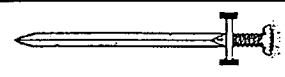


RACK & RUNE



RACK & RUNE #13: Adventures of a Glass Eye

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Quite a bit of water has passed under the Troll Bridge since last ish. Once again I've been forced to put off some things I've had in queue for months. Oh well — at least I won't run out of things to write about!

I recently noted with interest that A&E's price per page for photostenciling now equals TWH's cost per master page for photocopying! Hmm. I wonder what that could mean, if anything?

I'm pleased to say that of fifteen copies of TWH on sale at Excalibur Hobbies, only five remain. We may be reaching some new people out there. An omnibus welcome to new readers!

On a personal note, I broke the smallest toe on my left foot on December 11th by bumping into a padded Ottoman in my living room while wearing socks — and then broke the bone again on the 22nd while walking up my front steps with a bag of Christmas presents from Gargoyles. I've finally recovered. Jeez! There ain't no game mechanic to cover that!

SPACE RANGERS — WHY?

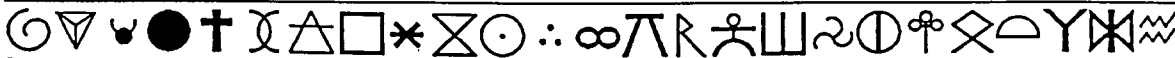
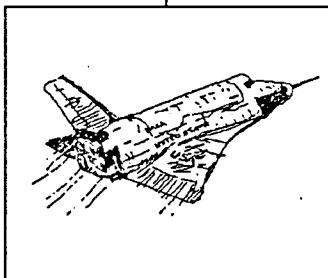
I recently had the dubious pleasure of watching the premiere episode of Space Rangers. It's a tough one to judge. It's no Max Headroom, that's for sure. There are quite a few weaknesses. The basic plot

seems to be, well, just what the title says: Space Rangers. Kind of a Wild West folks in outer space — far future, in this case, with many alien races. It has a slightly noir feel, but only slightly. At first I had some hope. Though not perfect, the pilot showed at least a little promise. My assessment at the time:

Bad Points:

1) The Hero (I missed his name). This guy is seriously annoying. I can just see the network pinheads now: "Put in a handsome guy with a five-o'clock shadow, a tough-talking macho he-man for the little twerps (as they clearly envision all SF fans to be) to admire." Unfortunately, this guy is just obnoxious — the archetype of the moronic hero. He's always right, of course, never raises his voice much above a monotone, seemingly has no sense of humor and is (inevitably) respected by all — though many of the supporting characters seem far more interesting. You have to wonder why they'd follow this jerk!

2) The Villain. It seems to be a requirement these days that all villains (or at least most of them) be fat, loathsome, and effeminate. I've noticed that in many shows and movies lately, evil people display mannerisms commonly associated with homosexuals — this show is no exception.



This is starting to disturb me. Why must the fat and horrible antagonist mince about in such a manner? I doubt that all this is part of a planned campaign against homosexuals (or fat people, for that matter), but discrimination of any sort gets me quite annoyed — and concerned.

As a minor side note, in one scene a spaceship in combat starts shaking madly while traveling down a tube. The female interest (who's well-played, incidentally) is lying face-down at her weapon. The sexual connotations are rather notable: as she's jiggling, she licks her lips and moans in anticipation, ostensibly for the coming battle. Please! I'm no prude (well, not much), but I thought this sort of thing went out of fashion at least three months ago.

3) The Writing. "It isn't *that* bad, but Lord, it isn't good." Actually, standard TV SF writing — with the usual unformed and uncertain quality of a new show. Not Max Headroom, but not totally embarrassing. But this early it's hard to call.

Good Points:

1) The ensemble. There are two actors I recognized among the heroes: Linda Hunt (?), who played the short ugly guy in "The Year of Living Dangerously", and the guy who played either Beast Rabban or Baron Harkonnen in "Dune". They both do well with what they've got — but the writing's going to have to improve to be worthy of them, and the other supporting cast who were almost all good.

2) The Special Effects. Pretty much all computer-generated, and very good. Not with the breathtaking quality of naturalness of ST:NG (you could tell it was a computer effect), but very good nonetheless.

There were several specific weaknesses, as well. The show was more than a little derivative; I understand that the TV

executives feel that they need to capture the **Star Trek: The Next Generation** audience, but the similarity of the warrior sidekick character to Worf was annoying, as was the presence of Troi-like empathy. The character was fairly well acted, but fatally cliched.

Another point — the BS science doubletalk on this show was markedly inferior to that of ST:NG (though we're really only talking about a lower grade of crap...).

The first "regular" show confirmed all my deepest fears. It was as ABSOLUTE and TOTAL a ripoff of *Aliens* as you can imagine! And the writing was...there's no question. Writing like that should be a crime. They used all the sad old stereotypes, including the extremely obnoxious one of "the heroes must rescue a child in trouble". Little Jimmy fell into the old mine shaft, Paw! I quit watching before my larynx could leap out of my throat and strangle me to preserve my soul. 8^>} These pinheads never learn...

Anyway, my theory is that this was a show that may have been pretty good when it was first written, but was turned into infantile pap while being 'improved' by the network pinheads. I understand this is fairly common — a writer makes something good, and by the time it goes through the tenth rewrite by the studio flunkies it's Buck Rodgers time. This dog deserves a cruel and protracted death, but I doubt it'll last the season. And I only hope that Linda Hunt can redeem herself before she dies of shame.

DEEP SPACE 9

And now for something completely different: **Star Trek: Deep Space 9**. This was surprisingly good — much better than I imagined it could be. I'm not calling it great yet, but there's definitely hope. It's a clear improvement over ST:NG. I won't

compare it to the original show, though; there's simply too great a gap between the two series.

Casting: Excellent. The guy who plays Commander Sisko did a great job. He brought a touch of humor to the role, which (I'm told by an actress) is an extremely valuable acting tool. I also noticed that his voice was very impressive indeed, with great control — could that be why he was chosen for the role?

Thankfully his son does not seem to be at all like Wussley. Though I just realized that the commander's son is the Sisko kid...

The others were all very good as well — I was particularly surprised when someone pointed out that the actor playing Odo (the shapechanger) was Clayton, the prissy functionary from "Benson". I'd never imagined he could play a serious role, yet he did a great job. Almost all of the support cast had surprising touches of quirkiness, and a much more "human" feel to them — not that eternal placidity and self-assurance of TNG!

I was amused to realize that Odo spends all his time going around naked. I mean, those clothes have to be part of him, because he's wearing them when he changes back. And if he could affect matter other than that of his own body, he could melt through stuff by morphing it!

The only two possible exceptions to this are Dax, the Science officer, and the doctor. Dax is simply too good looking to be believable as a Federation officer — too smooth, too model-like. I just can't buy her in that role. The Doctor's real problem is his voice — that English accent sounds like Tim Curry camping it up as an earnest young scion of the British Empire. He may turn out to be the closest thing to a Wussley on the show, though in the first

two regular episodes they seem to be playing him more for laughs — a sort of bumbling naivete being his hallmark. That seems overplayed (after all, how could he have got through Starfleet?), but we'll see.



Writing: Again, very good. There were a few touches of the required schmaltz, but the characters were generally not used to make preachy little points — though the potential for that was clearly built in. That was perhaps the greatest flaw of TNG — they had to make it into a preachy and condescending morality play almost every time. Somehow, I suspect that this improvement may have something to do with the death of Roddenberry...

Directing, special effects etc.: All very good, up to the usual standards if not better.

Summing up, I'd say that this is quite a hopeful start. When I compare this to the STNG premiere, "Encounter at Far Point", well, there's no comparison — this is MUCH better. I'd say, in fact, that this is as good as any of the best of the STNG shows — which is a very good sign indeed. And the first two regular shows were quite good, as well.

There's absolutely no question that Space Rangers looks very sad indeed compared to this. Now to see how Babylon 5 stands up — does anyone know when that will be on? And how about Time Trax (I'm already gagging in anticipation), and Kung Fu: The Next Generation?



GM'S HALL OF SHAME: THE VIDEO

As readers may remember from previous issues, I've been involved with the Amateur Video Contest at the local Arisia Con for the last three years. The first year, I acted in "Tales of the Bedside Radio", which was written and directed by Lois Folstein (and which incidentally won the Grand Prize over stiff competition); the next year, I co-wrote and acted in "The Probability Ship", with Lois and my roommate Scott Ferrier, though Lois was, in all fairness, the motivating force that got us going on the project (that one placed first in its category, which wasn't difficult as there were only two videos entered. The other won the same prize in a different category). Finally, last year, I...well, *watched* Lois's "Conversation With An NPC" video, anyway. Since that contest was the best run by far (it was run by the founder of the Con, who was especially interested in amateur video), I screwed my courage to the sticking point and decided to shoot and enter a video myself this year.

The decision of what to shoot wasn't difficult; I've often thought that "The Gamemaster's Hall of Shame" from *Rack & Rune #2* would make a very funny video, as well as being easy to film. Virtually no modifications would be necessary with the extensive use of titles from the original text. In previous videos our titles had been sheets of paper or transparencies taped to a TV screen which we filmed, with incredibly crude results. This time however, Mark Sabalauskas, a gaming friend with an Amiga 3000, had heard of our plans and offered to generate video titles for us — possibly with a Video Toaster that a computer store would let him use gratis. A golden opportunity, and one which I accepted gladly.

Editing would be a problem; we no longer had access to the video equipment we'd had in the past, and would have to edit the titles and live footage together with two VCRs. For those who haven't tried this, believe me: it's a very clumsy method indeed. The result always abounds with clicks, static, and often a "rainbow effect" if the tape is copied over at all, or even if the VCR heats up. This was not going to win any technical or style awards, that seemed sure.

I planned to have a short introduction to the concept of the video in either title or live form at the beginning. Each GM type would begin with the name and AKAs (i.e. "The Drunk — also known as Not Again!"), followed by live footage of the "Quote" (with player reactions and additional dialogue), followed by "Good Points" and then "Bad Points", the latter all in title form. Then we'd go straight to the next GM title.

We began shooting live footage spontaneously one night, without any real preparation. There were difficulties. The battery pack for Scott's videocamera was unfortunately dead, and as it was Sunday evening we weren't likely to be able to get a replacement. All the filming would be indoors though, and he did have a plug that could attach directly to an outlet. However, the plug connection to the camera was poor and would cut the power if the camera were moved at all. To top it off, there wasn't even a tripod to rest the camera on. Finally we ended up resting the camera on the TV and the TV stand, tilting the camera to the correct angle by sliding a piece of cardboard under the base. Scott cleverly hooked things up so that the camera signal was displayed on the TV's screen. A person sitting at the side of the camera could watch our progress, and we could easily play back and judge our work

as we went along.

The shooting itself went like a dream. Game aids and props of all sorts were used to vary the scenes from each other. We used GM shields for RuneQuest, HeroQuest, Shadowrun, and AD&D (tm) among others. Figures and layouts were different for every shot. We played music on a portable stereo, and though the sound quality was poor the music really did help. Lighting was lamps from all over the house, tilted in every direction — and there was even a naked bulb situated on the floor between the GM's legs, making it hazardous to move around! All in all, the rest of the living room was trashed while we filmed, piled high with props from other scenes and unneeded furniture.

It was Nereyon night, and friends kept showing up; as we went along, we discussed and expanded the scenes, never needing more than five takes for a shot, and usually only two. I did the most GM roles, at four — but everybody did well. The addition of players really enhanced the production. We wrapped things up after only about three and a half hours. Viewing what we had filmed, everybody agreed that it was very funny stuff.

Some other gaming friends agreed, when they saw the raw footage the next Tuesday. Mark (the guy with the Amiga 3000) was among them, and he planned to get the titles generated post-haste.

The titles were finished by the next Saturday. They were gorgeous: animated full color text, with incredible fades and wipe-outs. For example, in the case of "The Insane Plotter" the "Good Points" text faded in on a green background, and then red jigsaw puzzle pieces floated in, assembling the text of the "Bad Points". Incredible. And the others were as appropriate — the "Sexist Pig" one was a sure

attention-getter. I only regretted that such great titles and funny footage would have to be edited together with such poor equipment.

Several friends were visiting at the time, playing Star Fleet Battles with Scott; one of them spoke up. He could get us access to a top-quality video editing studio, including the ability to dub in digital sound. Did we want to try it that night, after the game?

You bet we did! And so, shortly after midnight, we got to work. Sorting through huge quantities of CDs, we picked out music that fit in with each bit — often with a very humorous effect. And then we started editing.



What can I say? Things soon became a somewhat mind-numbing blur. Patch in a title, overdub sound, patch in live footage, patch in "Good Points/Bad Points", overdub sound, etc. etc. etc....ten times, and then credits and outtakes. By the time we were finished it was 7:00 AM Sunday morning. The tape looked great, apart from a few awkward cuts. In some points the music jibed incredibly well with the animated titles; we had been lucky. We watched the tape several times as we copied it to VHS, and then I took everyone to breakfast and took everybody home by about 8 o'clock.

Later that day I took another look at the tape, only to discover to my horror that the entire title for "Das Killmeister" had somehow been omitted! It just started

straight in with the live footage. An obvious glitch. Disaster! Though Monday was a workday, we had to go back into the editing rooms that night. When we finally finished at 4 AM, I knew I wouldn't be able to make it into work at 9 the next morning. So I called in and took a half-day off. It was worth it; we had made a great video. It came to just about thirteen minutes long, by the way. Oh fateful number!

All that remained was to get the video shown. For that we'd have to wait...for Arisia.



ARISIA '93

I'd been looking forward to Arisia with great anticipation; it was the first Con I'd ever attended, and it's still the big event of the year around here. I'd reserved a hotel room, taken that Friday off, and generally psyched myself up for the Con in a big way. And in fact it did turn out to be great, the best Arisia ever — but with a few major exceptions.

Getting Ready

Before the Con even began, there were a few problems. I'd called the hotel, the Boston Park Plaza, to reserve a double or triple about a month before the Con. They'd told me that there was nothing left but singles! This was frankly amazing. When I queried the Arisia folks about it on Tangent, the Arisia BBS, they told me that there were indeed rooms left, and that the hotel had screwed up. I called back, and made arrangements for a double room with two double beds. I'd also queried on the

BBS about the Amateur Video Contest, as well as writing in to ask about it; since I had a great video to show, I wanted to make sure I could promote it properly. I'd worked up posters, with a blank space to indicate the time of showing.

No response *vis a vis* the Contest came. Finally I called the voice number one of the Arisia people had kindly supplied me with. I was informed that no Contest info had been sent to me because none had been received from the people in charge. I was given a number to call.

When I did reach the person in question, I was told that the Contest was "on hiatus this year" due to lack of interest — mine was the only video that had been made. I asked that my video be shown, and was told that after it was screened (presumably for propriety) it would be shown — I should bring it to the Con.

Checking In

When I got to the hotel Friday afternoon, things were clearly backed up at check-in. I was in line for at least half an hour; when I was finally helped, I was directed elsewhere and forgotten about. Nebbish that I am, I waited for another twenty minutes before calling for attention! Finally I received my key. Shouldering my heavy bags, I set off to find my room.

The room was as far from the elevators as could be. This wasn't surprising, as the correction to my room status (from single to double) had happened only days before. What was surprising, however, was what was inside the room: only one double bed! Typical. I've yet to be at a hotel that didn't screw things up somehow. It took a while, but eventually I did get things straightened out.

I'd pre-registered for the Con, and unlike last year that turned out to have

been a wise decision — it took bare minutes to get my badge and info. To get the ball rolling early, I tracked down the head of Video and gave him my tape of “The GM’s Hall of Shame”. He told me that he’d screen it within 12 to 16 hours, and let me know when it would be shown. I requested that he tell me as early as possible, so that I could get out some publicity — and let those of my friends at the Con who wanted to see it know when to watch. Moving on, I spent some time at the Icebreaker dance, which was fun but wore me out — and after a rest, I checked out a Design Your Own Tarot panel, which was mildly interesting. Annoyingly, panelists did not all sit behind their own name cards (I think), and so I was not able to figure out which of them was Lee Gold — if any of them were. That pretty much settled me for the night.

Saturday Morning

The next morning we got up early to see the indefatigable Hal Clement show slides of Jupiter. It was a fine presentation, but many in the audience failed to get the elementary science witticisms he essayed now and then; I was often the only one to react. After that, some more wandering about the Con, and then on to Regency Dancing. This was a lot of fun, and quite a new thing for me — I’m glad I tried it. It was hot in the room where it was held, though, and so I retired to the room for a while. I’d yet to visit the Dealer’s Room, Dealer’s Row, or the Art Show, but there would be time.

After resting for a short time, Lois and I tracked down the Video director and pressed him (politely) for an air time for the video, so we could start putting up our posters. He told us that the best he could do right now was “sometime between 10:30 PM and 2:00 AM”, and we should track him down later. It was already after-

noon (this was on Saturday), so we started putting up the posters with “between 10:30 PM and 2:00 AM” on them.

Saturday Evening

I did get to the Dealer’s Room after a while. It was outstanding, definitely the best one yet. Particularly interesting were the wares offered by The Weapon Shops of Isher, who were new to Arisia. They had some really incredible guns, plus a magic wand that I couldn’t resist — not to mention a very authentic-looking sonic screwdriver (from Dr. Who). Just about everything lit up or made noise or both, and they all looked great. I bought the wand for \$55 — it was made of two brass tubes end-to-end, separated by a narrow circle of plastic. When the plastic was bridged, it completed a circuit that lit a Christmas light at one end, surrounded by a faceted clear plastic tip. Later, I bought a natural quartz tip for the same wand. The effect was truly magical — I caught some kids staring at me with awe (I should mention that I was in my full IFGS wizard’s regalia). Speaking of my costume, Dina Flockheart of Cloak and Dagger was at the Con, too, sporting an even bigger collection of great garb than last year. Again I couldn’t resist, and ordered a black undertunic. There were also books, trinkets and jewelry of all sorts, crystals, puppets, game stuff, gargoyles (from some of the same people who supply the Gargoyles store I’ve spoken of in earlier issues), and much more...but there simply wasn’t time to look at it all.

I also enjoyed dinner at Legal Seafood with the estimable Bob Butler, Dana Derbyberry, Dana Erlandsen, and George Phillis...even though I was disappointed to find that there were no hamburgers available on the menu. Who knew? 8^>}

It was getting late, and we’d heard

nothing about the video. The Masquerade Contest had begun, the most popular event at Arisia; most people were watching it in the Grand Ballroom. Lois and I decided to try to find the Video director and get an exact air time before it was too late. Little did I dream where our search would lead us!

A Desperate Hunt

We began by searching the Video room, and around the main areas. No luck; nobody knew where he was. We went to Ops, but the only person there was a Gopher who didn't even know the guy. After making another sweep of the floor we returned to Ops to leave a note for him. One of the staff was there now, though, and kindly offered to page the Video Director (what the hell, for the sake of convenience I'll call him... 'Bob') on his radio. After a few tense moments the answer came "Bob's standing right next to me...he's just about to go onstage." Turning, Lois ran like the wind to the Grand Ballroom, with me close behind. We had to catch him as he came off the stage!

On the way, a man with a camera stopped us; he wanted to take a picture of Lois and me in our costumes. We waited while he shot, looked for a better angle, and then shot again; it was a lot like a scene from an old comedy movie. As soon as he was done we were off again.

Bob was onstage, in a tux. He was speaking to fill time while the judges made their decision. We moved to the stairs at the left side of the stage, where he seemed most likely to go if he walked off. When he finished his remarks, however, he did indeed go left — backstage, and not down the stairs at all! Without a second's pause Lois charged across the Ballroom, ducked under a rope into a forbidden area on the right side of the stage, and went through

the door at the side of the stage. I followed.

Past an intermediate area we ended up in the hotel kitchen; it was mostly empty, being cleaned by a few maintenance people. In response to our hurried questions they kindly guided us towards the backstage direction. Through a door, we went up some stairs and found a door marked "POSITIVELY NO ADMITTANCE"; this didn't stop Lois for a minute of course, and she charged through far more bravely than I could have (as I followed I had visions of life in jail). 8^>}



There we were: backstage. We could see the audience from behind the curtain, as well as the Master of Ceremonies, numerous staff, and — huzzah! — Bob! Without ceasing her forward motion Lois rushed up to him, talking quickly. I still don't know why we weren't thrown out at this point! Bowled over, Bob set the air time for the video as "just before the Midnight Movie", and what's more agreed to have the time announced to the Masquerade audience. Wow. If it weren't for Lois it would have probably been shown at 5PM Sunday night, after the Con proper, if at all.

Wasting no time, we raced around the Con correcting the posters. I ran upstairs to tell the folks at the TWH room party the new air time. The video was going to be shown on live feed to every hotel room (or

so the video people said), so the Pack wouldn't need to leave the room. I wished that I could stay with the party, but I really had to see the general reaction in the Video Room to the video — plus, I knew I'd have to be there to tell them about the blank two and a half minutes at the beginning of the tape, and to insure that they'd play all the outtakes at the end.

The GM's Hall of Shame—At Last! (?)

Finally, we got to the Video Room at about 11:30 PM. It was pretty crowded — some weird Japanimation movie was on. We found seats, and settled down. Many of the gamers and IFGS people I know were there, too, to see our video.

The movie we were watching was called *Akira*, and the animation was incredible. As I watched it, I came to the sinking realization that our video would look pretty pathetic after this; I said as much to Lois, and she'd been thinking the same thing. Still, I could hardly complain. We were lucky that it was being shown at all.

Akira dragged on forever, getting more weird, depressing, and artistically spectacular all the time. When it finally finished, it was 12:40. I moved up to the video control table. The nearest member of the Video staff was a guy I'd gamed with for a while, a couple of years ago. As I told them about the blank at the start of my tape, he told me that they were running late — they couldn't show my video. I was definitely not in the mood for that! After a few heated remarks on my part, he agreed to show it, and sourly announced that the *Midnight Movie* (the original uncut *Barbarella*) would begin at 1:00 AM. I went back to my seat, but Lois leaned over and whispered, loudly, “No, you have to stay on top of them or they'll f@ck it up!” The IFGS folk in the area heard her, and

laughed fairly loudly. So I went back up.

They fast-forwarded past the beginning of the piece, and immediately started playing. There was, however, no sound! I immediately pointed this out; they seemed willing to play the video without sound, but the shouts of “Sound!” from people in the audience persuaded them otherwise. After several panicky minutes, the problem was finally fixed. Inevitably, they didn't bother to rewind, but just picked up from where they'd left off — the title for the first GM type, “Minnie Haul”.

Either there were a large number of gamers in the audience (certainly a possibility), or else the video was funny enough to amuse non-gamers — in either case, we got a lot of laughs. Loud laughs. The audience really seemed to enjoy it. As the video neared the end I went back up to remind them to let it run through the outtakes, only to be told that there wasn't enough time for that — sorry!

Me: “But they're the funniest part of the whole video!”

Video staffer: “We don't have enough time — sorry.”

Me: (demanding/begging) “C'mon! It's only about thirty seconds! We've worked so hard—”

VS: (exasperated sigh) “30 seconds? You're sure?”

Me: (not sure at all) “Sure!”

So they played them, and got a gratifying reaction from the audience. But they still cut the last five seconds. When they had finished I went up and took back the tape — we'd let them keep copies of our videos in previous years, but not this time. They'd made us work too hard.

Jeez. After all that work, to have to beg to have the complete 13 minutes

shown...in retrospect, I really do resent the shabby treatment we got from Arisia. It took most of the joy out of getting the thing shown.

After that I ran up to see what the Pack had thought of the video — fortunately they had managed to catch it on the live feed. Perhaps we can look for their reviews in upcoming issues? 8^>}

Down a Strange Corridor

At about 3:00 AM, Lois felt like checking out the Con Suite. I feared that it would be a hot and sweaty experience, but acquiesced. We headed to the fifth floor, and started looking. Turning left, we quickly ran into a crowded hallway, filled with the most exotic leather-clad folk of the Con. At one end of the hall a door stood open, lights and strange noises coming from within. The smell of human effluvium and sweat was unmistakable. Was this the Con Suite, I asked? No, said a bystander, this was the line for the Bondage Suite. We beat a hasty retreat. The Con Suite, when we eventually found it, was hot and sweaty, with one shriveled carrot left on the snack tray.

Sunday Morning

Much of the rest of the Con is a blur. The estimable Glenn Blacow, fresh out of the hospital visited the Con. I picked up a very nice small gun from The Weapon Shops of Isher, a silent model with an adjustable-flash LED light for \$37.50. Then an all-too-hasty sweep of Dealer's Row during which I ordered a Robin Wood Tarot (I don't believe in that stuff, but it can be a **great** game aid), and we were off to the post-Con gripe session. We certainly had something to talk about! Lois was boiling to comment about the video.

Showdown At The Gripe Session

The gripe session was being held in

the Grand Ballroom. When we got there things were just starting; the Con section leaders and Chair were sitting at a conference table with microphones on the stage. At the start the audience had no microphone; people were shouting their remarks up to the stage, and then the Arisia folk replied at length, and in detail. After a few minutes a microphone was found for the audience, and an Arisia Board member held it at the front of the auditorium. Eventually Lois got to speak (I should explain that she felt that it would be better for her to complain about the Amateur Video Contest, as she felt I might get too angry). She was quite impassioned about the treatment we'd received, both this year and in all the previous years, and made her feelings clear. In response, the Tech Director got up and said, unsympathetically "Welcome to Fandom.". But Lois was certainly not going to take that lying down! She held on to the mike despite the attempts of the moderator to take it away from her and turned to face the audience, elaborating her point. The Board people replied that if she was so interested in the Video Contest, she should run it herself; I'd warned her that this would be their response, and she answered that if we'd had so much trouble showing one amateur video at Arisia, why should we expect it to be any easier to show several? The Board ignored her, of course, and things started to get loud. Eventually it was clear that things were going nowhere, and she gave up the mike and sat down. There followed a small lecture from the Board. They had limited staff, and the Amateur Video Contest had been the pet project of the founder of the Con, who had not been involved with the Con this year; if we were interested, we should do it ourselves. After all, there was very little interest in the field. While this was going on, a member of the audience came over to tell me that he'd made a

video as well, and had received no information from Arisia at all about the Contest. Another got up and said basically the same thing. I got up, congratulated the Board on a great Con, and pointed out that if my people ran the Contest we could hardly compete — and our videos had been a major part of every Contest so far. And after all, they had included the Amateur Video Contest in their flyers... It seemed that things would be left at that.

Then another person came to the audience microphone. I recognized him: he was the founder of the Arisia. As he came to the front, a couple of Board members audibly whispered “loose cannon”. He introduced himself, and began to speak:

Ninety percent of the talking so far had been done by the Board members, he pointed out; that wasn't what a bitch session was for. The Board should shut up and be taking notes. They weren't here to explain how things weren't their fault or to ask if those with complaints could do better.

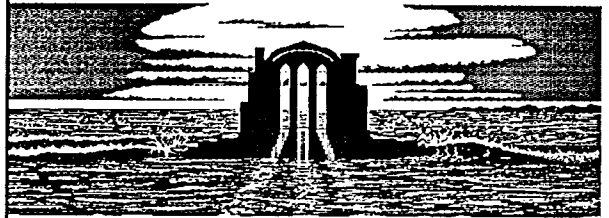
Next, he said, the Tech Director owed her (Lois) an apology; “Welcome to Fandom” had been a shitty thing to say. She'd had a valid complaint, and they'd given a lousy response. At this the audience broke into applause.

Thirdly, he said, he'd offered to help with the Con this year, even though he was now living in Texas; in response they'd sent him a standard application form, which implicitly asked “Why should we give you a \$40 value membership for free?” They seemed to have forgotten that the existence of the Con depended upon volunteers, people who gave their time and efforts freely. Arrogance was the last thing the Board should be displaying to volunteers.

There was considerable applause from the audience after he finished, and no one

from the Board replied at all. But they did stop answering in such great detail and did start taking more notes.

Later, one of the audience members got up and volunteered to run next year's Video Contest. Staffers took his name and address to applause from the audience. So, I guess all's well that ends well!



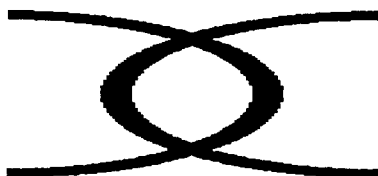
Summing Up

This was apparently the first Arisia to be a financial success. As a result, the time and place for Arisia '94 have already been set: January 14, 15, and 16 (Martin Luther King weekend) again at the Boston Park Plaza Hotel. Overall, despite the problems, it was a great Con — the best yet, without doubt. In fact, I've already purchased my membership for next year! My only regrets (apart from the Video) are that I didn't get a chance to really look at the dealers, the Art Show, or many of the panels, and that I didn't get a chance to spend more time with the Pack. Particularly Dana and Dana, who had traveled so far. Again, my apologies, folks!

One of the most fun things about the Con was going around in costume. The relaxed and friendly attitude of the Congoers really made the difference. Incidentally, does anyone out there know of any other Cons like that in the East Coast area? I think I have the Con bug — I don't want to wait a year to do this again! 8^>}

One more thing I got out of Arisia is the Video. If anyone would like a copy, let

me know — but don't mail me a videotape! Greg Stafford made that mistake a year ago, and I only just discovered his tape buried under a mountain of others! (I am filled with shame, Greg — a thousand apologies. The whole thing completely slipped my mind! I'll send your tape back post-haste. Mea culpa. Jeez. If there's any way I can make it up to you, just let me know. Dispatch the Thanatari to my address whenever you wish). Anyway, if anyone else *does* want a copy of "The GM's Hall of Shame" I'll just copy the tape and send it to you — there's a place where I can pick up Maxell Gold 120 minute VHS tapes for \$3.99+. After you get the tape, then send me \$4. It's the only way to keep me honest. 8^>}



RANDOM RUNEQUEST

It looks like *RuneQuest* is finally making the comeback it deserves. Two new publications came out in December that I've been waiting for for a long time.

King of Sartar, by Greg Stafford (published by Chaosium), approximately \$15

It's hard to know what to call this. Is it a novel? A historical treatise? Mythology? A set of sociological essays? In many ways it's all of these. Greg Stafford has finally put together a masterwork of Glorantha, the world of *RuneQuest*. It's been a long wait, but it was certainly worth it. The first section reminds me strongly of sociological studies from college, packed with references and footnotes, and with a slightly dry and pedantic tone. Later material is more exciting, with fewer inter-

ruptions. The whole book is set as a collection of historical documents, written about the Age of the Hero Wars (when most Gloranthan campaigns are set) from a time hundreds of years later. The main focus is Prince Argrath, unsurprisingly. Many of the great mysteries of "modern" (i.e. Hero Age) Glorantha are explained in surprising ways. However, since the word on the grapevine is that Greg no longer plans for any source about Glorantha to be absolutely objective or reliable, the conclusion reached are not necessarily set in stone. In other words, any document about Glorantha will be written from the perspective of a Gloranthan author or authors, who will certainly express their own biases and misconceptions. A great idea. I suspect that Greg Stafford, like me, has some formal training Sociology or Anthropology. And that seems like a great background for a game designer...right? 8^>}

There is surprisingly little about Arkat. I did look the book over carefully for references to old favorites such as Ruric, but found almost none; the closest thing I could find was a reference to a, um "Zeronian method" (or something like that — the book is not to hand right now). I suspect this to be a reference to Detective Zero, the Lhankor Mhy Sage from Allen LaVergne's highly amusing "The Smell of a Rat" mystery story in the *RuneQuest Companion*. Perhaps I didn't look carefully enough.

That reminds me — I sometimes wonder if characters such as Zero and Ruric were ever actually PCs...

It definitely not a casual read, but it's an exploration of a really different and deep fantasy world on a level that's never been done before. In many ways it reminds me of "The Silmarillion". All in all, an absolute must-have for *RuneQuest* fans. Highly recommended.

River of Cradles, by A Whole Bunch of People (published by Avalon Hill), approximately \$20, 176 pages

An outstanding work, this is a good omen for the future of RQ under Ken Rolston, the new RQ Czar. The first 80 pages are basically a lot of material selected from the old RQ2 supplements Pavis, Big Rubble, and Borderlands, stuff I've been looking for for many years indeed. I do wish, however, that all of the material from the old products had been included; comparing RoC with my Pavis supplement, I can see that much was left out. The material given on the Big Rubble would really require extensive GM development to be useful as a setting. Still, it's nice to get anything at all, and perhaps more will be included in later supplements.

The next 48 pages are a massive interlocked scenario called "Troubled Waters". It is exciting and well written, but rather limited in scope; it's really only good for relatively new characters who are willing to commit to the Zola Fel cult. Such a campaign could well become boring in the hands of a less-than-capable GM after the published material is played out. All in all, I'd have preferred to read the "Giant's Cradle" scenario, which I've heard of but never been able to get. And a scenario or two set in the Rubble would have been good...again, perhaps these will be included in later supplements.

The last 26 pages contain detailed cult writeups of Orlanth, Lhankor Mhy, Daka Fal, Storm Bull, Issaries, Chalana Arroy, and Zola Fel, all long-awaited expansions of RQ3 information which go beyond even the RQ2 material in Cults of Prax. Great stuff, though there seems to be no information at all about Lay Members — it would seem that that status has been removed from RuneQuest.

One thing the book could certainly use is a good Index — unfortunately there's none at all. This seems strange, given the proliferation of automatic indexing programs — Stafford as much as says outright that he used one in King of Sartar. Surely Avalon Hill has the same resources as Chaosium! And considering the volume of material given, an Index would certainly be worth including...

Finally, three maps have been included in the shrink-wrapping. These are high quality, and are actually copies of the maps from the RQ2 sources RoC was taken from.

Overall, this is a great introduction to the area of Pavis and the Dragon Pass area, and indeed a great introduction to Glorantha in general. It fills in many of the holes in the information I have, though I'll still be looking for the RQ2 originals. For those who came to RuneQuest during the Great Draught, this is certainly a must-have — heck, it's a must-have for any RQ player or GM. What can I say? A great job. If it were only *longer*, it would be perfect.

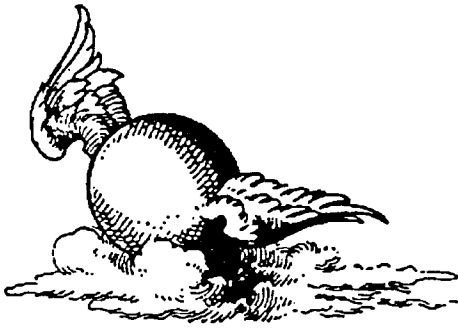
Runic Sorcery

There are quite a few questions and changes being planned for RQ4 Sorcery, I understand. I've included a basic writeup of an alternate Rune-based Sorcery system at the end of this 'zine. For the most part this is an elaboration of some original concepts by Bill Moodey (who has, incidentally, given me permission to do this). It's compatible with any percentile-based system, I believe. If anyone has any comments, I'd be glad to hear them.

NEREYON: A New Voice

Making her debut at the end of this issue is Lois F. (of video fame), with a writeup of some Nereyon events from the perspective of a player. Will she write

more? Who can say? 8^>}



COMMENTS

Swanson: I was so sorry to hear about your problems with those goons! It's people like that that make me doubt the worth of the human species. Maybe we're not so far from the animals after all. Good luck dealing with those punks!

I was also sorry to hear about all the illnesses suffered by you and your family. Mark, tell the truth — did your player choose the “Bad Luck” Disadvantage when he rolled you up? 8^>}

Regarding Education and Experience — need I say it? The Basic Roleplaying approach is the best I've seen. No surprise there!

Blacow: The Hunt seems beset by problems this year! Do try to keep away from doctors, Glenn — many of them aren't trustworthy. 8^>}

Great light bulb joke. And you've inspired me to make up a new one:

Q: How many Immortals does it take to change a light bulb?

A: There can only be One!

Sorry. 8^>}

As a side note, how *do* you judge a

good GM? I've known quite a few terrible GMs who had players clamoring to be in their games, and some great GMs who couldn't get players for love or money. And I don't buy into the argument that the judgement of 'good' or 'bad' is a personal matter; there are some GMs who are out and out bad, and their players were fools to stay with them. Though indeed such judgements must be subjective, it is facile to pretend that there is no ground for a general assessment of a GM's ability.

Butler: Many thanks for the fiction, Bob! How you manage to write it so well and quickly is beyond me. For me, 'zines are easy, and fiction is hard...8^>}

Looks like the story begun in *Dragon Friend* has a while longer to run. Of course, I suppose that as a game it has yet to reach its conclusion — is that right? Have you and Glenn worked out any eventual end?

Re the IFGS defection: where personal faithfulness is involved I have little tolerance. And it's not the defection *per se* that bothers me; there's much more to it than that. But we'll let it lie. Hey, you know I'm a seething mass of rage...8^>}

Dunham: I love *Pendragon Pass!* More, please. And am I correct in supposing that you've had far more personal experience with Glorantha than I?

I'd be interested in hearing your opinions of RQ4. I've made quite a few comments about it to the authors, but have no idea what others think of all this. Perhaps a good way to handle playtest comments would be to have all comments relayed back out to all playtesters via the Net...with an option for private non-relay, of course.

As I recall, there is some provision in *The Primal Order* for cultural influence.

A God of War can start a war. But there wasn't much material devoted to cultures for Gods to rule. Perhaps that will be left for a later supplement (The Cultural Order, perhaps)?

Now that River of Cradles has come out, I've had a chance to see what Chaosium's Newtling info is like — and I'm embarrassed to say that it's quite similar to the stuff I made up, with the single exception of the principle of *selection* as the Newtling racial ethos. I did have more elaborate concepts in mind, but it'll be a while before I can get them together. There are so many other projects to work on!

Oh, did you get the point of the picture of the knight kicking the dragon? If not, take a look at the last line of the original Dragon Friend. 8^>}

Erlandsen: It's a little strange to write to you know that I know what you and Dana Derryberry look like! 8^>} I hope you two didn't have too bad a time here in Boston. If/when you come back, we've got to get you over to Newbury Street. And to the Compleat Strategist. And Excalibur Hobbies. And — jeez. You haven't really been to Boston at all! 8^>}

Re games as novels — I suspect that many popular fantasy novels had their genesis as RPG campaigns. Stephen Brust's excellent *Vlad Taltos* books being a fine example.

I'd vote to call it LARP (rhymes with 'harp'). It just makes more sense. After all, just what is distinctive about Live roleplaying? Does that mean that traditional RPGs are dead? Live-action seems more logical.

But there is a nomenclature problem here. What *should* we call traditional, table-top roleplaying games to differentiate them from live roleplaying games, or computer-moderated RPGs? TT-TRPG just won't make it! I'll have to give that one some thought...

Jeez, Dana. I didn't realize that you were doing a 'zine for Pallas' Podium as well! How on earth do you manage the time?

Jorenby: Hail, noble Madisonian! 8^>}

The academic community is thinking and writing about Cyberpunk? Jeez. It really must be dead (CPunk that is, not the academic community). Just out of curiosity, has the academic community taken any notice of roleplaying

games? I just had a lunatic vision flash across my brain — something to do with professors assigning TWH for class reading. Weird! 8^>}

Your writeup of Dream Park:TRPG makes it sound quite interesting. Maybe I'll give it a try. You are aware that there's a real Dream Park Corporation, and that it's planning on building Dream Park someday, aren't you?

As I understand it, one of the first campaigns you ran was a Chivalry & Sorcery game. Yet I haven't heard of your running a fantasy campaign since. Did you give up on them?

Phillies: When you say you average 2,500 words per week, is that before or after editing? Just what is your approach, anyway? How often do you edit, and how many incarnations does your text



go through?

Great **Pickering**, as usual. Please keep it up, George, and whatever you do don't get yourself killed under a bus or something! We'd never forgive you if we couldn't read the end of **Pickering**...8^>}

Re your comment to me about **Rack & Rune #11**: You "forgot the last one"? Just what does that mean? "Moderately interesting"? "Readable"? I'm afraid all this flattery has bowled me over!

Ricker: I've been meaning to ask (or did I already?): Where do you get your Net access? I have friends who desperately need it, but they can't afford to go the commercial route (though recently the local mega-BBS **Channel 1** reduced their rates for a Net address to \$25 for three months).

Re IFGS insurance: Jeez! I had no idea it was that complicated! One of these days I really must get into law school, if only to enable myself to feed greedily at the deep pockets of the world. 8^>}

Ah. If **First Comics** "flourished", how come they went out of business?

Collier: Fine cover, Collie! But I must confess that I didn't get the "detail humor" of the bridle. Wait a second — I was looking at the stirrup strap. Now I get it! Very amusing! Say, wouldn't 8^>} be a fine detail for some future cover? 8^>}

The **Team From Hell** was hysterical. Maybe you should make it into a video! 8^>}

Re **Sam & Max** — I've heard that Steve Purcell, the author of **S&M**, will be putting out a regular comic which will include a **Sam & Max** segment in every issue — and that there's a lot of **Sam & Max** merchandise coming out, too. My local comic shops haven't heard anything about this. Have you?

NEXTISH

It's 3 AM. How can you ask me questions like that?

—>Pete

Colophon

Rack & Rune #13: Adventures of a Glass Eye was generated in ASCII form using good old dependable PC-Write 2.5. It was formatted for desk top publication by not-so-dependable Publish-It 2.0. It includes lots of clip art, blah blah blah. Listen, do yourself a favor—Pulphouse Publishing has just published five volumes of really funny short science fiction stories by Robert Sheckly. They probably won't be around for long. They'll be hard to find, but if you're reading this you obviously haven't got anything better to do... 8^>}



A Rack & Rune Supplement

RUNIC SORCERY FOR RUNEQUEST

Runic Sorcery is a science of magic, using purely human skills and abilities. It is based on evoking Elements and manipulating them to the Sorcerer's will via knowledge of the corresponding Runes. These Runes correspond with, but are not necessarily identical to the true Runes of Glorantha.

Sorcerers may create magic in either of two different ways. They may use their knowledge of the Runes to create off-the-cuff castings, also known as Runic 'sentences'. These offer incredible flexibility within those Runes the Sorcerer knows.

Additionally, a Sorcerer may formalize a Rune sentence as a spell. Such a spell lacks the flexibility of a casting, but is quicker to cast and easier to master. Spells may be created by the sorcerer or learned directly from another sorcerer or book.

All Sorcery is based upon a sorcerer's knowledge of the Runes. Each Rune is learned as an individual skill; these are usually Hard skills, though some are Very Hard. Knowledge of a specific Rune can be acquired as any other skill: through training, or research. All Rune skills are at (00) base percentage, with

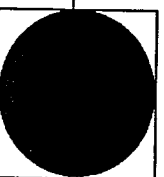
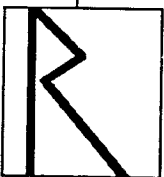
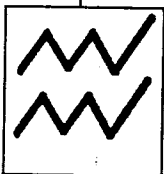
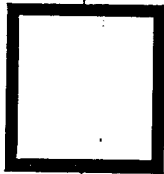
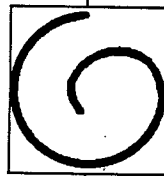
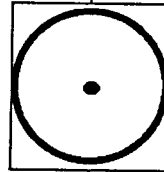
the exception of the Self Rune, which starts at (Age in years x 5%), and can be trained as a Very Hard skill.

There are six different kinds of Runes: Elements, Shapes, Forms, Names, Conditions, and Powers.

ELEMENTS

Element Runes are used to summon elements to be modified by other Runes. The commonly recognized physical Elements are Earth, Air, Fire, Water, Light, and Darkness. Of these, Fire, and Light are clearly related. All of these are Hard skills. There is also one non-physical Element: Magic. This is raw magical energy, used in spells and Castings which do not incorporate a mundane element. The Magic Rune is Very Hard to learn, since it cannot normally be seen, smelled, touched, or otherwise experienced.

The Element Runes may be used to create an amount of the raw element (actually the elements are believed to be summoned, but this is a fine point). Each magic point expended creates one cubic meter of an insubstantial element, or one kilogram of a solid one. If the element is already present, twice as much of the material



may be controlled per magic point. The maximum number of magic points which may be used to create or control an element is the Rune skill divided by ten.

Damage, etc. as in Form/Set and Animate. (?)



Greater amounts of material may be created/controlled by incorporating the Rune in question more than once. However, the magic point cost per point is increased by one for each re-use of the Rune. For example, with a skill of 50% in the Fire Rune 5 Intensities of Fire may be summoned, with a damage potential of 5D3. This would cost 5 magic points, before costs for Shape, Movement, and any other modifications. If the Fire Rune was used twice, however, up to 10 intensities of Fire could be created. Each of the first 5 points would cost one magic point each; each point from 6 to 10 would cost 2 magic points apiece. Therefore, eight Intensities of Fire would cost a Sorcerer with a Fire Rune skill of 50% 11 magic points to summon: five times one (5) plus three times two (6). The same Intensity of Fire would cost a Sorcerer with a Fire Rune skill of 80% merely 8 magic points to summon ($8 \times 1 = 8$), and would cost a Sorcerer with a Fire Rune skill of 10% 36 magic points! ($1 + 2 +$

$3 + 4 + 5 + 6 + 7 + 8$) Obviously the chance of success in the last case would be virtually nil.

If the Fire Rune were incorporated three times, the first five points would cost one MP apiece, the second five points would cost two MP apiece, and the third five points would cost three MP apiece. A maximum strength triple-Fire summoning with a skill of 50% would therefore cost 30 MP before any additional modifications.

Different Elements have different effects. Armor subtracts from all attacks using the physical Elements; since such Elements still have a physical manifestation, however, they still do half damage even if the caster fails to overcome the target. The Magic Element ignores armor, but has no effect upon the target if resisted.

Fire is the most destructive Element. Each Intensity of Fire causes 1D3 damage to a target. This damage is absorbed by armor. Fire, however, causes no extra damage for a Special result.

Earth (or Stone) causes 1D2 damage per Intensity. Unlike Fire, Earth can Impale on a Special result — or Crush, depending on its shape.

Water causes 1 point of damage per Intensity. It is also more likely to knock down a target. When striking an object, each point of Water counts double for Knockdown purposes. Water Slashes on a Special success.

Air, Light, and Darkness each cause

1 point of damage per 2 points of Intensity. They have no additional effect on a Special success. They may have special effects on some creatures, however. Light, for example, may blind a target, and in addition would do extra damage to Shades. It would also be especially demoralizing to Darkness-dwelling creatures such as Trolls.

Magic causes 1 point of damage per Intensity. It has no additional effect for a Special success.

SHAPES

Shapes are perhaps self-explanatory: they represent geometrical ideals, and are commonly used to shape elements. There are, therefore, as many possible Shape Runes as there are shapes. However, some are more common than others. The simplest Shapes are Bolts, Balls, and Walls. Bolts are usually used to fire an Element toward a target, intersecting a single hit location. This is an Easy skill. Balls are used to shape an Element into a large sphere, possibly encompassing a large area indeed. The Ball Rune skill is a skill of Medium difficulty, as are the Rod and Spike Shapes. Walls are, again, self-evident; the complexity of the Wall Shape makes it a Hard skill to learn. Cones, solid Cubes, and solid Cylinders are also Hard. Hollow Spheres, Cylinders, Cubes, and other hollow forms are Very Hard, as are some irregular and multi-sided Shapes. More complex shapes can be created by combining less complex Shapes.

If no shape is used in a Spell, the

element summoned has no cohesion once the active portion of the spell is finished, and will behave normally. Water flung at a target will simply fall to the ground, doing little if any damage. Fire will disperse, unless there is fuel to sustain it. Light and Dark will be absorbed by the ambient environment, etc. The exception to this is magic, which if directed towards a living target will conform to the target's shape — unless the target has successfully resisted the Spell.

FORMS

The Forms are as those listed in the RQ2 book, with the addition of a generic Target Rune. They are generally used to target magic. The various Forms are Hard skills, with the exception of the Sorcerer's own Rune(s), which are Easy. The basic Target Rune (Very Hard) simply allows the Casting to reach a specific point in coherent form. The caster must roll separately against his Target Rune skill. If species-appropriate Runes are used instead (Man for men and women, Dark and Man for Trolls, Plant and Man for Elves, etc.) then the Casting will automatically strike the intended target.

NAMES

Names are actually refinements of Form Runes; they are the true name of a specific creature. They can be learned only with the greatest difficulty, if at all — long and intimate association with the creature in question would be necessary. A spell or Casting created with the true Name of the Target cannot

