

RACK & RUNE



RACK & RUNE #18: A Many Splintered Thing

Copyright © Peter Maranci September 1993/ 81 Washington St., #2, Malden, MA 02148 / (617) 397-7958

InterNet address: pete@slough.mit.edu or rune@trysetro.com or rune@ace.com

In the last two months I've had an unprecedented burst of creativity — table-top games, short stories, videos, LRP scenarios, nasty letters and more have been boiling out of my brain. Ideas in abundance! This may partly be because I've been writing my ideas down more often, but it really does seem that ideas come much easier these days. It's wonderful to have no shortage of things to write! It's actually getting them down on paper that's the hard part. But I am getting it done.

It seems more and more likely that this is all somehow linked to the fact that I haven't been roleplaying for months...I wonder what we're all doing to ourselves? What wonders might be produced if not for roleplaying? 8^>}

I DO DECLARE

I wrote the following shortly after reading a number of statements by candidates for the Board of the New England IFGS. The letters appeared in the NEIFGS newsletter, Thud & Blunder. Mine won't. 8^>}

LETTER OF DECLARATION

I would like to declare my candidacy for the position of Board Member. Why do I seek this position? The answer is simple: power. I want the power to force obedience and respect from everyone I see. I want emotionally unstable and

immature teenagers to bring me food in hopes of gaining my momentary favor. I want to force attractive young women (who wouldn't give me the time of day in the real world) to fawn upon me and call me "My Lord".

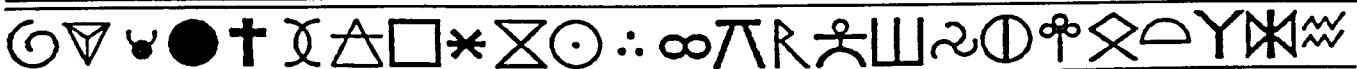
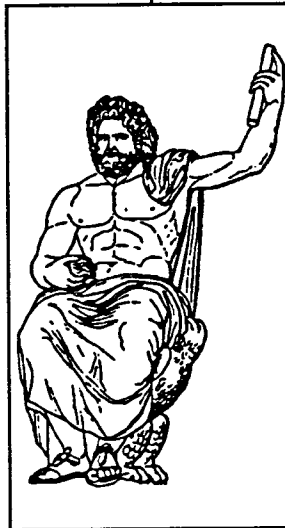
I want to be invulnerable and omnipotent. I want to star in elaborate rituals designed to glorify me. I want to issue a new rulebook every six months, and force everyone to buy a copy. I want to say who lives and who dies. I want to charge huge prices for my rigged "events" and make an obscenely fat profit. I want the best of everything. I want every magic item in The Book, and every magic item *not* in The Book.

I want to be able to order my stoat-brained young lieutenants to chop up anyone I feel like, whenever I want. I want the power to crush people's hopes and dreams. I want to charge new PCs outrageous fees to play in my games, and then slaughter them over and over again for their gold and experience points. I want to crush anyone and any organization that gets in my way. I want my word to be Law. I want the power to make people listen to me. I want—oh, wait a minute. This isn't NERO?

Never mind.

THE FIRST TIME (AGAIN)

Lately I've been feeling an ever-increasing urge to start GMing a new game. It wouldn't be as serious as Nereyon; I think that running more than one "major" game at a time is probably a mistake. My Nereyon players feel that my interest and GMing decrease markedly



when I run a second game, particularly if the other game is held the day before Nereyon.

But I still feel the urge. This has led me to think about GMing in general from a new angle. Discussions with various folk (particularly Doug Jorenby) have brought me to a new (though tentative) realization as to why I began GMing, and perhaps why I continue: Because someone needs me.

Isn't that how most GMs begin? A group of kids sit around with a new, interesting looking game. No one particularly wants to GM; it seems both burdensome (like being the bank in Monopoly) and somehow daunting. To be the entire world, to assume control of and responsibility for the enjoyment of the group...this is no small thing. But if someone doesn't do it, there will be no game.

So what sort of person is most likely to step into the breach? Two possible types leap to mind. One is attracted by the power and social dominance that GMing offers. The other GMs primarily out of a sense of responsibility — a feeling that "if I won't do it, no one will."

In the latter case, this would seem to indicate that the person most likely to GM is the most responsible member of the group — the one who feels some impulse to provide entertainment. A parental figure, perhaps?

One other bit of evidence seems to support this theory: several of the best GMs I've known have been cooks. In fact they often combine the two roles, cooking a meal for the players.

On the other hand, some of the skills used in cooking are also used in GMing — combining different elements into a harmonious whole, timing everything to

come out right, and satisfying the diners.

I'd be interested to hear about other's experiences with GM/cooks, and about any first experiences with GMing, of course.



DEATH ONLINE

I've been running the Grey Company campaign online at the local Argus BBS for months. I used a heavily modified Amber Diceless system, mixed with RuneQuest; or rather, I would have done so, except that we never actually got to any combat. The game played incredibly slowly. In several months of realtime we accomplished what took perhaps six hours of in-person playing to complete. Recently, exasperated with the outrageous lack of participation by some of the players, I decided that ending the game was the only thing to do.

Still, it was an interesting experiment. I think I learned a great deal, and may someday choose to run an online game again. However, there are certain things I'd do differently.

For one thing, I'd make a minimum

number (two, say) of posts per week be mandatory. Fail to keep up (without a good excuse) and the game would go ahead without you; fail three times and you'd be out. Online games are even more dependent upon player action than other games — they're more player-driven. This was the main reason that "The Grey Company" online failed. Some players posted lavishly; there were some lovely flights of quirk and fancy. But others were dead weights, posting rarely if at all, dragging the game down to a dead stop. The active players frequently had to pause, unsure as to whether the others were participating at all, and reluctant to play through days of game time before the others had a chance to react.

I'd also use even fewer mechanics. For TGC online I had the characters make up RuneQuest 3 character sheets, assigning their skills with an unusual degree of freedom; I also worked with each player to develop a good background. It was difficult overcoming the preconceptions of those who were unused to non-hack-n-slash games; on the other hand, some of the players showed a surprisingly deep and strong aptitude for roleplaying, without having had any RQ experience at all.

My intention was to use the Amber method of resolution on the RQ skills and stats. Since players couldn't roll against their abilities, I'd have them describe their choices and tactics in a storytelling manner, as if they were writing a fantasy novel. These descriptions, modified by their relevant skills and abilities, would determine success or failure.

In hindsight, it was something of a waste of time to have them generate skills at all. Numbers were fairly irrelevant; all in all, the time spent making up stats for the characters would have been better spent working out character history and

personality. Online games should be as close to pure storytelling as possible. Anything else simply gets in the way, and acts as a huge stumbling block — what would take a minute to do in person can take days or weeks online.

Magic is a different story. RuneQuest magic is difficult to mesh with Amber-type resolution — at least, the variable Spirit Magic spells are. The difference between a Bladesharp 1 and 2 is easy to see in a numerical system, but fairly meaningless in a storytelling-type game. It's too fine a distinction for the GM to make. A simplified system of magic would be necessary, were I to run an online game again.

The game certainly had its good points. There were some interesting exchanges, and one really funny three-way conversation that I'm hoping I have captured on my hard drive somewhere — if I find it, I'll print it in a future Rack & Rune. And I've definitely learned things about running online games, and perhaps about games in general. If I do try again, it will probably be on the InterNet. Perhaps there I'll find enough dedicated players to keep a game moving along.



FROM THE CLOSED SHELVES

I'm taking a slightly odd turn for this issue: children's books. Some of the most enjoyable and interesting books I've ever

read have been written for children, and I make it a point to still read them every so often. The Wind In The Willows is a good example, and so is Alice In Wonderland. I think, too, that it's important to supply good books to children; if my father hadn't read a book of Greek myths to me as a child, I might not be gaming and reading science fiction today (I'm sure he regrets it, in hindsight 8^>). But seriously, I'm sure that reading the right books as a child can greatly encourage the development of the imagination. And a more imaginative individual is more likely to game, don't you think?

There are some children's books which have been forgotten, and have fallen out of print. Some of these are outstanding, so good that I would still recommend them to adults — or at least to adults who retain a certain sense of whimsy.

The Portmanteau Book, by Thomas Rockwell

Rockwell is better known for his book How to Eat Fried Worms. However, The Portmanteau Book is more imaginative, more challenging, stranger — and much more rare. I was fortunate (again!) that Wordsworth in Harvard Square was able to find it rather quickly with a rare book search.

It's a large book, with quite a bit of interior art. It's also something of a grab-bag, filled with comics (one made entirely of words drawn to look like what they spell), short stories (including four separate stories about a group of kids

walking around town on a hot day and an attack by aliens with a Nakedness Ray), poems, recipes (Boiled Kvetch or small nagging sister is featured), a story in the index and much more. All of it is very funny; the book is a real treasure. If you have or know a child, try at least to get it out of your library; they should have a copy. Read it to them. And when you get a chance, read it by yourself. The Portmanteau Book can be enjoyed by anyone of any age.

Emperor of Space by ???

This one is a bit of a mystery; I somehow lost my only copy several years ago. Nevertheless I remember it quite clearly. It was an English book, no more than fifty years old (if that). A boy named Guy befriends an aged Professor who lives off in the moors. In time he discovers the Professor's secret: he has built a spaceship, one that operates on a completely new principle. The

government, however, has forbidden research on this crackpot idea.

One night Guy hears that a group of dangerous convicts have escaped from a prison, and are believed to be nearby. He rushes to warn the Professor. When he gets there, however, he finds the Professor strangely different: there is a large bandage on his head, and his personality seems markedly altered. He is powerful, contemptuous, ruthless and has forgotten his friendship with Guy. Soon the convicts break in and are captured by the Professor, who is glad to press them all as crew to take his ship into space — Guy included! The planet they reach, what happens there,



and how they get back make one of the most exciting stories I've read. If it all sounds a bit old hat, believe me — it doesn't read that way. And given the age of the book, I suspect it wasn't old hat when it was published. There's something very new about Emperor of Space. This is a great read for ages ten and up, I'd say.

□ □ □

While I'm writing about children's books, I might as well write about two that I can only barely remember. Perhaps someone out there will know the names or authors of these. Both must have been published at least fourteen years ago, but not more than thirty. One was about a boy who fell through a door from another world. He has amnesia while on Earth...the book was a bit like some of the work of Zenna Henderson. A feeling of magic, though it was definitely science fiction. The other book was about a pair of kids who took a subway, and somehow ended up in the time of the Pilgrims (I think). I don't recall much more than that. If anyone knows of these two books, I'd appreciate hearing about it.

On a different tack, what's wrong with American and English culture? The Japanese seem to be far more on the ball regarding English-language art than we are. Laser disks of the Max Headroom show aren't available here; if you want them, you have to import them from Japan. Likewise this next item:

Olias of Sunhallow by Jon Anderson

I thought this great old conceptual album was lost in the mists of time, and so was amazed to see that it was now available as a CD. It's by Jon Anderson of Yes fame, and has many of the qualities of a Yes album; the music and art are very similar to most Yes albums, with strong and strange science-fantasy themes. Olias is

a bit more knit together than most, though. It's a continuing story on a single theme: a race of alien creatures who must flee their dying world to a new place, travelling on a strange ship made of metal fish. The music makes fine background for a fantasy RPG, and is well worth listening to for itself. The cover art is most interesting, even beautiful; it's an entire book illustrating the songs, and the extreme reduction shows one of the great drawbacks of CDs as compared to albums. On the album, you could read the words and make out the fine detail of the art.

As I said, it's only available as an import from Japan; it comes with a separate Japanese lyric sheet (an English one is also supplied). The cost is outrageous for a single CD: \$30. It was worth it, though.

But I still can't figure out why Japan has all the best of English/American art and we don't!



WITHER THE WILD HUNT?

I've become a little concerned about the future direction of The Wild Hunt. The copy count seems likely to head downward; though the overall physical quality has much improved over the past few years,

there seem to be few new contributors coming in. In the meantime, we've lost some fine people. And yet I'd say that the quality of writing is as good if not better than when I first started reading TWH several years ago! So what's going on? Whither The Wild Hunt?

A little more exposure might not be a bad idea. It certainly couldn't hurt. Yet flyers seem to be an ineffectual method. How to spread the word, and reach the right people?

Recently a friend spotted the following on the Net:

□ □ □

From: C521832@MIZZOU1.missouri.edu

Newsgroups: rec.games.frp.misc

Subject: Attention zine publishers!

Date: Fri, 30 Jul 93

19:35:47 CDT

Do you publish a gaming zine? Or a zine in some way related to gaming (regular reviews, columns, whatever)?

Here's the deal. I'm the publisher of THE UNSPEAKABLE OATH, a quarterly magazine devoted to the Call of Cthulhu RPG. I'd like to begin a new feature: a sort of zine contact page. Each issue, this page will have a bunch of short descriptions of different gaming zines, with information on ordering a sample copy, subscribing, etc.

There's no charge for a listing on this page. I just want to help spread information about all the zines out there that, like the OATH, have been or are struggling to get off the ground.

The gist: If you're a zine publisher, send the following to us.

a recent copy of your zine (print-out if it's

an e-zine)

a 25-word description of your zine, what it covers, etc. for publication

the zine's mailing address

single-copy/sample-copy price, for US, Canada, and air mail

subscription price & frequency

That's it! We'll compile the listings and they'll go onto the page on a first-come, first-serve basis. When production time comes, we'll put as many on there as we can fit. Next issue, we'll run the rest of them, then start over at the top again. We can't print logos or graphics.

Again, there is no charge and no obligation for this. Information about your zine will go out to more than 3,000 readers around the world.

John Tynes

Pagan Publishing

□ □ □

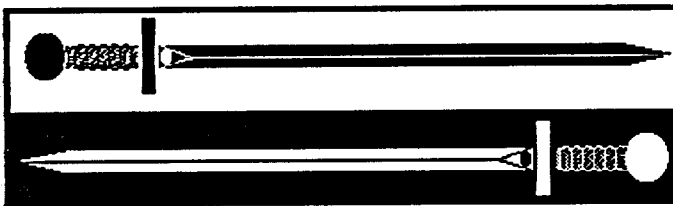


I've spoken to Mark, and he's willing to let me give it a try. Most of the requirements are easy, but a description of The Wild Hunt in 25 words or less is an interesting proposition. Here's what I've come up with so far:

“A classic since 1976. Reviews, scenarios, fiction, gaming philosophy, LRP, writeups, more. All systems discussed. An intellectual forum with a sense of humor. Newcomers welcome.”

Twenty-five words exactly. However, I'd like to hear any changes or completely new versions that others might suggest. If you have an idea, please email it to me, send it on a postcard, or whatever. We might not get any results out of this, but

what the heck. I'll probably be sending it in within the month, so act now before this amazing offer expires... 8^>}



REVIEW: Elric!

Basic Role Playing-derived new roleplaying system

Publisher: Chaosium

Authors: Lynn Willis, Richard Watts, Mark Morrison, Jimmie W. Pursell Jr., Sam Shirley, Joshua Shaw

Price: \$19.95

When I first heard about this system, I was confused. Why would Chaosium bring out a new roleplaying system with the same setting as *Stormbringer*? What would be the point, particularly if both were based on the Basic Role Playing system?

Perhaps there was some confusion. Could it be that Chaosium was reissuing the *Elric* boardgame, and that somewhere along the line the news got scrambled? Maybe this was simply the newest edition of *Stormbringer* under a new name.

Neither of these was the case, however. *Elric!* is a new roleplaying system, based upon BRP but substantially different from *Stormbringer*. In some ways it seems an attempt to reach out to new players, inexperienced with BRP games. The words "Dark Fantasy Roleplaying" on the cover and the spine seem designed to pull in something of a fad crowd. However, overall *Elric!* is an extremely interesting addition to the Chaosium family.

Elric! is, of course, basically

compatible with *Stormbringer*, *Hawkmoon*, and all other BRP-derived systems. In fact, *Stormbringer* is called a "companion" system in *Elric!*; the two do inevitably overlap. I have to wonder if *Stormbringer* will still be published.

Physical:

A perfect-bound book, 160 pages long. The art, layout, cover, and binding are all up to Chaosium's excellent standards. I'm particularly pleased that the book seems to be complete in itself; everything needed for play is in the one reasonably-priced volume.

Mechanics:

Elric! doesn't seem to represent a great leap forward for the evolving BRP kernel. In fact, it seems to represent an unusual degree of simplification. Though simplification is a laudable goal (IMHO), the methods used in this case are not aesthetically pleasing. The rules move away from the "smooth" trend in rules design, and are at times almost arbitrary. For example, there is always a minimum 20% chance to increase a skill. No matter how high a skill percentile gets, every character always has at least a 20% chance to make a successful experience gain roll for it. Fumbles are rolled on 99-100 for skills under 100%, and a 100 for skills over 100%. Blocky! And strange. But if it speeds play, it's an acceptable alternative.

Special successes have been confusingly altered from the norm — most confusing of all, the names have been reversed. *Criticals* are 1/5 of the chance to hit, rounded up; they do double damage. *Impales* occur when an 01 is rolled, irrespective of the adventurer's skill; they do double damage and ignore armor. Will this harm playability? Probably not. But it is a bit disturbing from a simulation point of view.

The slightly-inconvenient mechanic of rolling dice for armor damage absorption has been retained from Stormbringer. A system of Law, Chaos, and Balance points replace Stormbringer's *elan*; these are rather reminiscent of the character traits of Pendragon. Interesting, and not a bad idea. The mechanics of demons have changed dramatically. Magicians are still more powerful than non-mages, but are not quite as badly out of balance (if I may be forgiven a pun).

There is a good though not voluminous index at the end of the book, which is certainly helpful.

Setting:

Elric! is a definite improvement over Stormbringer in terms of faithfulness to the Moorcock originals. The Virtues of Law have been eliminated; the essence of Law is to improve skills. All magic is fundamentally Chaotic, and even the few Lawful spells add Chaos points to the caster. One spell in particular, however, is a real atrocity and must be remarked upon. It's one of the few Lawful spells, and is called Four-In-One; it enables up to eight characters to combine into a large and powerful being to fight Chaos. Elric, Corum, Erepose, and Hawkmoon did this as the Four Who Are One (in each of their series).

This is outrageous! The Champion(s) were able to do this for one reason: they were all aspects of the same person, brought together in a Universe-threatening response to a colossal extra-universal threat. This was one of the major accomplishments

of the Champion, a pivotal moment in the story of Elric. And now this unique occurrence is simply another casting of a standard spell? I'm very surprised to see something like this come out of Chaosium. I wouldn't even expect T&R to do something this klutzy! I suppose that there was a strong urge to supply a few interesting Lawful spells, but this is a disastrous way to do so.

Demons are most interestingly handled. They seem rather reminiscent of the supernatural creatures of Jack Vance's

"Dying Earth" stories; amoral, and of truly bizarre qualities. The Mage forms a mental image of the desired creature, and from somewhere in the Million Spheres that creature is summoned and delivered.

Incidentally, the Million Spheres concept would be a fine way for Chaosium to link up all the

BRP-derived games. I'd be reluctant to see the gloom of Moorcock's books dominate the BRP multiverse, but there's no reason that things couldn't be more cheerful elsewhere. Note: could Chaosium be planning some sort of multiversal link game, based on the Million Spheres? I wonder...

All in all, Elric! is a good value, a more faithful representation of Moorcock's writings, and presents some interesting though not ground-breaking new elements to the Basic Role Playing system. It's certainly worth picking up by anyone interested in Moorcock's works or in fantasy roleplaying of any kind.





REVIEW: Dorastor, Land of Doom

Supplement for RQIII

Publisher: Avalon Hill

Authors: Sandy Petersen, Ken Rolston,
Greg Stafford

Price: \$25 (approximately)

Dorastor is one of the long-awaited supplements for RQIII — particularly long-awaited because it contains mostly new material. I haven't had a chance to read it thoroughly, so my review will have to be a bit brief.

Dorastor, Land of Doom is a comprehensive sourcebook for the Dorastor area of Glorantha. It includes an extremely interesting history of Dorastor, Talastar, Nysalor/Gbaji, and Arkat which has been considerably expanded from the previous sources I've seen. The material is well written, though fairly complex; new gamers might be a bit bewildered by all the detail. Old RQ hands will have no problem, though, and most sophisticated gamers should have no problem absorbing the information.

The book also contains the following sections: Inhabitants, Important locations, Encounters, The Riskland Campaign

(sounds interesting, haven't read it yet), the cult writeups for Dorastor and Telmor, and a final section on Illumination. It lacks an index, which is a pity — that's been a real lack in RuneQuest supplements in general. There's also a color map of the area, and a 16-page insert of handouts and reference material.

Physically, the book looks good. It's 128 pages long and perfect-bound. The cover is very nice indeed, an illustration in stained-glass style of the Broo King Ralzakark meeting a group of Lunars; interestingly, Ralzakark is portrayed as having a Unicorn head. The internal art is mostly good to excellent. The full-color map is one of the best I've seen — I'm tempted to frame it.

An odd note: the illustration of Nysalor on page 17 looks strangely like some paintings of Jesus. For some reason I never pictured Nysalor with a beard...

At first impression, I have to say that the book looks outstanding. Certainly no RuneQuest player would want to be without it, and even non-RQers might want to give it a try, though not as their first experience with Glorantha. It does make for very interesting reading though, more so than any other AH supplement so far. It's expensive, yes. But worth it.

RANDOM RUNEQUEST

Major doings in RuneQuest seem to be the order of the day. The following is reprinted complete and unedited from the RuneQuest Daily Digest (via the InterNet), with Ken Rolston's kind permission.

Semi-Formal Announcement to the RQ Daily from Ken Rolston, RuneCzar

I am now a freelance RuneCzar.

AH and I have a tentative agreement to continue publishing RQ supplements according to our original schedule. I will continue as an

out-of-house developer, editor, and production coordinator.

Strangers in Prax is scheduled for release in November 93, Cults of Dorastor in January 93. The schedule after that depends, but I'm likely to choose two out of four projects that have promising prospects.

First choice is Soldiers of the Reaching Moon by Mike O'Brien. I very much want to arrange a contract for this project.

Prax Companion (by Reaching Moon Megacorp), Tower of Night (vampires in Talastar by Pat Elwer), and Lismelder Pak are all plausible contenders.

One major alteration in our current publishing scheme is that all art — maps, interior illos, and cover — will be done in house by Matt Pumphrey and Steve Langmead. It saddens me to lose Roger Raupp and John Snyder in particular, but it keeps production costs down to a point where AH is comfortable continuing to publish supplements. I am confident of their fine art and illustration skills — this is not a repeat of the Dobyski illustration debacle. It also gives me spectacular control over the schedule of completion and details of the art — and may even permit me to increase the number of releases, since each will be more modestly budgeted. My only worry is that AH might carelessly limit the amount of time the artists are given to complete their assignments. My strategy in the short term is to narrowly limit and focus the art assignments — and worry about them.

The major change in this arrangement is that I will not be doing the extensive writing, design, rewriting, development, and general fussing I have been doing on past products. The manuscripts I receive will be far cleaner, more completely developed, than any in the past — or this isn't going to work. This suits me just fine. I spent far too much time writing for River of Cradles, Shadows on the Borderland, and Dorastor. I will also be arranging for out-of-house developers by contract wherever practical. Mike Dawson's development of Strangers in Prax (which is coming along splendidly, I might add) is a good model.

A further benefit of this new regime is that I will consider writing original designs for RuneQuest, or developing my old designs for

RQIII, or collaborating on original designs with other RQ writers. In the final analysis, I am a designer by preference, and would much rather design than edit and develop.

The prospects for a new edition of RQ in the near future are uncertain. I would cheerfully entertain the prospect of adding another project to the schedule — a RuneQuest Rules Companion. This would include one or two RuneQuest Lite schemes and the most promising and acclaimed-by-consensus aspects of the RQIV project. I personally am most interested in an RQ Lite, and will be working on a proposal for that myself. Advocates for RQIV in its various incarnations should consider making proposals to me on this project.

In conclusion, I suspect that the new arrangement is in many ways promising. There is a real chance that I will be able to release even more supplements per year, since the basic design and production costs are now significantly reduced, and since we now have about got the major production routines ironed out. The four new RQ Renaissance products represent a standard that Avalon Hill intends to maintain.

I have guarded optimism about the in-house art provisions. Langmead and Pumphrey are desperately sensitive to the need for first-class art, and eager to achieve to the standards of recent publications. I've seen their work, and am most satisfied. They both acknowledge that the crucial element will be in our preparing detailed art orders, complete with ample visual references.

As for RuneQuest and Glorantha, my fate is now tragically linked with their survival — and their potential for renaissance. My love for both has been sorely tested by my trials with the past four supplements, but now things look pretty good to me. The basic challenges of development and production are whipped. A steady stream of first-class manuscripts are available. Greg is back in the Gloranthan saddle. RuneQuestCon looks lovely, and the live roleplaying Home of the Bold looks splendid. (Wouldn't that be a great supplement?) And a hard core of RQ Glorantha fans and writers have formed a print-and-electronic network to support and enliven RQ dialogue. I think a slow but steady renewal of RQ Glorantha's prospects is assured.

Me, I'm looking forward to a producing a bunch of stupid games celebrating senseless violence and soul-crushing gaiety.

□ □ □

Quite a profound change. What disturbs me is that there's no indication of what Avalon Hill plans for the future of RuneQuest. Is anyone at AH taking any sort of responsibility for RQ? Is there anyone there who even understands roleplaying? Do they plan to just chug along in a minimal way, or will they someday fulfill the promises they made about promoting RQ properly, and perhaps even giving T&R a run for their money?

No one knows. Or if they do, they're not telling. But four supplements per year is just not going to do it — RQ will splutter along as it has, never growing, slowly shrinking as players die, for as long as Avalon Hill feels like letting it continue. Without more supplements and a lot of promotion it seems unlikely that RQ will ever appeal to a larger market. And given the success that Chaosium was having with RQ, AH's scaled-down plans don't seem entirely justified.

In Chaosium's hands RQ must have been successful; after all, Avalon Hill bought the system. And certainly no company could handle RQ and Glorantha any better than Glorantha's creator; to AH, RQ is another not-very-profitable roleplaying system. More and more, I find myself wishing that Chaosium would reacquire RQ.

I mean no offense to Ken Rolston. The latest RuneQuest release was an outstanding job. But I don't think Avalon Hill really cares about RuneQuest. And I have to wonder how much influence Ken has with AH management these days...

RuneQuest needs Greg Stafford. It needs a company that understands

roleplaying, and has had experience in marketing roleplaying system and making it successful. After all, in terms of RPG experience Chaosium is the giant, and Avalon Hill the dwarf.

And I'm so bloody sick of these endless debates on the Net about RQIV, RQLite, RQSlim, RQDiet...David Dunham certainly made a good point against overcomplication of the rules. But what about overcomplication of the rules creation process? The RuneQuest rules seem to be in a state not unlike that of modern Italian politics. I see the attraction of having someone arbitrarily publish the system — then everyone could make up their own house rules, and go back to making up scenarios and supplements the way they should be.

The major reason they can't, however, is Sorcery. What sorcery *is* should really be determined by Greg Stafford, since its mechanics are merely a representation of what the Gloranthan reality is like. In other words, the fundamental nature of Sorcery has to be laid out by Greg before anyone can produce a proper mechanic for it.

Philosophy Corner

Carrying on a small point of discussion with Dana Erlandsen, I think I've come up with a few more points as to why hack-n-slash gaming is harmful to the hobby as a whole.

Non-roleplaying-intensive games (which is what I'll call hack-n-slash, for now) inevitably run up against character power limitation — characters can only become so powerful before they become too big to fit in their world, mechanically. Most game systems are set up this way; balanced at lower levels, but once the PCs enter the divine or semi-divine stage they're writing

their own script without the support of scenarios or mechanics. Result: campaigns that go for a while, get too big, and die. Over and over and over. Eventually the players come to realize that this is pointless, and give up. It's like playing the same video game over and over; *eventually* you get tired and give it up. The difference, however, is that with a video game you can rescue Princess Cauliflower and win; there is no clear victory in a roleplaying game, except so far as the GM can simply declare one.

For a gamer to find continuing enjoyment from a game they have to get their primary entertainment from subtle developments and interplay of characters, rather than from constantly increasing personal power (would anyone like to suggest a third or fourth paradigm?). Adult, mature roleplaying is what keeps gamers coming back, in other words. Hack-n-slash harms gaming as a hobby by supplanting the quality gaming that produces lasting enthusiasts rather than faddists. True, some hack-n-slash may be necessary to entice faddists to give roleplaying a try. But it should be strictly an introductory gaming style.

RUN RAGGED

All right, all right! Everyone seems to feel that ragged-right text reads easier than nice, neat, justified text. Fine. I'm trying it for this issue, but I can change back at a moment's notice...8^>}

CARDS AND LETTERS

I've received several cards and letters from TWH readers. Some, unfortunately, have disappeared into...well, you wouldn't believe me unless you could see it. I'm sure they all still exist, but they're trapped like dinosaurs in a tar pit, beneath the walking surface of paper in my room. I hope I won't have to fight off paleontologists some day! 8^>}

Seriously, I will find those letters eventually. And when I do, I'll certainly respond posthaste. In the meantime, my apologies to all.

COMMENTS #182

Mark Swanson:

So, Mark, are you planning on attending the RuneQuest Convention? If not, how about Arisia?

- Congratulations to your daughter Erika on her graduation. I hope her degree proves more useful to her than mine did to me...which makes me wonder if education has ever been a topic of discussion.

- Regarding your comment to Ruggles on XXX *anime*, I must admit that I'm no great expert on the subject. But I've always been under the impression that Japanese law is rather strict about pornography. The

distinction between XXX and hard R may be a fine one for some these days, and the official ratings do seem to be applied somewhat capriciously.



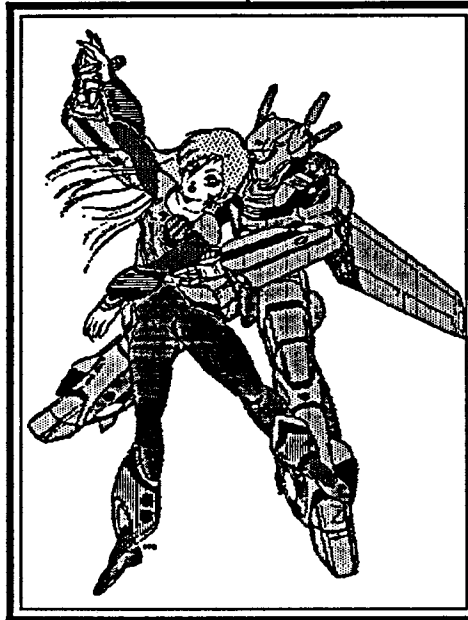
- On the subject of anime and manga, did you know that there is supposed to be a popular Japanese comic book called **Rape Man**? It's apparently about a superhero who...um...rapes. I guess that's his power. Talk about different cultures! It's not available in the US, of course...probably just as well.

- The Lenta writeup was quite interesting. There's something about long-running well-developed campaign settings...a certain richness, a density. It's a pity that such works of art aren't available to the general public. Though I'm not sure that there's any way, even theoretically, that they could be. A movie made of Glorantha would give a substantially different impression than a roleplaying game.

When you were still running Gorree, did you ever have to introduce new players? If so, I'm wondering how difficult it was to accustom them to the world, since the other PCs would have so much more knowledge of it. I'm considering (rather hypothetically) adding another player to Nereyon, and acculturation is a problem that concerns me.

Is there an afterlife in Gorree? What's it like? Have you done any gaming concerning it?

- Oh, just in case you didn't know



(and I may have already mentioned this to you): There are Thomas the Tank Engine videos, toys, and plush dolls available at the WGBH Learningsmith in Harvard Square.

George Phillies:

I'm glad to see that Pickering's quality remains high. You know, I was recently looking through old Wild Hunts when I suddenly realized that I *still* don't know what the Arch of Time is. Gonna clue us in sometime? Or did I just miss it? 8^>}

- The religious fanatics in tanks were particularly amusing, by the way. Could "The Living God" be Jerry Falwell, I wonder?

- I hate to seem dim, but just what does "The Lord of Order" mean?

- Re women in Star Trek: I've heard that there are plans to produce yet another show set in the Federation universe. I know little about it except that it will supposedly feature a strong woman as Commander of a ship.

- I gather that you plan to get Pickering published. Since I frequently daydream about getting professionally published (which sounds vaguely obscene, doesn't it?), perhaps I should ask you what the best way is to go about it. The first thing is to write, I know. But do you need an agent? How do you get one? Should you start right in on a novel, or try a few short stories first to get your name in the magazines? I've heard widely different

opinions from countless folk, including several fairly well-known authors, but I'd certainly value your opinion. If you have one.

Scott Ruggles:

Love the Jaggiri. The background is excellent, and the art is perfect — quite a few non-gamers laughed out loud at the continuing illustrations of the Jaggiri version of "This Old House". I'm coming to realize that art is an absolutely invaluable tool to present a creative vision, which only makes me regret my total inability in that area all the more.

- The Jaggiri version of "Little Red Riding Hood" was absolutely — wait a minute. I almost wrote "Robin Hood" instead. How does that sound as a candidate for a Jaggiri translation? Just thinking about it breaks me up.

But as I was saying, the "Little Red Riding Hood" story was outstanding — I read it several times over with enjoyment. Again, this was something several non-gamers found quite amusing too.

- I can't help but feel that I've seen Jaggiri material in some prozine. Am I wrong? And what issue of TWH did part one of the Jaggiri appear in?

David Dunham:

Great-looking zine, David! The asymmetrical column design gives it a pleasingly different quality. I've been advised to change my zine to differentiate it from the others, but all I could think of was a three column format. Three columns just don't seem to work with my font and page size, though. Your zine gets around that nicely.

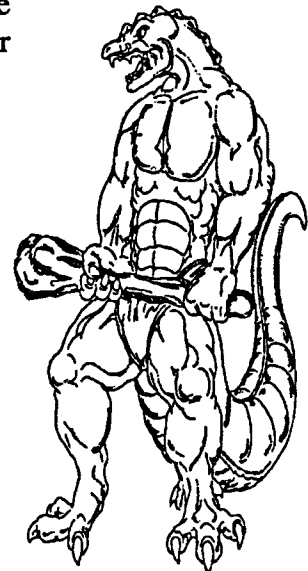
So, since your zine looks different I no longer need to change mine much, eh? No need to worry about boring the readers!

8^>]

- Regarding your comment to David Hoberman about game designers who have no understanding of computers — I've heard that the original Traveller had computers which were larger, slower, and less technologically advanced than the computers which were already available in the real world — which was not surprisingly featured in Murphy's Rules, I think. That points up the challenge that any futuristic game designer faces: how to balance between over-conservatism and wild fantasy? I'm coming to the conclusion that progress is generally most marked in ways that we aren't expecting. No futurist of the nineteenth century, for example, ever dreamed of virtual reality.

- I do have a copy of the Big Rubble supplement for RQII now, fortunately. It's a true classic, and I can't understand why it's not in print. Unfortunately I can't run it, because most RuneQuest players I know own it, have read it, or have already played it! Nonetheless, I'm glad I bought it simply as reading material — and as a guide in writing my own scenarios. You know, I bet that if Avalon Hill were to re-release all the old RQII modules they'd sell quite a few. Most old RQ players would buy them, out of sentiment or more importantly because their old copies are falling apart!

- I sympathize with your inability to loan out your issue of TWH to your players because there's information about your campaign in it that would ruin the game for them. I have the same problem; I



regularly upload ASCII versions of Rack & Rune to some local BBSes, but couldn't upload the last several issues because they held information about the Grey Company that would end the game immediately.

- Regarding compressing time in live roleplaying games, there are of course many ways of handling this. But in the games I've seen the most common method is to simply make the game realtime. There's no need to simulate night or the passage of days if your game is written as lasting for only a few hours of game time. Of course, this does limit designers rather severely. There can't be night in such a game, and you can't let weeks or months pass. Though several games together could give the same effect, playing out widely separated events in a larger context. That has been tried locally, with at least some success.

- Thanks for pointing out the error in my RuneQuest Creatures table in TWH #180. Aldryami are certainly *not* more populous than humans. Good point about the Trollkin, too.

- Enjoyed the Pendragon Pass. I hope we'll see more!

Dana Erlandsen:

— Congratulations on successfully leading your LRP team!

- Your experience with the grateful townsfolk at the end of the game reminds me of a similar occurrence in an early

game here. In that game, however, things were a bit different. After getting horribly damaged in our desperate fight to save the village (I lost the use of both my arms, and my weapon), we finally were victorious. The townsfolk immediately descended upon us and found that all the treasure was loot

that had been previously taken from them. We had little choice but to give it back. To top things off, the town cleric actually *charged* me to heal my limbs! I went out of that game poorer than when I went in, and that village is considered to be accursed by all who played in that game. We shouldn't have been surprised, though; the name of the village

should have given us a clue. What sort of people would call their town Smug, after all? 8^>}

- From your description, it sounds as if the Wisconsin IFGS is still a little crude when it comes to costuming and props. I'm sure that as time passes greater resources and expertise will make the NPCs more realistic and frightening. NE IFGS games are incredibly improved from the old days, when the major special effect was a single looped strand of red yarn (representing a fire) and some really lame plastic shields. Give it time. Still, your point about using imagination is well taken. Some things just can't be simulated.

By the way, many NE IFGS folk do wear armor — some of it quite elaborate. It's purely costumery, though.

- What's this about L.I.O.N.E. Rampant having a presence in Wisconsin?



That seems odd, since the initials stand for Living Imagination Of New England. NERO has the same problem. Now that it's spreading (like a disgusting fungus), its name sounds more than a little insular. No fungus comparison intended *vis a vis* L.I.O.N.E., Steve! 8^>}

Bill Ricker:

So, Bill, what's with the axes? It must be a piece of ancient Wild Hunt lore that I missed.

- I thought that the margin art was particularly nice this issue, BTW.

- I'm a bit confused by the lists you printed, though. Is the maximum number of inches of a single zine published in 100 issues *really* less than one and a half? I'm only up to 17 issues (I can't measure this one) and I'm looking at about 7/10 of an inch already!

- I must admit that I can't make head or tail out of the membership list. I'm also in the dark as to just what a "Jacobite tartan screen" is. Care to enlighten me?

- Thanks for the correction on the trademark/copyright question.

- I can't agree with you about the Arisia Convention's Amateur Video Contest. I don't want to run the contest; I want to *compete* in it. If there were no contest, I'd be up a creek. But there is, and they've been advertising it for four years and then screwing it up.

I'm sorry, but that's just too long. They should have either stopped having a contest after the first two failures, or asked around for someone to take charge of it. They did neither.

I paid to be at the Con, and put in weeks of hard work (I even took a couple of days off from work) to make a video, all based upon their announcement that a

contest would be held (I know that this wasn't the brightest thing to do). I realize that the people who run Arisia are human, don't get paid for this, and make mistakes; but that argument could be used to explain *any* failure, and I just don't buy it. We're not talking about a matter of taste here. It's not that I disagree with the manner in which they ran the contest. No, I object to the fact that except for the third year they simply advertised it and then blew it off! We always had to beg and bludgeon the person in charge to hold the event, and then this last year they cancelled it outright, without letting anyone know. That's absolutely unacceptable in any capacity, volunteer or otherwise. Adding their sneers on top of that simply exacerbates the offensiveness of their behavior.

It's not as if there's no interest in amateur video. The first year there were seven or eight entries, and the Video Room has been fairly well occupied during *all* the contests over the years. Several people told me that they wanted to participate in the contest, but that Arisia never responded to their inquiries!

All I'm saying is that they should do at least a minimally decent job with the contest, or stop having one. I don't think that's too much to ask.

Sorry to diatribe, but I'm still pissed from that rude comment by the Arisia Board member. I have volunteered for Arisia in the past, but am neither qualified to nor interested in running the contest — and in any case Arisia is working up a reputation for treating low-level volunteers very badly.

- I hear that Channel 1 is possibly going to have to shut down, since they're now being charged back taxes on membership fees. Not sure I believe it,

though. Just FYI, the Argus BBS offers email and newsgroups, four hours of access a day, for \$50 per year. That's the best price for Net access I've seen yet, apart from free access. Of course, there are still quite a few bugs in the system.

David Hoberman:

The Project Leda writeup was very interesting; thanks for letting us see it. The history reminds me a bit of a near-future campaign that was proposed back in my old school days. In a near-future orbital-colony Earth, an oppressive world government was resisted by a small group of misfits and freedom fighters: the PCs. That game had everyone really interested; we all worked on our characters constantly, and talked about them quite a bit. Unfortunately the GM was in irresponsible jerk. He missed the first three sessions completely, and showed up at the fourth just long enough to cancel the game — so we never actually got to play.

- If I'm not a crusty curmudgeon, it's certainly not for lack of trying! 8^>}
- Regarding Deep Space 9, I must say that the show seemed to be going downhill as the season progressed.
- The Superhero list was pretty funny. Do all the contributors to it read The Wild Hunt?

Bob Butler:

Your computer went "freaky" on you, Bob? Hmm. That makes two of you. 8^>}

• Regarding your comment to Ruggles, in the Fantasy to Superhero to Cyberpunk to disillusionment progression I seem to be permanently stuck at Fantasy — thank goodness! 8^>}

• "The bottom line is that playing a character isn't much fun. Becoming the character is the thing." Amen. I've never

heard it put better.

NEXTISH:

Could be anything; I have a ton of material backed up in the R&RHOLD file. Maybe an expanded outline for the Grey Company campaign...some new fiction is a possibility...almost certainly a review of a pretty interesting book that didn't *quite* make it into this issue. Plus the usual features, of course.

-->Pete

Colophon

Rack & Rune #?:
TITLE HERE 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 a laser printer.

You know, it was only by a tremendous act of will that I kept myself from including a writeup of Beavis and Butt-head as RuneQuest characters in this issue. Quick, turn the page before it's too la—

Heh. Heh-heh.

