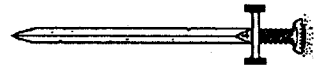


# RACK & RUNE



## RACK & RUNE #19: The Ghoul of My Dreams

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I've been trying to decide what I should do about the cancellation of the October collation. I contemplated writing two zines, but that seemed like too much work. I considered simply leaving my zine as is, but that would be a futile effort; there's no denying I have the writing monkey on my back, and I know I'll keep writing as the weeks go by. The upshot is that I've decided to write a particularly large issue. But I hope I don't have to face this choice again. What follows is my original opening for the October issue.

I'm starting this the night of #183 collation. Maybe this time I'll really get the zine written and formatted before deadline. Last time was sheer hell...



### SHEER HELL

I'd typed in almost all the text of R&R #18 well in advance, saving the comments for last (as usual). Notes for comments in every zine were all written up and ready (if anyone cares, I insert slips of paper in my copy of TWH, and then jot short notes of comment-hooks as I go along). I buzzed through the comments, finishing them at midnight. Needless to say, this was the very last possible day before the deadline!

A friend was visiting, and needed a ride home. We got in the car and started it up—or rather, we tried to. The engine wouldn't even *try* to catch. The starter was

fine, as was the battery, but there might as well not be an engine in it at all. I tried pumping the gas, keeping my foot entirely off the pedal, holding the pedal all the way down (a good way to start if you've flooded the engine, incidentally)...nothing worked. We were stranded. We went back to the house and my friend went to sleep on the couch, while I returned to my room to finish the zine.



I started DTPing, and ran up against the reason that a 286 machine just doesn't cut it in the modern world: every time I loaded a picture into the document it took about five to ten minutes. Every time I *saved* the document it took fifteen to twenty minutes. Text scans took about twenty minutes. When all was said and done, it was 5:00 AM! And I didn't even use that many graphics.

Normally I print Rack & Rune to disk as an encapsulated PostScript file. I then take the disk to a publishing service near my workplace and get it laser-printed, after which I get it photocopied nearby. I also print out a dot-matrix version at home as a safety, though I really don't like the way those printouts look.

This time I had a problem—the file was simply too huge to fit on a single 3.5" floppy. In desperation I started printing sections of the file to disk. It took three separate 1.44 MB disks to hold it all.



When I finished, it was 6:30 in the morning!

I called work to take the morning off (fortunately I can do that sometimes), and caught some sleep. Later, my friend and I took the subway into town, and went to our respective jobs. First, however, I stopped at the printing service and had my files printed.

**DEATH AND DEVASTATION!** Page twelve was missing! In my state of near-unconsciousness that morning I must have somehow missed printing it to the disk. What could I do?

Fortunately I had the dot-matrix printout with me. I didn't want to do an all-dot-matrix issue (not after I'd gone through so much, and had already paid for the laser printing). Perhaps I could just take page twelve from the dot-matrix version?

Unfortunately it didn't quite match the laser-printed page—there was some text missing between pages 11 (laser) and 12 (dot). Some of the text at the end of 12 (dot) was also duplicated on page 13 (laser). That last I could white out, but what could I do about page 11?

The cause of my problem was that the Publish-It fonts are very slightly different for dot-matrix and laser printers. The dot-matrix fonts are perhaps 5% smaller—*just* enough to cause a mismatch between the pages.

Anyway, I cut and pasted and reduced the text from page 11 of the dot-matrix copy, and taped it onto page 11 of the

laser printer. It looks strange, I know, but at least it got done.

Of course my car was fine the next day.

### STOP THE CHANGES!

My InterNet access seems to change by the day, generally for the worse. Due to a crackdown by MIT administrators my Slough account (pete@slough.mit.edu) may disappear at any time without warning. My first and oldest account (rune@trystero.com) at Trystero is also imperiled; the company which has been supplying

Trystero's InterNet feed is cutting it off, and a replacement feed is problematic. Unfortunately my one remaining account (rune@ace.com on the Argus BBS) is quite unreliable. I've asked the Sysop for a refund of my membership, and was inevitably refused. My public request inspired a fierce Argus partisan to attack me for whining—our subsequent debate makes for an interesting and

extremely funny story that I won't include here (but can email to those who are interested).

This sucks! Mail might reach me at Argus, and then again it might not. It seems that I'll have to look into picking up a new address, one that most importantly **WON'T CHANGE**—I'm sick of constantly changing my address! Delphi and the local Net supplier The World are possible sources, with America Online a distant third (they don't supply full access, only email and news).



Why does it all have to happen at once? That's what I'd like to know.

### I AM INCENSED

I was at a friend's house a couple of weeks ago when she lit a stick of incense. It instantly put me in mind of Wonder, the new campaign that I've been working up (detailed later in this issue). Suddenly I realized that the sense of *smell* has been almost totally neglected in the field of roleplaying! Yet smell is perhaps the most powerful and primal sense. I've read that the olfactory nerves are actually a direct extension of brain tissue, and that odor is the only thing directly perceived by the brain—thus explaining why cocaine and other narcotics have such a strong effect when snorted. Come to think of it, that also explains why some people have seizures after inhaling medicated nasal spray.

In any case, smell does seem to have been ignored in roleplaying. Perhaps this is because it is virtually impossible to market in some formats; the failure of "Glorious Smell-O-Vision" as a special effect for movies springs to mind. Still I'm almost surprised that Chaosium, for example, hasn't made use of smell in some of their prepackaged *Call of Cthulhu* campaigns, if only to the extent of working in the smell of oranges or lemons—surely it would be easy enough for a GM to obtain them him(her)self, and squeeze them under the table!

*Strange images float through my mind of Citrus-flavored Cthulhu and Vanilla Hounds of Tindalos...s-cenarios such as "The Horror From the Pantry" and "Perfume Counter of*

*Doom" suggest themselves. 8^>}*

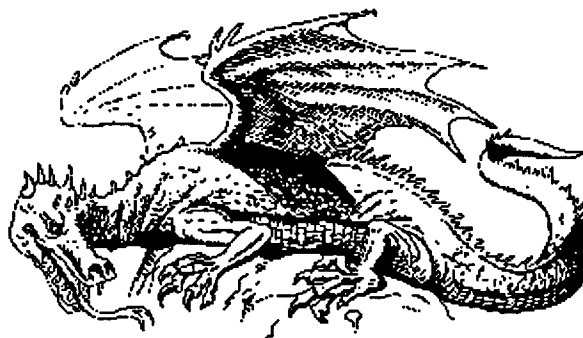
In any case, incense is a perfect smell for Wonder. I'll certainly be burning a stick or two during the sessions. I went down to **King Richard's Faire** on Columbus Day, and found that quite a bit of incense was on sale—as was an incense holder. I sniffed and sniffed until I thought my nose would drop off, and finally picked a large selection of smoky, exotic, religious-smelling (if you know what I mean) stuff. Sure wish I'd labelled them! Still, I'm sure I'll learn what works best with various moods. If anyone out there has any suggestions as to good kinds of incense (or experiences with the use of smell in roleplaying), they'd be much appreciated.

### THE MAGIC OMNIBUS

Rather than clutter up the issue with a number of short pieces, I've decided to put them all together in a sort of omnibus area. If anyone has a better name to suggest for this section, however, I'm all ears...though I look nothing like Ross Perot, thank goodness. 8^>}

### Joy and Rapture Unalloyed!

For the last month, I've been more and more unhappy over the scheduling conflict between RuneQuest Con and the local Arisia convention. It's possible that this may be the last RQ Con ever, as well as the first; this could be my only chance to meet the many RuneQuest authors whose work I've enjoyed for so many years. On the other hand, my commitment to the Arisia Convention is strong, even ignoring that fact that I've already paid for



my membership; though we've been generally treated like trash by the con organizers in the matter of the Amateur Video Contest, the con itself has always been the major event of the year for me. Furthermore, it's possible that Arisia will actually put on a decent video contest for the first time this year—they've been advertising it as bigger and better. Since no contest was held last year, I could enter The GM's Hall of Shame video in this year's contest. To be able to compete without sweating blood is a highly appealing idea!

And so I was quite torn indeed. On the one hand, RQ Con; on the other, Arisia. Both do-not-miss events. Both scheduled for Martin Luther King weekend. Agony!

But as you might guess from the title of this section, a mailing recently arrived in the mail. Arisia has been moved back one weekend—now I can attend both! Talk about dreams coming true, eh? 8^>}

### The NESFA Plunge

Speaking of Arisia, it would seem that a shadow of doom has drifted across its horizon—and that shadow is called NESFA. I'm not privy to the full story, but according to discussions on the Tangent/Arisia BBS the ConCom Chair and at least two other members are dedicated NESFA members. At least some people seem pretty confident that the upcoming convention will be the last independent Arisia ever. I have to say that seems a pity. Though I have no experience with NESFA, I do know that Boskone was pretty much a major convention, and that NESFA essentially destroyed it. On the other hand, I've been told that much of the membership of NESFA has changed since then. On the *other* other hand, I've also

been told that they're something of an elitist organization; I had my fill of elitists when I quit Mensa. Perhaps someone out there can tell me the truth about NESFA?

### What, Me Angry?

At the collation of #183, several people remarked that I seem much angrier in print than I do in person. Oddly, a close friend has told me the reverse—that I'm much "nicer" in R&R than I am in person. Strange. And an interesting comment on perception, I think. Either that, or I'm unusually calm at collation. 8^>}

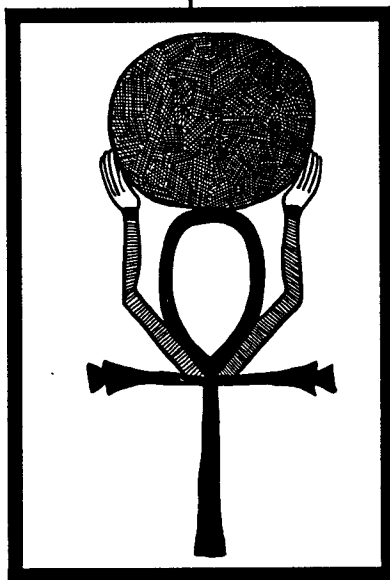
### Write On?

It may be a bit of a crazy idea, but lately I've been wondering if I should try to commit to writing one piece of short fiction for every Rack & Rune. Every source I've consulted has pretty much agreed that the only way to develop writing abilities is to *write*; and I've found that it's somehow much easier to write for TWH than it is to simply write with no deadline or audience in mind. I suspect George Phillis

would agree with me (eh, George?). But is that too audacious? Is one piece of fiction for every issue simply too much to do? I'd hate to make that commitment and then fail to keep up with it. Perhaps every other issue...but that might not be often enough. Guess I'll have to mull this one over.

### Goodbye Joel

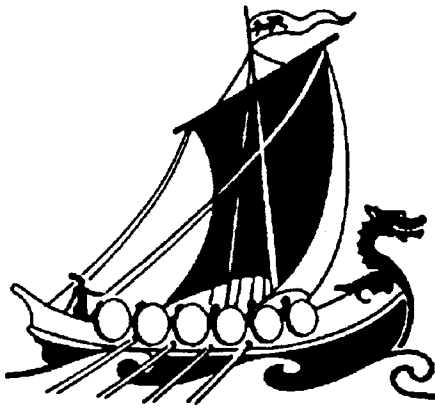
It wouldn't be right to let the departure of Joel Hodgeson from Mystery Science Theater 3000 go unremarked in these pages. He did a great job as Joel Robinson of MST3K—and after all, he created the show. He'll certainly be missed! Though I believe that he'll still be writing at least occasionally.





However, I didn't much like the means of his final exit from the Satellite of Love. It seemed too casual, somehow—I know heavy goodbyes aren't exactly comedy fare, but still I couldn't help but expect something more. Joel and the 'bots were like father and children—perhaps literally, since he did create them. The whole thing was an anticlimax.

I'll admit to being curious as to how Mike Nelson, Joel's replacement and the head writer on MST3K, will handle his new role. I'm afraid that he'll play it "nicely", dulling that evil edge of sick humor he has. That's his best side, however: his viciously funny Michael Feinstein parody couldn't possibly have worked without that slice at the jugular. Time will tell!



## WANDERLUST

I never expected to be really surprised by anything about myself at this age. I thought I knew myself and my likes and dislikes rather completely. Nonetheless, I'm astonished to discover that I've been bitten by the travelling bug, rather badly.

Perhaps I should explain. At 29, I'd never been anywhere west of the Mississippi. I'd never been off the North American continent. The farthest north I'd travelled was Canada, and the furthest west was Detroit—or maybe Cleveland. And I was quite happy with this state of affairs.

Why travel to far-away places? I asked. They probably don't have the kind of food I like overseas. Most of them don't speak English, and I have no skill at languages. What's the point in racking up huge expenses to see scenery that I can see as well or better on TV? Not to mention the discomfort of long trips, and the danger any American faces in other countries. I live in the best place on Earth, so why screw things up?

But when my father retired, my parents decided to take the family to Switzerland and Venice for two weeks. I was less than thrilled about the idea—in fact, I viewed it as something of an impending ordeal. But I did go.

I won't say I loved all of it at the time. But it *was* extremely exciting, and much different from what I'd expected. The language wasn't a problem, and I was able to find enough food to get by. The scenery couldn't possibly have been as good on TV, and there were lots of things that really had to be experienced in person—stuff that would have been meaningless without personal experience. Wow.

Now I find myself with a bad case of wanderlust. Venice is stuck in my mind, and I dream about the Alps. I'd like to go back—and what's more, I'd like to travel to even more exotic places. Africa, for example. Perhaps the jungles of South America. It would be wonderful to comb through the old bookstores of London. Even Paris might be fun, and the Parisians might not be the sneering snobs I've always expected them to be. And there are so many other places...

This must tie in to my love of gaming. I love to travel to far-off places in my imagination, so why not travel in the real world, too? There really is a world of *difference* out there, and it's funny that only now after nearly thirty years have I come to realize that simple fact. Live and learn, I guess.

## REVIEW: Maps Book 1: Cities

Generic Roleplaying Supplement

Authors: Raven Design Group. Maps & illustrations by S.S. Crompton.

Publisher: Flying Buffalo, Inc.

Price: \$11.95

Format: 8.5 x 11" perfect-bound paperback, color cover, extensive interior b&w map illustrations

Length: 96 pages.

After the obnoxious "Political Correctness Warning" of *Heroes Now!*, I'd sworn to boycott the work of Paul Jaquays forever. My one regret was that this meant I'd be missing out on the fine "CityBook" series of generic fantasy supplements. Now a new CityBook has come out, and fortunately it's not by Jaquays at all.

In fact, it's not really a CityBook! Nonetheless Maps is clearly closely related to that series, and is in fact part of the same "Catalyst" line.

Maps: Cities contains maps of 21 fantasy cities. Each is accompanied with two or more pages of explanatory text, along with ideas for scenario hooks. These tend to be geared toward fantasy settings, though some might be adaptable for other genres.

The text is reasonably well written. The ideas are fairly interesting, though they tend to be a bit...simplistic; I'm not sure how much use they'd be to an experienced gamer. Some aren't much more than vague suggestions, without explanation or detail.

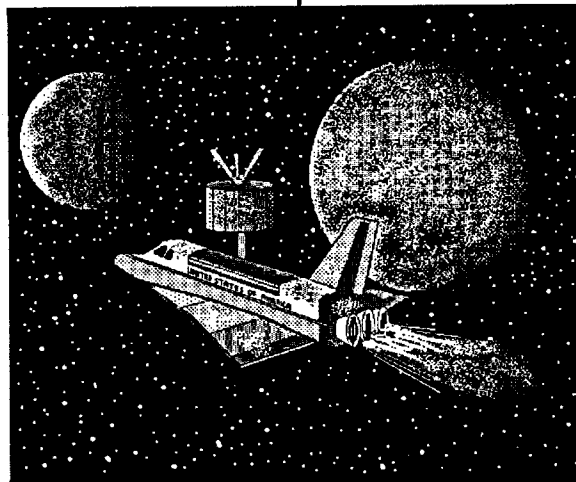
There's a lot of "The party is hired to get something from this city". That's fine for me, since I prefer to make my own plots anyway, but for the novice gamers who would be most helped by the book these truncated scenario hooks could be mystifying.

Some of the cities involve major assumptions about the game world, assumptions which would flavor an entire campaign; these would be good for inexperienced gamers, I think, but of limited use to those who prefer to create unique fantasy worlds.

The maps themselves are simpler than I'd expected. The artwork is acceptable, but I'd hoped for more fine detail—some of the maps appear almost crude! Most maps have about 20+ points of reference, though one has as many as 55.

Hmm. I have to say that some of the maps could have been drawn by a talented amateur—they're potentially useful, but not beautiful to look at. If I'd never seen *Petersen's Field Guide to the Creatures of the Dreamlands* I might not kvetch, but that book proved that fantasy roleplaying art doesn't have to be crude or embarrassing—and while the art of Maps isn't really bad, it certainly isn't something you'd particularly want to show to your non-gaming friends or hang on your wall.

All in all I'd say this is worth picking up as a gift for any...dammit, I'm trying to find some other word than "munchkin" to use, and failing miserably. How's "Young AD&D(tm)er" sound? Anyway, it would be a fine gift for a "YADD". I think it would also be of some use to an



experienced GM who prefers not to make maps. All in all, *Maps: Cities* isn't an outstanding addition to the field. But it does show some potential, and the price isn't too unreasonable. I hope to see more from the Raven Design Group in the future.

Rating: B-

### REVIEW: Heroic Worlds

A History and Guide to Role-Playing Games

Author: Lawrence Schick

Publisher: Prometheus Books  
(1991)

Price: \$16.95

Format: 9 x 6" perfect-bound paperback, color cover, some b&w interior art. Acid-free paper!

Length: 448 pages.

I can't imagine why anyone would publish a history of roleplaying games. What's the point? It seems a specialized publication for an all-too-small market. Not even a reasonable number of gamers are interested in such a product—I doubt that many munchkin are interested in the history of their hobby. Nonetheless, quite a few such books have been published.

Recently I read one that was really dreadful. It was loaned to me by a friend who had noticed that The Wild Hunt was mentioned within—but he was doing me no favor. That book sucked! Fortunately I've forgotten the title and author. Since it was rather old and out of print it's unlikely that any reader will be in danger of buying it unaware.

Heroic Worlds is a book of quite a different caliber. A good thick tome, it is an extremely useful and authoritative

reference work for the entire gaming hobby, something any gamer would find useful or at least interesting—even munchkins could find all the information about AD&D (tm) that they could want.

It begins with a workmanlike explanation of what gaming is. This is followed with an 18-page history of gaming, which is fairly unbiased and thorough (I suspect I can detect some antipathy towards T&R on the part of the author, but he hides it well).

The rest of the book is an extremely comprehensive catalog of roleplaying games. They're broken up into genres and categories, and short descriptions are included. For the most part the authors avoids much commentary, sticking to straight description; he does note exceptional cases, however. I was amused to read his description of the astoundingly bad KABAL RPG: "Lame fantasy system requiring numerous and complex mathematical calculations"; I once read a friend's copy, and that description is actually kind! 8^>}

There is some rating of games, however; for each genre certain top systems are recommended. In most cases I was pleased to note that I agreed with the author.

Roleplaying systems and supplements are listed; the definition of "supplement" is somewhat broad, however, including such things as GM's screens and an AD&D (tm) coloring album. Magazines and such are not listed, unfortunately; I'd like to see them written up as well as this, and not just because I'd like to read about TWH.

Scattered throughout the book are quotes, long and short, from major game authors. They are well selected for the most part, and help liven up the book. So



too do the illustrations that are spotted every four or five pages; these are taken from the various original game sources, and are both useful and interesting.

The book is topped off with a directory of game publishers, a list of award-winning games, a few pages of definitions of gaming terms, an extremely interesting and large timeline for the hobby, and finally a very well done index.

All in all, an extremely good job. I'd say this book is an invaluable reference work for any serious gamer. I still can't quite figure out how it got published, though, particularly since it's apparently the only gaming-related book ever printed by the publisher. I'm told that Prometheus Books offers quite a few "adult" books in their catalog. Now how on *earth* did they end up with this one? 8^>}

Rating: A

### RANDOM RUNEQUEST

#### Once Again, The Grey Company

...doesn't seem to be going away. I wrote it up into a neatly organized five page outline (wish I'd done that before I printed it in TWH) and sent it to **Tales of the Reaching Moon** and **The RuneQuest Adventures Fanzine**. Both are interested; John Castellucci of **Adventures** would like to see it written up as an 8-10 page scenario, while David Hall suggests writing up the senior members of the Grey Company for **Tales**. I don't *think* the two projects are incompatible; I'll have to try to

**Q:** How many Chalana Arroy Healers does it take to screw in a light bulb?

**A:** One—but you'll have to give half your cash to the Temple, and tithe 10% of your income for the next year.

find the time to work on them.

#### Borderlands!

This seems to be a lucky period for me, at least as far as roleplaying goes. Recently I got to cap off my collection of major RQII material with a near-mint edition of **Borderlands**. Of course it's great! Even if Chaosium never takes the license for RQ back, if they'd occasionally publish a supplement like this I wouldn't mind so much. And I'm sure it would do wonders for the game. I wonder if Avalon Hill's **RuneQuest** agreement forbids Chaosium to publish their own **RuneQuest** supplements? It does seem that RQ may be being put on the back burner by Avalon Hill, by the way. A real pity.

#### RQ Con

Is definitely on. I received an update via the Net on Tuesday October 19th, and it seems that there will be about 150 attendees—it should be a small and intimate Con, perfectly suited to give me a chance to meet and talk to all the people I've corresponded with for so long. As an interesting side note, apparently a surprisingly large number of people participating in the "Home of the Bold" Gloranthan LRP have red hair; I wonder if that could mean anything? Of course I'll write up a full report of both RQ Con and Arisia for the Hunt.

### THERE CAN ONLY BE [x-1]

I thought that the original **Highlander** movie was rather poor. I could never quite get past the incongruity of Christopher Lambert's cheesy French/European accent while he was playing a Scottish peasant. Sean Connery's Scottish accent made Lambert's inability painfully clear, especially since Connery was playing an Egyptian. Who thought up that nightmare of casting? And the plot itself was idiotic. The idea of immortals battling through time til only one was left was a neat one, but the "prize" gained by the eventual winner



was so ridiculous that no one I know has been able to take it seriously. The right to have children, die of old age, and “influence men’s minds”? What was the bloody point of that!?

I therefore skipped the sequel entirely. I passed on the TV show, too—the lame theme music by Queen alone was enough to get me to change the channel. Lately I’ve been watching the show, however, and I must say to my surprise: it’s good. It’s quite good. Not great television, but certainly more intelligent than the usual fare—quite respectable, in fact. The writing tends to be good and somewhat unpredictable, avoiding hackneyed plot lines at least occasionally. The acting is certainly better than that of the movie, though I have to admit that Connery might have been a welcome addition. All in all, this is now a show worth a second chance from those who saw the early episodes and wrote it off.

Afternote: the latest episode featured an extremely surprising development: one of the major characters was killed off. Generally I respect this sort of thing in a show; I’ve always been a little irritated at the unchanging quality most shows have. No matter what happens, you know that Kirk and Spock will always be on the bridge. On the other hand, now that I think of it, major cast changes aren’t really all that rare these days—perhaps the reason is that stars are becoming more and more demanding these days, or that they tend to be more willing to take risks. Be that as it may, I thought that this exit was handled quite well. And we certainly seem to be looking at major changes in the show as a whole. I expect some interesting episodes

ahead.

### FROM THE CLOSED SHELVES

#### The Golden Turkey Awards by Harry and Michael Medved

I despise Michael Medved. His crusade against “immorality” in Hollywood is nothing more than a cheap attempt to suck up to the extreme right wing and the

fanatic fundamentalists who support them—I wouldn’t be surprised to see the jerk run for office one of these days. Still, this is an outstanding book, and I believe that it’s his brother Harry Medved who did the main work on it—I think Harry’s the one who really cares



about the subject.

The subject is bad movies. Not just boring ones, but movies so bad they can be painful to watch—or hilarious. That’s not such an esoteric subject these days, what with *Elvira’s Movie Macabre* and *Mystery Science Theater 3000* on the air; but back when *Turkey* was published, bad movies were pretty much the province of late-night shows in art houses.

The book is hilarious. My strongest memory of it was reading it in my high-school library and nearly choking to death trying not to laugh out loud, not just once but almost continually. I hate to admit it, but the writing in this book is as funny as the bad movies it describes.

It’s divided into a number of categories. Each category has a number of contenders, and a “winner” is selected from among them. There’s “The Worst Performance by an Actor as a Member of the Clergy”, “The Most Badly Bumbled

Bee Movie”, “Worst Title” (including the classic *I Dismember Mama*), “The Worst Special Effect” and many others. It’s a treasury of bad movies. What can I say? I’d have to call this one of the funniest books around. It’s been surprisingly useful over the years as a reference work, too—it can change watching terrible movies from a painful experience to an exhilarating one. It may or may not be out of print, but it’s certainly worth looking up. I’d also recommend *The 50 Worst Movies of All Time*, by Harry Medved.

As for a gaming connection...I suppose that *Turkey* would be useful to GMs and players of *It Came From the Late Late Late Show*, though I’ve never actually played the game myself.



### The Teddy Bear Habit by James Lincoln Collier

Some books don’t leave you alone—or at least they don’t leave *me* alone. I first read this book in perhaps the fifth grade. I checked it out again and again while I was elementary school. Even afterwords, through high school and college, this book always stuck in my mind. I finally went to *Wordsworth* in Harvard Square to have a rare book search made; when it arrived (fairly quickly), I was pleased and surprised to find that it was actually *better* than I’d remembered! Great bits that I’d forgotten had nonetheless always been in the back of my mind, frequently remembered throughout the years.

The *Teddy Bear Habit* might be described as something like an optimistic *Catcher in the Rye* for young teenagers,

though it’s not a derivative work. It’s really that good; I found bits in it that I’d have sworn came from *Catcher*—that’s how I’d remembered them, though I re-read *Catcher* at least once each year. The writing is outstanding, and is enhanced by the art of Lorenz, whose work has appeared in the *New Yorker* as well as elsewhere.

The book is narrated first-person by George Stable, a 12-year-old living in New York City’s Greenwich Village with his father during the late 60’s. George is a lot like a young Holden Caulfield without as many problems. However, he does have one oddity in his life: he’s dependent on his teddy bear. If it’s not around, he gets nervous and makes mistakes. Since he’s an aspiring actor and musician that can make life difficult. He’s surrounded by interesting characters: his father, who paints modern art in the insane style and writes comic books for a living (featuring such classics as *Garbage Man*, a wealthy playboy by day who drives a flying garbage truck by night and can render evildoers unconscious by beaming a terrible smell at them); his voice teacher, an aging and affected wanna-be Englishman; and Wiggysy, the fat creepy hood who’s secretly teaching him to play guitar.

The trouble begins when George discovers that a pouch of jewels have been hidden in his bear—jewels which must have been stolen in a recent highly-publicized robbery...

Though technically for young adults, this book is yet another that I’d recommend without hesitation to any adult with a flexible mind. Unfortunately it is long out of print; however, I’m sure that most libraries carry a copy in their children’s section. Though I’ll admit that it can be embarrassing to walk into a children’s room and take out a book. 8^>}

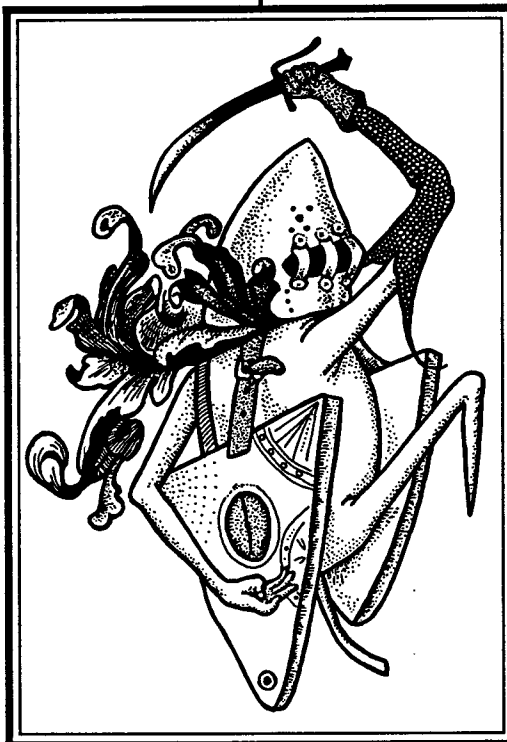
Hmm. James *Collier*. Now why does that sound familiar? I wonder if he has any grand-nieces... 8^>}



**Author Profile: Mack Reynolds**

I'm not sure if any of Mack Reynolds works are still in print. If any are, they're probably the rather unfortunate posthumous collaborations that have been butchered by Dean Ing (whoever he is). This is a pity, as Reynolds was a truly original writer who presented some novel ideas and approaches to the themes of science fiction.

Reynolds was rather an interesting character himself, who worked as a soldier of fortune around the globe. Much of his experience is no doubt reflected in his work, but he lacks the militaristic and dogmatic qualities that characterized the writings of Robert Heinlein, for example. He specialized in a social/economic point of view; though technology is certainly a factor in many of his stories, the really interesting elements are the future societies themselves. He reused many of his concepts in various works. The Universal Credit Card for example: not hard to predict, perhaps but Reynolds went ahead and worked out the implications of such a card—and ways to beat it. He dealt with the problem of a near-total robotic economy, in which human labor is no longer necessary; one answer (though it is not portrayed as a perfect one) is a Negative Income Tax which is paid to all citizens. The Soviet/US hostilities, organized crime, social fragmentation, drugs—he wrote about every social topic under the sun. It's perhaps not surprising that he rarely wrote books involving a space-travelling future: most of his stories



take place on near-future Earth or on orbital colonies. An exception is the "Section G" series, which uses various alien planets to portray social situations that mirror modern situations.

And of course there's the sex. There's no way to tell if he felt obligated to put it in, or if he did it because he liked it; I suspect the latter was mostly the case. Be

that as it may, some of his books feature a dose of softcore porn, though in small proportion to the fiction itself. You wouldn't necessarily want to give an unread book of his to a child, but there's nothing that would disturb anyone other than a fundamentalist. It's not very graphic, in other words—Heinlein was far more offensive with his themes of incest and his arrogance (though as an aside, by far the worst thing about Heinlein was the "wisdom" he offered in his platitudes. God,

the pain! 8^> } ).

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention Reynold's short stories. They're engaging and well crafted, often quite memorable. There's one that quite a few people know who know nothing else by Reynolds: A man goes door to door, selling soap at an incredibly cheap price. He explains to customers that the soap has the same ingredients and is made in the same factories as the brands they buy—the price difference is simply due to the fact that his soap has no packaging, advertising budget, or any other irrelevancies. He works for an organization that plans to expand this concept to the entire market of goods...

Another writer might have had the man be an alien, smuggling its pod-babies into people's homes disguised as soap. Mack Reynolds took the risk of lecturing—just a little bit—to make a really interesting socioeconomic point, instead.

Reynolds wrote quite a lot, upwards of forty books at least. Most used bookstores usually have one or two, and while a few are duds most are lively and interesting—even now few writers deal with the themes that he did. Though he can be a bit didactic at times, and occasionally veers into pedantism as a character suddenly decides to explain the social causes of a custom, his writing style is simple, interesting, and involving. Mack Reynolds is certainly worth a try, even two tries. But avoid his “collaborations”!



### **Bridge of Birds by Barry Hugheart**

No rule is absolute...at least, not in these pages. 8^>} Not only is this book still in print, it's likely to remain so for years. Nonetheless I'm including it here on the off chance that some readers may have missed it among the proliferation of science-fiction and fantasy books out there.

Bridge of Birds is one of the

comparatively rare breed of fantasies set in the ancient Orient. It is narrated in a somewhat modern and very readable style by Number Ten Ox, a strong and moderately honest peasant in ancient China.

The children of Number Ten Ox's village become desperately ill. Setting out to find a sage to cure them, he comes upon the disreputable and drunken Li Kao, a sage of great age and wisdom. Together they travel across ancient China to discover the cure for the children, racing against time. On the way they dabble in a number of very amusing encounters, and flimflam their way out of many of them.

The book makes no pretense at grimly historical accuracy. Magic and the supernatural are common and accepted. The book itself is refreshingly different, and the end is genuinely moving. Will it become a classic in the field? Perhaps—but in any case I'd heartily recommend it.

There are also two sequels about Number Ten Ox and Master Li Kao: The Story of the Stone and Eight Skilled Gentlemen. Both are good, but definitely nowhere near as good as Bridge of Birds.

### **DICE**

It seems a little...childish to talk about dice. They're the most toylike element of roleplaying, at least for me; I suppose that miniatures are more so, but I don't use miniatures. Though I'm more and more inclined away from the frequent use of dice in my games, I nonetheless must admit that they're fun. Apropos of that shameful fact, I've been pleased to see that a useful sort of new die has apparently been gaining in popularity. Gamescience calls it a Decaider (tm) (sp?), which I think is a stupid name. Other companies make it as well: a ten-sided die with the numbers 00, 10, 20, 30, up to 90 written on it. Coupled with a regular d10, it avoids all confusion and uncertainty as to which digit is high when making a percentile role. A good idea, the kind which makes you wonder why it



wasn't around years ago.

That ties in with the next section:

### DICING RATS: Beating the Cheating



One advantage of running a sheetless game is that there's no need to worry about players cheating—not that my players would cheat anyway. However, cheating has long been one of the politely ignored problems of roleplaying. In most if not all of the games I've played in there's been at least *some* cheating.

There are many different ways of cheating, of course. The one I've run into most often is the roll cheater. One player I knew never inked in the numbers of his percentile dice. They were impossible to read unless you were less than a foot away from them. I soon noted an amazing statistical anomaly: that player never rolled a result in which the second number was lower than the first. For example, he never rolled a 32; but 23 was always a possibility (for those not familiar with RuneQuest, low is good). He was obviously reversing the digits to suit himself. I recall that doubles would cause him to make a distinct and uncomfortable pause.

The other players began sitting closer and closer to the cheating player, trying to see what he rolled. He developed the habit of curling his arm protectively in front of him, and rolling the dice against his own forearm. When the other players moved still closer, and occasionally began leaning casually against the wall behind him to look over his shoulder he developed a new

habit: he'd scoop the dice up again almost as soon as they touched the table, and announce the result.

This began to drive some of the others crazy. One of them finally cracked, and decided to make a character whose sole purpose was to kill the cheating player's characters out of the game—all of them, for as long as he continued playing. Things began to become painfully obvious, so in desperation the GM made up a large table of random numbers. He'd ask players to announce their rolls when they made them, and then he'd consult the table and tell them what the actual result is.

The cheating player was stymied. He tried asking casually "What number do I need?" when he picked up his dice, but the GM would tersely reply "Just roll." A few months later the game came to a natural end.

It may seem a little silly—so many people so aggravated, and yet no one saying anything—but at the same time that seems to be the pattern. Accusations of cheating are almost never made, at least not to the accused's face. Why is it taboo to point out that a player is cheating?

The sole exception to this silence is when the GM himself is cheating—though even then, the tendency is to pass over the offense lightly.

As a GM, I've found it difficult to deal with cheating. It's somehow very embarrassing. At the same time, it infuriates me if done to excess. One player in an old game of mine cheated outrageously: His characteristics were all within a point or two of species maximum. His skills always increased, and always by the maximum amount. He always did within three points of maximum damage, and on those very rare but much played up (by him) occasions when he fumbled the dice always yielded the least harmful result. Soon he was far and away the most powerful member of the group—he could

have easily defeated the rest of the party combined. His powerful and domineering personality enabled him to demand the best magic items. He'd charge ahead into danger in order to grab all the best magic for himself before the others would arrive; in the meantime the rest of the party would be desperately trying to deal with all the dangers he had roused.

His cheating didn't stop there, however. The laws of chance were bent and broken virtually every time he rolled his dice. Criticals and specials were a constant feature of his battles. Needless to say, his dice were not clearly marked—and he kept at a distance.

One combat I remember especially clearly. He had decided to leave camp secretly and go out alone, into what he'd been clearly told was near-certain death—a land of devastation and corruption. He claimed to be looking for food, though

the party had more than enough and nowhere could less likely foraging ground be found. He searched for some time, but found little until five dangerous disease-carrying monsters were upon him. Both the character and the player were furious. He seemed to feel that it was my fault that his suicidal venture had gone awry! In fact it was a fair random roll. With what may be a world's record of critical hits, he dispatched the creatures in three combat rounds. They never even touched him. And of course he made his CON roll versus disease every time.

The player's anger at that fight was so

great that I began to feel physically threatened. I'm pretty big, but this guy was just as big—and there was a psycho quality to him that made him seem far bigger. Nonetheless, I was furious at his grotesque cheating, and determined to do something about it.

I sat down and deliberately designed a weapon to destroy that player's character—an NPC intended to counter his every move and beat him. For the first time in my life, I plotted the cold-blooded execution of a PC. I'd be fair, of course—as much as I could be. I created the NPC in a totally unbalanced way, but I would roll fairly thereafter.

When the encounter finally took place...well, I should have known. A completely shameless cheater can beat anything a GM can throw at him short of outright murder—and I was, remember, more than a little intimidated by this player. I

wasn't sure I'd survive the murder of his character.

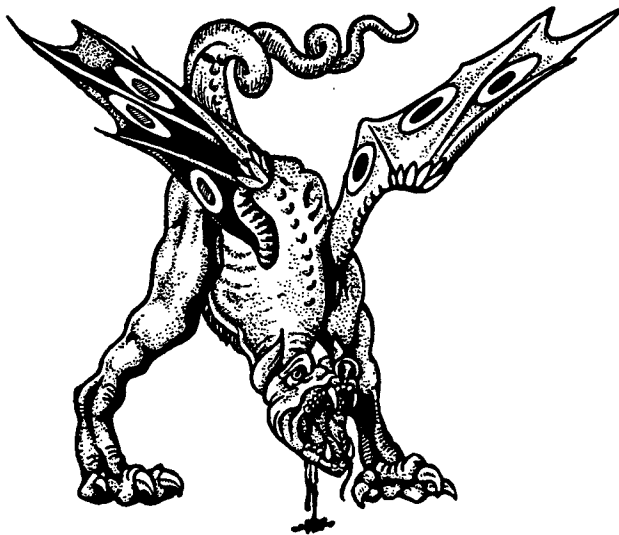
He never rolled anything other than criticals, both for attack and defense. Every blow he struck did absolute maximum damage. Magic bounced off him without effect. Spirits never overcame his Power. Nothing could touch him. Later, I found that his Power was far above species maximum. He claimed it was a mistake, though that was odd coming from one who claimed to have gamed with the creators of the game system.

Eventually he left the game—and that, I think, is why the game was so successful



afterwords, and lasted as long as it did. But I must say that dealing with that player was one of the worst experiences I've ever had as a GM. I'm sure that others of the Hunt would have sent him packing with a sneer and a snap of the fingers. But I was unwilling to do that, both from physical fear and from a desire to avoid what could only be a game-ending confrontation. I don't like confrontation, particularly when it could be my face confronting some big psycho's fists. 8^>}

I'd be very interested in hearing about other experiences with cheating, and in particular how other GMs have dealt with it.



### THE LIGHT, AT LAST

I've been talking and thinking about starting a new campaign for months now. Only recently, however, have I had the spark of insight that I find necessary to start a new campaign. And strangely enough, I got it here, in the pages of The Wild Hunt.

I don't know if others have experienced this, but sometimes when I look at a picture or hear a piece of music or read a story I feel a powerful *resonance*. An entire world presents itself from that tiny beginning, filling my mind with possibilities. More than anything else, I get a *feeling* for the world, which is difficult to

describe. I find myself thinking about the story/picture/music frequently, and can daydream about it for long stretches at a time. That sort of inspiration is the best way I know to begin a campaign. Should I find myself becoming stale or at a loss later on, I can usually refresh myself and gain new ideas by contemplating the inspiring object.

That's what happened to me with the picture of the monk in the last Rack & Rune. Looking at it, I see a thousand mad monks chanting sonorously in a high mountain monastery of pale stone, colored incense smoke spiraling upward as a nameless god is invoked. I've tied this in with a number of literary sources: Lord Dunsany, H.P. Lovecraft's Dreamlands, James Branch Cabel, Kipling, A Thousand and One Nights, and others. Together they make a world that I really think I can work with. Already in the last few days I've amassed enough ideas to last for a year or more of play.

I'm calling the world *Wonder*. It's far more magical than most worlds—more archetypal. Small kingdoms, decadent sultans living their lives in strange harems, talking animals and mysterious gods...some gods are no more than powerful human beings. Others are little more than abstract philosophical concepts. The spectrum is filled between these extremes, too. There are many forms of magic, one of the most common being Dreaming. A Dreamer sleeps, and dreams of a needed thing. When s/he awakes, the object is there—if the Dream was successful. Dream-objects are not always stable however, and may disappear or have curious properties. If a Dreamer is disturbed before naturally waking, the Dream fails. Experienced Dreamers can train themselves to sleep for specific amounts of time. Creation of objects does tire the Dreamer in a way that only Dreamless sleep can restore. More complex objects are more tiring, and living things are more tiring still. Magic is the hardest thing of all to Dream.

Lovecraft's Dreamlands are perhaps the strongest element in Wonder, and I'm taking the flexible nature of reality from that. The Dreamlands for Call of Cthulhu has been an invaluable resource. However, I want the players to have the perspective of inhabitants of the world, not mere visitors—and I want far less horror in Wonder than in the Dreamlands. Nonetheless, there is an Underworld where dark things dwell, and it is possible to sail or fly to other worlds. Mystery and the unknown will be the major element. I expect that the PCs will do a lot of travelling...

Fortunately I was able to come up with a campaign start that will encourage them to do so, as well as tying them together in an interesting way. I can't detail the opening in this issue, of course, since at least some of the potential players will probably read this; however, once the first session is played out I'll write it up in detail. As an aside, I can't help but feel that I've all too frequently started games without finishing them. If it weren't for Nereyon, I'd be more concerned than I am.

I plan to advertise and bring in a few new players—it'll be nice to add some fresh blood to the old gaming circle. I've yet to decide whether the game will be sheetless or will feature a modified and simplified version of the RuneQuest rules.

*Philosophy Corner*

**NDC**

Doug Jorenby's comments about

Non-Directed Campaigns have stuck in my mind. Perhaps this is because Nereyon is as close to an NDC as I've ever known. That seems to be both the strength and the major failing of Nereyon. In the six years that I've been running it it has grown and developed remarkably in my mind; I no longer need to spend time particularly planning out details. Situations and reactions are generally self-evident, and those that are not can be swiftly worked out during a very short break. That's not to say that the world has become stale.

Delightful surprises still crop up, when two elements that were developed entirely separately (at least in my conscious mind) suddenly reveal a surprisingly natural relationship, which explains and enhances both.

But it is extremely

free-form. I place little direct pressure on the players apart from those forces already present in the world. They are generally not forced into plots, and their agenda of action is extremely open. In many cases, nothing more than conscience impels them to act. I am also reluctant to cut short discussion time; since the game is sheetless, character choices and roleplaying are all-important. To give them less than all the real-time they desire for debate and planning (with the exceptions of such situations in which game-time is short) seems unfair to me. This attitude may be a reaction on my part to some extremely bad games I've played in, games in which virtually all player actions were GM-dictated, and no time for discussion was permitted at all. Still, it does make the game move incredibly slowly sometimes! The PCs talk and talk and nitpick and debate and brainstorm, sometimes to the

## Things I'd Like To See In An RPG Campaign

(but probably never will)

#1:

*A PC who loses his hair  
through natural pattern baldness.*



point of aggravation. They come up with fascinating ideas, only to shoot them down again. I'm not saying that this is a bad thing necessarily, but it certainly makes for a slow game at times!

Situations change, of course. I suspect that I've taken the NDC route a little too far. Fortunately, that can be fixed. There seems to be a breaking point of history approaching in Nereyon...at the rate of my writeups, you can expect to read about it in issue #230. 8^>}

### TRAGEDY OF HORRORS: MY FIRST IFGS GAME

I first heard of the **International Fantasy Gaming Society** (apart from reading *Dream Park* like everyone else) at WorldCon in Boston—was that in 1988? Anyway, I wasn't actually attending the Con. I was playing in a *Call of Cthulhu* game in the hotel room of a guy I knew. I'll call him "Sven".

He was a pretty bad GM, so after a while we all started talking about other things. He started talking about the IFGS, claiming to have had a great deal of experience with it in Colorado. He told us he was going to start a chapter of it in Massachusetts, and tried to get us all to pay for memberships right away.

Most of the guys refused. For some reason, however, I and one other guy did pay him. Temporary insanity, perhaps. 8^>}

No games were run for more than a

year. Finally, Sven called everyone and announced that he had a game ready to go. It was called "The Revel", and he'd written it himself. He'd also rented a church hall on Newbury Street—which (if you're not familiar with Boston) is like the 5th Avenue of Boston. Very rich area, lots of really cool stores with extremely expensive stuff, and probably the most expensive real estate in the area. The hall would cost about \$300 for the night, as I recall.

We went berserk with promotion. Posters and fliers were placed anywhere there even *might* be someone interested in playing. The response was outstanding—about 40 people sent in checks. The game was on.

It wasn't a very *good* game, however. Sven clearly wasn't much of a writer. The plot was simple: a King and his men (the PCs) revel in the Palace, celebrating some saint's day. All weapons are of course

locked away on this holy day of peace. The portly King bitches out his people as they eat, calling them lazy and cowardly, unworthy of the deeds of their grandsires. Suddenly, however, the doors open. A sneering, diabolic figure enters, flanked by foul henchmen: the Mocker, a recreant



knight.

Instantly the armed henchmen seize the Princess. The Mocker laughingly announces a contest of riddles; the winner may keep the Princess. The Royal Herald gets a book of riddles from the Royal Library, and

questions each in turn: five riddles are asked of each side. Once defeated, the Mocker nonetheless steals the Princess and escape. The shaken King announces a quest for the Princess (setting up the next game) offering half his kingdom for her rescuer, and then knights all the PCs. The End.

Ten incredibly lame riddles were written for the scenario, one of which was a bare-faced steal from *The Hobbit*.

At this point when I was first reading the scenario I became concerned. What if there was a tie? What if a tiebreaker was necessary? The NPC playing the Herald had already said he couldn't wing anything.

Sven assured me that there would be no problem. He'd be playing one of the Mocker's henchmen, and would make sure that they missed enough questions to avoid a tie. Though I expressed my concerns several times, Sven felt I was making a mountain out of a molehill.

Somehow it had been assumed that I would play the role of the King, and that my roommate Scott would play the Mocker. Unfortunately our lines were precisely scripted, and Sven never had time to actually get us copies of the script. When we finally got the scripts, it was the night before the game!

Incidentally, one more thing about that script: It was lifted, plot and all, damn near word for word from the Sean Connery movie *The Green Knight*. Literally. When I saw that movie years later, I was stunned.

Scott and I were more than a little nervous. We'd had almost no preparation, and neither of us was experienced at memorizing lines in a hurry. To screw up

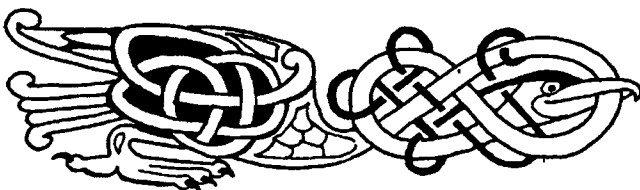
in front of forty or more strangers was a frightening thought!

The beginning of the event went well enough. In fact, things went pretty much according to plan—right up til the Riddle Contest. Both sides got the first riddles right. The second riddle for the King was guessed correctly. Scott had planned to miss that one, but Sven as his henchman went up to him and whispered in his ear—Scott later told me that Sven insisted on answering the riddle correctly. The good guys missed number three—no shame there, as these riddle really sucked. Apart from being incredibly talentless Tolkien pastiches, most of them had several valid answers—some of which made more sense than the “official” answers (prompting a general reaction of “Huh?” when the answers were revealed).

Scott was going to miss number three, when one of the PCs shouted out the correct answer. He had no choice but to smile mockingly and give her answer back. Another point for the Mocker! Incidentally, the woman who'd let the answer slip went on to become President of New England IFGS, though she isn't a member 'any longer.

So far the score was PCs=2, Mocker=3. The fourth question was asked of the PCs. The PCs hemmed and hawed...this was perhaps the worst riddle of the lot. Finally, in desperation, I answered the riddle myself. I was immediately congratulated by the PCs nearby. I smiled and said “You have to know these things when you're King, you know.” 8^>}

Scott wanted to miss question #4—but



once again Sven went up and insisted that they answer correctly. Sven's a pretty physically intimidating guy...Scott gave in.

Do you see the quandary we were in? Only one question remained to be asked of each side. The good guys were down by one. If we answered ours, and the bad guys answered theirs, the bad guys would win! Likewise if we both missed the questions. And if we succeeded, and the Mocker failed the last question there would be....a tie!

Damn Sven!

The Herald turned away, clearly refusing to deal with this. Scott and I stared helplessly at each other. I was just about to suggest that if we answered both our riddle and his we would win, when Scott announced that he was bored, and would leave the Contest unfinished, taking the Princess with him. He turned and fled with her.

That was about it! But it was pretty amazing. I don't think I ever said "I told you so, but I was never more justified! Incidentally, Sven is now a member of NERO. They deserve him! 8^>}

As a side note, on the ride home Scott, another guy (I'll call him Ingmar), and I had an interesting experience. It was about ten o'clock in the evening, and the subway was jammed with a gang of young toughs and their newly pubescent female hangers-on. They were playing a game—I don't know the rules, but they apparently involved pressing up against the doors of the train from inside as it pulled into the station, then running at top speed into the

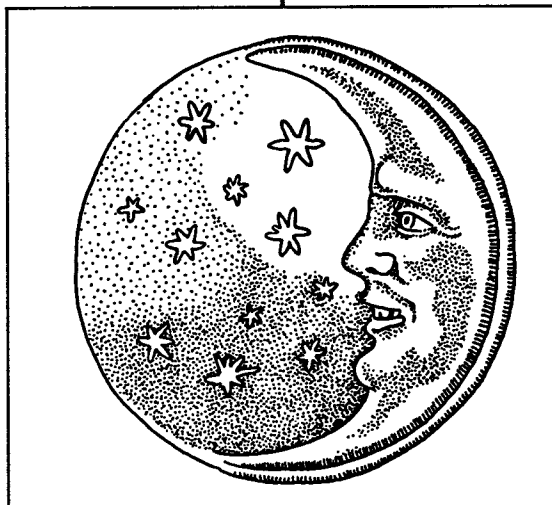
next car while screaming at the top of their lungs. As Scott, Ingmar and I entered the nearest car the whole swarm of them came screaming in after us.

It was about 10:30 PM on a Saturday night—not so late that immediate fear would be indicated, but late enough keep me on my toes. The next few stops would be in "bad" areas, though they were really not very dangerous; the worst I'd ever seen was a group of kids throwing lit firecrackers down into a crowd from a balcony. Still, this gang of twenty-odd urban menaces was a definite matter for concern.

The train doors closed. The gang members were milling about, screaming machismo at the top of their lungs; the girls, who seemed mostly between fourteen and sixteen, were laughing and shrieking like tortured parrots about nothing at all.

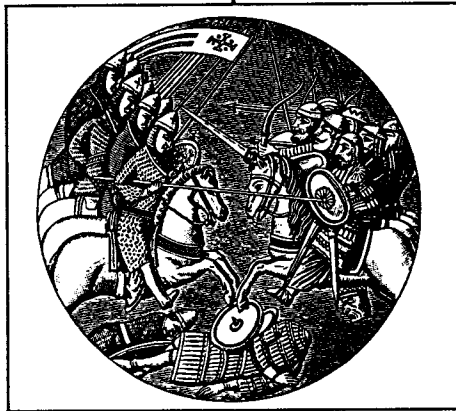
After a moment the conductor's door at the further end of the train opened, and a large conductor stepped out. He was perhaps 45 years old. He angrily berated the gang members for their wild behavior—loudly, but he had reason to be. The gang seemed almost stunned, many curling back into their seats.

Suddenly one large guy who had been coiled like a spring on his seat leapt forward and punched the conductor in the face, slamming into him full-force. The gang member was wearing attack rings of some kind, sharp and jagged; the conductor's face was deeply sliced, and immediately began bleeding. Chaos ensued as the rest of the gang jumped the conductor.



It's strange, but probably the strongest memory I have of that night is the sound that the girls made. They were shrieking and laughing, a cacophonous din; they seemed really happy at this turn of events. There was something deeply horrifying in those voices... something like the piping of Azathoth, perhaps. Soulless.

Scott started to get up to help the conductor. Instinctively both Ingmar and I forced him back into his seat. We were truly jaded city dwellers! In retrospect I'm not proud of that action; at the same time I'm not sure that any of us would be alive if we'd done otherwise. None of the other passengers moved.



The fight was fierce but brief. In a flurry of action the conductor grabbed the attacker's head and slammed it against the vertical metal bar attached to the seats. Wham! Wham! Wham! The attacker's face was a mask of blood. Quickly dragging himself to the door, the conductor forced it open and got out onto the station platform. The door shut and locked behind him.

I'd thought things were crazy before, but now I became really worried. The largest men of the gang went roaring up and down the aisle like wounded tyrannosaurs, screaming and bellowing with rage. "I'm not going back to jail, man—I kill 'em before I go back!" howled the bleeding attacker. "Oooh, that n---r got a gun!" shrieked the girls gleefully. I could well believe it.

This went on for what seemed like hours but must have only been minutes, while the train sat at the station. The few other passengers, mostly elderly folk, stared back at us in terror. Where would it end? Would the police come soon? Would there be a shootout? Newspaper stories about

innocent bystanders being shot in the subway suddenly seemed a lot less abstract. And still the train sat.

Scott later remarked that the thing that annoyed him most about that evening was that the gang just stood around screaming. Since they believed that they were going to be arrested, why didn't they force the doors or break the large windows and escape? It would have been fairly easy to do. But instead they just stood around, making no effort to get away.

Finally the train started with a jerk. The gang quieted a bit. The train sped along smoothly, and soon pulled into the next stop.

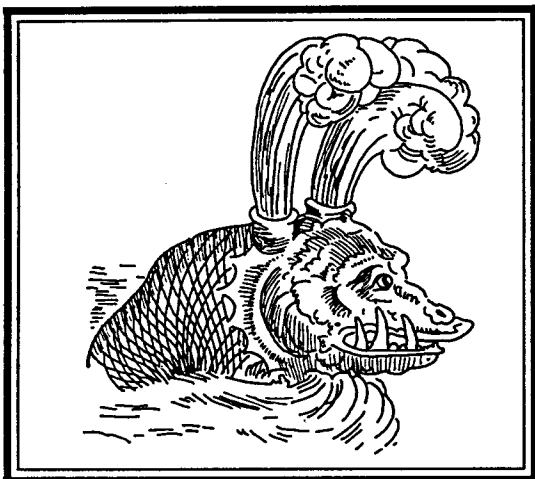
The gang walked out of the car and went up the stairs, out of sight. No one stopped them, and I feel fairly sure that they were simply allowed to leave the station without any difficulty. What a perfect ending for a crazy day!

With a start like that, it's amazing that the IFGS is still here—but it is, and doing very well. Though only two of the founders of New England IFGS are still members... 8^>}

By the way, I should make a note for non-Bostonian readers. Boston is not a particularly dangerous city; crime statistics available at your local library should confirm that. Murders and such do happen, but they happen more frequently elsewhere. Personally I can't imagine a better place to live than the Greater Boston area.

You know, it's funny—I never thought of turning that encounter into a scenario until this moment. I wonder, though...just what would be the point of such an encounter? To demonstrate mindless violence and stupidity? It doesn't sound like a fun game.





### ART EXPLOSION

It's likely that this will be the largest issue of Rack & Rune ever. It will also have more art than ever, barring disasters. Why? It's simple: I've found a great source of high-quality copyright-free art. Thousands of absolutely great images! I'm actually faced with the problem of not being able to print all of the art I would like. It's a nice change.

What's my source? I'll keep that secret for an issue or two yet—just enough time for me to choose the best images, and print them first. 8^>} Of course, I'm sure that at least some of the Pack already know my source. Perhaps the upcoming issues will see an art renaissance in these pages.

### PUSHING TWH

I've been publicizing TWH rather a lot lately. First I sent off material to **The Unspeakable Oath**, as I mentioned last issue. Then I sent off a description of TWH in response to a general plea from the editor of the *Chaosium Digest* on the InterNet; unfortunately she printed some items I'd not intended for publication, and omitted others. The result is that some readers might be under the impression that some of the founders of RuneQuest still contribute to the Hunt, something that I'd made clear was not so. Lastly, I've sent in a classified ad to be printed (for free,

fortunately) in the program booklet of the RuneQuest Convention. I hope we see something come out of all this, though of course the **Unspeakable Oath** ad won't run for several months, and the RQ Con booklet will be unavailable until January. Keep your fingers crossed!

Afterthought: Recently I made up a new poster for TWH, slanted at new contributors. I may make one up for subscribers too, if the bug bites me. I've included the poster in this issue. Of course I'd be glad if any of the Pack were to decide to copy and distribute it...

### STRANGE INTERLUDE

About a month ago I agreed to NPC in an outdoor IFGS game in the Blue Hills. My part was major in a sense, but not a fortunate one; I appeared only at the beginning and end of the game. Since the game was supposed to be eight hours long, that meant I'd be waiting for a long time in my car at the parking lot, alone.

I brought a book, and a fair amount of snack material, but was still rather remarkably bored. It was a beautiful day, very sunny (hard to believe that this was just a month ago, considering the weather these days), and it soon became rather hot in the car. Every so often I'd go outside and try to cool off in the shade.

Joggers and bicyclists came by every so often, and invariably asked what I was doing. I tried manfully to explain it while avoiding mention of the Evil System, but invariably they'd reply "Oh, is that like D&D?"

It could have been worse, though—one girl in the forest was actually asked if the players were Satanists! 8^>}

To continue: As I was sitting in my car, a shiny new luxury car roared up and parked in the fire lane. A man in a tuxedo jumped out. Going to the back of the car, he opened up the rear trunk and pulled out an absolutely huge wire cage. Inside was

one of the largest raccoons I've ever seen (and I've seen a few). Picking up a stick, he opened the cage and started banging on one side of it to urge the raccoon out. After it left he grabbed the cage, threw it into the trunk, and roared off.

I was trying to think off some pun for this section, but all I could think of was "Free Willy". And I've no way of knowing what the raccoon's name was. 8^>

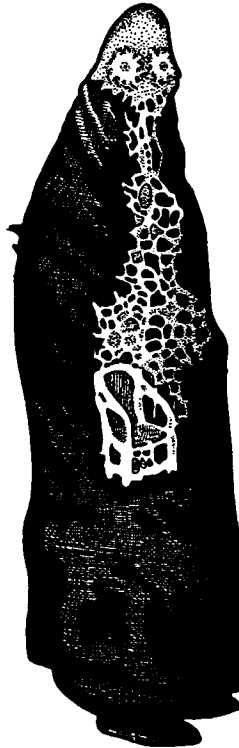
But it was a very odd incident...

### LUCKY AT CARDS

The concept of Luck as a character advantage troubles me. It's an interesting idea, though it's debatable whether luck (or unluck) should be represented by a simple statistic rather than overall roleplaying. The **Amber Diceless System** and **GURPS** both present interesting and quite different takes on the concept.

In the case of the Amber Diceless system, the point is almost moot. Luck (Good Stuff and Bad Stuff) is expressed through gamemaster fiat. I'd disagree with the way the effect of Stuff is described in the system, however, as it seems too absolute—a character with Bad Stuff is apparently invariably doomed to misery and failure. Unless one is playing in a Wagnerian tragedy, this seems an unappealing option—and somehow unaesthetic. As with every element of the Amber Diceless system, this is easily remedied with a little common sense and judgement on the part of the GM.

GURPS offers a far more mechanistic approach. Depending upon the level of Luck purchased, the character may get a



number of rerolls in a certain amount of time. That seems too formless and at the same time rigid: the character may be somewhat lucky at any sort of thing that the PC chooses, but only once per hour. A poor mechanic.

It was while watching an episode of **The Rockford Files** that I came up with a satisfying alteration to the GURPS method. Rockford is an extreme example of both luck and unluck: he's almost always stiffed by his client, and frequently gets beaten to a pulp. Yet though his death has been ordered by Mafiosi dozens if not hundreds of times, he always ends up surviving—and solving the case.

James Rockford has area-specific luck. The perfect correction for the limp GURPS Luck mechanic! Lucky at cards, unlucky at love...lucky in a career, unlucky with friends...I leave it to someone more dedicated to GURPS than I am to devise exact areas and point costs. I still feel that the "lucky once per hour" mechanic is too limiting, but even so the concept of area-specific luck helps a great deal—IMHO. As for areas, off the top of my head: Love, gambling, money, survival, injury...actually, it would be possible to divide areas of luck and unluck down into ridiculously narrow categories. Perhaps it would be easier to make a point cost system based on frequency and importance, with a few guidelines, rather than detailing every one.

### NEREYON: The Showdown

(continued from TWH #182)

*Nereyon is my long-running regular Sunday night game. It is sheetless and*

*effectively has no mechanics. The focus is very deep roleplaying, characterization, and plot.*

*Nereyon is an ancient world. 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. Two hundred years ago Nereyon was suddenly invaded and overrun by a mysterious non-human race called the NeMarren, servants of the unknown and terrifying Dark Ones. They have instituted a cruel reign. It is illegal to be a free and unprocessed Watcher in modern Nereyon. All the PCs are young unregistered Watchers, who were gathered together illegally by a pair of kindly old men.*

*The PCs: Dara (Lois), a Sensitive; her empathic ability causes her some distress at times. Robert (John), a Sneak; he is sometimes cautious to an extreme. Jack (Damon), whose power (if any) is unknown: the new member of the group, he is in some ways an enigma.*

*Ex-PCs: Vlad, a Healer who went insane and disappeared; and Hawk, a Warrior who was obnoxious and suffered the same fate.*

*NPCs: Sam, a Watcher Sensitive, youngest of the group; Andrew, a Healer with a somewhat cynical attitude; Lord Lluagar, the (kind?) NeMarren who employs the PCs; Tec, his human mage, the PCs nominal supervisor; and Coradan and Bear, the old and now infirm tutors.*

The situation between the PCs had

become explosive. Vlad had seemingly cracked, swearing to kill his childhood friend Robert; Robert, ever the prudent soul, wisely remained out of sight (an easy task, given his ability to be virtually invisible). Vlad feverishly worked on ways to detect Robert, with murder in his heart.

The situation amongst the players was not entirely sanguine, either. Vlad's player (I'll call him Jerome) felt that he was not respected by the other players, and stated so frequently and at length. To me it seemed that his line between fantasy and reality was becoming somewhat blurred, always a danger in my style of deep roleplaying. Not only were the characters divided; it seemed necessary to me to keep player actions separate, too. This led to considerable note-writing and separate out-of-room conferences.

Dara and Robert decided that Vlad was sick, mentally ill (not an unreasonable conclusion, given his behavior). They searched their sources of knowledge for a cure. Little hope was offered, though. One slim chance was mentioned by a creature that dwelt on the Plane of Dreams, who spoke of Dragons in a distant place who could restore a sick soul.

But getting Vlad to the Dream Plane would be difficult. Dara was the only one of the PCs who could go there voluntarily, and in full self-control.

Another search, and a means was discovered: an ancient recipe for a potion that would transport the imbibers to Dreamland. Robert used his minor alchemy skills to brew the draught. Dara tricked Vlad into drinking it; as he



passed out he seemed almost satisfied, as if his predictions of player enmity had finally been borne out and he was being poisoned.

They proceeded through the Dreamland, encountering many bewildering creatures and events. There were challenges and trials, puzzles and battles; for all this time Robert shadowed the rest of the group, keeping out of Vlad's sight. Finally after much arduous travel the PCs discovered a vast plain of ice, high cliffs rising all around. From all reports the Dragons would be here, if they existed at all.

They travelled across the ice. Time is hard to measure in Dream, but it nonetheless seemed to drag for an eternity. Finally they came to a huge cavern of ice in the far wall of the cliffs. Entering, they found a blank wall of ice, a smooth and perfect mirror—or so it seemed. Faint and delicate, nearly imperceptible, there were subtle curves in the wall. Somehow, these were the Dragons.

I should explain that Dragons in the universe of Nereyon are not the beasts typically portrayed in medieval fare. They're not even the godlike beings of Glorantha. Instead, scraps of legend describe the Dragons as the Thoughts of the Creator of the Universe—or possibly as the bearers of those Thoughts.

It was perhaps the greatest challenge of my career as a GM. Not only did I have to bring a character back to sanity, but I had to find a way to convince the player to fit into the game, and abandon or at least mute his hostile attitude. This meant that

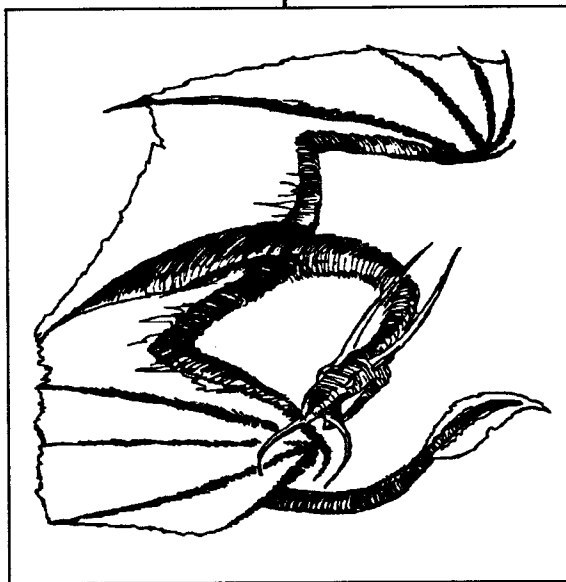
I'd have to find a way—if possible!—to redraw the line between fantasy and reality for him. At the same time I'd have to avoid declaring his character cured by fiat, as he was just looking for an excuse to accuse me of dictatorship and unfairness. It didn't help that I was bloody tired. I'd been GMing for most of the night.

I needed to make this a transcendent experience. The Dragons were in some ways a rather Zen construct: looking into their Mirror showed the viewer his or her own soul. At this point, too, I was flying blind—I'd been able to work out my thoughts to this point, but hadn't really been able to take them through to determine what the insight would be. Or rather, *in-sights*—each character was looking into the Mirror, and each would experience understanding.

I took out my notebook, and began writing furiously. For each PC I wrote their experience of the Mirror. In truth, I can't remember what I wrote for the

others—they may remind me, in which case I'll include them in a later writeup if relevant. My greatest effort was given to Vlad, and his player.

Vlad looked into the Mirror, and saw standing nearby...his childhood friend Robert. His friend who'd risked death, and even his soul, to help Vlad. As had they all—all had taken the supreme risk, for no other reason than to help him. His grievances, real or unreal, could now be seen in the light of that new understanding: his friends loved him, and feared for him. He could choose to act as he wished, but





that vision of his friends would always be a part of his understanding—he could deny it, and act against it, but that one spark would always be there.

A bit corny, perhaps—but that’s what the situation called for.

Some of the inspiration for this insight came from the description of Illumination in the *RuneQuest II* book *Cults of Terror*, in which the Illuminate learns on an emotional level that Chaos is not inherently evil—but may yet choose to fight Chaos.

Vlad’s player began to scoff. “Fine,” he said, “I’m a robot. I have no self control. I have to obey them.” “No,” I replied, “it’s an understanding that you have, and can never forget—but that you can choose to ignore. Read it again.” He did, slowly. Gradually understanding grew on his face. He was shaken, confused, and impressed; he said he’d need time to think about it. But Robert stood visible in the cavern, and Vlad did not attack him.

We ended the session. Morning had come.



### COMMENTS #182

#### Mark Swanson:

I’ve written extensively in past issues about the use of various props to add atmosphere during games. There was the time I pulled out a real chess board and

played out a game, for example. The section in this issue about smell was pure coincidence, as it happens. I also once used a curious sculpture that I picked up at Gargoyles in a game. It was a bone, about five inches long and moderately thick, with somewhat hollowed ends—some sort of animal thighbone, perhaps. From one hollowed end protruded a small and eerie human face—an unsmiling cherub. The characters encountered the bone lying, face down, in the desert (the bone, not the characters). One of them picked it up. When he saw the face, he threw the bone from him. Fortunately the bone didn’t break; it was, after all, made of some kind of brittle poured stone, almost a ceramic. It made for a nice moment—very dramatic.

As I’ve mentioned, there was an old game in which the GM seriously considered requiring everyone to play in costume, and to speak only in character (right down to requiring that all descriptive actions be done with notes rather than aloud). A twenty-minute break would be allotted for each hour of game play. It was eventually decided not to do this, in part I suspect because it would have given us all even stranger reputations than we already had.

Incidentally, I’m told that eventually a group of gamers at my old college *did* take to wearing costumes on campus, even when they weren’t gaming. Apparently this pretty much killed gaming at Allegheny, at least in any sort of public mode. On the other hand, we’ve received mostly friendly interest (with, albeit, some stupid questions like “Are you Satanists?”) from passers-by while playing IFGS games in costume. Maybe the geeky thing is to be in costume while sitting down. Or maybe the big (though padded) weapons used in the LRP games inspire respect. 8^>}

- About The Grey Company scenario: you may have a point about setting it elsewhere than Pavis. On the other hand, some fairly major RQ folk have told me

that they feel that powerful NPCs are just what Pavis needs—and they didn't seem to be sarcastic about it.

I'm a bit confused by your remark that TGC will "attract people who enjoy big scenarios, (but) such want to create their own characters, not reuse fixed ones." What fixed characters? The scenario allows the players to play any sort of character they desire, with a far broader range of possibilities than usual. Could you explain? Also, I'm not sure I'd really call it a big scenario; perhaps "campaign framework" would be a better description.

#### Collie Collier:

I found your article on "The Disciple He Loved" to be quite interesting—it's nicely different from the usual fare around here. It also amuses me, as one of the movies featured in the Golden Turkey Awards (from this issue's From the Closed Shelves) is called "Him", which is a movie that supposedly presents Christ as gay and extremely promiscuous. It's the winner of "The Most Unerotic Concept in Pornography" category, in fact. A book I've read recently about urban legends suggests that "Him" might actually be just a myth, used by fundamentalist groups to raise funds.

- Loved the "Cat-back" bit—it had me laughing for several minutes. Likewise the imaginary dialogue at T&R about their study of gaming habits. You know, I'd love to see that study—I'd bet it would be

a highly revealing look into the minds of the questioners.

- Good point about **Clan Brujah**. Censorship is becoming more and more of a sore spot with me; in fact, the automatic censoring of my email is what prompted

me to demand a refund of my Argus membership in a public forum. I see no conditions under which censorship is acceptable. If a society is such that it cannot withstand an idea, it is unfit to survive. The issue of harm to children is a troubling one, but it seems to me that that is a matter of parental responsibility. Slander...another tough one that I'm still pondering.

- Re Net harassment by Bob Butler: Huh? What's that wacky Bob been blaming me for now? Don't believe a word he says. 8^>}

- I don't recall saying that I specifically wanted three new people for the Hunt, but I must admit that it certainly would be nice! Given the apparently inexorable decline in readership, though, I'm not sure it

would help much. It seems we may be in the last days of the Hunt.

- So, is one of those pictures you?

#### Dana Erlandsen:

I love that Celtic knotwork—particularly now that I know where you get it from. 8^>}

- Your writeup of the Dream Park event



was fascinating. I've heard quite a bit about their technology in the last few years, but this is the first time that I've heard details about one of their events. I've also heard that Dream Park is developing technology in cooperation with at least a few megacorporations—Disney and Sony leap to mind, though I could be misremembering.

● An excellent review of the issue of character death. When I came to “dead means dead” I experienced a minor flashback to a character I played a few years ago. It was a Mosteli, a RuneQuest dwarf—they are essentially atheistic and almost robotic, believing that they have no real personal existence. Mine died, senselessly—and was brought back by his human companions. This caused a fundamental schism in his belief structure. He did not have a soul; and yet he'd retained his identity after death, and had been brought back. The result was that he went insane, believing at times that he was dead. It was a slightly horrific take. But interesting. Once the character had died I knew I couldn't play him in the same way again.

You know, now that I think of it I've never enjoyed having a character die.

● Unfortunately I doubt that I'll be able to afford either GenCon or Origins in 1994. RuneQuest Con will be about as much as I can do! And since it was obviously Divinely intended that I attend, I'd better comply. 8^>}

● About advertising on the Moon—perhaps you read Robert A. Heinlein's The Man Who Sold The Moon? It brought up that very possibility more than fifty years ago. Of course the media is acting as if it's a new concept—same old

story. I'm reminded of James Blish's classic The Day After Judgement, in which a major arms dealer reflects that many of his best weapons designs were stolen bodily from the “unpaid imaginations of science fiction writers”.

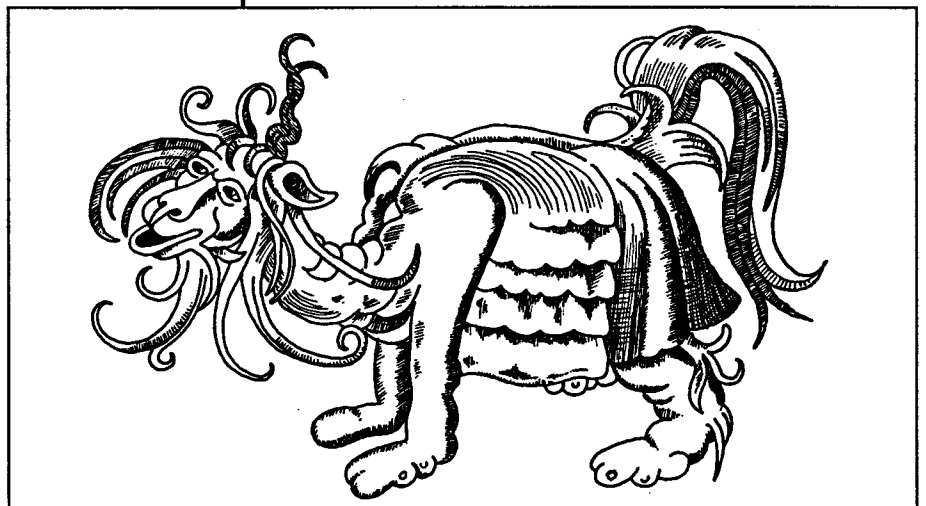
#### Steve & Win Marsh:

I'm so sorry to hear of your loss—I can't really imagine what it must be like. What can I say?

● The alternate RuneQuest/Pendragon rules system was highly interesting to me, of course. It never ceases to amaze me that there's so much interest in RQ online and yet Avalon Hill seems to be planning on cutting the line down! Idiots.

The latest rumor I've heard is that the folk who were working on RQIV have decided to ignore all input from outside sources and simply produce the game as they wish. I've also heard that Avalon Hill may be cutting RQ production back almost completely—that they may put out just enough material to retain the copyright, but no more. I do hope that this turns out to be nothing more than an ugly rumor...but I'm afraid it wouldn't surprise me in the least.

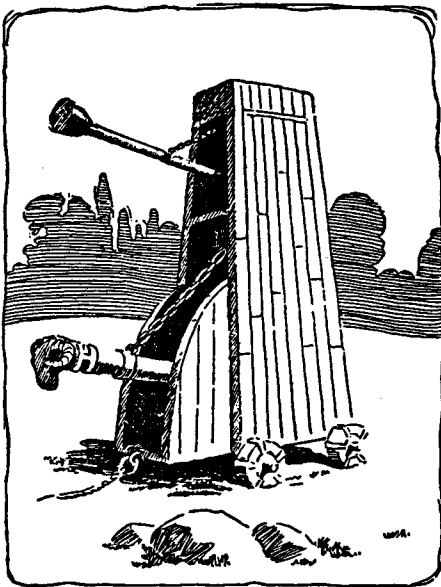
● A most interesting personalzine. The discussion of the declining need for professionals reminds me quite strongly of topics covered by Mack Reynolds, oddly



enough. If you haven't read some of his works in that area, you might find it interesting. For example, I recall one book (at least) in which the right to hold a job was a matter of a lottery among the most highly qualified applicants—because only a tiny percentage of the human race was needed to work at all. Many people had no desire to work, however, living off the minimum stipend guaranteed all citizens. I can't help but wonder if that's an accurate portrayal of American society. I hope not.

### Hero Games:

Actually, I'm commenting on this for two reasons: 1) I believe that it's rude to ignore any contributor, and 2) I laugh like hell every time I see "Hero Games" listed along with everyone else's name. Guess



I'm just strange. 8^>}

Actually, I found the survey interesting. I've written of my (bad) experience with Fantasy Hero before, but (as I mentioned then) I feel the problem was not so much with the system as with the GM. That must be one of the more frustrating aspects of publishing RPGs—you're totally dependant upon the abilities and good intentions of people you will never meet, and have no control over.

I'll admit that I find the Hero System

lacking in appeal. However, that doesn't mean that I won't buy Hero Games products—it just means that they'd have to be particularly exciting. Development of a unique and *different* kind of background would be a good way to bring in new gamers. This would be a matter of escaping the standard paradigms. A genre is begun. Numerous companies follow in the wake of the leader, ringing all the changes. Eventually the changes become hackneyed, and a new genre is developed.

Why restrict yourselves to only developing one new genre at a time? Available fantasy and science fiction literature shows that a huge and untapped variety of worlds and concepts are being ignored. I'd like to see a company start taking chances on products that are really different—not a new superhero system, but a totally new set of assumptions about what being a superhero is. Easier to say than do, perhaps, but it surely should be possible—and the company that succeeds in developing a new genre might find itself sitting on a gold mine.

Perhaps more important would be to find a way to quickly and cheaply try out new and fundamental genres and ideas.

### George Phillies:

Is it me, or does Pickering seem a little more sinister in this episode? A good job, nonetheless. It certainly explains a few things. Though I must admit that if I had the whole book I might have already flipped through to the end, or at least speed-read it through. The alternate view of the nature of history is quite interesting—I don't know if I mentioned that before. At the same time, it's difficult to make a judgement about the work as a whole, having seen it in pieces over such a long period. I'm not sure, but I might feel that it skirts many interesting plot elements too often.

● I'm looking forward to hearing more about the sky octopi and such. Do I



correctly guess that an extended flashback is soon to be forthcoming?

- Glad to see that you've been keeping up with your **Sandman**. But do you really think **Death** is a maiden? Hmm. Not if a hundred thousand fanboys have anything to say about it... 8^>}

- What's the new company that sues those who refer to it? I suppose I should ask you in email...do you think they'd sue on the basis of a mention in TWH?

- Thanks for the kind words about The Grey Company. Now all I have to do is find the time to write up the various elements...somehow. 8^({

**John T. Sapienza:**

*It's astounding. Time is fleeting! Madness...takes its toll. Congratulations on reaching your 50th birthday again, John!* 8^>}

Seriously, I couldn't help but wonder: what happened? Your zine definitely held up to a second reading, but I hope we haven't lost any new material from you because of some cosmic calamity!

- All is not lost, however. I recently had the pleasure of reading issue #48 of *The Wild Hunt*, through the kindness of a friend. Your zine interested me particularly, given my dislike of a certain large company. If that's the truth about the T\$R/SPI affair, it's even more contemptible than I'd ever imagined. I realize that it was an old zine of course, and that the facts may have turned out to be somewhat different from what you reported. Is that the case? If so, I have to wonder what happened to that \$400,000.00 loan—presumably it couldn't have all been spent in one month. I wonder if it was part of the assets forfeited in the loan default? Is it really possible to take over a company for virtually no cost?

As for those SPI stockholders who gave up their voting proxies, I have to wonder just what they thought they were

doing. Idiots! They almost deserved what they got. Do you happen to know what finally happened to the hollow corpse of SPI?

- I hope we'll see a new zine from you this issue—or even two zines!

**David Hoberman:**

I must reveal my ignorance: what's a Siamese "Beta"?

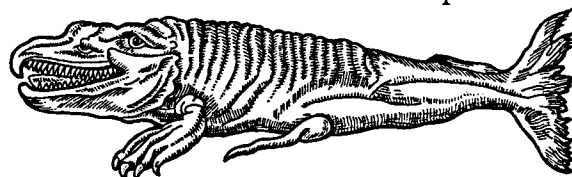
- Re GMing vs playing: Ho ho ho! I think I may have just been called a repressed dictator. 8^>}

It could be true, actually. The issue of control can't really be overlooked—a GM has control where a player must adapt. Perhaps this is an explanation for my difficulty finding a game I can enjoy: I'm unwilling to put myself into a situation where I lack control. Would that make me a control freak? 8^>}

- Good points about burnout. And in fact I can't think of any other antidote than the one you suggest: withdrawal from gaming activities. Actually, though, I don't believe that I've ever burned out as a GM—the malady only seems to affect the player side of my psyche. But I have known GMs who've burned out.

- Regarding the Hegemony campaign: You ran one of the better campaigns I've seen in the Boston area. My variable interest level had little to do with the game itself—I'm sorry that this became a concern for you, though I understand that this was unavoidable. Two additional factors that may have contributed to my ennui are the fact that science fiction really isn't my genre of choice, and that the gaming group was one that I'd GMed for and gamed with for quite some time. In a way, I'm stale with this group—which is why I want to make sure to add some new faces when I begin to run *Wonder*.

I must agree with you that games that are run less often than every week are hard to sustain. It did make it hard to keep the



crucial information in mind. Scheduling problems seem to be a factor of post-academic life, though!

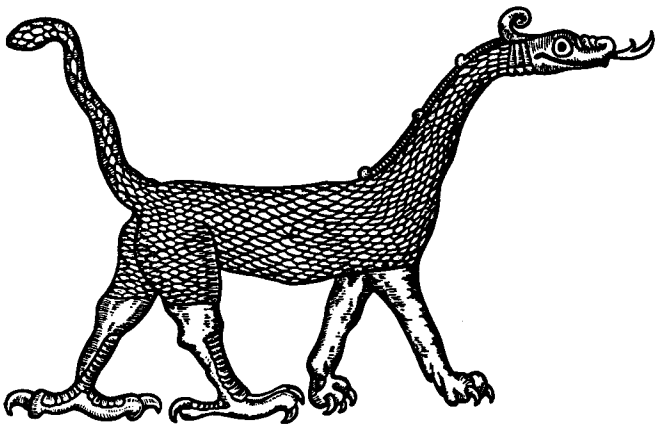
**NEXTISH:**

Whatever it is, it won't be this long...



See you next year, all! If you see me at RQ Con or Arisia, flag me down! I'm not as nasty as I seem here—I think.

8^>} —>Pete

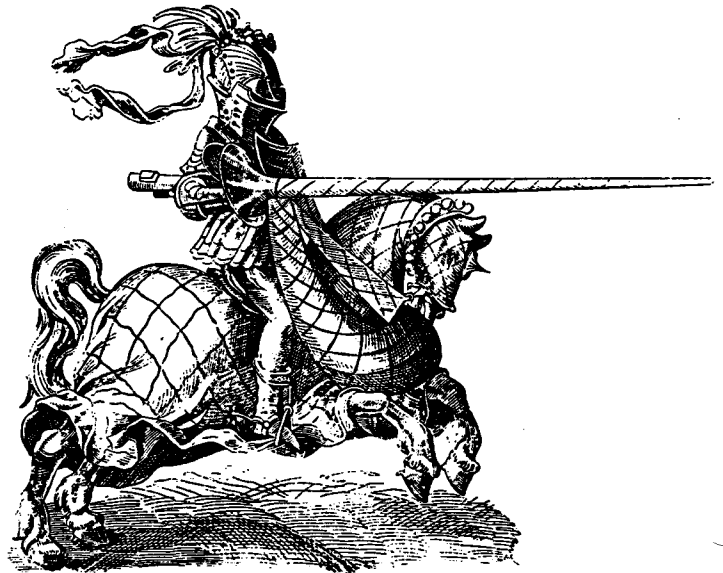


**Colophon**

Rack & Rune #19: The Ghoul of My Dreams 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 by yours truly with the Windows 3.0 Paintbrush utility (the bad-looking stuff), clip art downloaded from several BBSes (of varied quality), and art from a Secret Source. It was printed on a machine, and I ain't talking, see? I wanna see my lawyer. 8^>]

Jeeze. Only seven issues this year. This is depressing. What the hell am I supposed to say? 8^()

Have a great holiday, everyone. Take care! —>PM



# ROLEPLAYERS:



## BLOW YOUR OWN HORN



Gamers have been writing about roleplaying in The Wild Hunt APA since 1975. It's a forum where you can speak your mind, try out new ideas, write up your best (and worst) gaming experiences, and get feedback on what you write. Anyone can contribute and there's no commitment; you can write as often as you like, once per issue, once per year, or even once in your lifetime. Fair warning, though: many people have found that APA writing can be habit forming!

### What's an APA?

The letters stand for Amateur Publishing Association. An APA is basically a collection of magazines (called "zines") which are sent to a central editor by writers from all over the country (or world). The editor copies the zines, binds them together with a cover, and mails out copies to subscribers and all the contributors.

APAs have been around for a long time, by the way. The noted horror writer H.P. Lovecraft held offices in several American APA organizations in the 1920s.

### What do contributors write about?

The main focus of The Wild Hunt is science-fiction and fantasy gaming. But contributors write about anything that interests them. As it says on the title page, The Wild Hunt covers "new ideas in the hobby, reviews, comments and criticism on the works of others, occasional weird poetry, discussions of game philosophy and mechanics, campaign and scenario descriptions, occasional good fiction, and evidence of excessive editorial tolerance." Other recent topics include:

- Online Gaming
- Convention Reports

- Live Roleplaying (in many different systems)
- Reviews of RPG systems, supplements, books, TV, movies, and other media
- Sex, Romance, and Gender in Roleplaying
- How to Find Players
- Humor
- The Public Image of Roleplaying
- Game Cartoons
- Conflict Resolution in RPG Groups
- Science Fiction on TV
- Common Myths About Gaming
- Rethinking CyberPunk
- Vampires Through the Ages

...and much much more.

All game systems are open for discussion.

### Is there a standard format?

No. Many contributors format their zines by computer, but that's not necessary — a typewritten zine is fine. Even among the zines that are desktop-published there's a great deal of variety. Contributors set up their zines the way *they* prefer, which is part of the fun.

### How do I get started?

It's best to read an issue or two before sending in a zine. Sample issues are \$4 each (\$5 US for overseas). Write to the editor at: Mark Swanson, [REDACTED] or email Peter Maranci at [rune@ace.com](mailto:rune@ace.com) for more information.

