

time ago but resumed for my European tour. I know that some authors have given up gaming, claiming that it consumes creative energies that would otherwise be put into writing. I'm not sure I believe that they're right, but it is a thought-provoking idea.

NET CHANGES

My old peter.maranci@channell.com address is now one with the snows of yesteryear. My rune@trystro.uucp and trystro!rune@think.com addresses (which are really different forms of the same address) are still valid, but have been superseded by rune@trystero.com . Please note that the new address is spelled trystEro, not trystro.

My pete@slough.mit.edu address is the only one I have with full Net access, rather than just email and news; it's also by far the fastest and most reliable for sending and receiving mail. However, the mail reader at Slough is less than convenient to use.

I'll probably have a new account in a couple of months, perhaps sooner. It'll be another mail-and-newsgroup account, and I'm not sure what the mail and newsreading programs will be like. I'm not positive, but my address there will probably be something like rune@ace.COM . My Trystero and Slough accounts will not be affected by this.

RANDOM RUNEQUEST

The RuneQuest Renaissance continues to progress rapidly, at least on the InterNet. Huge quantities of RQ discussion go on daily through automated mail lists. Much of the discussion seems to be about rules, however. It's looking more and more likely that RQIV will be a huge, ungovernable mass of rules, exacerbating RuneQuest's already bad reputation as a hypercomplex and unworkable system. Not that I agree with that judgement, but it does seem to be a common impression among those who have played RQ once or twice and given it

up.

Of course I'm not *too* concerned about the eventual state of the new rules; I've always changed them to suit my needs anyway, like any other experienced gamer. And in any case, Nereyon has been both sheetless and systemless for years. Purely intuitive gaming has been occupying more and more of my limited interest. Still, I am concerned about the eventual outcome of the RQIV rules for one reason: if I do write up scenarios to submit for publication (an idea which still has some interest for me), I'll obviously need to know the new rules thoroughly.



THE GREY COMPANY?

I've been pondering a problem question for a while now, and only recently did it occur to me that the Hunt is the best place to ask for advice. As some may remember, I have a scenario in mind that I think is really quite good. I'd like to write it up, and submit it for publication (preferably to Avalon Hill for RuneQuest). The question is, how should I write it up? Please don't say "Just do it" — it's not that simple. This isn't a typical scenario, and I don't want to put in weeks or months of work and find I've been wasting my time (as was apparently the case with my Runic Sorcery system). Another point: it's pretty huge. Depending on the amount of detail given, it could easily fill a large book.

I call the scenario "The Grey Com-

pany". It's designed to start a campaign and weld a disparate group of characters into a working party, while inspiring numerous and continuing plot threads for the duration of the campaign. Given the pivotal nature of the scenario, I'm reluctant to write it up in a rigid fashion — obviously each GM would need to customize it to suit his or her own vision. Also, I set it in the RuneQuest Pavis/Big Rubble region, at a time when I had access to neither supplement; I had to make up the details of the area out of whole cloth. I've obtained the two RQII supplements since, and there are no compatibility problems that I've noticed. But I still have to wonder if it's likely that a work set in the heart of documented Glorantha would be likely to be accepted for publication.

Of course, the scenario could be moved to another Gloranthan city or region, or to some other world or system.

Here are the basics of the scenario. Please note that this is a bare-bones description, omitting many details and any attempt at decent organization or writing!

The PCs may come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures, including those fairly far from Pavis. They may come from any compatible non-chaotic races. They must be fairly young and inexperienced — definitely not anything above a new Initiate at most.

It begins separately for each PC. Ideally, the GM would meet privately with each player to work out the specific details. Each PC gets in trouble in their home area, and must leave for at least a while. This sort of thing is easy for the GM to arrange, of course; a family feud, a famine, a false (?) accusation of crime, disease, bad spirits, whatever. A trusted elder decides to help the youngster in his travels. In addition to

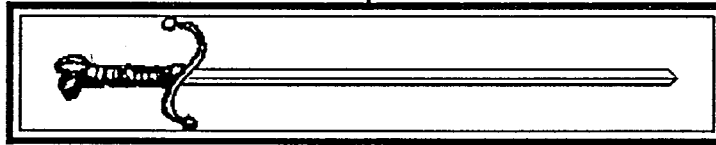
a little money or equipment (whatever the GM feels like handing out), each PC receives from their elder a small bronze medallion. This medallion (the PC is told) is a token which will entitle them to some help from a member of the ancient and prestigious Grey Company of Pavis, a small group of skilled bodyguard/mercenary/salvors who live in that far-off town. If they are fortunate, they may even be considered for apprenticeship to the Company. Needless to say, the elder once worked with some members of the Grey Co. long ago, and earned their gratitude.

Off go the PCs, each on their merry way, to far-off Pavis to seek their fortune. When they arrive in Pavis, they will find upon inquiry that the members of the Grey Co. are out of town, working. I stretch coinci-

dence when I run the Grey Co. (once in a game is okay, I think), and have all the PCs arrive at roughly the same time at a local tavern which they've heard the Grey Co. often frequents. It's a bit trite, I know, but I like to see how they interact in that situation. A minor challenge or two, a bar fight or pickpocketing perhaps, and eventually a member of the Company arrives.

I have the personalities of the Grey Co. members worked out in some detail, but in the interests of brevity I'll omit them. In any case, the GM might well want to alter them a bit to suit the PCs. They should be characters that the PCs will tend to respect and obey.

The PCs are brought to the Grey House on Gobalt Street. There they are cordially greeted (assuming that they've shown their tokens), given dinner and put up for the night. In the morning, the members of the Company ask them many questions, and eventually offer them the opportunity to apprentice. Oddly, there are



no apprentices at present (but no member will mention this, and they are reluctant to talk about it). It should be emphasized that the Company is an ancient and honorable group, with proud traditions and great loyalty to each other and their history. Of course it is recognized that cult duties come first.

If the GM wishes, a few tests may be required of the PCs. This could be a test of combat, or skill; an interesting test I've used is to ask the PCs to each come up with their own test, their own performance. The choices they make can be quite informative. In any case, they are accepted (unless they are dead set against it) and sworn in. The oath includes a promise to aid and protect their fellow Company members, including the other PCs. It does not bind them to active service for life, however — obviously the GM must modify the oath to avoid having PCs refuse to take it.

Their duties will be light. There is a paid servant who takes care of some of the most menial chores around the house. He is a bit contemptuous of the PCs, a trifle disdainful.

The Grey House is large and very well-appointed, with a courtyard large enough to practice combat and acrobatics, enough rooms to house all the PCs, a locked Armory, and a locked and spirit-guarded Treasury. If asked, the members explain that the Company is very old indeed, and has amassed much wealth and knowledge over the years.

While running an ordinary errand in the next few days, one or more of the PCs might notice that they and the house are being watched by a shadowy figure or two.

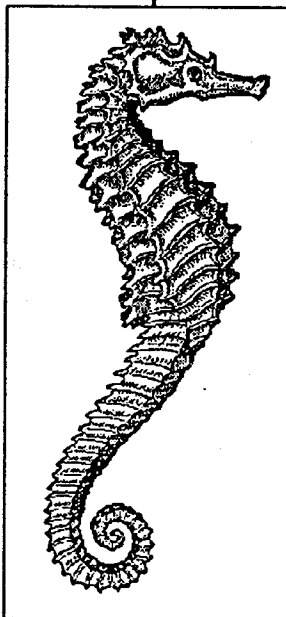
A couple of weeks later there is some-

thing of a disturbance in the night. A strange visitor in a black cloak comes and speaks urgently to the head of the Company. The next morning, the PCs are called together and informed that a small emergency has come up, and that all the members of the Grey Company will have to be away on business for a few days — not more than three, at the outside. If questioned, they are going to the Big Rubble. The apprentices will have to stay and watch the house.

Three days pass, however, with no sign of them. Four, five, six days pass — a week. Nothing. They don't seem to be coming back. Eventually, problems begin to develop. Merchants want their bills paid. Tax time is coming, and the PCs can't get into the Treasury. It turns out that the Company has certain regular contracts that must be fulfilled (a caravan-guarding job makes a fine first adventure for the group). And there definitely is someone watching the House.

The real situation is as follows. The house is being watched by the former apprentices of the Company. They are fairly powerful in their own right, and had been pushing for full membership for years before their expulsion. A year ago, the unofficial leader of the old apprentices finally led them in an attempt to eliminate some or all of the old members (the leader has ties to the Black Fang Brotherhood), and when this plot was discovered and foiled the old apprentices were thrown out of the Company. They've been keeping an eye on the Company, and are aware of the disappearance of the elder members.

As it happens, the elders are still in the Big Rubble. Far underground, they are engaged in an unplanned HeroQuest that may take them years to finish. If the PCs



track them down (a considerable adventure in itself which I'll omit for now), they will find them seemingly trapped in crystal. They cannot leave until the Quest is finished. They can communicate briefly with the PCs however, and will wish the PCs well and give them the passwords to allow them access to the Treasury and the location of the key to the Armory.

(If HeroQuesting NPCs are not to the GM's taste, the members could be dead, instead. Which would lead to a whole new set of complications for the PCs...)

If the PCs have chosen to follow the elder members into the Rubble, they have now managed to solve the problem of taxes. There are, however, other problems. The Grey Company has made many commitments, which may lead into whatever adventures the GM desires. Given that the apprentices are far less experienced than the elder members, they will often find themselves seriously overmatched. Some of the magic items stored in the Treasury will be of help to them, but quite a few will be incomprehensible to them, and useless.

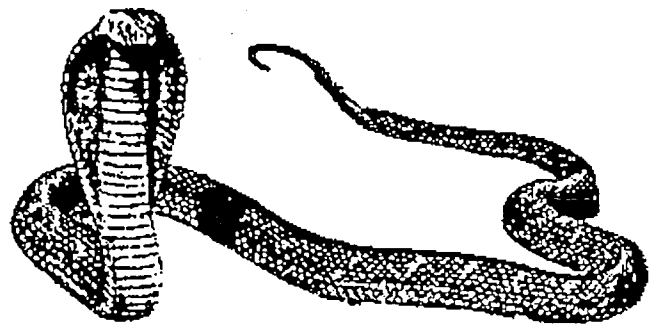
In addition, the old apprentices will not stay idle. At first, they may simply deliver a few sinister messages, warning the PCs to leave the House. A midnight attack is carried out, with a small fire set on the opposite side of the house as a distraction.

Eventually the apprentices decide to play hardball. They tip off Lunar authorities anonymously that the new apprentices are a secret Orlanthi cell of assassins who have displaced the Grey Company in order to make an attempt on Sor-eel's life. The disfigured body of a nameless stranger, found not too far from the Grey House, is obviously a victim of secret Orlanthi tortures — a loser in some internecine struggle, perhaps.

The Lunars are understandably concerned about such reports, and while they may not give them absolute credence they're not likely to ignore them utterly. At the least,

the Grey House will be watched. In one running of the game, a player chose this time to track down and attempt to kill one of the "spies" that was so suspiciously watching the front door! Paranoia becomes rampant as almost any action the PCs take can seem very suspicious indeed...

One amusing adventure I used at this point was to have a messenger bring a summoning from a Pavis noble. When the PCs arrive at the noble's manor, however, they discover not the noble, but his twelve year old son. The son makes use of the Glamour spell to appear more effective, but the PCs may become suspicious when he has to leave the room every ten minutes to renew the spell. His father is out of town on business, and his appointed guardian has unexpectedly died of natural causes. The household servants are powerless to stop him. This is, in other words, his big chance.



The youngster plans to enter the Big Rubble with several of his friends (who are also noble children). He wishes to hire the Grey Company to act as bodyguards on his adventure. He clearly has no understanding of what real adventure and danger are like, and is extremely set on travelling into the Rubble. He's a likeable young fellow, and any decent PC would want to keep him from getting eaten by Trolls. Not to mention the possible reaction of the Lunars to suspected Orlanthi terrorists being linked to one noble death, and risking the lives of

several other young nobles...

There are, of course, a number of courses that the PCs might take. They might refuse the youngster's offer, but if they are decent and kind-hearted folk this is unlikely. In one running, the PCs decided to do a "practice run" with the young nobles, taking them out into Prax for a few days. Several of them went ahead, made themselves up to look like bandits, and "attacked" in the middle of the night. The children defended themselves fiercely, and inflicted unexpected injuries on the "bandits" — still, when all was said and done some blood had been shed (carefully) on both sides, and the shaken and surprised children decided to wait and grow a little before embarking on another adventure.

The overall scenario of the Grey Company goes on, of course. But the main thrust of the campaigns usually began to include other plot threads more personal to the individual characters at this point. The set-up encourages them to stay together as a group, and provides the GM with a constant source of activity to fill in quiet spots — what I generally did was create the old apprentices in my mind, and take what seemed to me to be the best course of action from their point of view. As time passed, the PCs became more and more able to fill the shoes of the vanished members, and despite a few disastrous scenes with Lunar officials they managed to avoid complete disaster — though it could have gone the other way, of course. There are so many possible plot threads...

- The old apprentices set themselves up as the "Grey Company", and put out the word on the streets that they are at a new address with lower prices; the sudden drop-off in clients should disturb the PCs considerably.

- It turns out that the spirit that guarded the Treasury is something more than it appears — some sort of ancestor worship was a part of the Company's heritage. After long neglect, the spirits must

be placated...

- Some of the items mysterious items in the Treasury turn out to have unusual qualities. Some are being sought for...others have peculiar properties that manifest under the right circumstances.

- There are some folk who have done odd jobs for the Grey Company in the past. It's not impossible that a stranger might turn up at the door at any time, with any sort of strange information — but are they who they claim?

And so forth. You get the idea. It really is a huge campaign premise, one which I've found to be enormously successful. I realize that I've presented it *very* poorly, but my primary concern right now is to simply get as much of it on the page as possible, to give everyone some idea of what it's all about. If I can work up the right approach, there'll be time to organize and pretty it up later. Also, I do realize that it may potentially be more powerful or magical than a GM might like — in such cases, it's simple to eliminate much of the excess magic. But there are so many options! I have to wonder if it's possible or even desirable to put it all together as some sort of supplement — would people buy it? I don't know. What do you think?

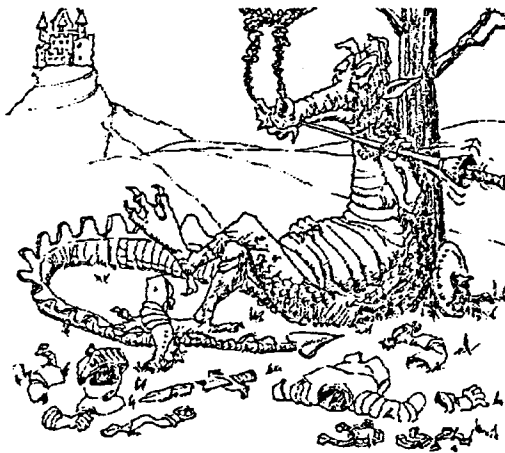


FROM THE CLOSED SHELVES

It may be a coincidence, but I've been reading little in the science fiction/fantasy genre lately. What's really captured my

interest, oddly enough, is old detective fiction. I've been delighted to discover that some of my favorite old science fiction authors, some long since dead, have written quite a few hard-boiled detective stories! And their mysteries are often as enjoyable as their more speculative works. Many of these great old books are out of print — it seems that small presses often come out with limited editions of an author's works, and go out of business rather quickly. It's fortunate that the Boston area boasts so many fine used bookstores and specialty mystery stores. Still, large and well-stocked chains do sometimes turn out to have an odd old mystery or two on their shelves.

Rather than list individual works, I'll simply give a short description of a few of my favorite mystery writers.



Fredric Brown

Fredric Brown was in many ways one of the most truly unique science fiction writers of the 1940's and 50's. He was notable for his use of humor in an age when such was rare indeed. Though he tended to do his best work in the short-story format, his novels What Mad Universe, Rogue In Space, and Martians Go Home are classics of the field, and are still in print today. The same can't be said for most of his outstanding detective stories, unfortunately. His first mystery novel in hardcover, The Fabulous Clipjoint,

introduced the continuing characters of Ed and Am Hunter, the latter an ex-circus barker who solves crimes with the help of his nephew. Brown's real-life experiences with a circus show clearly in the gritty realism of his work — I was surprised to see that the sordid side of American life was depicted so nakedly as long ago as 1947. Yet there is a core of humor and optimism that makes the Hunter series a truly enjoyable experience — making it all the more regrettable that they are so hard to find.

Other Brown mysteries delve more deeply into the darker sides of human nature, without ever descending completely into the despair that some of his non-sf-writing colleagues became known for. Among his non-Hunter works are The Screaming Mimi, Before She Kills, The Lenient Beast, and many others — Brown wrote a total of twenty-three mystery novels, far outnumbering his science fiction output.

There is also an outstanding collection of short mystery stories, which were released in a series of volumes by a publisher who soon after (surprise!) went out of business. These are all large paperback volumes; Pardon My Ghoulish Laughter, Thirty Corpses Every Thursday, Homicide Sanitarium, and several others.

I can't recommend Brown highly enough. Anything with his name on it is sure to be well worth picking up, and very hard to put down.

Anthony Boucher

In some ways Anthony Boucher is not unlike Fredric Brown. Humor and a certain sort of fundamental good-naturedness are integral to his work; his writings, however, were gentler than Brown's, much less hard-edged. Like Brown, he did some fine work in science fiction — unfortunately, much of his work was done as an editor, both of *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction* and of detective books (it's worth

mentioning that tone of the first mystery conventions named after him — Bouchercons). His writings are rare indeed, and there are far too few of them.

One of the nice things about Boucher is that he tended to mix up the two fields a bit. Fergus O'Brien, a red-haired Irish detective, appeared in several mystery novels *and* in at least one story about a professor who turned into a wolf (this last collected in the outstanding F/SF collection The Compleat Werewolf). One of his mystery novels, Rocket to the Morgue, is set in the early science-fiction community of California — the identities of several of the characters can be discerned despite altered names. The book is an exciting and well-worked-out mystery as well, and interestingly features a nun as a detective.

It's a little unclear as to whether he wrote seven or nine mystery novels. He seems to have written a number of short detective stories, but no collection of his work in that field has been published, to my knowledge. Only two collections of his science fiction stories have been published, and they may well be all that he ever wrote. A collection of four of his novels was published in England a few years ago, but once again the publisher seems to have gone out of business.

There's something about Boucher's writing that's very likeable. It's a pleasure to reread even his mysteries, just to get acquainted with the characters once again.

Ron Goulart

Unlike the two authors listed above, Ron Goulart isn't dead. In fact, he's quite prolific — not only has he written a huge number of science fiction novels and short stories in his trademarked wacky style, but he's also written comic books, mystery novels, and even a history of the detective fiction pulp magazines. I should admit that I'm a bit prejudiced in his case; he comes from my home town, and I saw him lecture about science fiction at my local library

when I was about fourteen years old. Truthfully, I don't enjoy his works quite as much as those of Brown or Boucher — but there are far more of them, and they are fun to read. They're also mostly out of print.

Goulart's science fiction is, well, wacky, though I hate that word. It has a bit of that "hero going insane on an alien planet — what is real? What is Reality?" quality that I find extremely annoying, yet unlike such works (which I consider to be the products of failed imagination) Goulart's novels maintain plot and an essential coherence — things are weird and quirky, but never go seriously illogical. Needless to say, humor is a very large part of Goulart's approach to both science fiction and (to a lesser degree) mystery.

As an additional warning, in the case of Goulart's mysteries I'm even more biased. Many of them are actually set in my old hometown. It really adds a layer of meaning to a work when you actually know the setting! Angelenos may have Raymond Chandler and countless other Southern Californian practitioners of the *noir* school of detective fiction, but Westport, Connecticut has Ron Goulart. 8^>}



Nuts by Gahan Wilson

This last is not a mystery at all, and really doesn't belong with the other authors listed — I'm including it only because finally, after years of search, I now own it. Nuts is a collection of a comic strip called (surprisingly enough) Nuts which appeared for a while many years ago in the old, good National Lampoon. It chronicles the adventures of The Kid, a hapless child protagonist not *quite* as fortunate as Charlie Brown...

Gahan Wilson's macabre cartoons have appeared in numerous collections of his works, as well as in the New Yorker. In The Kid, however, he created an especially penetrating and funny look at what childhood is really like. I think he put it best in the introduction to his first strip: "Those of you who remember how great it was to be a little kid, gang, don't remember how it was to be a little kid..."

The Kid's adventures are filled with the cool, gruesome stuff that your parents never wanted you to do — 3D horror movies, playing at that dangerous old pier, imagining what your decomposing body would look like, building a Torture Victim plastic model, and all sorts of other stuff. His ordeals at Camp Tall Lone Tree alone are a hysterical odyssey, and the titles and occasional glimpsed pages of the comic books he reads ("The Horrible Head!") are well worth a little squinting.

Unfortunately, I doubt very much that anyone out there will be likely to find a copy of Nuts. It took me about fifteen years, and I ended up paying quite a high price for an old and somewhat worn copy (which I immediately proceeded to photocopy — I'll read the copies, and avoid wearing out the original). Even libraries are unlikely to carry a book as quirky and marginal as this one. Which is a real pity, because it's some of the finest comic cartooning about childhood ever done.

You know, I can't help but think that

an RPG about childhood could be really a fascinating experience. Actually, that might just be the wedge needed to bring roleplaying into the mainstream! Many adults seem to have a deep-rooted desire to re-experience childhood (God only knows why), and if it were presented just right, a roleplaying game could be the perfect excuse for them to really let go and do it.



NOTES FROM NEREYON

For those who did not read the previous write-ups of Nereyon (the last being in R&R #11), it is the regular Sunday night game that I GM. It is sheetless and effectively has no mechanics.

Nereyon is an ancient world, which was overrun by a mysterious non-human race called the NeMarren, who serve the unknown and terrifying Dark Lords. At times Chaos bursts into Nereyon, causing untold havoc — only those rare humans known as Watchers may sense or resist Chaos. Such Watchers often develop powers unique to their personalities. It is illegal to be a free and unprocessed Watcher in modern Nereyon. All the PCs are unregistered Watchers, who were gathered together by a pair of kindly old men. In the last write-up, the PCs had been discovered by a NeMarren Lord — who wished to hire them, rather than giving them up to the Dark Ones.

The young Watchers were soon well set up in the city of Torrington. As may be remembered from Rack & Rune #11, they had accepted an offer of employment by a NeMarren noble — though they were reluctant to cooperate with one of the hated oppressors, they also realized that there would soon be little choice, and that the Lord Luagor was as tolerant a NeMarren as they were likely to find (in truth, most NeMarren would probably simply report their existence to the Black Lords). The terms of employment were relatively easy ones: the Watchers would be asked to perform a number of assignments, which would allow them to practice and improve their abilities. They would be able to refuse a reasonable number of these assignments on moral grounds, but if these refusals came too often or too unreasonably, they would be discharged without prejudice. In return, the Watchers would be supplied with whatever they required in the way of money and materials. Among the first things supplied were two residences: a

small but private set of rooms in the City proper, and a hideaway in the woods near Torrington called Forest Haven. It was at Forest Haven that the ailing Coridan was ensconced, with his old friend Bear to help care for him. Forest Haven was a most pleasant place, which had clearly been formed by an ancient and now-lost form of magic to be an ideal home. Their fears of the Lord at least partially assuaged, the young Watchers settled in to their new surroundings. It was about at this time that Sam, the NPC Watcher-Sealer, discovered that his ability to drive Chaos out of the world and seal the remaining holes in the fabric of reality had additional ramifications. He somehow made contact with what seemed to be a nearby Plane of Elemental Water. Using his ability, he was able to open and close holes to that realm, obtaining alchemically pure water at will.



The first assignment came fairly soon. A great music contest was to be held in Torrington, and the two greatest students of the Master Bard Oliver were to compete. The winner would be recognized as his heir. The Lord Luagor preferred that the woman Ariel win the contest; this would somehow gain him an advantage in the vast and mysterious game of power played among the NeMarren nobility. Fortunately,

she was given the edge by the local bookmakers. Jeremy, her fellow student, was considered to be definitely the less talented musician. He and his followers, however, were reputed to be less than strictly ethical and so the Lord Luagor asked that the Watcher PCs keep a discrete watch over Ariel. The Watchers were willing, and accepted the assignment.

Unfortunately Vlad, the Watcher Healer who had already given hints of his instability by showing an unnatural (for a Healer) bloodlust, soon decided that it was necessary to kidnap or kill Jeremy. This was madness, of course. It would require obvious and direct action, exposing the Watchers to the possibility of discovery and a fate worse than death. It was also unnecessary, since simply protecting Ariel would in all likelihood be more than sufficient to ensure her victory. In addition, the Lord Luagor had made it clear that direct action against Jeremy or his followers might well attract considerable attention to all in the area. The other Watchers begged Vlad to let well enough alone, but he would not be dissuaded.

He planned to use his Watcher abilities to alter his form to that of a beautiful woman — he had been assiduously practicing the arts of self change. Once completely feminized, he would go to the inn where Jeremy was known to stay, seduce him, get him into his bedroom, perform the “act”, and then render him senseless or dead as he lay basking in the afterglow.

As GM, I was dubious that such a major body alteration would be practical, desirable, or even sane. But Vlad’s player

insisted.

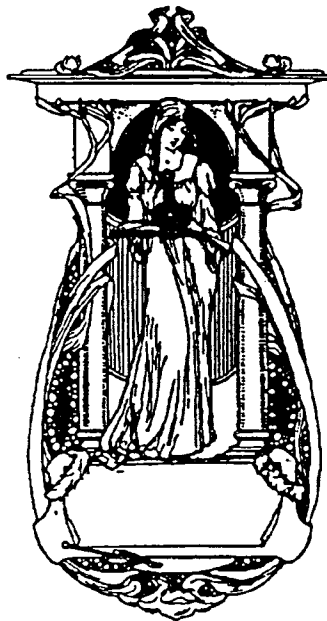
All that was needed to complete Vlad’s plan was a fine set of women’s clothing for him to wear while in his beauteous strumpet form. Dara’s clothes simply would not fit, and were not good enough for his purpose, anyway. Therefore, while practicing shapeshifting determinedly at Forest Hill, he asked Robert to go to Torrington and purchase a fine set of seductive woman’s clothing. “Sure,” said Robert, who had been desperately trying to dissuade Vlad from this plan without effect, “I’ll be glad to. But you’ve got to promise to do me a favor in return.” Vlad promised eagerly. “Fine,” said Robert, “here’s my favor: don’t do this. Don’t attack Jeremy.”

Vlad immediately seized the nearby spell staff and discharged a deadly Venom spell at the exceedingly surprised Robert, who nevertheless bolted like a rabbit out of hell to safety. Strangely,

Vlad felt bound by his promise; however, his sense of honor did not preclude an attempt to murder the childhood companion who had tricked him.

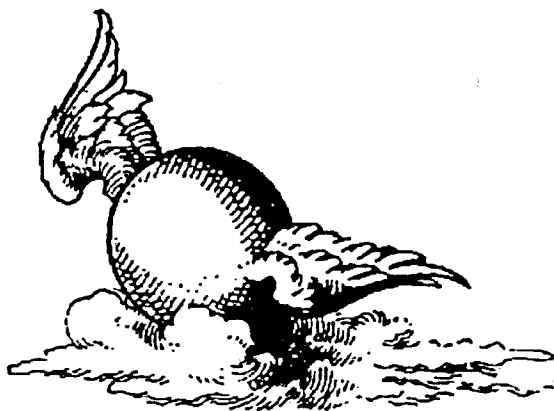
This became a major crisis for the PCs. Vlad would not be stopped from trying to kill Robert the moment he saw him. Robert, using his powers of unnoticability, made sure to avoid the murderous Vlad. This developed into a stalemate, during which Vlad worked assiduously to develop a life-sensing ability that would enable him to find and slaughter Robert no matter how well he hid.

As GM, I felt that this was an unhealthy situation. But it was clearly not going to be an easy one to resolve.



MY MISTAKE PART XXIXIV

While leafing through my copy of *Stormbringer* I just realized that some of the elemental art looked familiar. I checked my catalog of art, and sure enough! Several of my cooler images are flat-out scans of *Stormbringer* art. I'd like to apologize to Chaosium and the artist for my honest mistake. I downloaded that art from the Channell mega-BBS, and just assumed it was legal...sorry!

COMMENTS:**Swanson:**

Overwork seems to be the theme of your *life*, Mark! Do try to slow down a bit if you can — this sort of pace isn't good for your health, I'm sure. Wouldn't it be embarrassing to be the first American victim of the Japanese "exploding heart" syndrome? 8^>}

• Re LRP, well, I think I've made my position pretty clear in the last few issues. To recap, I'd say that the SIL/ILF style of gaming is the closest I know of to tabletop gaming, and that full-combat gaming seems more like a combination of Boy Scout camping, Capture the Flag, boffer

combat, and either old-fashioned D&D-style gaming (in the case of the IFGS) or Nazi death camps (in the case of — you guessed it — NERO). 8^>}

Neither style will be the future of live gaming, I think — and I should note that I don't think that either of these forms will replace traditional gaming. However, from what I'm hearing corporations like the Dream Park Co. are working with major entertainment corps to develop live virtual gaming that will be suited to tourists in Disneyland — in other words, no character continuity, no grand backgrounds, no major roleplaying, nothing that would challenge the average moron. It won't really be roleplaying, in my opinion.

Derryberry:

Sorry to hear about your troubles, Dana. The lack of computer access would trouble me most, I think. Ouch!

• I couldn't categorize myself on the techie/??? scale, either. About 65% of the tech talk at collation generally goes over my head. In my experience, techies are more commonly found in gaming than in the general population — but let's face it, gamers tend to be more intelligent, imaginative, and better educated than the general public. Most also seem to lack a sort of "groupthink" quality. Gamers are rarely the sort of people who habitually frequent bars or follow the latest big fad. Eccentrics? Individualists? Depends on your point of view, I guess.

• Thanks for the Loew!

Loew:

WOO! WHOA!! HAHAHAAAAHA!!!
Great stuff — it's a pity that *Dragon* magazine is probably too straight-laced to print it, because it definitely deserves a wider audience. I hope we'll see more...and where can a copy of that "Three Fellows" collection? Perhaps Dana or Dana could pass on that info.

Loved that demon from Sesame Street!
But where was Burt? 8^>}

• By the way, I can't help but wonder as to your gaming background. Care to enlighten us?

Erlandsen:

I hope your first experience leading a team in a LRP game went well, Dana. I found it to be quite fun, but I had excellent and cooperative players. But that title — *Mars Needs Women?* Doesn't sound like an IFGS game to me! I trust we'll be getting a full report?

• Re ct to Phillis: "Yeoman Rand"!?!
ROFL!

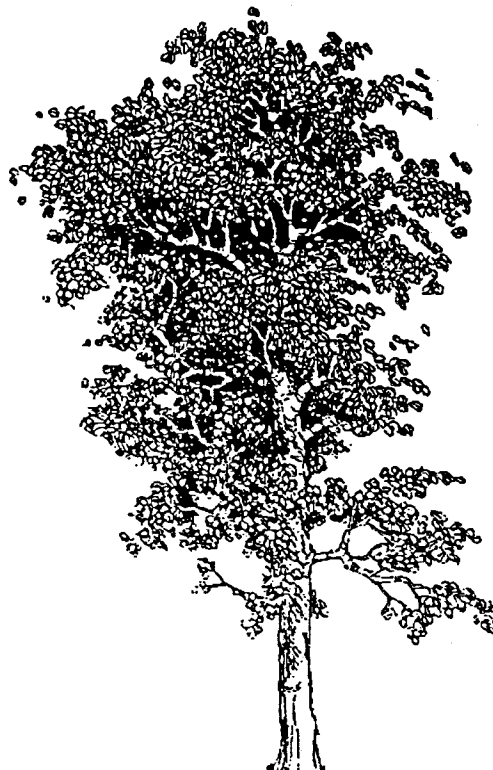
• From what I've heard, T\$R also tried to trademark "Hitler", "Goebels" and "Goering". Maybe they were looking for kinder and gentler corporate executives? 8^>}

• Thanks for the additional Loew strip!

Jorenby:

Perhaps you put the Non-Directed Campaign vs. Directed Campaign issue it too starkly, Doug. Isn't this another case for a greyscale? No campaign can be *completely* undirected, of course. But I suspect it's all a matter of degree.

• I don't know, Doug...when one of our most erudite and well-spoken contributors decides to drop out of the Hunt, I don't know which to worry about more: the fate of the Hunt or the future of gaming. As someone once said, we don't have anyone to waste. That particularly applies to great GMs, and from the reaction of your many players it's clear that's what you are. Believe me, you'll be sorely missed. And if you ever feel like emailing me some of those articles from your hold file, I'd be proud to have you as a guest columnist. *I'll* kill those trees! After all, most of them are just cash crops anyway. 8^>}



Patten:

Welcome to the Hunt! I had heard of DragonQuest before, as it happens. The folk who introduced me to RuneQuest had played it for a while, and they told me quite a few war stories. They also told me of T\$R's treacherous backstabbing of SPI.

• In fact, I actually did use an element of DragonQuest myself, once. A long time ago, when I was still in college, I decided to make an ultimate sorcery spell backfire table for RuneQuest (I was young). I worked long and hard, taking suggestions from friends, and made up two tables — a nasty one and a minor one. But two tables weren't enough, so I went berserk. The table I finally produced included the DragonQuest Spell Fumble table, the RuneQuest Chaotic Features and Curse of Thed tables, all the Relics and Artifact effect tables from the AD&D DMG, and I think one or two other tables culled from other

systems. When I put it all together on one piece of paper, I'd had to reduce it so much that it was barely legible. But it *was* huge...

- I'm interested to hear that you're into L.I.O.N.E. Rampant. Perhaps you've read of my gruesome experience with NERO? I understand that many L.I.O.N.E. Rampant members are ex-NERO members. What's the story? Any truth to it? From a look at the rule book, it seemed pretty similar to the NERO system (no offense). Of course, my big problem with NERO had nothing to do with the rules, but rather with the attitudes of the people in power. Does L.I.O.N.E. have a system of nobility and such? If so, are any precautions being taken to avoid ending up like NERO?

Quite a few people I know have expressed an interest in L.I.O.N.E. I'm sure any info you write would be of interest. It's a bit of a mystery group to some of us! 8^>}

- How did you get into LRP in the first place?

Phillies:



- GWOPAS (Great work on Pickering, as usual). But would I buy it in a store from scanning the first few chapters? George, that would depend on three things: 1) Would I have read anything else by you? (I assume not). 2) Is it blurbed as a Champions-related publication, or near the T&R Dragoncr@p section? (If so, forget it). 3) What does the back cover say?

Yup, that's the sorry truth. I rarely buy works by authors I don't know, but when I do I'm more likely to be influenced by the blurb on the back than by a quick scan of the contents. I'm a fast reader, but I can't abstract a good idea of what the book is like that quickly, and I don't spend very

much time looking at a book by an unknown author.

Oh, the cover art wouldn't matter much to me unless the style was really good or bad — and even then, well, it still wouldn't influence me much.

- Re Lord Doom: ROFL

- Thanks for the info on your word-processing/writing experiences.

Ruggles:

Great cover! I bet it sells well. One thing, though — weren't the Marines' weapons in *Aliens* bigger than that?

- The computer game sounds interesting, but just a bit beyond my machine's capacity. One of these days, I'll have to upgrade...

- Your "generational progression" analysis of game systems was interesting, but I'm not sure I agree with all of it. No matter, though. Systems are becoming less and less important to me. Does that make me Generation Seven? 8^>}



- Re character deaths: you know, it's been so long since I played in a campaign that actually *lasted* more than a few months that it's difficult to remember! But I know that I generally felt really lousy when I lost a character in days of yore. It wasn't because I had "lost", so much as I felt sort of...cut off. It's hard to describe. I put a great deal of effort into my characters, both in the creation of them and in playing them. When they died, it was uniformly in some sort of casual, unimportant encounter — they fell to the Storm Troopers rather than Darth Vader. I think that was part of it. In any case, having a character die generally put me off playing for weeks. Who knows? Maybe I was just sulking. 8^>}

• Hee hee! I won't touch your RQ comments with a ten-foot pole! 8^>}

• Thanks for the info about the WWII reenactments. But what's "Rhino Hiding" mean? I mean, I can guess that it means to play dead. But what's the derivation?

Collier:

Nice to see you haven't deserted us altogether for the glamorous, exciting world of professional Champions writing, Collie! 8^>} But I miss your art. We have *two* covers on *The Wild Hunt*, you know!

• I'd planned to review The Primal Order: Pawns when it first came out, but got sidetracked. I agree that it's a good book, though I pretty much just used it for reading matter. On the other hand, it probably wouldn't be a bad idea to force every AD&D munchkin to read both TPOs. 8^>}

• Re your ct to Phillies re Pickering's "insanity" — that reminds me of a probably apocryphal story about The Prisoner (the TV show, not the GURPS supplement). Supposedly after the last episode was filmed, the film crew cornered Patrick McGoochan and threatened to kill him if he didn't explain the show. Unable to escape, he finally confessed that the Prisoner was insane.

I don't believe that, either. 8^>}

• I think Mark could explain what SIGGRAPH is better than I — all I know is that it has something to do with really cool computer animation.

• Re Guy Fawkes, I seem to recall reading that children in England dress up as Guy Fawkes (or do they carry a scarecrow?) and ask for a "penny for the Guy". Sort of like our Halloween. I don't know if that's done anymore. To tell you the truth, I'm much too ignorant about that period, and would very much like to learn more.

• Say, what made you think that I was a lawyer? I'm not. I WORK for lawyers,

but have not yet given in to the urge to justify my LSATs and go for a law degree.

• I did try *Fantasy Hero* once — that's a Hero game, right? Hmm, interesting typo — I almost wrote *Family Hero*. I wonder what sort of game *that* would be? 8^>} Anyway, my one experience with the system was pretty bad. In fact, I think I may have written it up as a Horror Story in a previous issue! However, I'm not too likely to try a Hero game any time soon for four reasons: 1) I don't know anyone around here who's running it, 2) as I said on page 1, I'm not that interested in playing these days, 3) I haven't played in a decent superhero campaign yet, and doubt that it's my cup of tea, and 4) with my growing preference for an emphasis on the content as opposed to the form of gaming, I have less and less interest in rules systems — and Hero confused me pretty badly, as I recall.

But then, I'm easily confused. 8^>}

Hoberman:

You know, I'm not sure any of us players in your Hegemony campaign are quite sure why we ended so abruptly! The insurmountable problem must have been much more visible from the other side of the screen, because the situation seemed difficult but not hopeless to me. Still, it



was an interesting campaign, and I'm sorry it's gone — particularly because my character never got a chance to Change!

Just to avoid confusing readers, I'll explain that I designed my character using a of tried-and-true technique. It was the Butterfly Metamorphosis Gambit: design a character that's extremely wimpy compared to the rest of the PCs, but who has the potential for a major change built in that will take place at some point in the campaign. It's sort of like mortgaging the beginning of the campaign for the fun of a Big Secret, some moments of high drama at the time of Change, and greater power for the remainder of the game. It's best if the major details of the change are decided by the GM, particularly if the character has amnesia — that way both you and the character can be surprised. And a good GM will choose abilities and details for the Changed character that will almost certainly be more interesting and appropriate to the campaign than anything the player could devise. In fact, by throwing the bulk of that labor onto the GM, you make it a virtual certainty that your character will be inextricably involved with the core plots of the game.

Of course, if the game ends unexpectedly before the Change even *happens*, the player is screwed... 8^>}

- Pretty funny fiction, BTW.

Re the Mirash from my "Floating Isles" one-shot being "kinder and gentler", that's only in respect to *human beings* — they still have plenty of flaws. And that only describes the average Mirash. Variation accounts for a lot. Let's just say I was going for a more mythic story, and away from gritty realism — drug-addicted slave-whipping Mirash just wouldn't have fit my image of the world. 8^>}

Butler:

Yeep, Bob! You mean you'd rather destroy innocent simulated aircraft (who

never harmed a hair on your head) than pound out page after page of highfalutin game philosophy?!? Why? 8^>}

- Re character creation systems: I can't recall if I discussed this before (I think so). Still, what the heck. Remember, you asked for it! 8^>}

* * *

I do have a preferred method of creating characters. It works like this: ask each player to come up with a basic character concept — what sort of person they'd like to play. In Drachenvald, this was described as "I'd like to play a snivelling little guy who's quick and sneaky, but who'll change suddenly and dramatically somewhere during the campaign — a sort of caterpillar into butterfly thing, to make everybody feel bad for mistreating him before." Or "I want to play a bitter old mage, cursed with weakness and bad health because he tried to save his master from an evil mage long ago. He has a soft spot in his heart for children, but hates to admit it."

The GM and player discuss the concept for a while, see what they can work out together in the way of tying the character tightly into the game world and smoothing out any problems with compatibility (for example, maybe the GM prefers that all PCs be cheerful, friendly types, and the old angry mage won't fit in).

After a session of this, let at least several days pass. Then the GM and player should get together (or talk over the phone) again, and see if either of them has developed any new ideas — they almost always do.

Basically, you continue the process for as long as you feel like it — meet and discuss the character, let it rest for a while, and then see what developed in the interim. The more times you do this, the better the character will be. One outstanding character I know was discussed for more than 40 hours before play began, over a period of more than a month!

What happens after that depends on the specific system being used. It often works well if the GM finally designs the character's stats after all discussion has concluded — without *too* much concern about any “balancing” mechanisms built into the character design system, if any.

In the sheetless games for which this style was first developed, on the other hand, the GM designed the characters stats and kept the sheets to himself! We players never had to make a jump from thinking about our characters as “people” to thinking about them as a collection of numbers. It worked really well.

By the way, I've noticed that the longer you spend designing a character, the better that character is — and the more likely it is that the player will enjoy the game.

* * *

So, as you can see, I agree with you about good characters taking time.

• Okay, I might not manage to wipe out the T&R apostates — though come to think of it, that's not the right word for them. I could view myself more in the role of Martin Luther, tacking up a list on their door...8^>} Or Galileo, perhaps. But I'm sure zine writers make bad eating. 8^>}

Fast:

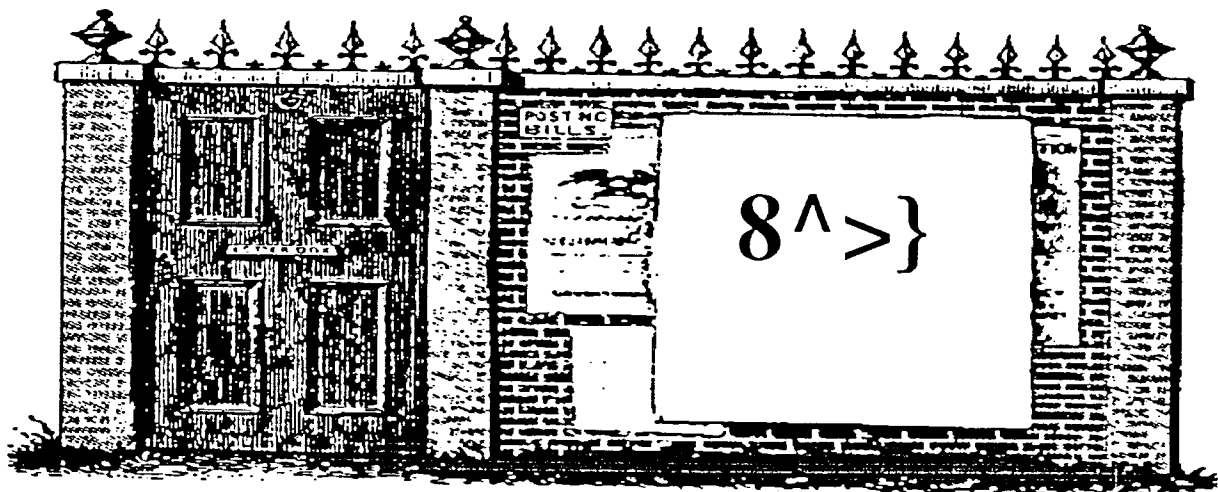
I'm trying to figure out what to do about your zine, John. Two and a half readers receive their zines through me — Mark doesn't have an address for them. So how are they going to be able to read, and in David's case comment, on your zine? Not to mention the confusion that those who buy TWH in stores might feel. Hmm.

• Thanks for the Terramar writeup — it's always extremely interesting to see a new game world. I can't find TWH #180, so forgive me if you already answered this: how long have you been running Terramar? How many players do you have, and how often/long are the sessions?

• Many thanks for the kind words re “Blue Moon”!

• Did you know that the original title for *Army of Darkness*, the third of the *Evil Dead* series, was *Medieval Dead*? 8^>} Or was it you who told me that? My memory is a sieve these days...

• Given your strong recommendation, and the fact that I hear that it *is* going to be coming back as a series, I guess I'll have to give *Babylon 5* another look. Now if I can only dig out the tape of the pilot from the 200+ tapes on my living room floor... Liked your interpretation of the



Babylon 5's station commander's inability to act. But I'm afraid that he doesn't even seem able to convey the sense of fundamental morality that Frank Furillo did — after all, he's already slept with a bimbo! 8^>}

• Let's bundle my (comparatively mild) dislike of the GURPS rules system with my ever-increasing apathy towards all complex game systems. Perhaps I'm losing my flexibility or interest, but absorbing these new concepts gets harder and harder as the years go by.

• I'm afraid I'm too much of a coward to face down the owner of *The Games People Play* over her ban of Clan Brujar. Not to mention that it would look pretty bad, since I'm the one who delivers TWH to them! Sure would be a pity if they stopped carrying those big 2 copies of each issue! 8^>}

• Re Libertarianism. Actually some but by no means all of my own beliefs have a definite libertarianistic flavor — after all, I'm a fan of *The Prisoner*. But when I ran into *The Libertarian From Hell* on the Argus BBS (a sort of Rush Limbaugh with an attitude, an even stronger desire to really piss people off, and the power and will to censor others while sanctimoniously issuing false appeals to authority to justify himself), I found myself with a severe case

of Libertarian-itis. I'll get over it — thanks to that twerp I no longer participate in several forums on that system. Good riddance! If he'd been a practitioner of civil disobedience, that guy would have driven Mahatma Ghandi to violence. 8^>}

NEXTISH:

Something, I'm sure. But what, exactly, would be very hard to say! 8^>}

Colophon

Rack & Rune #17: A *Paler Shade of Grey* was generated in ASCII form using PC-Write 2.5. It was formatted for desk top publication using Publish-It 2.0. It includes clip art generated with the Windows 3.0 Paintbrush utility, as well as clip art downloaded from several BBSes. It was printed on some sort of printer, of course.

"If you don't want to kiss Duke Muchkin's ass, you can pretty much kiss your own goodbye." —Traditional NERO saying that I just made up. 8^>}

—>PM

