder, from tiny villages to large city-states—but villages are much more common in central Wonder. Most societies are family- or

clan-based, and many groups exist in relative isolation from each other.

Traders and caravans travel across Wonder, carrying strange goods and stranger stories. These are generally welcomed, though there are exceptions.

RACES OF WONDER:

The concept of race is not alien to Wonder, but it is not very meaningful, either. The “human” race is widely variegated; there are “men” with tails, with horns, with strange-colored skin...these might be viewed with curiosity and fear in some cases, but not to the extent of violence...usually

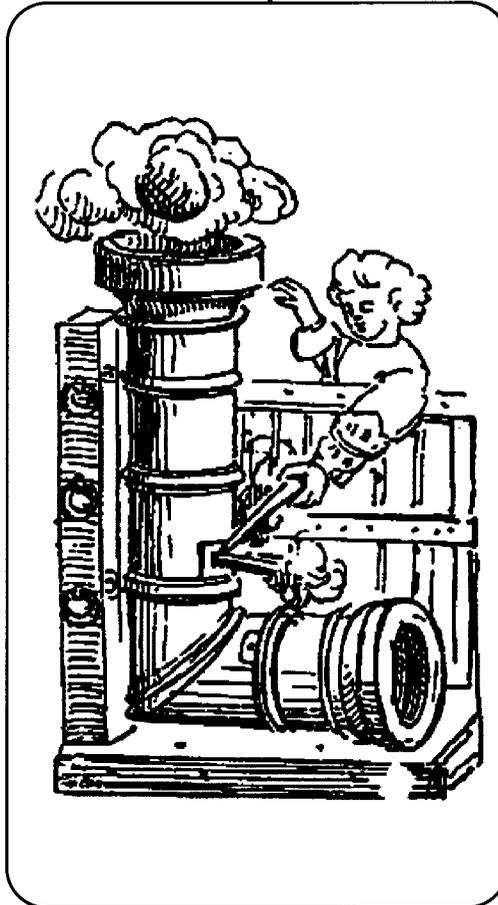
There are completely non-human races, but these do not mix with humans on a daily basis. Among some rumored species are a race of giant talking spiders, centaurs, the Wild Folk who live in swamps and the isolated places of the world, the Brownies that no one sees, the Gnoles whose houses are deep under trees in dark woods...there are many stories about strange creatures.

Because Wonder is so large and communication is so poor, most groups have little knowledge of other species.

Fabulous monsters exist in Wonder, too: many of the creatures of classical mythology, for example. These are not always as depicted in legend, however.

MAGIC:

Magic is everywhere in Wonder, but it is not common.



That's not a contradiction; magic is manifest in much of nature, and many of the inhabitants of Wonder are touched in some way by it. But there is no standard type of magic, no catalog of spells; in fact, magic rarely comes in the form of spells at all. Wizards, Sorcerers, Enchanters, Summoners, and other kinds of magicians all exist, but the magic they practice varies from town to town and region to region.

Enchanted items are not rare in Wonder, but they are often the product of long and difficult toil. As with spells, enchanted objects are wildly varied; a certain principle of randomness seems to apply, and magical items may sometimes have whimsical or picayune qualities.

Magic of all kinds tends to be marked with character and personality. For example, two wands might both produce fire, but one would emit streams of blue flame, while another might make a high-pitched whining noise and cause disks of red fire to emerge from the ground. How they work, how often they may be used, the side effects if any, and all other qualities are generally unique to each item.

Magic items are often passed down within a family as heirlooms. A widow might bequeath her oldest son a magic boat, for example.

In mortals, magic generally manifests itself in special skills and abilities. A man might be unusually strong, for example, or have a perfect sense of direction. He might be gifted to make rope of a beautiful shimmering silver color (using secret, special ingredients). Or he might not have any noticeable ability at all. Not everyone does. Some do attempt to specialize in magic, but this is a difficult thing to do; most mages are not interested in taking an apprentice, and there is no commonly available body of knowledge about magic. Much of magic is a matter of personal ability in any case.

The scientific method is not widely known and practiced in central Wonder. Magic is accepted as magic, and therefore unknowable, by most.



DREAMING:

The one type of magic available to anyone in Wonder is Dreaming. This is a deceptively simple sort of magic: the dreamer attempts to place their mind into an appropriate condition, performs some ritual of their wish (these can vary), and sleeps. Sleeping, they dream of a thing they desire. Waking, they may find their Dream—or not, since dreams can easily fail.

Dream-objects have strange properties. Usually they last only for a short time—a few hours, days, or weeks. Sometimes an object can apparently be made permanent, but this is usually an accident; to Dream such an object seems to drain the uninitiated dreamer of a basic life force which can never be restored. Many who dwell in Wonder never dare to deliberately Dream.

Common natural objects are the easiest things to Dream. Rare and precious objects are more difficult, and their existence is more tenuous and brief. Magic items and living things are most rare and difficult of all.

Dreams are not always voluntary, but spontaneous Dreams are rare.

There are some who believe that a Dream object in some way partakes of the soul of its Dreamer—an old

legend tells of a man who could not be slain except by the sword that he himself had Dreamed as a child.

Visions

Since a Dream can take the spirit of the sleeping throughout Wonder, it is possible to Dream visions, both real and false ones. Dreaming spirits can be unseen, or have the appearance of their mortal bodies; other effects may exist as well.

Failure

Dreams can fail. If a dreamer does not wake naturally of themselves, the Dream is likely to fail or be flawed in some way. Dreams can also go wrong even if the dreamer is not prematurely woken. There are many ways in which a dream can go wrong.

A failed dream can produce an insubstantial image of the thing desired, fading swiftly or slowly as the case may be. A dream object may turn out to be flawed, or to have strange and disconcerting properties. A Nightmare may produce objects or scenes of terror and death. And there are many other ways in which a dream may fail. The most common, of course, is to have no effect at all.

Dreamers

Some rare individuals become Dreamers, dedicating their lives to oneiromancy. These are strange and reclusive mages; among their abilities is said to be the power to sleep for exactly as long as they choose, completing a Dream in exactly the time desired.

RELIGION:

Religion takes many forms. Some gods are known to travel in mortal form in the world; these garner worshippers or not, as their nature dictates. Most gods are not immensely powerful, however. They may heal the sick, kill groups of mortals,

encourage fertility in a local area, and create other minor miracles, but these actions must generally be performed in person. Gods have power, but they are subject to limitations. Some believe that mortals can become gods, though the mechanism of deification is not common knowledge.

“Demons” as such are not known in Wonder. But there are many strange creatures that roam the world, from the Underworld, the worlds in and beyond the sky, and even from odd corners of Wonder itself.

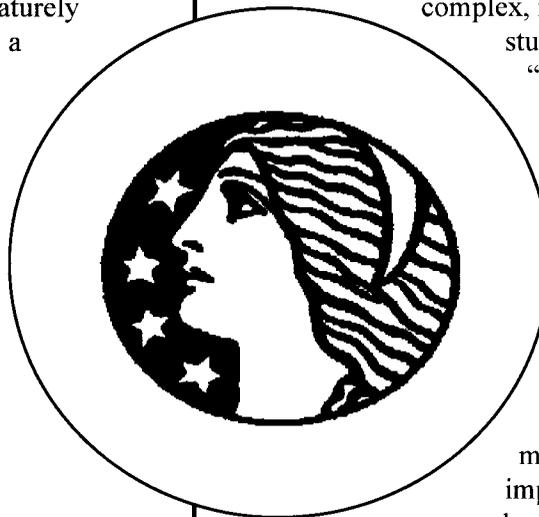
Philosophical principles are also worshipped by some in Wonder. These may or may not be personified as actual entities. They tend to be hugely powerful in theory, but effectively unreachable by mortals. The concepts involved are often extremely complex, requiring a lifetime of study to understand. Such “principles” perform no visible actions, and are of little use to most mortals. That the prayers of the monks on V’lish Mountain to Dread Hish keep the Circle of Time moving at the appointed speed is of little interest to most—and it would be impossible to prove that the prayers had any real effect, or that Dread Hish existed.

No religion is widespread across Wonder.

* * *

A few points about the campaign:

- 1) Expect the unexpected.
- 2) The stereotypes of standard fantasy gaming will be avoided as much as possible.
- 3) Atmosphere and mystery are the key elements of Wonder.
- 4) The most important point is to have fun.





DECEMBER THEME: Resurrection

Few of my characters have been resurrected.

That's not because I've played with particularly tough gamemasters, though. It's simply that my initial (A)D&D roleplaying was comparatively brief. I didn't have the time to have characters brought back to life (though since my first GM was probably the ultimate character killer, I've probably had as many characters *die* as most other players).

Since the vast majority of my gaming experience has been with systems that have a strong emphasis on realism, resurrection has almost never been a possibility.

In one instance however I recall taking an unusual slant: focussing on the horror of resurrection. That character, an atheistic Mostali (RuneQuest dwarf), was driven somewhat insane by the inherent contradiction of his personal experience of rebirth and his fundamental belief that personal identity could not continue after death. It was fun, though it never really went anywhere.

Dying is a pretty big thing. It seems strange that so many characters die and come back to life without being seriously changed. Some games (and gamemasters) do make permanent changes in a

revived character (most commonly with a reduction in Constitution or the equivalent), but psychologically the matter is generally ignored.

That doesn't make sense. It seems obvious that dying would involve some sort of "death trauma"; after all, it would probably be the most momentous event in the character's life! Likewise, wouldn't it be interesting if as part of the process of resurrection a character experienced a "rebirth trauma"? I've never heard of such a thing, though I'm sure *some* gamemaster out there must have tried it...



A Tirade

Readers of previous IRs may recall that we've had trouble with Factsheet 5, a large reviewzine; specifically, that they printed a review of IR without giving it anything more than a "quick skim" (as was confessed by their science fiction staff writer). That staff writer had promised to read and review IR properly for the next issue of Factsheet 5 (he didn't, as it happens).

While looking though the alt.zines newsgroup on the Internet, I read a thread in which a zine writer complained that the chief editor of FS5 had not read his zine before "reviewing" it. The writer was bitterly



attacked for his plaint. No one can accuse me of not being quixotic; I couldn't help but post a low-key followup stating that the chief editor did in fact review some zines without reading them. Though I noted that I had confirmation from a knowledgeable source on that point, I explicitly failed to identify the source to protect confidentiality.

It's bewildering how many people have a knee-jerk reaction to defend putative authority (and why do such defenses so often take the same form, no matter what the subject?). The attacks came fast and furious. One of the most virulent and surprising was from the science-fiction staff writer himself—the very person who'd *told* me the reviews were spurious!

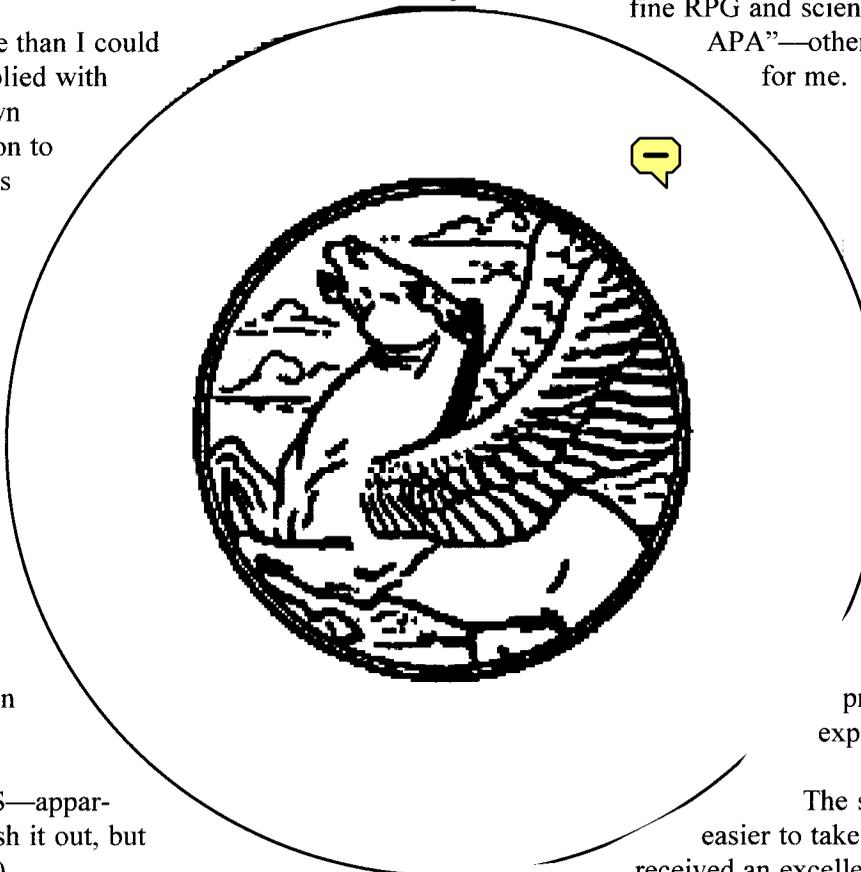
That was more than I could take, and so I replied with the text of his own original confession to me. His reply was intensely personal, and didn't respond to my point at all; among his remarks was the statement that Factsheet 5 would not review Interregnum (which is ironic, since the magazine awards the most adulation to "in your face" zines that expose hypocrisy and BS—apparently they can dish it out, but they can't take it).

The science fiction reviewer's repeated personal attacks annoyed me to the point where I announced that I'd be posting a monthly repeat of Factsheet 5's "review" methods, and an anti-FS5 tirade in IR (that last inspired by the fact that the entire thread had been started by another author's similar tirade).

My purpose was to annoy FS5 as much as possible. I was mad as hell.

There's not much point in posting the info to the Net, as it happens. It seems that most "alternative" press people are nonetheless quite loyal to authority, and only a fool spits against a wind—even if the wind is wrong. I won't waste my time tilting against a windmill. As for the tirade, this is it: not as venomous I'd first planned, but after all who really cares? Factsheet 5 caters more to the music and unusual sex crowd, and while those groups overlap with roleplayers to some extent there are only a few RPG magazines reviewed in FS5. They're not a loss.

It's ironic, though, that the science fiction reviewer later announced that Interregnum was "an otherwise fine RPG and science fiction APA"—otherwise, that is, except for me.



I think I annoyed him. Good! 8^>}

But I won't let myself be drawn into this sort of thing again; while re-reading the autobiography of Isaac Asimov recently I was surprised to see that he'd had much the same problem once. I'll profit by Asimov's experience.

The situation is also easier to take since Interregnum received an excellent review from Shadis roleplaying magazine, which will appear in an upcoming issue.

ARISIA PANELS

Arisia '95 will have a greater emphasis on roleplaying than in previous years. The panels in

particular look extremely interesting; many of the topics have been covered in Interregnum and in the last few years of The Wild Hunt. Here's a list.

Gaming Track Panel Schedule

FRIDAY

8pm: Advice To New Role Players: What You Need To Know

9:30 pm: What Shall We Play Now? New Games.

SATURDAY

10am: Publishing Fanzines

11am: Problem Players ... Troublesome PCs: What Is A GM To Do?

12pm: Magic: The Addiction

1pm: GM HelpLine

2pm: GM HelpLine (cont.)

3pm: Gaming On The Electronic Frontier: Play-By-Email And On-line Freeform Roleplaying

4pm: Tabletop Versus LARP: Where Is The Line? Only The GM Knows For Sure.

5:30pm: What's New At White Wolf?

8pm: Crafting Original Game Worlds: A Beginners Guide

10pm: As We Grow Up: Adult Situations In Role Playing

SUNDAY

11am: Long Term Campaigns: How To Avoid GM Burnout

12pm: Role Playing As An Educational Tool

1pm: Game Writeups As Story Fodder: Good Idea, Bad Idea, Too Private A Joke?

2pm: GURPS: Does It Live Up To Its Promise?

3pm: Is Gaming A Man's World?

COMMENTS ON IR #8:

David Hoberman: I suspect that we disagree on the definition of art. Still, I see your point.

“(to) ...bring something away from a game...is more difficult, more hidden and in the end, a personal



process.” I immediately thought of some modern art I've seen, which makes even the more abstract roleplaying I've witnessed seem meaningful and clear as day.

Gil Pili: Jumping the gun, eh Gil? Your article on resurrection was very interesting indeed. I liked the “Crude Example” very much.

• I'm sorry to hear that Stargate and The Puppetmasters were so disappointing—it seems that despite all the progress there's been in the last couple of decades, Hollywood *still* doesn't understand science fiction. A pity.

On the bright side, at least television seems to be getting the idea. Babylon 5 has been quite good, and has already remained on the air longer than most quality science-fiction TV shows (Max Headroom and The Prisoner come to mind). Not that bad shows aren't still possible. Stuff like Time Traxx, Space Precinct, and M.A.N.T.I.S. proves that the old style of science fiction television may never be entirely banished from the small screen.

• Speaking of one-shots—years ago I created a one-shot science fiction scenario, and ran it several times. I had elaborate maps, and the whole thing was rather thoroughly written up; one of the most complete scenarios I've ever written. The players seemed to enjoy it a lot. Needless to say, the materials are all lost somewhere...I have little hope of finding it again, and can't remember much of the details. Pity, because I could have published it here...

Dale Meier: The mini-scenarios look like a lot of fun—it's too bad I can't run a game of Pendragon to try them out. I was particularly amused by the "bad monk".

• Regarding the new Star Wars™ magazine from West End Games: I picked up the Star Wars™ RPG system some years ago. It was very disappointing: so poorly written and designed, and so reticent with information as to be ridiculous. How could they fail to publish stats for the movie characters in the hard-bound edition? It made no sense.

However, I recently saw the entire Star Wars™ series again. It is a fascinating background...I found myself wanting to play in it. I don't suppose I ever will, but perhaps if there's a one-shot available some time I'll give it a try. I have to wonder if the game manages to capture the essential "flavor" of the movies, though.

Doug Jorenby: Does poetry require discipline, Doug? I hadn't realized. ☺

• The "orphans' Thanksgiving" sounds very comforting. I've done that sort of thing a few times; with any quantity of people I usually end up too busy with the cooking to enjoy myself.

Reading about the food at your games made me hungry. But then, almost *everything* makes me hungry...which is why I'm the size I am. ☺

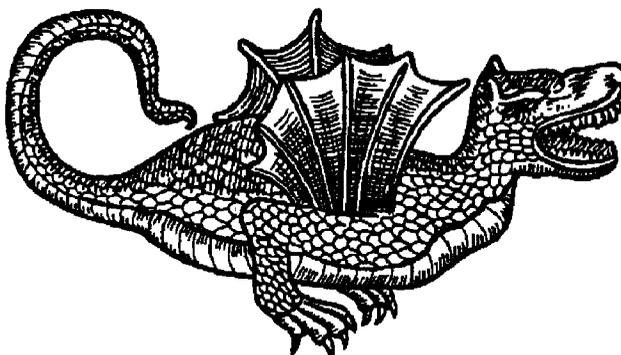
George Phillies: I suspect that by "modern standards" almost every woman in the world has a figure that's "undefined" or lacking in one way or another. There are times when watching television that I realize that if I were a woman, I'd feel under attack from the entire world. As a man, I don't really have to worry—though I note that television insists on relegating men of my general appearance to comic roles, "heavy" roles, or flying through the air with livestock and giving away presents. ☺

• No Tears for a Princess continues to be very enjoyable and interesting—it's exactly the sort of modern fantasy that I like best.

Curtis Taylor: Thanks for the RuneQuest information. I may not play the system any more, but I like to keep in touch just in case things change.

• It's interesting that you should mention Dream Park, Curtis: as it happens, the first book in the series inspired the formation of the real-world International Fantasy

Gaming Society™ (IFGS), and a *real* "Dream Park™" corporation. I believe that SIL-type games preceded the publication of the book, and of course the SCA has been fighting live combat for some time; there were also quite a few gaming groups who acted out their games long before the book. However Niven



et alia could make a claim to have set the pattern for live-combat roleplaying games of a certain type.

The SoloQuest is *great*, Curtis! I'm tempted to write one myself. Do you know if the format is copyrighted?

Virgil Greene: It's interesting that you're the only one who mentioned bards in connection with roleplaying; in retrospect it seems an obvious point to make.

Is TWERPS still in print?

I like the idea of reviewing old books; naturally, since I've been doing it myself for some time. I look forward to seeing more reviews of that sort.

Your reviews of roleplaying cartoons are generally on-target in my book. Perhaps you should review old RPG comics, too? There are a lot of interesting old ones, as I recall: *Wormy, Fineous Fingers*, an absolutely hysterical parody of Star Wars™ called "*The Good Guys*" (I think) which appeared in *The Space Gamer* long ago...it's a pity that most of these are totally unavailable. Even I don't have them. ☹

David Dunham: Childbirth...a very unusual subject for a game, and one I've not dealt with. Interesting. I was always under the impression that in Glorantha there were battle magic spells to avoid conception. Barring that, I assumed that an Uleria cultist could always do something. An "abort" spell, perhaps...though possibly a carefully placed Disruption could accomplish the same effect.

Jeeze. How gross. Sorry about that. I don't know what came over me. ☺

Bob Butler:

"The efforts of even the most veteran GM are not going to significantly impact the Halls of Academia". You're probably right, but I wouldn't rule out the possibility absolutely.

Uh oh...out of time...I'll have to continue this nextish...

GUEST AGAIN

Once again **Rich Staats** comes to the rescue—this time with another hysterical scenario for "It Came From the Late Late (Late?) Show", directly following this page.

LASER AT LAST

Yup, I finally broke down and bought a laser printer—an Okidata OL400e. It's a basic model, printing 4 pages per minute at 300 dots per inch; but compared to the old dot matrix, it's a wonder. And at \$325, it was a bargain.

I'll be printing future emailed zines on it at no extra charge from now on.

NEXT ISSUE

Reviews, more on Wonder...there are always articles which get pushed back again and again...anything's possible.

—>Pete

COLOPHON

The Log That Flies #9 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30.8 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable ~~villain~~ word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed on an Okidata OL400e 300 dpi laser printer—at last!

Most of the art in *TLTF* is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the **Dover Publishing Co.** of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a **Kodak 2110** high-speed duplicator.

The author is not responsible for headaches caused by eyestrain. ☺

—>Pete