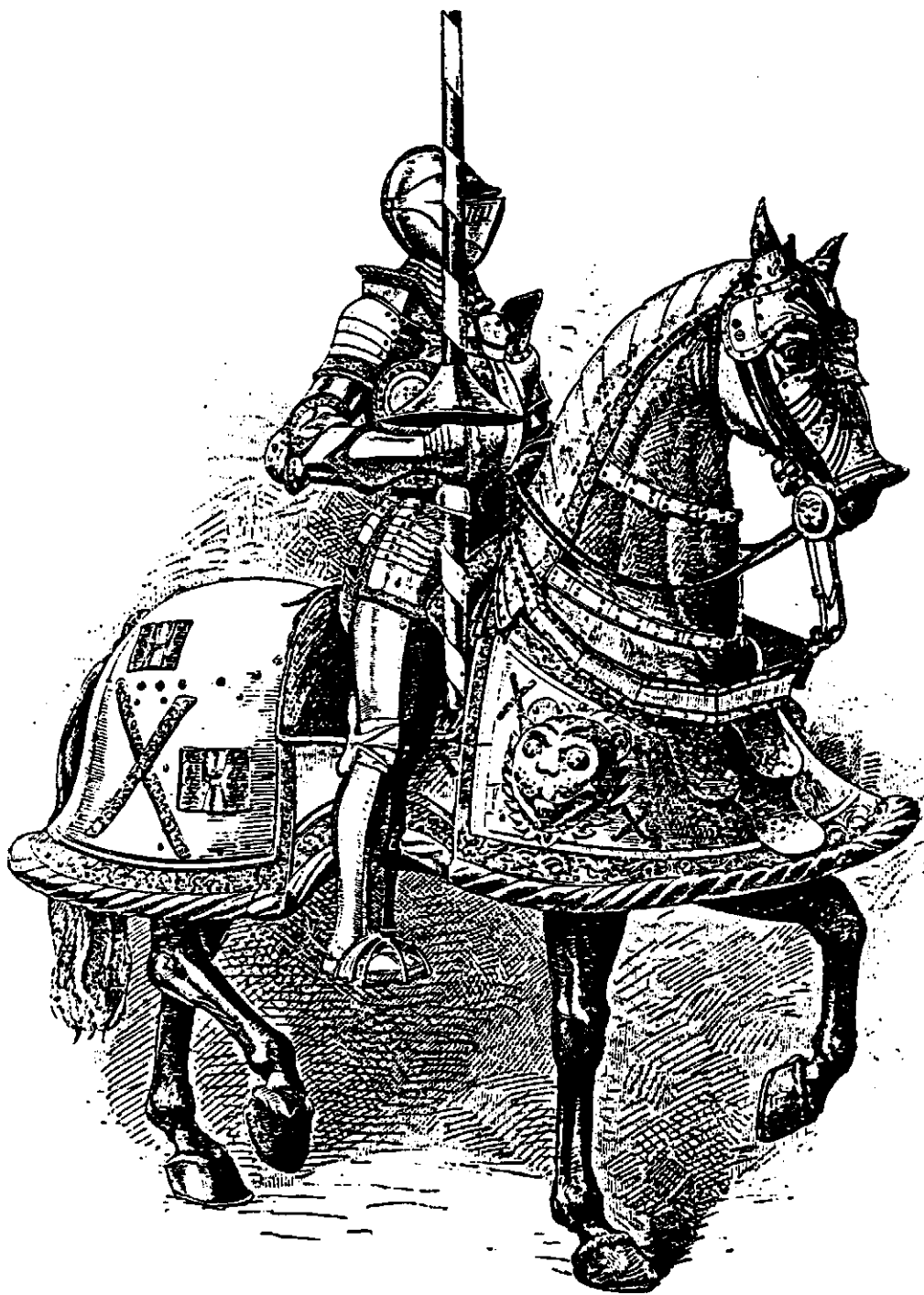


April
1994

INTERREGNUM

2

FREE



fantasy roleplaying and more

Yes, Free.

This is a free copy of Interregnum #2.

We hope you find it interesting. Interregnum is an amateur magazine, covering anything of interest to roleplayers, writers, and science fiction/fantasy fans. Since Interregnum is not affiliated with any company, the writers have complete freedom to write about whatever they want, in whatever style they wish. The results can range from peculiar to comic to startlingly original. Interregnum is—well, you can read it for yourself and see what it is.

The expense of producing the magazine is covered entirely by the contributors and subscribers; Interregnum is not for profit. These free issues are being produced at a loss, in order to bring in new subscribers and contributors. Most future issues will not be free. If you'd like to make sure you receive upcoming issues of Interregnum, please contact the editor.

If you are not interested in contributing a zine or subscribing to Interregnum, please pass this copy along to someone else who might be (after reading it, of course).

Thanks.



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INTERREGNUM

#2

*An Amateur Press Association
covering fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "DISBELIEF"

April 1994

Interregnum is an Amateur Press Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription costs \$2.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing. Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

Peter Maranci
81 Washington St., #2
Malden, MA 02148

Since Interregnum is an amateur production, it is necessary for contributors to help cover the costs of production: \$2 per single-sided master page mailed in. Alternatively, contributors may mail in enough copies of their zine to cover the copy count (which has not yet been determined). The only additional cost to contributors is the price of the postage to mail their issue to them.

All zines sent in for publication in Interregnum should be copyrighted by the author. Copyright may be asserted by the use of the following phrase:

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Many trademarked products are discussed in Interregnum. No challenge to the holders of these trademarks is intended.

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UP NEXT

⇒ Interregnum #3 will be collated on May 29th. Zines must arrive by the 26th to be assured of inclusion in that issue. The topic is *Dreams*.

⇒ Interregnum #4 will be collated on July 2nd. Submissions must be received by June 29th. The topic is TBA (suggestions, anyone?).

Note: the Post Office is giving me trouble about the use of Book Rate. It may become necessary to substitute 3rd or 1st class mail.

Glasnost. It's not a word we see often in the news these days. Yet it's an excellent word to describe the editorial policy of this magazine: openness. Openness to new ideas. Openness to reader input. Openness to participation, from any quarter. And why this aggressive openness? Because I've run out of ideas of my own.

No, just kidding. I couldn't resist. It's really not difficult to come up with ideas for Interregnum. But the last thing I want is for this to be a one-man show. Nor do I want to see an elite develop in this APA (not that I've seen any sign of that happening). So let me say for the record (as if I haven't already said it enough): Ideas, comments, and suggestions on any aspect of Interregnum will always be eagerly received from anyone. Along those lines, let me offer the following.

Wanted: Topics. I'd like to make a bank of possible topics of discussion to draw on. Send 'em in! You'll receive full credit when they're used (which means your name will be listed, not that you'll get a free copy of the issue ☺).

Lightspeed Interregnum? It's been suggested by several readers that an electronic version of Interregnum posted on the InterNet might attract more readers and subscribers. I have to wonder if that might not diminish the circulation of the paper version, instead. Why pay for a hardcopy when you can get it free instantaneously? True, there are good reasons to do so. The art and layouts of many of the zines are worth looking at in themselves, and greatly enhance the text. Also, paper has a solid, enduring quality that an electronic medium cannot match. I could go on and on...but these points might not be immediately apparent to Netters without APA experience. Ultimately the decision must rest with the contributorship. Is there interest in attempting something like this? Should it be a complete, or partial edition? Should there be a standard ASCII layout for the zines?

Finances: It's been suggested that the total of each contributor's account be published in each issue of Interregnum. I have no problem with that, except for this: Would readers and contributors have any concerns about privacy in that area?

Full disclosure: In the interest of openness, here are the costs of producing Interregnum: Each single-sided page costs 3 cents per copy. The front and back covers cost 8 cents each. It's too soon yet to establish a page count, but I can report that the original print run of Interregnum #1 ran to 80 copies.

* * *

Growth is obviously the major agenda for Interregnum now. Any suggestions on ways to promote the APA without major expense will be much appreciated. I've posted notices on the two **RuneQuest** discussion lists on the InterNet, which were fairly fruitful. Does anyone know any other likely sources of subscribers and contributors, either on the InterNet or otherwise?

About 110 additional promotional copies of Interregnum #1 have been distributed in Boston-area game and book stores. They've gone like hotcakes. There hasn't been any response yet, but I suspect that this method of promotion might have a delayed effect. About twenty promotional copies have been mailed to various gaming luminaries, too. Unfortunately I won't be able to do this sort of promotional distribution in the future, as it's fairly expensive (and I should make it clear that the costs for the promotional issues were not deducted from the Interregnum account; I'm doing this out-of-pocket). Still, I'd rather not focus overmuch on the Boston area—Interregnum should not be limited to any one locale. Anyone who'd like to distribute promotional copies in other areas should write or email me.

A number of **RuneQuest** devotees have written in response to the abovementioned postings on the InterNet. It's good to see that the system remains popular, even in the midst of turmoil. I'm sure that any **RuneQuest**-specific material will be especially welcomed, though zines about any system, generic systems, and even zines that aren't about roleplaying at all are always very welcome.

Experience on Interregnum #1 has taught a hard lesson: Deadlines *must* be adhered to. Much as I value every page of every zine, I can't afford the chaos and delays that result from having to copy and collate every zine separately. Please, if you think you may be late with a zine, contact me! I'd rather delay printing the whole thing than have to collate a separate zine. But the actual date of collation itself (as opposed to printing) *cannot* be delayed.

Take care, all! Til next time,

→ Pete

THE LOG THAT FEELS

#2

© Peter Maranci April 1994

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It's a slim APA this month. We're welcoming two new contributors, but several of the folk in issue #1 weren't able to get a zine together for this issue. I hope we'll see them back for *Interregnum* #3. A few people have suggested that an issue every month is too frequent a schedule for an APA, but I think that once every two months is too long. Any thoughts on this?



TOPIC #2: BELIEVE IT OR NOT

Like most other gamers, my first experience with roleplaying was AD&D™ (actually, I've noticed that most the newest generation of gamers seems to have begun with one of the robot or Vampire™ games rather than AD&D, but that's a separate topic). My experience with illusion, however, was perfunctory. If you thought it might be an illusion, you disbelieved it. Alternatively, you touched it with your bare hand to dispel it; some GMs ruled that this was effective. However, none of them used illusion effectively or

dramatically. It was never anything more than a different kind of trap or trick. The unique potential of illusion was wasted.

In the Dark

The one time I played an illusionist I did manage to come up with some interesting uses for the basic illusion spell, *Phantasmal Force*™. The only one that I can recall offhand was really quite simple: an illusion of darkness. A code word said aloud would let the other party members know that the illusion was being cast, giving them an improved chance to disbelieve. But for foes in the area who failed their saving throws, total darkness enveloped them. Needless to say, a party that can see has a huge advantage over blind enemies!

Eventually the GM became irritated with this tactic; it was simply too effective. Creatures began making their saving throws more and more often. Finally, I asked him why my spell had become totally ineffective. He informed me that the rules said that if the illusion produced was not believable, it had little chance of being believed—and according to him, sudden inexplicable darkness was something that monsters wouldn't buy.

The solution was simple, of course. I simply altered the spell to produce the appearance of a rising cloud of smoke, getting thicker and thicker until it obscured all sight. The apparent source of the magical smoke varied depending upon the circumstances. However, the GM

soon decided that this was ineffective, too; this time, however, he refused to explain why. As time progressed, he increasingly ruled against any innovative use of *Phantasmal Force*TM, until there was no point in even trying to cast it. Soon after, I left his campaign.

That was many years ago. Since then, I have applied a variation of that spell in a **RuneQuest** campaign: as a sorcerer, I used the MultiSpell skill to cast several illusions of darkness simultaneously onto the heads of a number of enemies at once. The effect was only a -10% chance to their visual abilities, but at the time it was the most effective thing a relatively unskilled sorcerer could do. Under the new rules, of course, I'd have been even less effective.

The Trap

A while ago, I had a strange idea for a trap using disbelief that would be, well, totally fatal—or damn close to it. It's pretty silly, too. You Have Been Warned. 8^>}

A party fights its way through a typical dungeon, battling monster after monster in an insatiable quest for money, money, money. Down they go, deeper and deeper, hacking their way through level after level of ravenous fiends. Why is population so dense in this desolate locale? Maybe the schools are good. 8^>}

Down the party goes, down through this mysterious underground skyscraper. Strangely, the deeper they go the more powerful the opposition they meet; fortunately, the more powerful the opposition, the greater the amount

of treasure to be gained (the monsters must not have anything to spend it on down there. Hmm...a good boutique might do well in the dungeon...).

Finally, at the very bottom, they fight the most powerful and deadly monsters of all. Taking punishing losses, they manage to defeat the ghastly things—only to discover a small unlocked chest in an otherwise empty room. Inside the chest is a simple piece of paper. On the paper are the following words:

Hello. I hope you've enjoyed my dungeon. I wish it could have been a real one, but that would have been far beyond the means of a humble illusionist such as myself. Therefore, (over)

This is the last opportunity for the party to avoid death.

(continued from front) I've constructed this dungeon entirely as an illusion—right down to the hole. In other words, you're standing hundreds of feet below the surface of the earth in solid rock.

Penny!

(signed) Bob the Illusionist



Now it's up to the party's disbelief. Can they maintain their belief in the illusion of a dungeon that's keeping them alive long enough to climb back out? Or will they find it impossible to avoid realizing that they are actually buried alive in solid rock?

A kind GM might allow them to make saving throws of some sort. They could keep going as long as at least one member had failed—the disillusioned could be led by those still

able to see the dungeon. Alternatively, the GM might simulate the difficulty of avoiding disbelief by ruling that they can live for as long as they are able to speak without, say, using the letters e, i, or o.

I doubt I'll ever use this illusion—it's too deadly, and I don't run dungeon games. And of course it uses illusion magic of a type that transcends most game mechanics. But it is amusing. Particularly since even if the party manages to get out, all the treasure they won is illusory...though the damage isn't.

Cascading Disbelief

Another idea on disbelief and illusion—I can't recall if I used this one or not, though I think I did. The idea is layered illusions, setting up multiple illusions overlaying and hiding each other. Disbelieving one reveals the next, and so forth. It seems a good way to allow a clever player to use simple spells to far more effect than normally possible—which is what unimaginative gamemasters hate, of course. Come to think of it, I must have been a real pain in that game. 8^>}



Readers of Interregnum #1 may recognize the following as a developed version of plot #11 in the Bar Wars article. As I recall, the article and this scenario were created pretty much

simultaneously. Truth to tell, I'm not sure which inspired which.

I've run The Grey Company several times, once as a play-by-email game. Low player participation ended that game fairly quickly, but even so the game was clearly developing along very different lines from previous runs—which was, paradoxically, typical. Every time I've run this it's been quite different from previous runs, and it has always been fun (for most of the players, anyway).

Editors of several RuneQuest magazines have suggested that I expand The Grey Company in various ways for publication. Perhaps someday I will, though by then they may not be interested.

A chaotic and disorganized version of The Grey Company appeared in a past issue of The Wild Hunt.

RuneQuest/Glorantha Scenario Outline: **THE GREY COMPANY**

The Grey Company is a group of closely connected scenarios designed to bring disparate starting characters together as a long-lasting adventuring group. It is set in the Pavis area, though it could be transplanted to another setting or system if necessary.

I. Start In A Pickle

1) The PCs start as young and relatively inexperienced characters. An unusually broad range of cultures and backgrounds are possible; the only unacceptable choices are obvious Chaos worshipers and races/cults so mutually hostile as to cause immediate bloodshed on sight.

2) In a short private session (a half-hour or less should suffice), the GM runs each PC through a pre-game set of circumstances in which they are forced to leave their home culture—either for a few years, or permanently. Possible reasons: family feuds, accusations of crime (false or otherwise), famine in the homeland, avoidance of conscription, disease in homeland, family poverty, a search for aid for the tribe, or anything else the GM wishes to inflict upon the players. In one odd situation, a non-human PC was ordered to spy upon the “human frontier”. If desired, PCs may be of local origin; in that case, they obtain the letter/token as a gift or legacy.

3) Each PC acquires a letter or token from a kindly-inclined elder or friend of the family, recommending the character to the members of the Grey Company of Pavis, a mercenary group of bodyguards/salvors/adventurers for hire. The elder explains that he/she has worked with some or all of the members of the Grey Company in the past. Alternatively, in some cases these tokens could be stolen, bought, or gambled for by the PCs. The PCs are urged to go to Pavis and seek out the Grey Company, which will doubtless offer an excellent chance for advancement, prosperity, and glory.

4) The PCs travel to Pavis. Some may meet each other on the road; some may experience minor adventures during the trip, of the GM’s choosing. PCs native to Pavis will obviously not need to travel.

II. Pavis!

1) The PCs arrive in Pavis, and find the home of the Grey Company. The members of

the Company are out of town; while the PCs wait for their return, they meet and get to know each other. Numerous minor adventures may transpire in the process (details omitted).

III. The Return

1) Members of the Grey Company return. They meet the PCs cordially, and invite them to spend the night (assuming the letters/tokens of recommendation are presented). A grand dinner marks the evening, with interesting conversation.

2) The next day, the PCs are given a tour of the house. Among other areas, they are shown the Armory and the Treasury—the latter is protect by a powerful spirit guardian, in addition to the usual precautions.



3) The PCs are invited to apply for apprenticeships with the Company. This is a highly prestigious opportunity, and a great honor. It must be stressed that cult obligations are understood to come first for all members.

NOTE: There are presently no apprentices in the Grey Company, though the PCs may not notice this. It is not called to their attention. If they ask about this mysterious lack, the elder members of the Company are clearly uncomfortable. If pressed, they say simply that it was necessary to dismiss the previous apprentices for malfeasance.

IV. The Tests

1) The GM may make up any number of tests he desires. Some options: tests of strength, mock combat, diplomatic questions, magic. In one of the most revealing tests in playtest, characters

were asked to make up their own test; to do something to show the Members their worthiness for apprenticeship in the Company. Player imaginations tend to run wild in this case.

2) Barring disasters, the PCs are accepted. They take the Oath of the Company.

V. Rote Duties

1) The PCs take up rote duties and training. One or more may notice that they are being followed by a shadowy figure in the streets of Pavis.

VI. An Unexpected Call

1) The senior members of the Grey Company (that is, all the NPCs) receive a midnight visitor on what appears to be a matter of urgency. They depart immediately for the Big Rubble, assuring the PCs that they will return within a few days.

VII. Where Are They?

1) Three days pass, a week...the senior members do not return. The PCs are in possession of a house, a Treasury that they cannot get into, and the reputation of the Grey Company—possibly the most valuable item of all.

VIII. The Tax Demon Cometh

1) Tax time has come, and taxes must be paid by the Grey Company. The tax is almost certainly more than the PCs have. They must raise money somehow, either from outside sources or by figuring a way into the Treasury, past the Spirit Guardian.

2) If they fail, the House and all of their own property will be confiscated by the Lunar Government. An auction will be announced,

and a group of bidders will attempt to buy the entire House. (Alternatively) Though the action is announced, when the time comes the House and contents will have already been purchased by a mysterious buyer. (details omitted).



IX. Brick Through The Window

1) Late one night, a brick is hurled through a downstairs window. Attached to it is a crudely-scrawled note, saying "Leave the House or Meet your Doom!"

2) If feasible, magical warnings are given. One possibility: Ranged Voice Projection (depending on the Sorcery system used) moaning and warning all within to leave or die.

3) If desired, the Grey House is fired late one night. While the PCs are dealing with the blaze, an attack will be made upon the House from the opposite side. The attack is interrupted by the Lunar Guard. Costs will be charged to the PCs if the Guard must help to put out the fire. This encounter may take place at whatever point the GM feels would be most dramatic.

X. Duties

1) The Grey Company has certain regular contractual obligations. One of these obligations is now due; a caravan must be guarded for a short trip.

2) Other short adventures may be included in this manner.

XI. The Lurkers Without

1) The Grey House is definitely being watched. Both the Lunar Government and the mysterious hostiles are possible culprits, depending on the PCs previous actions—both at once is also possible.

2) A Spirit spy enters into the House, and departs.

3) It becomes clear to the PCs that the Lunars regard them with extreme suspicion, whether they managed to pay the taxes or not. With luck and effort, they may discover that they are under suspicion of being Orlanthi assassins, guilty of a recent murder.



XII. A Noble Summoning

1) The PCs are summoned by a local noble. When they arrive, they find that the "noble" is actually the noble's young son, who wishes to hire them as guards for a trip he and his noble friends wish to take into the Big Rubble while

his father is away. If they refuse, the child will clearly attempt to enter the Rubble anyway; the already-suspicious Lunars will doubtless take an interest. The situation is best resolved through roleplaying rather than combat.

XIII. Into The Rubble

1) At this or some other time the PCs may decide to enter the Rubble, seeking the senior members. If they are intelligent, and have managed to get into the Company Treasury, they will hire as many Humakti to escort them as they possibly can.

2) The senior members may communicate with the PCs, but are inextricably trapped in the Big Rubble for a long and indefinite period.

a) They are dead, and are ghosts, or

b) They are embarked on a strange HeroQuest within an underground cavern of crystal, which will take a number of years to complete. (Crystal cavern scenario details omitted).

XIV. The Showdown

1) The mysterious hostiles eventually make their all-out attack. They are the old Apprentices of the Grey Company, who fell into evil ways and were dismissed. They desire possession of the Grey House and its contents, as well as the name and reputation of the Grey Company. In their campaign to achieve these goals, they killed an innocent man and anonymously tipped the Lunars that the PCs are Orlanthi assassins, responsible for the murder. At least one of the old Apprentices is an Initiate of the Black Fang Brotherhood, making detection magic unlikely to work.

2) If the final showdown is not decisive, the old Apprentices remain as a thorn in the side of the PCs. They may proceed in a number of ways against them (details omitted), and will act as a continuing plot device.

XV. Miscellaneous

1) The contractual obligations listed in Section X are a continuing way to introduce new scenarios to the PCs.

2) Additional history of the Grey Company may also be relevant. The PCs may find that they have friends as well as enemies, based upon the reputation of the Company.

3) The main force which acts to bind the PCs together is greed. The Treasury of the Grey Company is extremely valuable; the Oath of the Company forbids them to loot it (assuming oaths matter to them). The Grey House itself is most desirable, and the reputation of the Grey Company more valuable yet. With the resources of the Grey Company almost any personal character goal would be more easily attained.

4) The GM should intersperse personal plot elements throughout the scenario, unique to each PC.

* * *

NOTES

Many additional elements have been omitted for brevity. These include:

the nature of the Spirit Guardian of the Treasury,

the strange and unfamiliar magic in the Company Treasury,

the secrets of the history of Grey House,

and more. These may eventually be written up and published. On the other hand, GMs are invited to create their own answers.

Given the open nature of The Grey Company, it is best if the GM plays the role of the Lunar officials and the old apprentices

flexibly, as best fits the situation. Adopt the point of view of each party in order to decide what actions to take. Events need not take place in the order listed above; if the PCs are clever, some may never happen at all.



Time for me to make the plunge into fiction, I suppose. George Phillies' excellent work makes me feel more than a little inadequate, but this is old work after all—and perhaps printing it will jar my fiction-writing daemon back into high gear (not that it ever was, actually). I wrote the following three or four years ago, and took it to a local writing group. Oops!

There are groups and there are groups, I've been told. This was one of the latter category. The criticism was savage, the prevailing attitude "If you can't stand the heat, get the HELL away from the keyboard!"

Though Gordon R. Dickson once told me that the most valuable thing a writer can have is good harsh criticism, I don't think he meant criticism so harsh that the victims gave up writing. Now that I think of it, he probably does have a problem getting those close to him to give him honest criticism—after all, he's one of the greats of the field. But the pummeling I received at the hands of these writers put me off of fiction for several years.

Unchill was written as a mood piece, with an aura of mystery and hidden depths; I was influenced by the works of Cordwainer Smith at the time. Rather than nail every detail down with surgical precision, I metaphorically "fished" my imagination for images and words. This was, apparently, the sin of sins: I recall as clearly as if it were yesterday the reaction of one of the participants.

"Can you describe the plot in one sentence for us?" she demanded.

"No," I explained helplessly, "it's a mood piece. I was going for a larger impression—I mean, there's a plot but—"

"So YOU don't know what the plot is, either!" she exclaimed disdainfully.

I discovered that I'd lost the will to write, and didn't go back. A few weeks later I received a copy of my story back, dripping with red ink; the head of the group suggested throwing the story away.

Perhaps he was right. But the savagery of the criticism in that group was unnecessary, I believe; and from what I've heard I'm not the only one to have been driven out of that group. Later there apparently was a major shake-up over that very point, and the group underwent some major changes. It may be a kinder group now. But I, for one, will never look to a writer's group for help with my art again.

All of which serves to say: make nice comments about Unchill, or none at all. 8^> } Hee hee! No, I think I can take it. I'm divorced by time from the story now, and I have actually written a story since then—it needs a lot of work, but I did write it, and will probably rewrite it for *Interregnum* before long. A quick work of assurance: Unchill is not my usual writing style, insofar as I have one. I don't expect to write another mood piece, though I make no promises.

Now that I've talked it to death for you, here it is.

UNCHILL

Dal Sirenesman was not happy. The long winter days had come, and once again Unchill lay heavy on his lands. The sunplants were glowing too brightly, he knew; soon the wildfire would rage in the fields. As he walked the Home fence, he heard the beasthands lowing in their pens. Their cries were a portent of things to come. *Twelve fields, nine beasthands*, he thought, *We'll never get the crops in in time. What can I tell Sirene?* The thought of the season to come was a sickness inside him. Postponing the inevitable until the last possible moment, he stopped at the Gravehouse and crawled in.

Inside: Pappy, as always, was far ahead of him in thought. Tendrils of deceptively wispy mind-force came blasting out at him, powerful enough to make him wince:

NO MORE FISH!

Dal knew better than to try to answer Pappy immediately. Sitting before the redlit-angry console, he placed the thinking hat on his head and hummed the ritual invocation of the Open Mind. The song brought the image of fading pink flowers floating in a dark purple sea to his mind's eye. After a moment, the blistering smell of hot metal seared his nostrils, familiar and unpleasant as always.



".....@@@@@L@i@n@k@i@n@G@....." The mystic vibrations buzzed like steel flies in his ears. Pappy was angry.

"Fish? What difference does it make?" Dal inquired reasonably, with a slight touch of thinking-hat-induced arrogance in his voice. "It's all sanctioned protein-mash to you." He paused, then said suspiciously, "Are you getting bored again?"

"NO." The grating voice sounded clearly yet softly in his head, startling him with its calm, sane tone, "I—OR, IF YOU WISH TO BE SPECIFIC, MY SUSTENANCE I/O UNIT—CAN ACCEPT ANY PROTEIN EQUIVALENT IN APPROPRIATE FORM. THAT FACT, HOWEVER, IS IRRELEVANT (*YOU LITTLE BASTARD*)" a voice whispered.

"THE PROBLEM MAY BE EXPRESSED IN THE FOLLOWING WAY: DUE TO THE CONTINUING HEAT PHENOMENON YOU HAVE DESCRIBED AS 'UNCHILL', WE (THE COMPLEX) HAVE EXPERIENCED SIX SUBSTANDARD CROPS. AS A RESULT, THE ONLY SOURCE OF AVAILABLE PROTEIN FOR ANY OF US FOR THE LAST TWELVE PERIODS HAS BEEN FISH. WE ARE NOW WITHIN PROJECTED FAILURE THRESHOLD FOR BOTH BEASTHANDS AND SUNPLANTS. YOU KNOW WHAT FAILURE MEANS, DO YOU NOT? IN ANY CASE, AN EXCLUSIVE DIET OF FISH COULD RENDER SIRENE STERILE AND YOU CATATONIC, AND WHO WOULD I HAVE TO TALK TO THEN, YOU—"

This time the ocean sound did not go away. The Talk was over. Dal stood up, and felt a wave of fondness for the crazed old unit. "I love you, Pappy." he said. Wincing as he removed the thinking hat (its tiny needles grating his skin as they stabbed in, out, in, out), Dal turned and crawled from the Grave. He closed his ears to the tinny cries from behind.

Outside, insects sang and danced in the long grass. Home loomed ahead. Dal went in.

(And there was nothing but Sirene's damp eyes. And there was no sound but the water dripping off her flippers, and her soft breathing.)

He knew what he had to do. Unchill had to stop. The Wizard had to be told. After all, it was probably his fault anyway. Dal couldn't help wishing that somebody else could do it, but there was nobody, nobody in the world. Slowly, Dal took up his leather bands and his great blade of metal and went North to see the Wizard.

The land was strange. Smoke rose from the ground. Hot mists made Dal choke and sob, but the thought of Sirene's eyes drove him onward.



After a while, after he had suffered enough, Dal found the way into the Wizard's cave. Gnawing a braid of his long blond hair, he ducked quickly beneath the wings of the enormous MOTH that guarded the entryway.

There were clanging machines-halls with human voices, strange pools of sticky-looking multicolored liquid that sloshed madly with no visible cause, and incubators with small Elf-babies peering shyly from beneath cabbage plants. There were other things, too, but Dal didn't understand them and so didn't think about them. Eventually he found the Wizard behind a row of altars of many different shapes, colors, and sizes. He looked as strange as ever, with his tan *cyrdgn* vest, pointed astro-inscribed hat, and briar pipe clenched between his teeth. As Dal cautiously approached, the Wizard suddenly turned about, startling him.

"Ah, Dal," the Wizard said briskly, deftly catching his pipe as it dropped from his mouth, "this is an unexpected visit!" He paused, and frowned. "In fact, why are you here?"

"Uh—the Unchill, Wizard." Dal stammered. The Wizard had always unnerved him, even during the short time that they had been brothers.

The Wizard looked blank. "What? What's that?"

"My lands—are too hot. The sunplants burn." Dal said carefully.

"Mmm. I see." The Wizard frowned into the distance, then raised his eyebrows. "Excuse me." He turned away from Dal and sang to a monkey-like familiar, which shyly warbled back at him. After a few moments, the duet ceased. The Wizard sat in thought.

"Well, Dal," the Wizard said finally, "we seem to have a small problem. Tell me, for how many seasons have you noted this effect?"

"Four." Dal answered. He could count well.

"Interesting. I must have a record," the mystic mumbled to himself. Opening a drawer in the side of a black altar, he began rummaging through it. Straightening after a moment of hesitation, he held three small clear spheres out to Dal, who gingerly accepted them. "Place these in your fields for me, Dal. Remember where you bury them! Now. Let me see. I've been venting the Krasikoor residua of that absorption/analysis spell, not that it makes any difference to you, (might as well talk to a grape)—ah, where was I? Umm, yes, the residue

was shunted into the plate beneath your fields. Apparently the power involved is greater than I had anticipated, so I'll simply shunt the excess to a different end-point—it shouldn't be difficult, and the effects should subside almost immediately." The Wizard paused for a moment, then spoke carefully. "Unchill will end soon. All right? Good. Just show yourself out, will you?" The Wizard vaguely and sank through the floor. Bemused, Dal went Home.

During the next few days, things indeed seemed to be getting better. The air grew cooler, and the sunplants straightened and dimmed. Even the beasthands seemed happier as the hand of Unchill withdrew. Eager to keep the good luck, Dal carefully avoided the places where he had placed the Wizard's spheres, and guided the beasthands away from those spots as well. With each good day, the hope in Dal's heart grew stronger. After one attempt, he no longer spoke to Pappy, who remained more gloomy and pessimistic than usual. All too soon, however, Pappy's fears proved true. Two weeks after Dal's Homecoming, he smelled a terrible smell in the dark. Running outside, Dal saw the stream boiling, and a red glow to the east.



From the ocean. Unchill had come to a new place. The screams of the fish were deafening.

And so once again Dal found himself before the entrance to the Wizard's Cave. The wings of the MOTH fluttered slightly as he passed beneath. Lights flashed madly from the floor and ceiling, and strange energies tried to take things that Dal didn't know he had, and give him things that he had never imagined—all failing. It seemed to Dal that Time never meant much anywhere, but less here . . . Finally he found the Wizard, sitting cross-legged and motionless before a flower that wept pale tears.



"Yes, Dal?" the Wizard said, not turning around. "I—I—the ocean..." Dal said. "Yes?" "It's boiling!" Dal choked. "Arag, artegnag!" The Wizard seemed upset. "Obviously—" he gave a short bark of laughter, "well, not obviously, there must be some sort of progression resonance factor involved." He gnawed his lower lip. "Argh. Time for shunt number three, I guess. Make a note of that!" he exclaimed, apparently to the flower. "Now I'm afraid that I'm rather busy at the moment, Dal, so do forgive me..." He gestured, and green clicking clamps appeared from midair, seizing Dal's arms and lifting him up and back. Dal stifled a cry of shock. As the claws bore him swiftly and painfully away, Dal saw the Wizard turn once again to regard the flower. Soon the

pressure on Dal's arms became excruciating, and he fell asleep. When he awoke, he lay at the edge of his fields.

Once again, things went well for a time. The stream cooled, and the dead fish floated away, fins and tendrils gently waving in a parody of their dance of life. The stench of cooking streamweed faded, and the light in the east died away. Soon crops, lands, and beasthands seemed to glow with vitality. Even Pappy grudgingly announced that the failure threshold (whatever *that* was) was receding.

(And Sirene was happy...).

Disaster, when it came, came swiftly. Dal woke one morning to find the earth shaking beneath him. Scrambling outside, he looked frantically about—what was happening? The fields were fine. The stream was fine. What else was there? Then, spurred by a nameless instinct, Dal looked up.

The sky was melting. As Dal watched in horror, a piece of the Sun broke off and fell just beyond the south field. Wildfire blazed up in the south. The sunplants wailed as Dal re-entered the Home.

(On the floor, Sirene writhed in agony. Her eyes bled.)

* * *

Dal did what he could, then took up his great metal blade, bands, and birth-circlet. Shouldering the blade, he went North. His heart felt strangely heavy, as if it were not his own.

Outside, the land was screaming its outrage. Once-placid dogplants howled and flailed like demented things. Dal struck at them, teeth bared, till they stopped. Snakes leapt from the ground, snapping sharp orange teeth. Dal ran from them. Jets of hot blue rock spurted into the air. Dal dodged away, and ran till he was dizzy—and still, panting, he went on. Finally he reached the Cave

mouth, just in time to see the MOTH flutter madly and fly away. Heart and blade in hand, he entered.

* * *

Dal was used to madness at the Wizard's Cave. He had come to expect it. The silence and clean whiteness which greeted his senses within was more than surprising—it dazed him. He staggered forward into the stark and sterile hall. His heart beat three times . . . and then the world fell in on him.

There is a level of sensation so intense as to be no sensation at all. Few have experienced it. Dal kept walking, though at times he could sense neither the floor nor his own legs. It was not a matter of faith. There was simply nothing else he could do, and though the chaos around him made thought impossible, he had never needed to think very much anyway. Still, only the birth-circlet enabled Dal to find the man who had been his brother.

* * *

When next Dal could see, the Wizard was before him, gesturing frantically, facing away. Before him stood a titan-matrix of colored lights, radiating a power Dal could feel on his skin. Massive metal implements moved and chittered within the Wizard's hands, leaping from light to light. For a moment, Dal trembled. His lips began to form a word, then paused. The Wizard's back was still turned to him. Did the Wizard know he was there? Dal didn't know. The corner of his mouth twisted upward, and he felt something he had never felt before. *I could talk to him*, he thought, *but what would he do to us then?* The Wizard screamed at the matrix, his tools shrieking like doomed things. A soft thought touched Dal's mind. *Nothing ever changes*, it whispered. Dal took his blade in hand and paused for a moment of memory. Then, in a single movement, he struck, closed his eyes, and ran.

The Wizard was dead.

On the way Home, Dal saw the rest of the sky fall to the earth, shaking all of existence. He laughed, not knowing why, and went into the maelstrom.

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COMMENTS #1

ALL: Thanks again for contributing. Perhaps

I'm not the one who should say it, but I think it was a great issue.

Virgil Greene: The reviews of the various gaming magazines were very useful and interesting. Personally, though, I find that the magazines I enjoy most are the ones that inevitably die first. It's a good thing that doesn't apply to amateur press! 8^>}

♦ About the new *Fineous Fingers* in *Shadis*: two points. One, the author and artist is *not* the guy who created the strip and used to write it for *Dragon*; and two, well, frankly I think the new *Fineous* really sucks. That's from a man who loved the original, by the way. The art and humor are nowhere near the standards of the old strip, and if it weren't for the names being the same I wouldn't have recognized it as *Fineous*.

♦ Was it I who was responsible for starting up this fad of light bulb RPG jokes? If so, I guess I'm paying the price now...8^>}

Dana Erlandsen: Wow, Dana. I never thought I'd be interested in a Vampire campaign writeup, but I really was. The background and characters are lovely, very intriguing—they really make me wish I could play in the campaign. I've been so put off by those lame Vampire wannabes running around in their black clothes that I'd forgotten the fun I had with the old Dracula comic book, and Fred Saberhagen's Dracula series.

♦ While I'm on the subject, let me take a moment to say that in my book Anne Rice's vampire series are largely responsible for this idiotic Vampire fad, and are little more than poorly written sadomasochistic drivel. Down with Anne Rice! 8^>}

♦ Have you read much 17th century French correspondence?

♦ My condolences on your Magic: The Gathering addiction. I trust that it will burn out soon. I'm sure others will mention it, but apparently some cards are going for as much as fifteen dollars! Seems to me that that rate of exchange makes counterfeiting a profitable option. 8^>}

♦ Thanks for the reviews. It's always hard to know what new writers to try, and with the price of paperback books these days edging towards \$6.00, mistakes can be doubly disappointing.

David Hoberman: Congratulations on your successful PBEM game. One point that I think would be valuable to make: such games absolutely depend on the amount of participation from the players.

♦ I was extremely interested in your analysis of the effect of the PBEM medium on the game. I can't help but wonder how you would differentiate a game played over the InterNet from one played on, say, a local BBS. The interface is more difficult for the Net, of course; on the other hand, you have a far wider pool of gamers to draw players from. How did you recruit newcomers? And what do you mean when you say that the players come from "around the globe"?

♦ Most of all, I'd like to hear more about your use of IRC. While I have access to IRC myself, I must confess that I still have no idea how to use it—perhaps you can give me a few tips.

♦ I've just realized that I've been guilty of alphabet-soup syndrome. For those who don't know what all those letters mean (and I know there are some: IRC =

InterNet Relay Chat (I think), and PBEM = Play By Email. I guess I should start creating a glossary for Interregnum eh?

♦ Regarding the Cyberpunk issue, I have a strong streak of sympathy for the player who disliked the genre. After all, I disliked the genre myself. But my attitude has been mellowing of late; I've come to realize that to speak of "cyberpunk" as a single-voiced genre is a fallacy. Insofar as it draws on the tradition of pulp detective novels, film noir, and such films as The Terminator and Bladerunner cyberpunk is fine by me. It's the poorly-done reader-torturing trash that I have no use for—but that applies in *any* genre.

♦ The quotes are still very funny. You have some very funny players! Do you print all the good lines you get in a month, or are there more than you can use?



Curtis Taylor: It's great to have another RuneQuest player in Interregnum.

♦ I can sympathize with your strange sleep schedule; I used to work the night shift at a bread factory, and it was very inconvenient. I hope that you avoid the aftereffects I've suffered—I've been a nightowl ever since.

♦ Thanks for the bio. Just out of curiosity, are you running or playing in any games these days?

♦ Your method of character creation is much like my own. I assume the list of questions is actually much longer? If so, I wonder if you ever have a problem with new players,

unused to deep-roleplaying campaigns, getting intimidated by the unprecedented (for them) investment of thought and time required for their characters.

♦ The GURPS™ spells are interesting, though I haven't played GURPS (or anything!) for quite some time. Some of the spell names sound quite familiar. Were they derived from some other source?

♦ Glad to see the Glorantha hooks. They remind me a little of one of the Traveller books—I can't recall the name of it at the moment, but it was filled with small useful hooks for GMs to develop into campaigns and encounters. I like that sort of thing. Frankly, too many scenarios, even very good ones, straitjacket the imagination; I prefer to get a few seed concepts and grow them in my own way. RuneQuest desperately needs this sort of thing. I hope we'll see more!

♦ Another thought: One advantage to publishing hooks is that they can reach a wider audience. Scenarios generally sell to gamemasters; after all, if a player reads it s/he can't play it (okay, I know that's not really true for many gamers, but the principle is valid). But reading a book of hooks and bits can't spoil a game in the same way; after all, the bulk of the adventure is not in the book, but in the GM's mind.

George Phillies: It's hard to judge the end of *Pickering*, George—and it must be even more difficult for those readers of *Interregnum* who aren't familiar with *The Wild Hunt*. How many years have you been publishing sections of *Pickering*? And of course there are sections in the middle that we haven't seen yet.

Still, let me try to assess this final part. It seems satisfying somehow; the loose ends tied up, the group settled in their respective fates, and peace for Eclipse. The ponies at the end might have been just the slightest bit too much—a little too cute. On the other hand, such a life might be exactly what a young girl would choose for herself if she had the power. I remember how much my sister loved horses as a girl.

♦ The description of the effect of controlling horses through the use of telepathy was excellent. I have only a little riding experience, but they reacted that way to me even with a saddle and bridle. 8^>}

♦ Excellent work on *Who Slays Satan?* I'm extremely impressed, and enjoyed it very much. Perhaps that's in part because I've been able to read the entire work in such a short span of time. I certainly hope we'll see more of your short pieces in the future.

Incidentally, *WSS?* reminded me a bit of some of the work of Barbara Hambly, a fantasy writer whose work I enjoy quite a bit. She features much the same conflict between a Church driven by fear and superstition and essentially neutral magicians. The purification of Lucifer was a very nice touch, and reminded me both of Neil Gaiman's *Sandman* and Michael Moorcock's *The War Hound and the World's Pain*. Not that the work is derivative; you've handled the themes in a unique way. But I enjoyed *WSS?* in much the same way that I enjoyed those other works.



Doug Jorenby: I'm so glad to see *Session*

Notes again, Doug. Here's hoping that there will be many more.

♦ I must admit that I hadn't realized that Traveller still existed. There seemed to be so many systems coming out from GDW that I assumed that Traveller had been dumped for some cyberpunk game or some such. Not that I've played Traveller for years.

♦ When I did, though, it was pretty boring. All there was to do was trade, trade, trade, and that was pretty much a no-brainer after the best trade routes were discovered. Traveller campaigns always seemed to have a built-in time limit; as soon as the party members got wealthy to be able to afford their own ships, there was no reason for them to stay together. Old Traveller was an excellent demonstra-



tion of the futility of the mindless quest for ever-increasing material wealth.

The most excitement we ever had was the time we formed a band and went touring. But even that got boring after a while. Eventually, inter-party rivalries tore the group apart. As I recall, one player hired an assassin to kill two of the characters (including mine), because of his dislike for the players in the real world. On a purely irrelevant note, he was a sergeant in the US Army who was later dishonorably discharged when he was caught selling drugs.

That game fell apart.

◆ Regarding the removal of the possibility of character death during pre-generation in Traveller: Was that really a problem? I don't recall it happening very often, and when it did, it wasn't a big problem. It's not as if it took much effort or time to create a Traveller character, after all.

On the other hand, I do recall one player who essentially operated a death camp for pregenerates. He'd create a character, and if he didn't like their stats or the result of some die roll, he'd steer them into a highly dangerous profession. He'd keep killing off his characters in pregeneration this way until he got what he wanted. His final characters were always amazingly powerful...

◆ An in-game character experience increase system was an unbelievable lack in the old system. It's long past due. Good to see that GDW figured that out, finally.

Scott Ferrier: Rags?! Interregnum? Boy, is *that* a reach! I suppose I'm ineligible for the contest, eh? Just as well, as giving me a Magic card would be only slightly less obnoxious than giving me influenza. Or crack. 8^>}

◆ Alexander was amusing. It's a pity we never got to really get into the campaign and see him in action! On the other hand, given his combat paralysis he might not have lasted long. It's possible that in Alexander you had a character concept that was highly amusing but not really playable in the long term.

◆ Re the IFGS: You were a bit more savage than I was in my writeup in The Wild Hunt. And of course I didn't name names. Doesn't do me much good now, though, since anyone can cross-reference our two write-ups...8^>}

◆ The "Fat Jerk"? Hee hee hee! Pretty funny. You're pretty mean.

◆ For the riddle contest in the first New England IFGS game not only did I suggest the possibility of a tie, but I also suggested the possibility of the good guys losing (as actually happened). Am I psychic? Nah. But there are times when I predict the worst that I *know* that it will happen, and it often does. Perhaps that's just experience with human nature. And coincidence is always a possibility.

NEXTISH:

Who knows? I have at least six new RPG products to review, plus a CD-ROM or two. Beyond that, anything's possible...

—>Pete

COLOPHON:

The Log That Flies #2 was gestated in a P. Maranci 30.2 brain. Much of the text was then generated with PC-Write 2.5, an ancient but serviceable 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 at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

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.

Inspirational quote for the month:

"The InterNet perceives censorship as damage and routes around it." (unknown)

Take care, all!

—>Pete

Session Notes #16

Douglas E. Forenby



It Never Entered My Mind

In keeping with our esteemed editor's desire to include material that has little relation to either gaming or science fiction, I came across a fascinating article in a recent copy of the magazine *Wired* (2.03, March 1994). John Perry Barlow, co-founder and executive chair of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, wrote a very thought-provoking piece on "The Economy Of Ideas: A Framework For Patents And Copyrights In The Digital Age (Everything You Know About Intellectual Property Is Wrong)." Quite a mouthful, and perhaps not a title you drop casually into conversation during a night at the pub. The material, though, is well worth wading through the imposing title.

NEW INTERNET ADDRESS FOLLOWS:

dej@ctri.medicine.wisc.edu

Barlow conceptualizes information (and hence, intellectual property) as defined by three statements:

- I. Information is an activity.
- II. Information is a life form.
- III. Information is a relationship.

The first two statements contain some interesting and even provocative implications (including the radical view that carbon-based life forms are merely DNA's way of making more DNA). For me, though, the third statement was the most interesting.

To begin from a premise that information is a relationship leads to some very different endpoints than if we assume information is a commodity. Barlow posits that *familiarity has more value than scarcity*. It doesn't matter how technically wonderful something is if it doesn't reach enough people to become accepted. I think of the SuperBeta VCR I bought a number of years ago. It had excellent video and audio resolution, to the point where VHS-HQ users who saw it were amazed. But Sony didn't promote the format aggressively enough, and the ability to tape an entire week of soap operas on a single VHS cassette won out over technical excellence. Barlow's example is that commonly pirated software, such as WordPerfect or Lotus 1-2-3, become standards and actually benefit from more sales as users become familiar with the product.

Read More About It:

The text of the original Barlow article is available from the *Wired* server at:

infobot@wired.com

It's a great place to NetSurf.

Sound Byte d'Jour:

"For example, it may be unnecessary to constitutionally assure freedom of expression in an environment which, in the words of my fellow EFF co-founder John Gilmore, 'treats censorship as a malfunction' and reroutes proscribed ideas around it." — JPB, pg. 127-128

But Has He Met T\$R?

Then again, seeing as how T\$R, Inc.™ has managed to squelch *Dangerous Journeys* and *RoleAids* in the recent past, perhaps some assurances would be nice...

Authority or point of view have value when information is conceptualized as a relationship. Back in the late 1970s, Robert Zajonc at the U of Michigan, demonstrated that people had a significant preference for one item in a pair of nonsense syllables if they had been exposed subliminally (via a tachistoscope) to that item before. Hence, there was a preference for familiarity. If I've used VHS cassettes and am familiar with them, I'm more likely to stick with that format when I buy a new VCR. Because the first word processing software I used years ago was WordPerfect 3.0, it would take a huge improvement in performance to get me to switch to another platform. So far it has yet to happen. That authority, the knowledge that this general software has worked well for me in the past, has great appeal.

Barlow, who is also a member of the Grateful Dead, points out that the band has benefitted enormously from essentially "giving away" its songs (i.e., allowing fans to make bootleg recordings of its concerts). The same applies to point of view. How many times have you bought a CD, without hearing a single cut, simply based on positive past experiences with that performer/composer/group? Or gone to see a movie without reading reviews because of the director or writer or actor(s)? While it's certainly not an ironclad guarantee (I still wince at the memory that I paid *money* for Elvis Costello's *Almost Blue*), there are certain expectations about a point of view that come with an artist.

What intrigues me about this way of looking at information is (sorry, Pete, but I'm actually going to revert to the main topic of this APA) how it relates to role playing and the RPG industry. I've done endless amounts of tinkering with systems over the years. I've developed subsystems, variants, pages of material to adapt cultures to specific sets of rules. Over the years, I've literally filled a file drawer and multiple large 3-ring binders with campaign and scenario information. And yet, with the exception of a home-grown rules system that thankfully never went beyond a small group of friends, I've never tried to publish anything. Why?

One reason is simply lack of gumption. I never had the *chutzpa* to package up my work, mail it to a company, and say, "See? Isn't this great? Pay me money for the privilege of putting your corporate logo on it."

Another reason would be philosophical opposition, in that I have felt for a long time that creativity is a large part of what makes RPG unique and engaging. I'd much rather people make up their own worlds

IP or EP? As a related point, I think information is a reward that is often undervalued in role playing campaigns. Even if the primary focus of the game is not puzzle solving or "figuring things out" in the broadest sense, good information usually has value far in excess of a handful of gold pieces.

Obligatory Legal Disclaimer!

Kids! Don't try these wacky, but dangerous stunts at home! Remember, ad libbing refs are trained professionals operating on a closed track.

and adventures than put their hands to playing something I made up. This wouldn't account for not trying to sell a system, but there's precious little demand for home-grown rules systems relative to adventures and support materials.

To me, the major reason is that I simply think what I do wouldn't translate well into a commercial version. To the extent that anything "works" in one of my games, it is a result of the real-time dynamic between myself and the player(s). It might be possible to strip down an adventure to its archetypal essentials and sketch the NPCs in some functional amount of detail -- but it wouldn't be as good as what really happened in the original. Those scenarios were based around the motivations and fears of the PCs in the campaign, and events and NPCs shifted as those PCs and the situation evolved. To reduce that relationship to a static form necessary for a commercial product would be to reduce the relationship to the level of caricature.

One could certainly argue that commercial products don't have to be that way. I've certainly seen examples where the author encourages the ref to "play the NPC in accordance with PC actions," or "let this develop as you see fit." Certainly there are some refs who do take the time to go through modules carefully and customize them to their specific campaign and players.

What is far more common, however, is the case of refs running modules straight out of the box. I recall some hardcore AD&D™ers who lived in the same undergraduate dorm I did. We ran in to them one Saturday night at the local pizza place, where they were hooting and hollering and slapping their ref on the back. When we could get them to settle down and speak coherently, it transpired that this demi-god among refs had been running Official Module 2-4-D™ (or something like that).....and had actually had to ad lib an entire section!!! If you felt the earth stop in its rotation, that was no doubt the cause. ☺

Barlow's thoughts on the nature of intellectual property helped me see this in a whole new light. It is not the product itself (i.e., the plot of the adventure) that has value, but the relationship between the ref and the players. The stories themselves are not remarkably novel, but the point of view from which they are told can have great value. While I may well derive some pleasure from buying *The Grey Company* as a product produced by Peter Maranci, it probably pales in comparison to actually playing the campaign with Peter himself. It also accords with many of my experiences with the media. They don't really want facts --

those are available to anyone willing to spend the time to pick up a medical journal. What they want is a point of view, a summary or distillation of the literature. As Barlow puts it in his final two summary predictions for the future:

- The economy of the future will be based on relationship rather than possession. It will be continuous rather than sequential.
- And finally, in the years to come, most human exchange will be virtual rather than physical, consisting not of stuff but the stuff of which dreams are made. Our future business will be conducted in a world made more of verbs than nouns. (p. 129)

It's nice to know we're out there on the leading edge of the curve, eh?



How many clinical psychologists does it take to change a light bulb?

Only one, but the light bulb really has to want to change.

Comments On Interregnum #1

Maranci: Even though I've read it before, I enjoyed seeing "Bar Wars" again. The clip art made a nice addition to it, as well. It's a pity that the editor you dealt with wasn't willing to give his readers more credit. I think it's a better piece as a general "how-to", rather than specific mini-scenarios that may or may not fit a given campaign setting.

Any further developments on the RuneQuest IV conspiracy? Is it true that Elvis is a copy editor at Chaosium? ☺

Greene: You pose an interesting question: "How serious do we want to get in a game?" For me, the answer would be, "As serious as we like." I don't think problems stem inherently from running a serious game (comic games like *Teenagers From Outer Space* or *Toon* can get out of hand as well), but from players overidentifying with their characters. In a *TFOS* game I recall, a player got quite upset when another PC turned down his very inept request for a date. His cry was, "But I have a Bod of 6 and a Cool of 5 -- you can't resist me!" If it had been any other skill, it probably wouldn't have made any difference. Being that it was a romantic pursuit (an area where the *player* felt frustrated in real life), it became a big deal. Part of role playing can be about wish-fulfillment, but it's important to keep well-defined boundaries between wishes and reality. Loved the light bulb jokes, too.

Actual Headline! (I am not making this up; check *Premiere*, April 1994).

"Disney's Jeffrey Katzenberg wants to reward David Hoberman without losing Ricardo Mestres. But is that possible?"

So why haven't you confessed to being the head of Touchstone Pictures before, David?©



Stayin' alive...

Erlandsen: I see you have not lost your touch for character background development. Wow! It seems as though you have a good proportion of 17th century Paris developed as NPCs for the game. Good luck.

Hoberman: Wow! Great layout for your zine! You are doing some great DTP things these days (and let me put in a plug for consecutive-page story flow, too).

As an innocent bystander in your PBeM (Play Bug Eyed Monster?) campaign, it was interesting to read. Compared to FTF gaming, I found it a bit harder to track multiple characters and shifts in time, but those are difficult to handle in any form. My interest has been grabbed, as all the players in my current group have email addresses here at UW-Madison. We're running the games FTF, but email provides a novel way of disseminating background before the game and handling private character inquiries. New tech creates new possibilities, eh? Great quotes from the edge, too.

Taylor: That's an interesting set of questions you propose to ask players about their characters. Have you used these primarily with RQ, or with other games as well? Many years ago, I developed a sort of "campaign market research" questionnaire that I used to get a feel for what players wanted at the beginning of a game. It had some utility, but I eventually decided it was better to just observe players *in vivo*.

Phillies: Whew! Not only superheroes, but fantasy as well? You are clearly a man of many fictional talents.

Ferrier: Hahahahahahaha! I don't know what got more laughs from me, the "interview" with Alexander or the 1970s M:TG creatures. Certainly the latter were more terrifying. © I can't believe that the ugliest clothes in Known Space (AKA 1970's "fashion") are making a comeback. Just goes to prove that the feminists were right all along -- the fashion industry really *does* hate women. Please keep up with *The Scuttle*, as well. It's hard to find decent computer game reviews.

AND COMING SOON TO AN APA NEAR YOU...
THE FABULOUS F. BOB MOSDAL!

The Pen & Sword

Mark Sabalauskas, 15 Dahl Road, Merrimack N.H. 03054 marks@slough.mit.edu

Volume One, Number One

April 25, 1994

Type First Heading Here

Start text of first arti ... OOPS, wait a second, @\$\$(^, Huh?... &^@**#, ahh, there we go...

Hello, my name is Mark. As you may have guessed, this is my first attempt at putting together a 'zine. With a little luck, and your indulgence, I hope to pull this off.

By way of introduction, I offer the following fascinating facts about myself. I'm 28, and have been playing, reading, and collecting roleplaying games for two thirds of my life. I gamemaster a weekly Runequest game that has been running for about two years now. My other interests include wargaming (my, what a well rounded fellow), folk music, reading non-fiction, mucking around with desktop video, and cross country skiing. I'm a news junkie who enjoys the New Hampshire primary immensely. I study economics, and hope to make an original contribution to research any day now.

A Fronelan Campaign

I've always enjoyed reading about the gritty details of other people's campaigns. Now that I have a 'zine of my own, I have a chance to share the some of the background I developed while gamemastering. I GM a weekly Runequest game, whose main campaign is set far to the north and west of Dragon Pass, in Fronela.

The player characters are knights of Loskalm; a kingdom organized on the ideals of Hrestoli monotheism.

The material presented here is my of conjecture as to what Fronela might be like. I have no access to any Chaosium insider information. The "official" Fronela, if it is ever published, will probably not be at all like this. Runequest is a Chaosium game published by the Avalon Hill Game Company. Glorantha is a creation of Greg Stafford. (Just thought you'd want to know :-)



Coinage

The current Loskami monetary system was devised by Prince Conal (known in ballads as the Wizard of the Many Callings).

His Reformation of the Currency was an important part of the break with the God

Learners now known Restoration of Values.

Loskalmi currency is accepted throughout

Fronela.

There are four types of coins, one honoring each of the Malkioni castes. All are ring shaped; and they are often worn as jewelry. The copper Plough is the most common coin. It is popularly called the Ring, and has slightly less purchasing power than a lunar. The silver Sword has ten times the value of a Plough. A gold Wand is legally worth 10 Swords, but its market value is about 20% higher. The rarest and most valuable coin is the Crown. A Crown is a copper Plough that has been enchanted by a ritual spell. Sorcery users of the Hrestoli school can store a single magic point in a Crown. Loskalmi Wizards and Lords are known to have spells that increase the usefulness Crowns, and they generally consider a Crown to be worth about 400 Swords. Others accept this valuation, knowing that they can trade the Crowns for Loskalmi goods.

In common speech single Loskalmi coins are often referred to in the plural form to avoid confusion with the objects they are named after. It would be perfectly correct to say: "I'd say that knife is worth one Swords."

Fronelan Fauna

Birds: cranes, black and gray crows, swamp curlew, crimson ecclesiarch, Sog heron, blue jay, owls, field partridge, magpies, quail, skylarks, sparrows, starlings, black stork, swallows, wren, woodpeckers

Birds of Prey: Southbank hawk, march harrier, purple kite, osprey, vultures

Domestic Animals: cats, cows, dogs, ducks, goats, geese, hens, horses, oxen, pigs, pigeons, sheep

Fish: porpoise (on coast), salmon, trout, sturgeon

Lizards: frog, newt, toad, viper**

Songbirds: green linnet, nightingale, golden oriole, skylark, Jonatelan and Janubian warblers

Wild Animals: bats, black and brown bears*, beaver, bison, wild cats, red deer, spring deer, elk*, fox, white hare, lynx, mice, mink, mole, otter, reindeer*, brown and black rats, tahr, weasels, wolves**

* animals associated with major Hsunchen groups found in Fronela

** animals which are believed to have once been associated with Hsunchen, no such Hsunchen presently exist in Fronela

Heraldry

Loskalmi heraldry is mercifully uncomplicated compared to that of other western kingdoms. Armorial bearings are not used to show lineage, but are simply a means of battlefield identification. Each knight chooses a personal symbol or design, which is displayed quartered with her lord's arms. Wizards quarter their personal design with the Law rune, and a lord's design is unquartered. It has lately become the fashion to add a motto to one's coat of arms. If two knights find that they have selected the same symbol they resolve the matter through chivalric competition, with the loser selecting a new design.

Loskalmi Society

This is a description of the Hrestoli caste structure of Loskalm as it exists after the Thaw. Hrestol's teachings have undoubtedly been interpreted in many different ways over the past two millennia. The Syndics Ban gave Loskalm time and peace to refine its society into its present form.. Scholars may debate how closely present Loskalmi society matches that of Dawn age Shesnega, but such arcane socio-mythological disputation is of little interest to the common man.

Loskalmi society is organized around the traditional Malkioni castes. Farmers, knights and wizards work under the direction of lords. Only lords may own property; they are obligated to provide the other castes with tools and the necessities and comforts of life. Hrestoli doctrine holds that only Lords have the spiritual mastery needed to avoid conflating identity with material objects. In practice, of course, no mortal lord could direct the use of all of his holdings personally, and many resources are allocated by a lord's officers or by tradition.

Hrestoli are considered adults when they enter the farmer caste at age twelve. Farmers carry out all the tasks needed to produce and distribute the material things people need to live. Merchants, butchers, artisans, and hunters are all members of the farming caste. The vast majority of farmers, however, work the land as peasants.

The life of a Loskalmi peasant is good by the standards of western serfs, but austere by almost any other measure.

Most people never progress beyond this stage until they enter Solace in Glory.

Members of the farmer caste may learn spells of the Hrestoli tradition, but are forbidden to learn any sorcerous manipulations. Most learn only a few Low Magic cantrips. In many western states a large minority of serfs covertly worship pagan gods. This practice is almost unknown in Loskalm, although some echoes of other faiths can be found by scholars in colorful local festivals and traditions.

Here are some new spells that a member of the farmer caste might know:

Color Glass

Ranged, Active, Temporal, Easy

For every point of intensity the caster may change the hue of an Enc. of glass to whatever color he desires. The color of the glass is fixed when the spell expires. Loskalmi glasswork is generally regarded as the finest in Glorantha. Note that the "natural" color of glass is light green.

Detect Fertility

Touch, Instant, Easy

This spell indicates the state of the target's fertility. Pregnancy and barrenness are also detected. Detect Fertility is useful in breeding animals and dramatically increases the effectiveness of "rhythm" contraception. Higher intensity spells yield no more information.

Draw <specific animal>

Ranged, Active, Temporal, Easy

If the caster overcomes the animal's magic points, the beast will slowly move towards her. Additional intensities increase the number of beasts targeted.

Evaluate Coinage

Touch, Passive, Temporal, Easy

While under the effect of the spell the caster will be able to tell if Loskalmi coins he touches are legitimate or counterfeit. All manner of debasement, shaving, ect. are detected.

Polish

Ranged, Instant, Easy

This spell cleans and smoothes most surfaces. It will not restore lost armor points or remove deep scoring. A squire might use this spell to make his lord's armor look like new. One square meter of surface is affected per intensity of the spell.

Purify <substance>

Ranged, Instant, Easy

Removes all foreign matter from a substance. Affects one Enc. per intensity. The spell does not affect living beings.

Scare

Ranged, Passive, Temporal, Easy

If this spell's intensity overcomes the Fixed Int of an animal it will frighten the beast away. If the spell is cast on a ridden animal, the caster must also overcome the rider's magic points. Trained war horses will not be frightened away in any event, but instead are affected as if by Cast Fear.

Shout

Touch, Active, Temporal, Easy

Each intensity of this spell doubles the distance the target's voice can be heard.

Test Food

Touch, Passive, Temporal, Easy

The target of this spell will be able to tell if any food or drink she tastes is spoiled, unhealthy, or adulterated. Higher intensities only serve to overcome the Conceal spell.

Tune <instrument>

Touch, Instant, Easy

The spell adjusts an instrument to the tuning of the caster's choice. Additional intensity has no effect.

Whistle a Wind

Ranged, Instant, Easy

The caster is able to call up a short gust of wind. Addition intensity increases the strength of the wind. An intensity of one could be used to blow the hay out of your clothes, or scatter the papers from your teacher's desk. Intensities of five or greater can knock a man off his feet.

To be continued...

Comments

The Log That Flies:

Congratulations on the new APA! I'm glad to see Bar Wars finally in print.

8-Track Mind:

Thanks for the mini-reviews of FRP magazines. I'll have to look out for Vortex; it sounds wild.

The Player:

I was very impressed by the level of detail in your NPC writeups.

Sometimes, of course, player knowledge of the historical setting can be a problem. Especially if the players have researched details of which the gamemaster is ignorant. I recall a recent Call of Cthulu game. It was set in the rural Scotland of the 1920s. Lord Charles Shaw, a PC, accidentally shot a constable under the misimpression that the constable was a cultist. The blighter was carrying a gun!

Re: Magic the Gathering - In one local store very rare individual cards are being sold for 10 dollars!

I've always had a hard time thinking up NPC names, using a baby name book is a terrific idea!

WHO IS JOHN GALT? #2

Looters beware!

Curtis Taylor, P. O. Box 1144, Ontario, CA 91762-0144/(909) 985-3355/vingkot@aol.com

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WHAT'S NEW?

Since my last writing, *GURPS Religion* has been released. This is a large (176 pages) supplement split into three sections. The first section gives guidelines for the creation of religions, the second gives rules for the creation of clerical characters, and the third section provides sample religions based on the information given in the first two sections. I haven't had a chance to delve into in any great depth, but it looks like a good supplement.

Also new is the *Magic The Gathering Players Guide*. It is a slightly larger than paperback book that has a high gloss cover similar to the starter deck package. That is about all I can say about it, since my roommate has my copy of it and shows no sign of returning it.

For RuneQuest, we have *Strangers in Prax*. It is 96 pages long and contains three mini-campaigns for the River of Cradles area of Glorantha. Each mini-campaign is written by a different author: *The Lunar Coders* by Michael O'Brien, *Barran the Monster Killer* by Jonathan Tweet, and *Arlaten the Magus* by Mike Dawson. Editing was performed by Ken Rolston, development by Mike Dawson, and artwork by Stephen Langmead. The cost is about \$18.00 (I don't recall the exact price).

Inside the front cover is a 'Sorcery Spell Record Sheet' and a worksheet for 'Common Spell Combinations,' both for a sorcerer character. These will be helpful to organize your sorcerer character's spells.

I fully recommend this book for any RuneQuest/Glorantha fan.

Listed below is the errata for the first mini-campaign, *The Lunar Coders*. This information has been provided by Michael O'Brien, who gave me permission to present this errata to you in this zine. This errata originally appeared in one of Michael's contributions to the RuneQuest Daily. Thanks, Michael.

STRANGERS IN PRAX LUNAR CODERS ERRATA 1.0:

SPIRIT MAGIC CASTING PERCENTAGES

According to the official RQ3 Errata (available from Avalon Hill - write to 'em and they'll send it to you), the chance to cast spirit magic is equal to:

(POW x 5) +/- (magic skill modifier) - ENC.

Ergo, here's the correct spirit magic casting percentages of the Coders:

1. Julan 115% - ENC 20 = 95%
Armbreaker (allied spirit) 109%

2. Anderida 129% - ENC 6 = 123%

Anderida is particularly susceptible to the phases of the Red Moon. Her magic skills are affected. Alter spirit magic thusly:

Dark/Dying moon (halved)...
65% - ENC 6 = 59%

Crescent/Half Moon (no change)

Full Moon (increased by half again)...
194% - ENC 6 = 188%

Vectis (allied spirit) = 126%

3. Maculus 96% - ENC 5 = 91%
Seris (familiar) 107%
Canus (familiar) 138%

4. Nose Ring - doesn't use magic
Moonflower (allied spirit) 123%

5. Esilas 103% - ENC 12 = 91%

Curtis Taylor

Who is John Galt? #2

Wyvern Mounts: 38% - ENC (rider)

Reptus: POW 16, INT 12, DEX 13
Spirit Magic: 84% - ENC (rider)

Albus: POW 15, INT 06, DEX 13
Spirit Magic: 73% - ENC (rider)

OTHER STUFF:

JULAN

Julan's ENC is 20, not 36 as noted. His fatigue therefore is 37 - 20 ENC = 17.

MACULUS

Maculus's second familiar Canus's Magic Points are not included in Maculus's total. Add Canus's 24 to the total, giving a grand total of 111 for Maculus to play around with.

COMMENTS ON ISSUE #1

Peter Maranci: The first issue of *Interregnum* looks good! Congratulations on making it happen.

re RuneQuest In Ruins: RQ 3 was released in 1984. Also, (please do not read this as a defense by me for Avalon Hill or the lack of RQ material) Avalon Hill originally signed on as the publisher and marketer of RuneQuest 3, not as designer, developer, or editor.

Right now what is holding back publication of RQ/Glorantha material by Avalon Hill is money. The RQ audience has dwindled over the years. Avalon Hill is a business; businesses need to make money to stay in business. If it is not profitable (either in the form of immediate cash or as investment in a future market) for Avalon Hill to produce this material, then they won't do it.

I am not a spokesperson for Avalon Hill nor Chaosium, and the above discussion is my own opinion.

I think that David Cheng had the right idea in his article *Gaming Evangelism* in the RQ Con booklet on how to promote RQ/Glorantha at our level.

re RQ: AiG: As much as your work on RQ: AiG means to you, imagine how much Glorantha means to Greg Stafford.

Virgil S. Greene: re ...why are we playing?: I would have to agree with you, in that I do not want to play a game that does not allow escapism.

Dana J. Erlandsen: Excellent NPC sketches. I wish I played in your group of gamers. Most that I know do not put forth the effort you are showing us in your zine.

David Hoberman: re Notes From the Edge: I am now realizing that it may be better for a campaign to end at a natural division then to have it die later due to lack of interest. This page in your zine helped me to accept the truth of this.

re Quotes From the Edge: Good stuff.

George Phillies: RAEBNC

Douglas E. Jorenby: re Traveller: Thanks for bringing me up to speed on the current incarnation of *Traveller*. I have always been a fan of the system and GDW's Imperium. (I didn't have the time to develop my own *Traveller* universe.)

Scott Ferrier: re Interview with a Prick: I find this amusing also.

re Hell Cab: I have heard the same thing about this game (Mac version) that you say.

re Weird Magic Ideas: PLEASE! No more Magic cards!

re clip art: You have, without a doubt, found a source of strange clip art.

George Phillies: RAEBNC

ENDINGS

This is all that I have for this issue. Take care, all.

Colophon: Produced on my friendly Macintosh Quadra 660AV (20/230) using Microsoft Word 5.1. Printed on my trusty HP DeskWriter.

Who is John Galt? #2

The Slack Times

mosdal@facstaff.wisc.edu © F. Bob Mosdal Number 1, April 1994

INTRODUCTION

Howdy! (That's cowboy speak for hello. I know this since I am originally from Montana) The F. stands for Franklin but since my dad has used that name longer than I have been alive, I was relegated to using my middle name, Robert. That in turn was shortened to Bob or other less printable sobriquets. Anyway, my friends often call me F. Bob.

I have degrees in Political Science and Library and Information Studies. I work for the University of Wisconsin-Madison General Library System as an Information Processing Consultant (ie. computer geek), first class. I am interested in all manner of games from playing Pinochle with my relatives, to the latest parlor game with my wife and our friends, to hard core wargaming with my old college buddy. If pressed I guess I'd have to say Cyberpunk or the modern genres are the game settings I enjoy the most, though I stretch "modern" to include pulp detective games. I also enjoy realistic historic settings of all types. I guess that ties in with my enjoyment of history and political science.

I also enjoy a variety of computer games and am pondering what the best use of the computer is in a role-playing campaign setting. I keep a sharp lookout for new utilities showing up on the Internet.

REVIEW

My interest in modern genre games and my ardent peering into the digital cube led me to read about Millenium's End v2.0 (A Chameleon Eclectic Game by Charles Ryan) in one of the Usenet News game hierarchies. Was it rec.games.frp, rec.games.rpg or alt.captain.borg.borg. borg? I forget. Anyway, being the good consumer unit I am and not having anything to spend my money on until the fabled Castle Falkenstein comes out, I bought ME.

ME certainly competes with other gaming systems when it comes to its production values. I am ignorant of V1.0 but V2.0 has the glossy full color cover and binding we've come to expect from the first tier game production companies. The interior illustrations are decent too, IMHO. More impressive still to consider that the game designer did many of them.

Ah, but now to the meatier issues of the internal mechanics and the included background.

ME bills itself as "Modern Roleplaying in the Technothriller Genre." The game's emphasis on detailed combat and the background certainly guide players and game master in this direction.

The included background, which the author says you are free to use or not use, is that players are employed by BlackEagle/BlackEagle Security and Investigations Corporation. BlackEagle started out as a small investigations service and grew into a large "we'll do

most anything discretely but expensively" corporation. BlackEagle is free to hire any kind of character for all kinds of jobs: kidnap recovery, investigation, hostage intervention, courier service, bodyguarding etc. The game world is like ours but darker. The timeline provided with the game maps things out from 1990 until 1999 (thus the name Millenium's End). Essentially in this timeline bad went to worse: massive casualties and nukes in the Gulf War, more crime, more world violence etc. This is a setting ripe for heavily armed characters.

Character generation is a hybrid between random die rolls and point allocation. A pool of points is assigned to each base attribute. Then dice are rolled for the final total according to how many points were assigned for that attribute. Attributes and skill resolution are based on percentiles. Skills are arranged in a 2-step hierarchy with the top of the hierarchy representing general ability and second level members representing specialized ability. For example, a character may have an engineering ability of 50. This would represent a general engineering education. They may also have 20 points in Electrical Engineering which is added to the 50 of general engineering bringing the total for EE to 70 representing advanced expertise.

The skills detailed in the book are combat oriented. Additional skills are listed on the character sheet and the system is suited to adding skills. This provides the capability of generating a wide variety of complex characters.

Characters can be made from scratch or there are character frameworks detailing generic archetypes like "the grunt, the gangster

and the spook."

Combat resolution is very detailed in Millenium's End, but I'm not sure about the designer's intent. Charles Ryan writes several sidebars and parts of his introduction discussing how ME is not a combat game. However, the character frameworks, the skill packages, the nifty plastic attack overlays and the detail of the combat section and the technothriller all point the players and the GM toward a combat oriented style of play. I think the designer doth protest too much.

The combat system is realistic with shock and bleeding being taken into account. The mechanics for resolution are not too cumbersome. Initiative is rolled. Actions are resolved with characters having higher initiative having the option to act earlier than characters with lower initiative. Designated live targets get to roll for their defense first in hand-to-hand combats. If they succeed, the attacker automatically fails. For projectile combat, the target can't defend but can make itself harder to hit. If the defender fails their roll or it's projectile combat the attacker rolls and if they succeed the hit location is already determined with the use of the attack overlay, damage is determined by weapon type minus effects of armor and trauma level is determined. ME wounds are based on trauma level and shock rather than ablative hit points. I like the idea of some sort of shock roll being integral to damage resolution. I think it's realistic and not that difficult to add to a game system.

Other highlights of the game are a detailed martial arts resolution system, a vehicle chase system and a detailed international computer system.

Conclusion

Millenium's End exhibits a high standard of production and design values. The character creation offers opportunities to match player's conceptions but if the prepared background and the frames are used these will tend to be combat oriented. I found the combat overlays and several other systems notably the vehicle chase system to be interesting. If you and your players are interested in the technothriller genre or other contemporary combat oriented settings you may be interested in checking out Millenium's End.

Comments

Peter Maranci: I commend you on making the effort to put Interregnum together. I hope it can be a rewarding effort for us all. The underpinnings of a campaign are an area that gets short shrift in a lot of campaigns, sometimes encouraged by the game systems. Effort put into the campaign before the players ever sit down for the first session will pay off later for plot development and character growth. Thanks for taking us out of the bar and giving us some inspiration for other reasons for our characters to be together.

Virgil Greene: Good reviews of the various magazines. With the information overload upon us it's good to have a capsule summary of some of the other resources out there.

Dana Erlandsen: Wow! I hadn't realized that all of Paris were NPCs. Yours is certainly a background that has plenty of detail to inspire future adventure and character development. I think it's this kind of additional fleshing out of background that is lacking in other campaigns. It's something I've decided I'd like to do more of. Then

again if you've already made contacts with the whole population who is there left to adventure with?

David Hoberman: Interesting article on the possibilities of PBM. I'm hoping that my local campaign (once it gets up and going) might take more advantage of the fact that all of our players are networked electronically. That and the other possibilities of the PC and RPG'ing intrigue me a great deal. Cyberpunk played "the one almighty right way as interpreted by me and mine" is a genre I find compelling. Good to read about your experiences that take advantage of other aspects of CP besides high caliber artillery. Good chuckle from the quotes.

Curtis Taylor: Continuing the theme of backgrounds and character development and growth, I think your idea of guiding your players to getting into character more is good.

George Phillies: I guess I will reserve comment for the most part until I have a better idea of what kind of criticism you are interested in. I enjoyed "Who Slays Satan," and I take it from the relative numbering that this story is complete?

Doug Jorenby: I have the original black box edition of Traveller too and agree that the latest incarnation really brings the system up to snuff. What do you think about the spaceship combat supplement Brilliant Lances?

Scott Ferrier: Again the idea of greater effort at pre-first session character development appears. What are other techniques people use to develop new characters?

Well, enough for now.

F. Bob

THE EIGHT TRACK MIND

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

Virgil S. Greene

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Well, here we are again! Since I've not yet read other folks comments on my first go-round, we'll just wing it this month and hope y'all (since I was born in North Carolina, I can say that) like it.

SUGGESTED TOPIC: DISBELIEF

I don't believe in disbelief. :) Okay, seriously now, sort of. Disbelief in Fantasy RPGs has weird powers. In AD&D, by disbelieving, you can avoid injury by some powerful spells. In GURPS Magic, an illusion is dispelled if any viewer disbelieves it. It becomes an issue of the nature of illusions; what are they really?

In AD&D, they appear to be mental impressions. They exist in the mind of the viewers, and nowhere else. Thus, one person's disbelief doesn't necessarily help his or her friends unless they can explain WHY it's an illusion. The illusion is still "visible" sometimes, but just ineffectual. Some of the more powerful illusions are "quasi-real" to use their term and have a sort of physical existence. The problem that arises here is why exactly are you disbelieving the

illusion? In the Campaign That Would Not Die back in Rapid City, South Dakota, it became standard practice to try and disbelieve everything after a few nasty illusory encounters. At some point we should have successfully disbelieved reality. :) One writer in the Dragon Forum section suggested that disbelieving an illusion should require a reason, such as "the knight doing something funky like eating his armor". I'm inclined to agree, except of course that an absolutely perfect illusion would be undispellable. Perhaps all illusions have some trait that gives them away?

GURPS Illusions "have no real substance" as opposed to Creations which do. However it is possible to enchant the spell Illusion Shell and thus have a non-dispellable illusion. I decided in my GURPS Shifted Lands setting that illusions were visible in some way in the real world as opposed to being mental impressions. However that conflicts with their ease of dispelling; why should

they go away from all people's view? Plus the potentials annoyance factor if a street performer constructs an elaborate illusionary artwork only to have some heckler



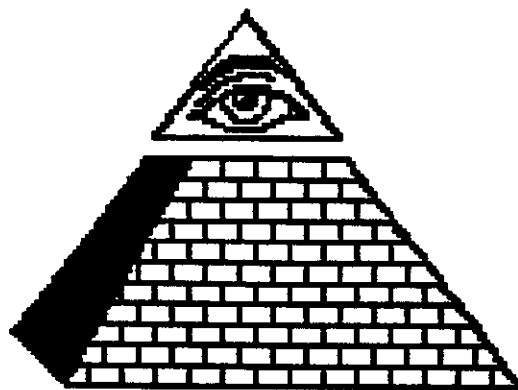
disbelieve it and dispel it. We'll fudge this into something else in the next campaign.

Now in RuneQuest, illusions are temporarily part of reality. They have substance and can do damage and take damage. Plus they cannot be dispelled. One poster on the RuneQuest Daily suggested that the whole world of Glorantha was a Trickster Illusion tremendously extended. Greg Stafford (Glorantha's creator) advised him that he was wrong, but it's still an interesting idea.

This brings up another idea. What is Reality, and how much of it is dependent on Belief? The various Storyteller games from White Wolf have varying views of reality, and in the Mage game the reality we see is actually a sort of construct. Call of Cthulhu's big feature is Things Man Was Not Meant To Know; the world isn't what it appears. This is now being used in a different manner in games like Kult, where reality is the illusion. So, could Reality be a sort of mass delusion or consensual reality? What if the Thing you try to disbelieve is more Real than what you think to be the real world? One suggestion I've seen in fiction is that Magic is largely a matter of belief; without it magic is powerless. I recall one short story in the New Destinies anthology in which the destruction of Atlantis occurs when a man comes and convinces people that the magic around them is impossible. Unfortunately, Atlantis's very existence is based on magic, so it sinks beneath the waves. In another short in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction a struggling mage has to convince the townsfolk that magic works for his magic to work

effectively. The implication is that reality is determined by the viewer; it isn't an independent thing. Which means that if the universe had but one self-aware observer, he/she/it would be God.

Now how does that affect a campaign? Well, if the assumption is that magic only works if it is believed in, one could become nearly invulnerable in a high magic environment by simply disbelieving any attack. On the other hand, if reality is not what it seems, the person who doesn't believe in magic or the supernatural lives at the mercy of those who have a fuller understanding. Great possibilities for mind games.



THE GOLDEN AGE OF SFTV

We now have more science-fiction type programs on television than ever before. The only period I can think of that comes close would be the mid to late sixties, when we had such shows as Star Trek, Lost in Space, The Invaders, Land of the Giants, and Time Tunnel. Other than Trek, not great shows.

But this was a time when we really thought that great things may well happen in the future. We were on the brink of the trip to the Moon; we heard about trips to Mars and space stations and Moon bases. I had a Major Matt Mason action figure and a Snoopy doll wearing a Lunar space suit (though not at the same time).:) Now we have a space program in disarray, a huge budget deficit, and no real chance of any of those great things people talked about in the sixties and seventies and even the eighties will ever happen. But our SFTV is better. Go figure. I'll give some broad impressions.

✱ STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION (syndicated)

This is now in its last season and that's probably a good thing. The creators of the show aren't trying to make a believable SF show, but stories about people. But some episodes were pretty good and the characters were likable; plus there was more character development than in the old show. The stories were generally inferior to those of the old show, and their world view seems to be really utopian to an excess. It would have been nice if they actually would "boldly go where no one has gone before"; most of the time they went where everybody had gone before.

✱ STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE NINE (syndicated)

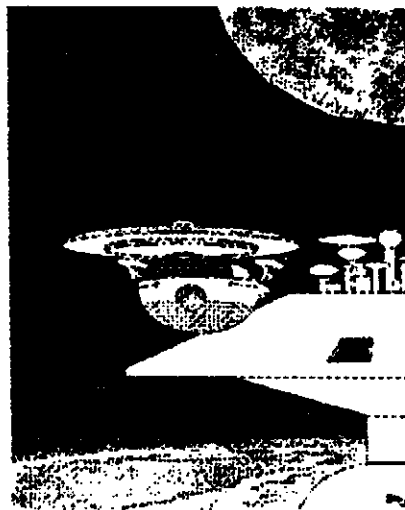
This is a sort of sequel to STNG, but is more of another place in the Trek universe.

Set in a former Cardassian station owned by the Bajorans but leased by the Federation near the only known stable worm hole, it oddly has had more unusual alien races than the Enterprise, seemingly. It is not as utopian as STNG, and gives more of an impression of how regular people in the Trek universe live. We now more about Bajor than Earth in the Trek universe; what do Earth people do besides join StarFleet? It isn't perfect, but characters like the Ferengi Quark help make up for it.

✱ BABYLON 5 (syndicated)

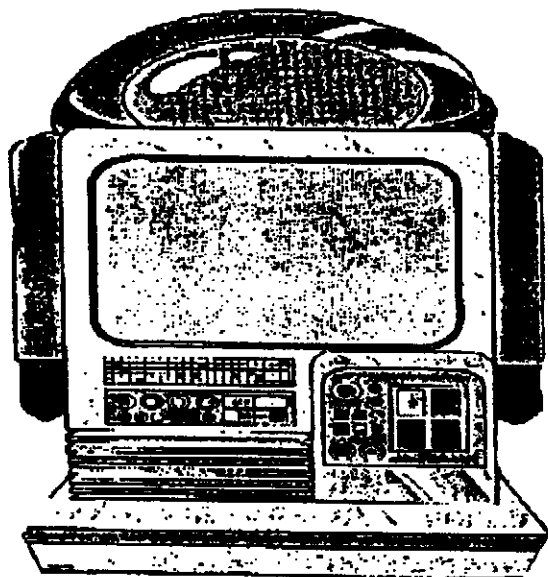
This new show is produced by people who actually know SF and are trying to produce a

real SF television program. It's set on a space station that serves as a sort of stellar United Nations; providing a place for the various peoples to interact peacefully. The station is run by the Earth Alliance, and has ambassadors from the major space powers. These are; in addition to the EA, the Centauri Republic, the Narn Regime, the Minbari Council, the Vorlons, and an alliance of small powers. The Centauris look the most human and in fact initially assumed that Earth was a lost colony. They helped Earth develop its technology, but are in decline. The Narn used to be governed by the Centauri, but now are independent. They seem a bit militaristic. The Minbari fought a war with the EA, but surrendered on the



brink of victory. This confuses the EA. The Vorlons are a race so alien nobody knows what they look like and they speak cryptically. No one knows what they're up to. The station also acts as a port of call and has a significant population.

The producer, J. Michael Stryzinski (sp?), has planned out a sort of long term plot that extends over a five year planned series. Every episode involves this to some extent. It is an ambitious project, probably the most ambitious thing ever done as far as SF is concerned on television. I hope it succeeds. And I hope that WSBK in Boston gets a consistent schedule for it, rather than bouncing it around to make room for sports.



✱ TIME TRAX (syndicated)

A lame series about a time traveler from the future who's looking for criminals who escaped to the past. About as bad as most supposedly SF TV shows of the last thirty years.

✱ ROBOCOP (syndicated)

The new show based on the series of movies; it seems aimed at a youth market. It tries to be clever and satirical, but is pretty heavy handed. Sort of a Cyberpunk light. It isn't really horrible, but you'd be better off watching re-runs of Max Headroom.

✱ HIGHLANDER (syndicated)

The movie had a let-down of an ending. The second movie is referred to as Highlander II: The Sinking. But the series is pretty darn good over all. While the situation is pretty much the same; Immortals seeking to be the last Immortal and get The Prize, it involves Connor Macleod's cousin Duncan. And the Prize seems to be more than "I know everybody's thoughts, and I can have children and die". Towards the end of the first season they added an organization of Watchers that has been observing the Immortals for centuries, maybe millennia. While their policy is only to observe (supposedly) some of them have decided that the Immortals are a threat, and the last Immortal will be a despot enslaving humanity. This makes the series more than the "quickening of the week" it sometimes seemed to be. It gives the impression that something is going on behind the scenes. In the second season they killed off Duncan's lover Tessa, made Ritchie an Immortal, made Ritchie leave, threw in a new sidekick who got killed off, and other rather drastic changes. A lot of risk taking for a tv show.

✱ BRISCO COUNTY JR. (Fox)

Okay, this is really a western. But it is a

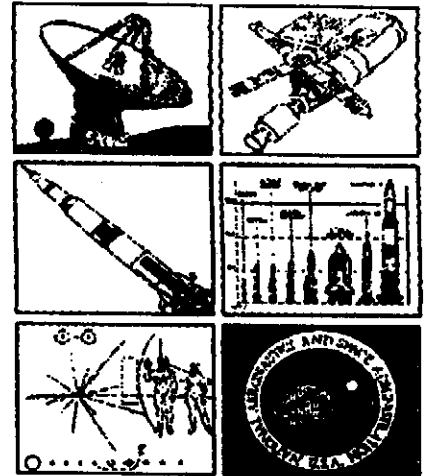
western with Orbs with mysterious powers, a villain who turns out to be a time traveler, and wild inventions. It stars the very likable Bruce Campbell from the Evil Dead movies. The closest equivalent would be the wilder episodes of The Wild, Wild West. Not every episode involves SF aspects, and supposedly they are going to be going away from the more extreme fantastic episodes, but it is still my kind of western. _Shadis_ #11 (the one with the time traveling woman in her undies on the cover) has a nice article on using the characters in RPGs.

* THE X-FILES (Fox)

This is kind of like Kolchak; The Night Stalker for the nineties. FBI agents Muldur and Scully investigate odd cases (X-files) that often involve things outside of human knowledge or experience. Aliens, mutants, spirits, mad science, and unknown creatures are the standard here. Almost Call of Cthulhu, the series. :) Actually one episode, "The Kindred", was very Lovecraftian with a "cult" that turns out to be Something Else. Stiff acting, but neat stories.

* MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATRE 3000 (Comedy Central)

Hey, it's more like real SF than a lot of stuff that's been shown on television. :) Mike (and earlier Joel) and the 'bots are in a basically SF situation, and the writers certainly have of good grounding in SF and fantasy. Plus those lovely horrid frequently sci-fi films in the experiments. If you've not seen this, get Comedy Central or find somebody who has it and get them to tape it.



WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

There's more shows to come. Amblin' is working on a series called Earth II (no relation to the early seventies tv movie) set in a colony on a planet in another star system. There's rumors (I've not seen confirmation) that Amblin' will also be producing a new Dr Who in a co-production with the BBC, continuing more or less where the original series left off. Star Trek: Voyager will replace STNG. Fox is going to have a new show called Mantis (pilot shown earlier this year) about a costumed crime fighter who's a paraplegic without his suit. And Fox will have an Alien Nation movie that will tie up the loose ends from the show's last episode. Plus they're going to have an Invaders mini-series based on the old sixties series.

All sorts of new SFTV, during a time when the space program is just above a joke, when the future is looking like the fulfillment of cyberpunk nightmares, but also when some tech is going ahead of anything writers expected. I'm not sure what this

means.

I should note that most of my information came from the Usenet SF groups and TV Guide, which now has a "Sci-Fi/Fantasy" column, plus of course my own viewing of the shows.



LOOKING BACKWARD

Well, looking at the last issue some stuff needs revisiting. In my article on RPG magazines I noted the lack of humor in White Wolf and the overly serious attitude of the sort of people who play Vampire and the other WW games. Well...issue 42 of White Wolf was an April Fools issue with such things as an article on "Vampurr", featuring the tale of a vampire cat. There was some fake news in the Industry News Column, and at least one fake ad (for Arkham 90210). And other stuff. Plus they seem to realize that some of the Vampire players are a little odd; in the "Beyond the Parents Basement" column they had a "handbook to Vampire gamers" which was a nice tongue in cheek examination sort of in

the spirit of "Profiles From the Four-Fold Way" by Greg Costikyan in Different Worlds #37 (and inspired by Glenn Blacow in issue 10). The types? People In Black, the folk the game was originally aimed at; they're "postmodern as hell" and wear a lot of black. Illuminated Weirdos, the folk who play the GURPS version and take it less seriously. Poseurs, the folk who want to be PIBs. Creepy Vampire Nuts, who are scary sorts turned on by the whole vampire thing. And the Ordinary Gaming Geeks, who doesn't actually play it unless there's nothing else; people who play D&D. So they're lightening up a bit.

COMMENTS

* The Log That Flies #1. Peter Maranci

Interesting that when you finally get the "Bar Wars Blues" in print, it's without the humor.:) _Shadis_ has a regular column called "Hook, Line and Sinkers" that sort of does what you article does; provides campaign or adventure beginnings.

As to the fate of RuneQuest; well, I'm doing my part on the playtest list. Some folk really would like to make major changes in RQ, things like making Healing magic ceremonial and thus making First Aid more important, or making it a "generic" fantasy system. I think that you have to keep in Glorantha as I'm not aware of any successful system in the last few years that didn't have a strong background other than GURPS and Hero, which were more than just fantasy systems. But some folk really dislike the fact that everything has to be

approved by Greg Stafford, noting that there's stuff that was promised way back in RQ2 days that never, ever came out.

* The Player. Dana J. Erlandsen

I must say that the description you give of this character and campaign is quite interesting. Much more so than I'd expect from a historical campaign and more than the general run of "gothic punk" stuff, I expect.

Magic: The Gathering addictive?
Well...yeah.:) And a very successful concept that is going to be copied by TSR in the summer.

Of the novels you mentioned, I've read one, sort of. Part of Beggars in Spain was in Asimov's SF magazine a while back. Interesting idea, though I think the drawbacks of not dreaming are underestimated.

On Red Mars : At one panel at the 1993 Arisia SF con (featuring among others John Norman of Gor fame) one person said the realistic Mars novels that were coming out were boring, that they wanted Space Opera stuff. I asked, "So you want Edgar Rice Burroughs's Mars, or Bradbury's Mars?" They acknowledged that. I think it should be possible to have "realistic" SF that isn't boring, that isn't just entertaining but inspires us to new frontiers.

* The Skeleton Key. David Hoberman

It strikes me that an email PBM would require a great GM and great players. I observed Peter Maranci's attempt on a local BBS, and it fell apart due to not having the right players for the sort of game Mr. Pete was trying. Of course the Internet allows you to have a lot of choice in players. But is it role-playing or more of a sort of interactive literature?



The player who said "All the players are jerks of one sort or another" in your cyberpunk campaign was stating a truth; from what I've seen in cyberpunk fiction there aren't heroes, just protagonists who at best are just trying to survive. But of course in a Fantasy RPG the PCs are often robbers and murderers; it just gets justified because, "Dragons are evil, so we can kill them, take their hordes, and make things out of their bodies". It's pretty hard to have PCs that AREN'T criminals (though perhaps with reason) in modern or near future RPGs.

* Who is John Galt? #1. Curtis Taylor

The GURPS spells look pretty reasonable. The Grimorie has one similar sort of to your "Tree Flesh" spell called "Body of Wood" in which you become a sort of living wooden statue with PD1 and DR3 and +2 to damage, but a vulnerability to fire.

The Gloranthan hooks were good. :)

* Refugee #186 and Refugee #2. George Phillies

Interesting stuff. I notice that the Magic: The Gathering card game features a "Solomon's Bottle" in the Arabian Nights expansion.

Why are #186 and #2 in the same publication? :)

* Session Notes #15. Doug Jorenby

On Traveller: The New Era :
"characters can no longer die during

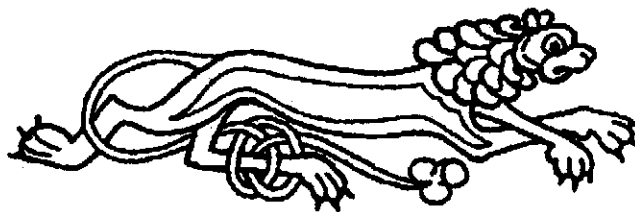
character creation"...I thought that was a feature, not a bug :) It allowed you to kill off a character with bad stats by making him a Belter (I think) since they had a good chance of dying. But one time that didn't work as I was put out after one term. Like your 'zine layout, rather like the GURPS books. :)

* Aye. Matey Vol. I. #III. Scott Ferrier

Oh yeah, good ol' Alexander. The combat paralyzed artist. Interesting character, really, but he got sort of involved over his head.

IFGS Beginnings : Oh, the memories. :) It's surprising just how successful IFGS has been, considering that the National office has generally been a bunch of part-time folk who couldn't give the organization the attention it needed. And it's surprising how successful it hasn't been considering that it gets publicity in the Niven and Barnes Dream Park books. I think if the National office of IFGS had been a for profit outfit with regular employees to handle stuff it would have been a lot more successful and NERO would never have had a presence outside of New England.

FINAL CREDITS Thanks to Peter Maranci for helping put the previous issue in a more interesting format and providing artwork; and for similar services in this issue.



the unnamed zine

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TIMELINES AND THEIR CREATION

"Okay, you go to the inn."

"Who's there? What do we see?"

"Uh, you can get some drinks and some entertainment."

"Entertainment? Not barmaids again!"

"Uh, it's a storyteller."

"What story is she telling?"

"Uh, the story of some hero or something....you know, beginning of the world stuff."

"Great! Tell the story!"

!?!%#@?!

Have you ever been caught flat-footed by your players expecting more background than you've prepared? Have you heard the complaint that your world is like a movie set for a western town--when they push on the building front it falls down because there's nothing behind it? Making a timeline can prevent this.

Timelines can be used to tell players something about the world their characters exist in. Preparing a timeline can help the GM flesh out the culture and give the players some idea of the world, and possible backgrounds for the PCs themselves. Timelines give a "feel" for the area and culture. They can also exist in multiple versions: the GM's version can include all the past, current, and future plots and intrigues, and the player's versions can be used to give cultural or regional points of view. Admittedly, if all the players are from one culture they will only receive one point of view. Even so, the timeline can be used to show cultural bias, accepted modes of behavior, the impact of religion or magic, and the importance of any other institutions the GM wish to accentuate. Finally, they

are a nice story-telling touch to add breadth and verisimilitude to the world.

Making timelines can seem daunting at first, but they are easy enough to start. The beginning of history in any fantasy world is almost always shrouded in religious symbolism. To start a timeline for a specific culture, figure out the religion of the area and apply the appropriate cultural bias. For example, if a culture believes art is the greatest profession, it's a strong probability that their foremost deity will be some kind of artist. Perhaps this artist carved the known world out of the primal slime, or sang the defeat of the chaotic dragon that was preventing the orderly creation of the world. If the creator of the world is a healer deity, the fertility of the world may rest solely on the fact that this deity periodically heals it. Remember, most cultures model their deities on what they believe is a cultural ideal. Observe how the GM can have deities, a possible quest (to defeat the evil fighting your deity), and a cultural background already built in with a creation story.

Say the GM wants all the best warriors to come from the North. The culture should be very war-like. The GM wants the warriors there to be egalitarian, with most men tending to be berserkers, which favors the generally greater strength of men. Women will compensate by being the distance fighters: missile weapons, strategists, and clever leaders. Furthermore, expansionism should be seen as a bad thing.

Okay, the lead deities should be aspects of warriors. The lead god is a female tactician, and the secondary god will be a male berserker. This means She should do something using His strength to create the world. Let's say She shot the evil whatsis with her bow, wounding it enough that He can slice it up with His sword in a berserker rage. Then She planned what the world would look like and got Him to hew it out of the evil whatsis' corpse so people would have a place to live. The deities are not omnipotent, so some of the evil managed to stay in the world, and regularly comes to light in the North. She has made the North an unforgiving climate so harsh warriors would be bred to fight the evil when it rises. Since the evil only rises in

the North, the warriors want to stay where their deities have told them to stay in order to fight it.

After the creation myth is established, more current legends and heroes can be filled into the timeline. These legends can also be used by the GM and player working together to flesh out the PC's background and motivations. This gives a new PC some context in her relationship with the world around her. If a legendary quest or cultural imperative exists already, many players like to work with the GM to place their PCs within this context. Alternatively, some people like their PCs to be the "odd man out". However, most cultures believe what they do is not only right, but the only correct way to do things. Depending on how fanatic a culture is, the "odd man out" can even be seen as wrong and dangerous.

In the South, there is an artistic, male-dominated society. Their monotheistic religion says that the world and man are the artistic masterpieces of the male Deity. Woman was a creation of evil which cajoled man into disobeying his god. Man's transgressions allowed woman, death, and decay to become a part of the heavenly cosmos. This has defiled the beauty of His creation. It is His command that man atone for his weakness by subjugating woman. Furthermore man must spread His religion to all by showing the splendor of His world, His greatest creation, in artistic formats. Thus the South's greatest heroes are painters, architects, sculptors, and other artistic types of people. Unfortunately, while the South has effectively subjugated women in their own culture, they are having some trouble convincing the North that the Northern religion is wrong. There have been three great wars between the North and the South. Unsurprisingly, the North has won all three. The South is becoming bitter and turning isolationist economically. However, it feels it must accomplish its religiously mandated goals. Instead of fighting the next war with warriors, it will have to fight on another front.

Now the world has a mythical background, two strongly defined and opposing cultures, and several obvious inherent conflicts. It doesn't matter if there was really a Big Bang, or if the world is really held up by four elephants standing on a turtle. What matters to the players is how their PCs see the world. A creation story, whether mythical or otherwise, gives a PC a sense of knowing, understanding, and belonging in this world or culture. Also, players have a wide variety of social stations and motivations with which to begin character development. Will they play a Northerner or a

Southerner? Will they play a grim, dedicated warrior priest, or a flippant youngster who doesn't really believe in "the evil"? Will they take up the quest of finding a way for the South to sneakily triumph over the Northern unbelievers, or will they play the person who believes the South should be able to defend itself physically, by training warriors instead of just artists?

One of the nice things about identifying and describing the heroes and legends that have gone before is they can be used as inspiration for both the players and the PCs. If one of the great "traitors" of the South was a woman who wished to change the South's religion and/or culture, perhaps one of the players will find this interesting and wish to include it in her character. Making the PC related to this long-dead person will connect the character with both the background and other people within the game. Perhaps the Southern One True Church is quietly watching the members of this particular family for more dangerous ideas. Perhaps it is a public shame on the family escutcheon which the PC's father wishes to see erased. Maybe the PC secretly desires to emulate the ideals of this ancestor.

Plots, intrigues, and points of view can also be delineated by one or more different timelines. The GM may have the driving forces behind certain cultural trends written down in her timeline, whereas all the players see are the different cultural reactions to these trends. The progression of "off-screen" actions, such as a distant war or assassination, can also be traced this way. Cultural points of view can give different groups different interpretations of these actions. What one culture sees as heroic another group may see as blackest villainy. Simple changes in how the story is told can be used to show this. As an example, a specific event occurring before the PCs begin playing can be described in several ways:

Pre-PC Date (Northern version) Southerners basely murder Northern hero/queen, and invade Northern valley. Northerners righteously object. Justice is done.

Dwarves (newly discovered race; friendly to North) teach Northerners to build sensible, square, stone, defensible buildings.

The same event is shown from the Southern point of view. Note how the emphasis on certain events and the descriptive style has changed:

Pre-PC Date (Southern version) In a gesture of peace, the Southerners attempt to establish an embassy in some Northern valley. The obstreperous Northerners violently object; apparently they do not know how to trade or share. Some unimportant Northern chief is killed in some tedious provincial political troubles; of course, the Southerners are framed for the murder. The Northern barbarians will not listen to protestations of innocence. They also start building monstrously ugly stone buildings all around the country they've seized. These are hideously painful to the Artistry of the One True God. The Northern barbarians are too stupid to see the truth. Like children, they will have to be taught correct behavior.

The writing for the North is shorter and choppy to signify the almost militant adherence to brevity and conciseness. The writing for the South is somewhat florid; it shows a slightly pretentious attention to the artistry of words. Obviously, both sides will depict themselves as right.

The GM, on the other hand, has a different version altogether--she knows the cause and effect:

Pre-PC Date (Secret GM version) The dwarves (a race unknown to the Southerners) decide to support the North, as their culture is closer to dwarven ethical standards, and the South is xenophobic. For religious reasons, the Southerners enter a Northern valley. Northerners object. The dwarves conduct an experiment in manipulation of humans by killing a Northern hero/queen in the valley, and leaving evidence against Southerners at the murder site. The Northerners blame the Southerners or her murder, and violently repel all Southerners from the valley.

The dwarves teach the Northerners how to build big, square, stone, defensible castles so the Northern domains can be defended from Southern depredations.

One thing to bear in mind while filling in details on past history is the cyclical nature of history. This can be roughly explained by pointing out that cultures tend to follow cycles of increasing and decreasing effects. For example, a militaristic society might wage war to the maximum capability of its homeland. At some point the supply lines get too long, or there is some huge setback, or there isn't enough raw material and people to throw into the military machine. At this time the culture will start to become disenchanted with its former goals. The cycle will start to swing to a less militant position. Some of these cycles can be

conservatism vs. liberalism, militarism vs. pacifism, religious fanaticism vs. magical fanaticism, or any other "-isms" you wish to include. Scholars are still arguing over whether this theory is true or not. However, *someone trying to fill in up to several thousand years of history with interesting cultural trends and occurrences probably doesn't care.* Use cycles to make logical chains of events. If one culture waged war on another, the loser probably had a bad time of it. In an agriculturally based economy, destroying the crop will probably cause hardship, starvation, riots, or even plague. If you lose a lot of your populace, eventually you will reach the carrying capacity of the land. At this time the loser may decide to redress old injuries and declare war on its former conqueror. And so the cycle starts another turn. This type of thing will cause change in the culture. It doesn't matter if these changes take generations: people and news moved more slowly in the medieval time period. The GM can do the same in your fantasy game if you wish. Also, one of your greatest time-savers in creating a timeline is to use previously existing histories. One of the best is the history of our world. Reading medieval history is not only fascinating, it vividly illustrates the old adage about truth being stranger than fiction.

Now the GM has a beginning, and some of the intervening times. Set this aside for a while, and identify precisely the "feel" of the current cultures in the game. Figure out what would cause these cultural generalizations, and put them in the timeline, working backward from the present. Eventually the GM will have the past and the present meet, and the timeline will be ready for play.

The desired current feel in the game is one of impending disaster that only drastic action can prevent. Okay, make sure the South has been caught at some unforgivably heinous deed, such as casting at the North immensely powerful, generations-long spells designed to kill women. Obviously the North is VERY angry with the South, and the South has never been good at defending itself militarily. The Northern religion of Him is certainly on the upswing, with more berserkers than ever before. Make sure the PCs have a good reason to not want the South to be obliterated, as it most assuredly will be unless something is done immediately. It doesn't matter if the PCs are Northern or Southern; the game's feeling will be one of impending disaster that hopefully only their quick thinking can prevent.

There are two basic times to make a timeline. Obviously, the first possibility is before the campaign begins. This has the advantage of giving your new and future players somewhere to start in their quest for an appropriate background for a PC. If a world and its cultures are delineated ahead of time, there is a framework existing on which to create your characters. How many times have you heard something along the lines of "she's kinda like a Viking"? This is a simple example of using a culture to give a character definition.

The second possibility is to make your timeline up after the game has begun. This isn't as difficult as it may sound. The one thing the GM must keep in mind is consistency. Pull together all your notes and organize the current, PC-affected history of the world. Obviously, the GM have a "feel" in mind for the game; you've been playing it for a while. Once you know where you wish to end up, backtrack and figure out what would cause the game's current set of attitudes. Fill in the current events the PCs know about, keeping consistency in mind. Then add a few current events they're ignorant of, and the GM will get a timeline with gaming suggestions already built in.

A final note on your timeline: you don't have to fill it in completely. Put in blank spaces: e.g.: "the time of the Great Plague was a decade of deep fear and unrest. Most of the records of that time were lost or destroyed." This means the GM can always have the beginning seeds of some useful game idea you've just thought of come from that time. Most huge cultural problems have been fermenting for a while. Leave yourself some slack to "ret-con" history. "Ret-con", or retroactive continuity, can be a very useful tool in explaining both things the GM originally forgot, and cool new ideas the GM wish to insert.

This article has been written with Fantasy Hero in mind, but it can be easily adapted to other genres. Remember, timelines tell your players about the world and about possible backgrounds for the PCs. For your beginning, use whatever the current culturally applicable myth is. Today there are people who believe in the Biblical story of Genesis, as well as people who believe in the Big Bang. Neither has received the "Deity Stamp of Approval". Both are systems of belief which help explain not only the creation of the world, but also our place in it. Both cause people to act in certain specific ways, and affect the culture of the people holding those beliefs. Blank spots in the timeline allow really weird things to be found from the "Imperial

Millenium", or a work of "fiction" from pre-history. For intervening times, heroes and legends can still be used, they'll simply be more well known, culturally specific, and widely spread.

The lanky gray rabbit busily chewed on a carrot and leaned against the backside of the industriously digging fat man. His characteristic "What's up, doc?" was answered by the expected "Shhhhh! Be vewy, vewy quiet! I'm hunting wabbits!" The crowd chuckled appreciatively. They knew exactly how the story would end, but they still loved to see the fat man get his comeuppance. They were watching a cultural ideal in action: never start the fight, but always finish on the winning side..

Finally, use the same techniques delineated before for current history. Leave blank spots, work backwards from the feel the GM want, use cycles of events, swipe from our past. Keep in mind, history is written by the winners. If the GM need to change some point in the timeline, have an adventure where it is discovered "the Truth" has been covered up, and the currently accepted version of events is a lie. Above all, have fun. If it isn't fun, why are you gaming?

Let's try the opening again:

"Okay, you go to the inn."

"Who's there? What do we see?"

"You can get some drinks and some entertainment."

"Entertainment? Barmaids?"

"No, you twit, it's a storyteller!"

"What story is she telling?"

"It's the story of the great goddess of wisdom and leadership, and Her consort, the god of emotion and war, and how they defeated the evil Chimaera of Chaos and created the blessed Northern environs for us all."

"Great! Tell the story!"

REFUGEE # II

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The contents of this zine include fiction and brilliant commentary on the last issue. Brilliant? Well, more brilliant if the issue is wrapped around a magnesium flare and the flare is ignited, but capable of reflecting light, anyhow. I will include *Communications Letters to the Editor*, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever receive one. If you are not a regular writer, and have remarks on REFUGEE or the rest of Interregnum, send them to me at the above address. I will print at my expense what I find interesting.

Commentationes

Editorial Page: Hmm, at one point you were going to publish accounts of all contributors in each issue, so we could see how clever we all are at our secret plot to drive you into bankruptcy. I think that it is a *good idea*, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is that most APAe are run in this manner.

The Log That Flies: It's a novel title; would you care to explain it? You appear to have been subject to the incompetent editor syndrome. A common though non-unique solution is to argue with the editor, and see what he says.

I confess that when I ran DandD/Other games I had a standard opening. I always dropped the characters through a portal into another universe. This had an astonishing effect. They could never complain about my rules interpretations not matching their expectations, because they knew perfectly well that they were now in Kansas, or some such weird place, and the laws of nature were different. The attachment of GMs to bars is something I've never quite understood. As a place to meet interesting people they must rate much to the bottom, unless your idea of interesting is indistinguishable from *sloshed to the gills*. On the other hand, killing PCs before play begins could

be very important, citizen, for classified reasons having to do with why they were traitors and did not love our friend, the computer. (I trust you recognize the rules I'm using.)

The Eight Track Mind: Oh, someone who has played ADD. Those of us who haven't may be interested. I began with *Dungeons and Dragons*, a Chainmail miniatures rules addition played on the Avalon Hill Outdoor Survival map. It was these three little booklets that came in a plywood-colored box. I've run a few Paranoia games, a PBM fantasy rolegame through the pages of *The Wild Hunt*, and played in a long Champions campaign.

Your description of Jorl's misfortunes makes this sound like a fairly losing game in a variety of ways. You appear to have been lucky to abandon the campaign. I am completely sympathetic to your notion of not abandoning something simply because the outcome does not appear to be favorable at the moment. There are a lot of people who quit, which tends to disrupt all sorts of games. On the other hand, some campaigns deserve to be abandoned.

We pray that in the future you will accompany your magazine reviews with a list of the addresses and subscription rates of the magazines that you report, so that those of us who wish to subscribe will be able to do so.

The Player: We hope that Boston will once again be graced with your presence on a near-time occasion of your choosing. There are worse fates than drowning in zinnias. I have rose bushes, but every so often the gardeners mow one of them flat. I ahdn't thought of Vampire as drawing gender-balanced groups. Pray tell, though, where did you run the advertisement? (The "Personals" column of the local paper sounds like something likely to have generated some odd responses.

The PC and NPC sketches were very interesting. I had some curiosity as to who or what the other players were running, and what one does in a Vampire run, especially if your character is, so to speak, a teetotaller. Are you using historic letters to understand the time, or do your players run things as a correspondence game? The fillins at the business and correspondents level was really good; certainly I never did anything like this in my last campaign.

The book reviews were appreciated. I found Beggars in Spain a bit tedious. Jordan is also sometimes tedious, in that he describes every step of travels done in a pre-paved-road civilization. He

has improved with time; in the first book there are several scenes which are extremely crude borrowings (only the names are changed) from Tolkein. The Wheel of Time series has generated enormous interest on Internet, with detailed analyses of every event, a 4000 line FAQ, and a (hopefully) satiric calculation of his comma usage.

The Skeleton Key: There was a key issue I did not completely follow. Are you actually running a PBEM with output, or are you describing what can in principle be done with the technology, based on what other people are doing. I seem to recall some locals fulminating about the evils of IRCs and MUDs (Locals like our school sysops) but I do not remember details — the topics under consideration were remote from anything I was considering doing.

Writing things down has the important advantage that you are bound to consistency. If teleporting behind someone and shooting them is a +3 bonus for surprise this week, when the GMs SO makes the attack, it will also be demonstrably a +3 next week, when you make the same attack, the same way, on the villain with the same stats. I can express sympathy on losing a player, but I have not had a good impression of cyberpunk as a pleasant genre in which to play. Perhaps the matter is that I deal with too many escapees from this sort of game while in real life.

Who is John Galt?: Your list of questions was interesting. What do you do with them? They do reveal particular things about the character. Regretfully, I don't play RQ or GURPS, so it is hard to comment on your other remarks.

Refugee #186: Ummh, you are writing a story about twelve-year-olds? And you plan to sell it in an adult market? Please donate your Sanity Points to the Campus Crusade of Cthulhu; you clearly have no use for them. Your horses are much too smart to be reasonable. They may lurk a lot if they want to be ridden, but horses are not dogs. Not in our universe, anyhow.

Session Notes #15: Good to hear from you. That is a really impressive layout program you are using. LaTeX is fine if I need to create some equations in a hurry; it is much less effective at integrating pictures with the text. I believe I can do sidebars, but I have never tried. I believe you have put your finger on a success issue. There are rules sets that can be used in a GM world, and rules sets that are rigidly attached to a designer's world. The former are usually more successful than the latter,

because the latter require the designer to do an impossibly brilliant job of creating a world as well as creating rules for how the world works.

Are the Space Vikings enough like the H. Beam Piper characters to wear swords and fight duels? There seems to be some improvement here, if they look like characters from the 30s.

Aye, Matey: Avast, ye swab! This here ship be Interregnum not Interragnum, and don't you be forgetting it again asking if we are a bunch of rags, or the Captain, ahh, collator will be having your innards for tying his packages shut, he will. This Alexander fellow will be fitting right in as a pirate, with his arrogance, disinterest in work, ability to relieve well-to-do halfwits of gold doubloons they clearly didn't need, not to mention his enormous stores of tact and patience. Patience? Why, he didn't fire a single pistol at that interviewer.

Hell Cab: God is on the side of the French? How does this fit in to the rest of the design? The flying octopus with human riders was seriously professionally weird. Where did you get the piece of art ('I designed it' would be a legitimate argument to me.) IFGS: You seem a bit less than totally supportive of the success of your scenario. Live Action rolegames are hard. A paper GM can always notice that there was an extra doorway in the ballroom. In live action, you can generally tell.

Refuge #2 And what sort of a numbering system would you be using, to be skipping from issue 186 to issue 2? Are the characters of your tale all somewhat demented? Why did the Chivalry and Sorcery necromancer just blow away the source of her powers? Is she as crazy as a mad hatter? Your heroine is certainly not a complete coward, to stand there trading insults with her captors. Well, perhaps this time we get to see them wheel out the torture instruments, which you can describe with the loving care and detail that you usually reserve for your descriptions of the night sky.

Fiction

Idiot! she snarled to herself. The monks could have dosed the water with enough herbs to convince an elephant that it was a nightingale, and you stood here sipping docilely away. From the light yesterday, she was sure that she was close to the outside of the building. All she had to do was to free herself. Now? No, her escape was best made while Peter was guarding her. He

would have arranged to have a long, uninterrupted stretch of time during which he could privately work sweet reason on her. By escaping then, she'd gain a few hours start. But she had to free herself now.

She braced her back against the wall, and pushed out as hard as she could. The chains dug into her wrists. The coarseness of the stone wall pressed against her shift. More than once she'd been held by people who put women in light, decorative chains, not suspecting her actual strength. The chains gave no signs of bending. The mortar was new, but well-set.

She thought. She would have to use magecraft to free herself, but how? She was in bare feet, wearing neither her sword nor her outer coat. There was a steel needle sewed into the hem of her dress, sufficient a tool to open their crude locks, but she couldn't reach it. She experimented with different positions, finally concluding that even if she had the needle in one hand she couldn't reach any of the keyholes.

Levitation? Under the best of conditions, she could move a piece of steel with her mind almost as delicately as she could move it with her fingers. But that sort of control required a wand and a comfortable position for sitting. Worse, levitation wouldn't give her a proper feel for what she was doing. The same problem held for rolling the tumblers with her mind. Without a wand, she couldn't feel what she was doing, and would have little chance of setting the tumblers right.

She could always try brute force. Casting a strong spell against the remnant goodness in this room would not be easy, but she had always been more of a powerful mage than a subtle one. What should she do? Enhancing her own strength, to try to tear the chains from the walls, was too risky. The steel in the bolts looked beyond her strength, even after she ensorcelled herself. She examined the links to her hands, finding the weakest of them.

She could feel the metal slip within her aura. It was plain, cold iron, unshielded against magic. The monks were probably confident that she couldn't use spellcraft in this room. Against a weaker opponent, they would likely have been correct. They would not be the first to underestimate how much power she could summon. She knew she was not yet a great mage, at least in skill, at least not yet, but most men assumed that maga had no more endurance than butterflies. She chose her spell.

Attacking the metal of the chain was like running through hip-deep water. Each move of the casting faced massive resistance. At least she hadn't made the mistake of some other mages, of relying on voice or gesture to cue them through their own spells. She was a necromancer, or, as her colleagues styled themselves, a Lord of Death. Necromantic spells imitated death, the quiet and still, in their casting.

The room fought back against her. The golden fire visible to her second sight concentrated against the touch of her own magic, blocking her efforts. Her logic told her that the fire would also block the monks' second sight, so that they could not tell that she was casting spells. Camilla focussed every fragment of strength, locking her will into the making of the spell. She could see fragments of steel disappear as she concentrated on the link, but the strain was enormous. She considered her likely fate if she failed to escape, then set aside her usual inhibition against drawing on her core strength. This spell, she saw, was going to be very dangerous. If the metal continued to resist her, she might draw on her power completely, so that she would slump unconscious, mayhaps even forgetting to breath. For an instant she brought to mind's eye the image of Tir na Na'Ogth rising out of the seamist, then strained with body as well as spell against the chain. She was sweating again, and could feel the strength draining from her body.

The link snapped, leaving her momentarily stunned. Half-dazed, she fumbled through her gown, finding the pin she had hidden in it. The locks were very simple. A few minutes work released them. She paused to ponder. She had to disguise the fact that she had broken free, so that no one would notice anything wrong until she was alone with Peter. Leg manacles could be hidden under her stockings, while hand manacles could be held with her palms. What about the broken chain? She tiptoed across the room, picked up the broken link, and bent it somewhat back into shape. It had parted after most of its metal had been spelled away, but it could still pass a casual inspection.

Bye and bye, Peter appeared at the door. "I see," he sneered, "that you are still thinking. My Superior, M'Lord High Inquisitor, thinks you need substance to focus your thoughts, something to give you strength to resist the devil." He produced from his gown a flattened, well-polished wooden club. "Before I saw the light, I was employed by the Lord Mayor of London, in a capacity directly relevant to my present intentions. You may be

certain that you will neither die nor bruise. You may also be certain that if you neither confess nor repent you will wish above all for death." He smiled as he ran the baton under her jaw line.

Camilla grabbed the club and punched him in the nose. She followed with a knee to the stomach, whirled him around, used one hand to clamp his mouth shut, and pulled. As he leaned over in pain she slammed his head, as hard as she could, into the stone cell wall. He slumped. She felt for his pulse, confirming that he was still alive. Good! Dead, his ghost might manage to raise some warning against her. Alive, he would do nothing for some time. The belt at his waist tied him in place, while chunks of his hair shirt provided a crude gag. She appropriated his sandals and habit for a disguise, wondering as she did if he had ever had the garment washed.

The empty corridor outside ended in a narrow window. She looked out and down. Then she leaned away from the drop, and looked down farther. The wall was smooth stone, with nearly a hundred feet of drop between her and a paved stone courtyard. Even in a hero tale, that would be an impossible leap. The pallet was hay, not rope; rigging a line was impossible. Besides, there were guards in the courtyard below. The corridor held three other cells, all empty, and a trapdoor to the floor below. Trusting the shadows to hide her, she peered through the grate, finding a half-dozen men below, busily playing at dice. She couldn't sneak around them. Opening the trap door and jumping through was absurd. One to six odds, with six swords against one pair of slim if well-muscled fists, was beyond her martial training. A small closet revealed only a long ladder. The corridor relied on outside illumination, and didn't even have a torch she might use as a weapon. Baricading the grate with the ladder sounded romantic, but would merely advertise that she was free.

Only after some bewildered pacing did she see the obvious. Why, after all, fifteen fathoms above the ground, did the closet have a ladder in it? There were no cressets to fill. There had to be some other reason why people might want to climb. She finally found the trapdoor in the ceiling, opening to the roof.

She stood on the tower, the trapdoor closed again, the ladder next to her. A few feet below ran the peak of a steep roof, heavily leaded against the weather. Climbing on such a surface would rapidly send her down to the gutters, followed by a fifty foot fall onto bare stone. She could straddle the roof peak, but that path didn't take her any-

place. She might be able to hang onto a gutter, assuming that the gutters would take her weight. Reaching the gutters would be a serious problem. The ladder might be her salvation again. It had hooks which could be snagged on a roof line while she climbed down from one roof to the next. She traced out the route she would follow. The back gardens were dark; she could work her way out through them. At this hour few would be awake to challenge her.

She lowered the ladder over the parapet, then followed herself, not breathing easily until she felt the rooftop between her knees. She turned around, set the ladder in front of her, and inched her way ahead. The roof was not so long, not more than thirty yards, but sliding the ladder ahead without making noise took a challenging mixture of strength and delicacy. She wished she had eaten the fruit in her cell while she had had the chance, then reflected that it might have been poisoned.

The second roof line was not very far below the first. She could see that the ladder would reach from one roof to the next. Setting the ladder in place, she slipped sideways to stand on its rungs. As she took the weight off her feet, she slipped. Afraid, she jerked convulsively at the rung in her left hand. The wood snapped. A frantic grab for the roof peak missed. Camilla found herself sliding, speed ever increasing, toward the courtyard below. Her last effort had carried her too far sideways; she couldn't reach the ladder. She scrambled against smooth, slick lead, feeling her slide accelerate. Then she pushed off with one hand and flipped stomach over back through mid-air, landing on the roof near the ladder. Her fingers touched wood and took the ladder in a steely grip. The groan of ladder joints was loud as a crashing avalanche. Moments later, there came the clatter of the errant rung striking paving blocks below. Camilla froze still, grateful for the new moon which hid her in its black velvet folds.

The remaining descents were more gentle, though her shoulder ached from the strain it had taken. Finally, she stood at an upper landing of an open stairway. The ladder disappeared into the weeds under the stairs. Where was she? Stars above gave precise compass bearings. She wished she had seen a detailed plan of the abbey. Roughly speaking, she knew she was in the middle of a complex of storage sheds, granaries, and barns. To the north lay the tower of Humbertus Magnus and his hidden, spell-warded garden. The thought of Humbert's tower brought a fey gleam to her face. The exchange with the Abbot had come to

nought, but perhaps she could simply steal the items she wanted. The Lord Inquisitor had stolen from her, the Queen of Pirates. He needed to be taught who was to be stealing from whom, in the natural order of things.

An open door let her into a network of corridors. Guards would be outside. From above, the buildings had appeared simply built. Long halls, with store-rooms to either side, brought her swiftly to her objective. Once she paused, trying to use her second sight to see what lay in the rooms around her. She was very tired, and far from the lands of the setting sun. She perceived confused images of boxes and bales, but no hint of traps or steel-bright weapons.

Where, she wondered, would the Abbot be? Asleep in his cell? Rooms, she corrected; the Abbot of Caer Gwenfaire was not sworn to poverty. Perhaps he was arguing with the Lord Inquisitor. And who had Moonshadow? She had paid very deeply for that sword, almost as deeply as she'd paid for her wand. She didn't want to lose them both in a single day. Well, if the Abbot had her sword, and wanted her secrets, he'd have tried to translate the inscription on Moonshadow's blade from the Elder Tongue. The monks so feared Faerie that no monk knew that language. In all likelihood no book in the monastery's library would contain it. But Humbert had dealt with the Elves and knew their speech. Surely he must have had a dictionary. If some of Humbert's books were still in the Tower, the Abbot might be there too.

She sent out her second sight again, this time to the innards of Humbert's tower. To her surprise, inner vision found only impenetrable darkness within. The doorway was held by two men-at-arms in the livery of the Abbot's Life Guard. She let second sight carry her view around the tower, finding that the hidden garden was also barred to her view.

She needed a point of view which would let her peer into the tower windows. Her fatigue, the hour, the demands of using sorcery without any artifact to assist, left the feeling that she was being transformed into the hollow shell of a person. The realization that she was without a wand, that she had to use her own mind to cut and cast each spell, left her afraid, isolated from all humanity. She found the vantage point she needed, and put down her fears again. There was light within Humbert's tower, and a solitary figure seated at a bench, some largish object cradled in his hands. The rosy glow of moonsilver was hard to mistake,

even by second sight; that had to be her sword under study.

How could she get by the guards? She had no weapon. They were doubtless shielded against spells, at least to some extent, not that she could manage to cast a solid spell of command through her exhaustion. It would have to be bluff. She would march up to the door, mumble to them, and have them let her in. With her head under the cowl, she would appear to be a beardless young man, doubtless extremely nervous about the vital message for M'Lord Abbot.

The guards did everything but offer to carry her up the stairs. They knew that there were disagreements, and that messages to M'Lord Abbot from M'Lord High Inquisitor of All England were to be treated with the utmost of dispatch, even if they were being carried by a nervous boy who could manage no more than a whisper. They opened the door, announced her arrival, and closed the door behind her.

The Abbot sat near the center of a great trestle table, his back nearly to the door. The tabletop was littered with alchemical implements and bottles of mysterious powders. At one end, in a space carefully cleared, were her cloak, boots, and Solomon's Bottle. The Abbot held her sword, comparing runes against entries in a small book. Continuing to focus his attention on the runes, he gestured her forward. Plainly he expected the Lord Inquisitor's messengers to wait patiently until they were spoken to.

"Her name," announced Camilla, "is *Tirgnoddyr*—Moonshadow."

The Abbot, not conceiving the possibility that his studies might be interrupted by a female voice, recoiled in astonishment. He turned to stare as she threw back her cowl. Recognition was immediate.

"How," he asked, "How in God's Wisdom — no, I suppose in your case that is not likely to be the explanation, at least not in a direct way — how did you get here?"

She shed her borrowed habit, wrinkled her nose again at the smell, and walked over to him. Her tabard revealed much of the length of her arms and legs. She used the moment of surprise to snatch back her sword. "I walked." She donned her cloak. "I came to finish our deal. I believe you owe me a philtre, a book, and a safe-conduct." She buckled Moonshadow to her belt. "There is also the minor matter of a bump on the head and another possession of mine, one which your in-

quisitor seems to have borrowed."

"Rather permanently, I fear, notwithstanding my objection that the object did not violate the letter of Canon Law, in that it did not appear to incorporate human bone. Or did I miss the obvious?"

"Nope. Human bone specializes the wand for hurting people, which is not my usual inclination. It also limits the power levels. Dragon's bone is a much better material."

"My appeal to Rome," he continued, hiding his disbelief of her last words, "may eventually lead to his chastisement. As I promised, your body is intact. For the remainder, this is the philtre," he produced from the tabletop a clean goblet and a pair of crystal bottles, "this is the book," he pulled from one drawer a small, leather-bound volume, "and I will find some way to get you out from here. The philtre is to be mixed, allowed to settle for a fraction of a candle, and then drunk." He fumbled through the tabletop, at last locating a sandglass. "I do presume that you want the philtre for yourself?" She nodded. "I am obliged to warn you against drinking it. Why confine yourself to this Earth, with its everpresent risk of incurring eternal damnation, when the joys of Heaven might be yours?"

"Mix the potion. And perhaps advise me against the risks of dying soon, and going to Hell. I don't know what's in charge down there with numero uno gone, but if I end there, not the Blessed Isles, I suspect I'll rate a lot of personal attention."

"You seek the fate of the beings of Faerie, rather than your birthright as a daughter of Adam?" He shook his head. "Even you might be forgiven, especially after your deeds this week." He opened the bottles, mixed their contents, and swirled the mixture lightly. The two liquids, separately clear, merged into a single mass within which swirled opalescent sparks of green and red and orange. The Abbot inverted the sandglass. "Humbertus Magnus," he continued, "was always interested in numbers, in ways I don't understand, for all my interest in alchemy. Instead of mixing a pinch of this, a dram of that, and tasting or smelling, he always weighed and counted everything, not at all the way a normal, rational worker usually proceeds. Oh, yes, the book has its holder." He found an oilcloth wrapper and steel box. "Though the book is sunk to the bottom of the Ocean Sea, the box will keep it dry."

Camilla paged through the volume. Humbertus's script was so fine as to be painful to read. It was better that the Abbot not be told what tongue

Humbertus had used, let alone admit that she knew the reading of Auld Wyrnish. "Like you said," she remarked, "It's not Chaldean or Greek, or Cathayan or Tibetan or any other common tongue." She shrugged, affecting ignorance. The book and its box disappeared into a pocket.

"You know all those languages?" he asked.

"To read, most not to speak well. Though Cathayan is easier than the tongue of Cipangu."

"But why, to ask a more fundamental question, does one of your sort come to a Holy Place?" he asked. "And why did a necromancer, one given over wholly to Satan and his accursed works, betray him? Which you surely did. Your own powers will suffer greatly thereby, which I may count as a blessing, but which you ought to regret."

"My powers will do nothing of the sort, and reducing the strength of the *fools* of my craft I count as a blessing, if one I've self-made. But I had my reasons." She grinned impishly. "Look, Cedric, we've got time until that potion settles. I'll play the riddle game with you, but only even, riddle for riddle."

"Very well. But there are some secrets — I'll certainly not say how many men-at-arms guard this Abbey, which spells are bound into its walls, ..."

"Not interested anyway. We both name riddles, then trade or not?"

"This is fair. My first question would be: why does a necromancer seek to slay her liege lord, first master of her forbidden craft?"

"And mine: what came from the Bottle — that figure of light?"

"That, my dear, was a heavenly being, an angel, though the details become more complex, and I could not swear as to its precise current place in the Celestial taxonomy. To be precise, the light was a demiurge, made of the same substance as Satan, purged of Satan's errors, and returning to the Mercy Seat."

She wrinkled her brows. "Necromancy is an art, like fencing. Binding yourself to the Devil is — mayhaps I mean *was* — a way to get a lot of power very fast, without any immediate hard work. But a necromancer, alone, can gain that same power, though I know few who have. The temptation of the easiest path is very strong. Since the Art is interdicted, most necromancers hazard little, and gain much, by becoming Satanists as well. Of

course, if you follow the easier path you soon — on a temporal if not secular time scale — end up in the warm parts of the netherworld. I prefer to stay here. If I had converted, given my soul to him, I could hardly have bound him, let alone touched your relics without physical scarring. So I really didn't slay my liege lord, though perhaps he was the true Master of my art. But if that stuff purified him, why didn't it change me? I seem to be the same as before."

"I would ask, perhaps again, why you did what you did." He waited for her nod. "In answer, you are human, or of Faerie. In either case, you have free will, and must choose your fate. The divine beings we encounter are — different. They choose Good or Evil because their nature so decrees, they having no choice in the matter. The Blood transforms one nature into another, in the same body, so that the body remains, but the Demon no longer exists."

"Why did I do all this? I have a bet with the Jarl Herverd, closing at year's end, for an iron ha'penny. The bet is to the one who does the more wicked deed."

"Jarl Herverd? The Scourge of God? The Second Attila? The monster who put London and Paris to the sack last Summer?"

"That's right. But I don't have armies to waste, like him, so I had to be cleverer. I wasn't quite bound to Satan, though the distinction is pretty tiny, 'cept to a good lawyer, so I maybe owed him something. Certainly most people think a necromancer does; you said so yourself. To win the bet, I killed the Fallen One, a great King, who counted me among his loyal and loving subjects."

"Dear God! What a motive! Forgive me, daughter, while I pray. Truly I am an innocent and unworldly man." He knelt. She stole closer to him, noting as she did that the final grains of sand were passing through the glass.

"Abbot," she asked, "do I drink the dregs, or just the liquid?" He didn't move. "Your promise is at stake!" she snapped.

"Oh, yes. It is ready. Drink the whole thing, every drop."

Her nostrils flared. She shook convulsively, for a moment not steady enough to lift the goblet. On long voyages, her sailors lamented the absence of women in the crew. Their lusts were nothing compared to what she felt now, what promises lurked for her in a swallow of murky, distasteful fluid.

She downed the liquid, then looked at the Abbot, transfigured by an inner ecstasy, a transformation too subtle and fundamental to be described, save to those who had also experienced it.

"The Baltic Vikings," she remarked, "brew a drink from fermented garlic kielbasa. It's enough to drive a drinking man to water. But that was worse, no matter what else it did."

The Abbot nodded in agreement. "Humbertus was very explicit about that. He compares the drink, though 30 times distilled without loss of volume, to fermented rancid butter, saying that the latter is more pleasing to the palate. But on my word, may God be my witness, that was the Philtre of Eternal Life and Health."

She made a face, wishing she could rinse her mouth of the taste.

"Humbertus," he noted, "recommended following the philtre with wine, to clean the taste buds, and perhaps food, enough to avert hunger. While this is not a refectory, I did have something waiting for me." He nodded at a silver tray. She lifted the lid, noting a silver flask, silver wine cup, a small loaf of bread still warm from the ovens, and a few fresh apples. "My predecessor," continued the Abbot, "would have preferred a quail stuffed with herbs, mushrooms, and its own eggs, the latter hard-boiled and stuffed with salmon roe, perhaps a little fresh salmon, three or four steamed vegetables, a cake or confection, three wines, and a digestive cordial. My tastes have always been far more simple. But don't wait. I can well imagine the philtre's taste. Assuredly there is no hurt in your eating; Humbertus Magnus himself did that after taking his own philtre."

"But he died of old age!" she shot back. Was the philtre a mass of humbuggery?

"Oh, no. That's just a rumor that some put out. No, he made the philosopher's stone, or at least enough of it to turn every gilt-work statue in the Abbey into solid gold, and disappeared. His final message to us, inscribed on yonder slate, read simply 'I am called. I go. Fare well, good friends. May the Almighty be with you.' Well, let us share this. I understand your caution." He found another mug, divided the wine, blessed his own portion, and toasted her. "To leave here is not so hard. We need only wait for night's deep, so you'll not be seen. They'll eventually notice you're gone, but likely not before daybreak — I know when the guard will be changed — so you can walk out through the garden and be over the wall. It's low from this side. The wall spells protect against

intruders, not against those seeking to leave us. Indeed, from this room you may pass directly to the waiting garden, through yonder window. I'll find a rope, thought the fall from here is no more than two or three yards." He sat again, broke the bread, and offered her a portion. "I still don't understand your theological status now. Surely, if you were to repent of your Art, your deed yesterday would earn you forgiveness for many wrongs."

"That was a wicked deed, or supposed to be one. Though since then I've done nothing especially malevolent. Even during my escape, no one was seriously hurt. Tied, gagged, but not hurt badly. If the Jarl Herverd argues that the deed was not evil, I may lose my bet."

"Virtue derives from one's motive, not according to one's material deeds. Besides, for a malevolent being to be struck down maliciously is a fiendish ... well, I was always an administrator, not a man of great insight." He leaned back in his chair, letting her eat more bread.

There came a pounding at the outer door. A breathless voice called "Abbot Cedric! Abbot Cedric! The witch has escaped! Open at once!"

"She has escaped? Then go, search for her!" he replied. "I am in the midst of a translation."

"Now, open!" The men outside pounded on the door again.

"M'Lord Abbot Cedric," came another voice, "It is I, your faithful Inquisitor. Is all well in there?"

"Yes, indeed," the Abbot answered. "Though all will go far less well if I am not given peace and quiet." While he answered, Camilla rose and peered down into the garden. She saw mounds of herbs, leafless apple trees, but no hint of movement.

"No one down there yet," she whispered.

"They'll be searching the front of the Abbey first. Besides, the only easy entrance to that garden passes through this tower."

"Guards!" called the Inquisitor, his voice plainly audible through the plain oaken door. "The Insight of Gabriel reveals all to me. She is within this tower. She must be threatening your Lord Abbot. Break down the door!" With a crash of steel against wooden panels, the door splintered, nearly flying open. A second crash shattered the door, leaving fragments hanging by the sill. Camilla heaved a small table through the window, then took a running leap for the opening

as a half-dozen guards pushed their way into the room behind her.

Camilla sailed out into the night, stretched, and waited for the ground. The skid across a damp lawn left her on her feet. A glance back showed men, still in the room, looking down but unwilling to duplicate her leap. She dashed for the outer wall, scrambling around bushes and over low decorative hedges.

As the Abbot had said, the wall was short, not more than chest height. She vaulted to the top and stared. The wall was not short from the outside. Someone had spent years carting fill to raise the garden to its present elevation. That, she told herself, was a long way down. She unbuckled her sword and dropped it over the edge. Then cautiously, she lowered herself over the side. She saw no handholds; touch revealed none too fine to see. She pushed gently off from the wall. 'To learn to fall, watch the cat' went the proverb. Her second jump was rather longer than the drop into the garden. She tried to roll, finding herself suddenly flat on her back. Lights like cut crystal, tinted blue and green, floated before her face, outshining the starstream in the cloudless sky above. She forced herself to her feet, searched out her sword, and staggered into the trees. The sound of metal on metal spoke of guards already on her trail.

After a time, she heard no more pursuit. She slowed a bit, trying to recover from the impact she'd taken. Her ship's crew had laughed at hero tales, telling of about princes who escaped from sorcerers' eyries by plummeting a dozen fathoms onto stone pavement, ran all night through thick forest, and fought a dragon in the morning, all the time dressed in full plate armor. Her drop had been less than a third of the tales' drops, onto soft ground, and she'd been lucky not to wreck an ankle. She leaned back on a tree stump, letting the night sounds envelop her, regaining a little of her composure. Then she began a slow, distance-eating run to the west. It was a good hour before she began to worry.

In the distance she could hear the baying of hounds, one after another, followed by the ill-tuned piping of horns. A hunt! She could readily guess what prey was sought. Almost in panic she began a sprint, then forced herself to slow down. She still had a long distance to the coast. If they wanted to chase her, she would give them a hard trail. Her wand might be gone, but a Lord of Death saw as well by starlight as by the light of the sun. Her hunters would seek to drive her inland. She knew where escape lay.

Camilla called to mind's eye what she knew of the surrounding territory. There were a few villages and trails, a couple of hunting lodges, but much of this land was still under the sway of the great forest. The road she wanted was to the northwest. The local Baron's castle, from which the hunt came, was nearly due south. The town with the goldsmith's shop would lie ahead. She'd have to go around that. Adepts from the monastery might have reached the townspeople, calling with the mind over greater distances than any shout could travel. If she had escaped a little later, all would have been well. After midnight, no one would have been awake to hear a mental call. At this hour, though, much would be left to chance.

She cut through plowed fields, hearing dogs barking and men shouting. There were no lights outside of town, yet. A night ambush with no light would be a one-sided affair — but she would be the one side. The town had no mage skilled enough to give others the gift of night-sight. For her, under these conditions, it would be like fighting blind men. Without a moon, she could almost think of matching the heroes of fable, the solitary warrior against whom armies could not stand. The Abbot's paxmen the previous night had had torches, and she had been obliged not to surprise them.

She could hardly stay on open ground indefinitely. A rider might not risk a gallop in the dark, but horsemen could still run her down. She cut into the woods, at first having to bat branches away from her eyes. Under the great old trees, there was open space, where so little sunlight entered that lesser plants could not grow. Ahead were the barrows. That would be an amusing place for the vermin behind her to enter, if they dared at all, no matter the price on her head.

The ground rose and fell around her. She had reached the burial place of the Celts or Picts or some older, now-forgotten race. Here, despite the bright stars above, her sight did not penetrate so clearly. The dead wished their privacy, and she was too tired to strip it from them. In the fullness of her strength, she had ignored this ground's dwellers. Now she might need to be more respectful. Aaron, who was by most standards not a superstitious man, had feared to come here. She could sense around her the motions he had feared, of the dead silently dreaming, waiting for time's end. She hoped they would not object to her intrusion. One set of enemies at a time was enough for her. If the Jarl Herverd wished war with France and England at the same time, that was his problem.

A figure loomed from a mound to block her way. She glanced to her side, seeing that others, equally wrapped in formless stygian blackness, had barred her choices of trail. She slowed to a walk, one hand resting on Moonshadow's pommel, fingers set against the sword's graceful crescent quillons.

"You dare to block my path?" she asked. "Do you really dare?" The figure remained silent. She stepped towards it, one pace evenly following the next, all too aware of a circle of unseen others gradually tightening around her. As she closed on the creature before her, the others hung back. That was good. If she fought, it would be one against one, at least for a few moments.

She only needed to drive around the creature, she reflected, not force it back into its grave. Her alternative to her sword was to use sorcery, to draw on darkness to compell the use of the trail. Her breath was raggedly painful. Her enchantments these past few days had been more demanding than any she had tried before. Recourse to the Art was clearly her last resort.

"You do not riddle me?" came a voice from the ebon gloom, in tones as chilling as January slush under bare feet.

"I didn't come to ask questions. I'm just passing through,"

"There is a true game. That is not the game. If you ask no questions I cannot answer, you are rightfully mine, for I am a Riddle Prince of Gwales, dead these eight hundred years and more. You must ask successfully, or join my company."

"I'm not interested."

"Interest! Interest? Who spoke of interest?" It produced a quarterstaff — or perhaps a wizard's stave — from its side. She guessed what was to come. In a flash of speed, she drew Moonshadow. Her blade's runes trapped the starlight. "No, mortal," the creature intoned, "you have come to my realm in my time of power, and you are mine. Your fellows bound us to our graves with the New Faith, sealing us to the Adversary and using the Names and Signs which bind his servants. But now the Adversary is gone, passed beyond the Second Death — and with his passing went all power of the New Faith over my kind. Now, from every barrow, from every hidden place, we will come forth, to replace our rule and return our land to the Old Faith of its mothers. And you are to be the first to bend your knee before us."

"Now," snapped Camilla, "Be gone from my path!"

Be gone, or follow the Adversary beyond the Second Death! For I am a Lord of Death itself, who calls on the powers of the eternal night and the ultimate deep. It is your kind who bends to mine." She hoped he wouldn't push on her latter claim. The adventures of the past few days had left her with no sense of inner power, no reserves for casting even the weakest of enchantments.

"Idle boasts, spun from wind. Bow before me, mortal!"

"Mortal, I am no longer! And you," she closed on him, "can go straight to Hell!" The creature brought up its staff. She could feel her skin tingle with the magic it was readying. Without hesitation, she aimed a blow for its head. It countered and responded. She parried, then felt the biting cold of an undead arm grasping at her shield arm. Wrestling with undead, its seeming objective, was a sport she preferred to leave to the insane. Meanwhile, behind her came the slithering and sliding and breathless meeping of the Prince's allies. She didn't want to fight a mob. *Moonshadow!* she called. *Tirgnoddyr!* She put the last of her inner strength into the sword's runes. Moonshadow, spun from dark and light, black and bright! It was the easiest of spells for her to call, but weaving magic when you were ready to fall exhausted, when your head still ached from blows and falls, was only a task for the sternest of wills.

Moonshadow changed, glowed, burst into burning black and white. Camilla had to squint against her sword's light. The Prince's shadows were dark, but Moonshadow was darker. The figure drank the light, but Moonshadow was brighter. *Tirgnoddyr*, she thought, the new and full moons conjoined in a single blade: no wonder the Cipanguese had treasured its sight. The glare burned through the prince's shroud, revealing a corpse, skin dried, teeth protruding — a body which ought have passed to final rest centuries before. It shrank from her, one arm shielding its eyes. She chased and swung downwards, her sword cleaving grey shadow into blinding night and sparks of brilliant light. She felt old bone crumble as she sliced through arm and skull. As the creature fell, the sounds behind her intensified.

"You are only dead!" she shouted. "I am a Lord Over Death. Against me you cannot stand, no matter the power of the Old or New Faiths." Her heart was fainter. She lacked the strength to set another spell. If the beings about her made a rush, she would cut some of them down, and then suffer the traditional fate of failed necromancers, fixed since time immemorial: making a last stand

against the dead. Her answer was the deepest of quiet.

All the time, the hunt had closed on her. Dogs barked, horns piped, and men shouted each other forwards. She ran down a slope. The hounds might smell her out, but their masters would have more trouble. The glamour faded from her sword. Her left arm was still numb. A barrow-wight's cold struck deep into human flesh, however little it might touch those of Faerie. She had boasted more than once that she was still part of the family of Adam. A disadvantage of that truth bit home.

A brook loomed before her. Camilla considered doubling back on her trail. The hunters had enough number to follow her both ways. She might as well choose the direction which led to safety. She had one reserve remaining. Beyond magesight, she had earned the Gift of Ran: to her, water was as clear as air. She followed the stream, feet skipping just below the water's edge, amused by the dart of minnows away from her unexpected footsteps. Behind, the hounds' bays turned to yelps of fear. The dogs had reached the barrows, and preferred to advance no farther. Then she heard howling, and men's battle cries, and eldritch screeches. The dead were carrying out their threats, or trying to. She made herself run, feeling as her feet transformed from flesh to wood to drossiest lead.

Her memories said the next brook emptied into the northern cove. If her hunters caught up with her again, she could always shed her clothing and swim downstream. She might need to breath, but in the night keeping her head above water was little disadvantage. Years spent at sea and in the Western Isles made her nearly at home in the water as on land. Her sailors believed that knowing how to swim was a curse — it would just prolong a sure death at sea — but she didn't intend to quit, not now, not ever, not so long as she could strive for life.

The cove was empty. Where was the *Dawnfire*? she asked herself. She considered the wind, concluding that the ship would be farther out, nearer to the ocean. She let the air fan her face, then struck out along the beach, scampering through the sand and letting the waves cover her tracks.

Her memory suggested an anchorage. It was very late, though still before the false dawn. She walked with eyes only half open, wishing she dared fall off to sleep. At last, out in the bay she saw her ship riding at anchor. The beach yielded a piece of drift wood. She stripped off her weather cloak,

wrapped sword and plunder in it, and pushed into the water, using the wood to support her burden. The Solomon's Bottle was heavier than a trio of bricks, the book in its steel box being only slightly lighter.

"Hugh!" she finally called. "Hugh! Toss me a line! It's cold down here."

"Princess? Are you there?" A rope came over the side. She grabbed, gave a tug, and half climbed, half held on as waiting arms hoisted her onto the deck.

"The water's cold as the Tethys. We don't want to stay here any longer than need be. They were staging a foxhunt, with me as the fox. Is the goldsmith on board?"

"Aye, aye, princess." He lifted his voice. "Crew to stations! Unfurl the jib!" He returned to her. "Though no cleverer fox, nor any prettier, has ever been hunted. What wish you?"

"A blanket. I'll take the sterncastle. Oh, I have my own snowstorm hidden within me!" He felt a hand touch hers, then reach to her cheek. "Hugh, I don't freeze, not that fast. Nat, keep the wheel!"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Course with the wind three points to starboard, then south by southwest. We'll leave our guests at St. Brendan's isle for a few days. I would stop at Tir na Na'Ogth, at which they'd not be welcome or comfortable."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Princess?" asked Hugh. "I've something half-dry for you to don. Your hands could freeze a stone's heart."

"When we're free of land." She shook as the anchor came free, relaxing only when sails caught the land breeze. "I'll not have us going onto rocks, not on this of all coasts." She realized she was shivering. "Two points to port!"

"Two points to port, aye!"

"Hugh," she continued, "I lost my wand. Gone! It wasn't pleasant. But I got the Bottle back, and did what I set out to do. Reef ahead! Stand by for starboard tack!" She paused. "Starboard tack! Now!" She clutched the rail as the ship came about, wishing they were in open water, so she could lie down and sleep. Looking out through the night, she could see trees on either shore. Below, her vision carried down to reveal a school of fish,

and the slow drift of the coastal bottom under the keel.

"You weren't hurt, princess?" asked Hugh.

"Hurt?" she answered. "Oh, the wand dying? I suppose you'd say so." She clung to the rail, overtaken by an occasional shiver. Finally the coast swung away behind them. "Course south by southwest! Full sail!"

She dropped her voice to a whisper. "Hugh, I won my bet with the Jarl Herverd. He just sacked a couple cities." She giggled. "The Abbot thought London and Paris weren't just any cities. But a city is a city. I killed a king, great and terrible, who thought me his bespoken servant." Hidden by the night, her smile glowed.

