



THE LOG

THAT

#17

FILES



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TONIGHT'S EPISODE: FOOLS RUSH IN

It's a small zine after all...

...but not a small issue, thank goodness. Once again I've had to put off several articles until next time. Perhaps it's just as well. I have a feeling that the holidays may make it a bit difficult for some contributors to work up large zines, and some extra volume from me won't hurt.

That's *my* rationalization, anyway. ☺



THE POSTAL WAR

Cobra and mongoose...cat and dog...Democrat and Republican...all these are fierce natural enemies. But they're wimps compared to the ultimate opponents: the APA editor and the postal employee.

I've been fighting the post office since Interregnum began. Most of the fighting has been over the question of what methods I can

use to mail IR; specifically, whether or not I can send it at Book Rate.

This is an important point, since quite a few US readers choose to have their copies mailed at Book Rate. It's slow, but at \$1.24 per pound it's extremely cheap. For example, it only cost \$1.24 to mail IR #16 at book rate; it cost \$3 to send it via 1st class mail (actually it was Priority Mail, but at that weight there is no difference).

The whole thing is weird. For a while a cranky old postal worker at the office on my street gave me serious trouble; he started asking all sorts of questions about the contents of the envelopes, with the obvious intention of refusing to let them go at book rate. I explained that there was no advertising, and that the magazine was not published for profit; but when I admitted that the issues were printed on a photocopier, he announced that copied material didn't qualify as "printed matter", and was therefore ineligible for the book category. I was furious, but what could I do?

I avoided that post office for months, going miles out of my way to another PO—very inconvenient, but there seemed no choice. Finally I found myself in a serious time crunch, and had no choice but to go back.

The white-haired guy was gone—apparently a number of people had complained about him.

Hallelujah! Over the following months I made a special point of cultivating the women who were working there. We chatted pleasantly, and they never gave me any trouble. Until...

I was mailing copies of IR one evening when one of the clerks snapped. It seemed that I was a troublemaker. I was only supposed to bring in 15 items at a time. I always come in just before closing (apparently offending her). We had “been through this all before”.

Actually we hadn't. I suspect that she had suddenly confused me with someone else; either that or she had multiple personalities. The change in behavior was too radical to explain otherwise. In any case, I had brought in exactly 15 items, which should have been acceptable. I remarked that there *were* only fifteen items in the very mildest of tones.

She started digging for a reason to deny the use of Book Rate. What was in the envelopes? Printed matter, without advertisements. She bent the envelopes. Ahah! She had found a basis for refusal: these were obviously not hardcover books. Special 4th Class/Book Rate was only for hardcover books. Permission denied.

Rather than arguing, I sent them all 1st class and counted it as a loss (book rate subscribers were only charged \$1.24). I left without complaint, seething inside.

Weeks later I decided that I had to find out once and for all whether or not I could legitimately use book rate mail. It took some digging, but after a number of phone calls I found a postal official who could answer my questions. As it turns out, regulations say *nothing* about the methods of printing that can be used. There is also no requirement that material have hard covers. The official assured me that Interregnum falls within the

definition of printed matter, and can be sent via book rate without fear. As a precaution, I took down his name and phone number. He told me that if any clerk should give me trouble in the future, they're to call him and he'll take care of it.

And that, I hope, is the end of our post office problems.

TOPIC #17: SET- TINGS

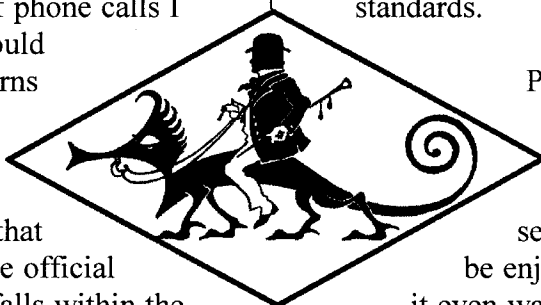
It seemed as though a weird myopia afflicted the roleplaying hobby for many years: an inability to consider more than two kinds of settings for roleplaying games. One was the standard D&D™ generic fantasy model, based somewhat upon Tolkien's Lord of the Rings but without the grandeur and beauty. The other was the Traveller space setting, which is more reminiscent of Poul Anderson's Flandry series than anything else.

Both of these models persist. I'd bet that at least 60% of all fantasy campaigns still follow the D&D paradigm, and whenever I've heard science fiction games discussed it has almost always been with the assumption that players would be travelling on a starship in a well-developed galaxy.

Of course there has been much improvement in recent years. Roleplaying systems set in specific worlds such as Call of Cthulhu, Pendragon, and Paranoia have been fairly successful. GURPS opened up a multitude of worlds for game use.

Still, the gaming world tends towards the two standards.

Perhaps it's just a contrarian impulse in me, but I like worlds that are as different as possible from the typical settings. Standard fantasy can be enjoyable—in one game I was in it even was superlative, when the GM



took all the standard elements and re-invigorated them in much the same way that Frank Miller reenergized the Batman theme in The Dark Knight. But in the vast majority of games I've seen the settings were the same old thing. Monochromatic, indistinguishable from each other, and mind-numbingly dull.

In the very first zine I ever wrote for The Wild Hunt I detailed my attempt to start a game club whose purpose would be to try many different sorts of settings. The flyer I'd distributed described a number of possibilities. Among these were a game in which modern-day characters die at the start of the game, and play ghosts discovering the afterlife; superhero cowboys fighting Cthuloid monsters in the Old West; and a modern-day conspiracy game in which characters discover a machine that allows the use of telepathy.

The club fell through (my fault), so none of this ever happened. Oh well.

Here are a few unusual settings I've enjoyed:

The Floating Isles

I described this setting in *Rack & Rune* #15, which appeared in TWH in March 1993. The Isles were created by Geof Dale, a college roommate who had a wonderful visual imagination but some difficulty in completing campaigns. His inspiration for this world was the art of Roger Dean, who painted a number of album covers for Yes. Over the years, I've run several one-shots set on the Isles.

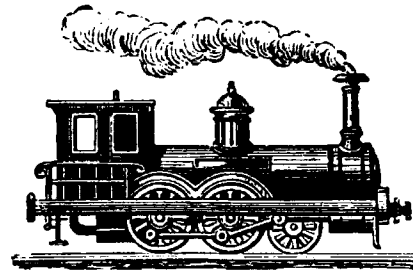
It's a fantasy campaign, but one of the most fundamental constants is changed: gravity. The universe is an endless air-filled blue void, filled with weirdly-shaped chunks of floating rock in various sizes: islands in the sky. On the Isles (some of them, anyway) something called gravity *does* apply; the inhabitants can walk, throw objects, and otherwise lead convenient lives. But the gravity effect is entirely localized. Jump off

an Isle and you'll find yourself floating in mid-air. Some species know a technique to apply gravity to boats and other craft, and travel between Isles for trade and exploration. Since the Isles move freely, though, it is difficult to map your travels—and it can be hard to find your way home.

The life-forms of the Isles are weird, too. No humans exist there; in fact, *none* of the usual races or stereotypes can be found in the Isles. Instead there are strange creatures and races of all kinds. Some are intelligent, with wildly varying cultures; some different species have lived in close contact that their cultures have evolved into amalgams that can only be called baroque.

Biodiversity in general is very high. Air-whales fly between the Isles, some as large as an Isle themselves. Peculiar things hide in the crannies on the underside of some Isles, or on small rocks floating alone. Clusters of small rocks are home to little creatures that play games by dodging through micro-gravitational effects. Travellers among the Isles are sure to discover new and dangerous life-forms.

It's a wonderfully refreshing and different world. I'll no doubt run it again some day.



The City

This world was also created by G. Dale. I believe that it was based on some work of art or literature, but I'm not sure what it was; if the setting sounds like something you've heard of, please let me know.

The City is ancient. No one living remembers the methods of its construction; no one knows how to repair the incredible mechanisms that keep it going. And this is unfortunate, since the City is starting to break down.

It stands on high metal pillars that thrust upward out of the cloud-shrouded darkness below; none of the City's inhabitants have ever seen the ground. Tracks in mid-air connect the various stand-alone parts of the city, and ornate steam-trains puff between the stops like clockwork. The trains run by themselves, according to unknown patterns and mechanisms created in some forgotten past.

There are whispered tales of the horrors Down Below. The mechanisms that run the City have their roots there: pistons the size of a city block, huge chambers filled with deadly steams and fluids. Gears larger than houses turn day and night, sealed within impenetrable housings. Some say that things which were once human roam the tunnels and crevices between the machines Down Below, but most refuse to discuss such things. One thing is certain: those who fall from the City never return.

The people of the City are human; their culture is rigid, stylized, and might best be described as a slightly decadent and baroque Victorianism. Their birthrate is low, and their numbers dwindle; they live a long time, however, and so this effect is not noticeable yet. The population is roughly 30,000 people. Many of the people spend their time in trade, the arts, or in esoteric social activities. A Council sets rules for the City, but it rarely meets; perhaps because the people are simply too civilized to seriously break their laws or disturb the peace.

Parts of the City have broken, but these areas are avoided. It is the height of *gaucherie*

to mention the breakdown of the City, or even to refer to it tangentially.

Knowledge is not dead in the City, though it is much decayed. Science and learning are taught to children, though these do not compare with the knowledge that the builders must have possessed.

When I played in the city, the PCs were strangers travelling together in a train. With no warning, the tracks beneath were destroyed—apparently by an incredibly powerful explosive—and the train dropped Down Below. They soon discovered that Down Below was a place of darkness, noise, dampness, starving fallen humanoids, and, deeper down, demons.

I'm not sure to what extent the works of Michael Moorcock inspired this world, but I do seem to recall that my character in the game was an incarnation of the Eternal Champion.

COMMENTS #16

...are something that I just don't have the time to do, now. Witness the perils of procrastination! I'll just have to play catch-up in the next issue.

