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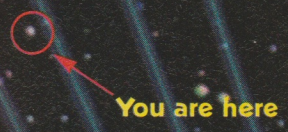
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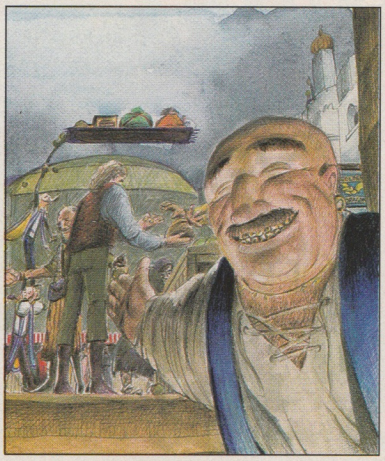
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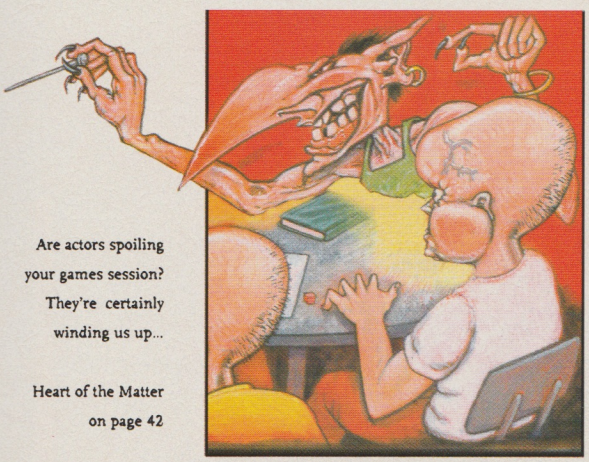
"Oh yes... Hopping through the dimensions... It's a bit disconcerting at first, but then you just get used to it really."

Encounter Stormburg on page 45



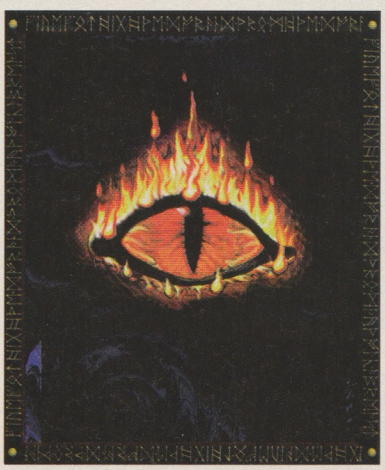
Want to enter the rich and interesting world of roleplaying, but don't know where to start? You do now.

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Are actors spoiling your games session? They're certainly winding us up...

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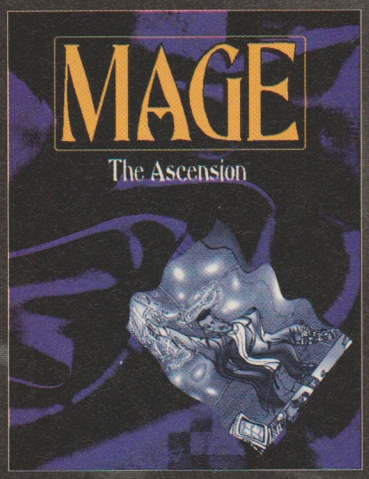
Mage: The Ascension

A new reality.

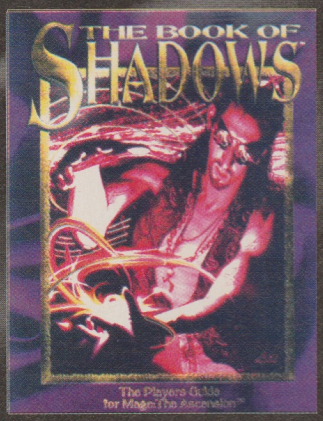
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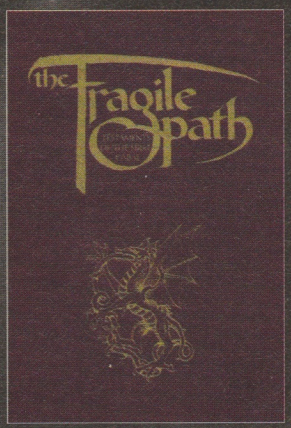
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If you would like to subscribe you should telephone 01225 822511, *fax* 01458 274378, *or write to*
arcane subscriptions
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The subscription rate for 12 issues is:
UK £30 **Europe** £42 **US** £54.75 **Rest of World** £58.75

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arcane Printed in the UK by
TPL Printers (UK) Ltd
ABC Member of the **Audit Bureau of Circulation**
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This issue would have been impossible without... **Jon's foul coffee and Cyril Howe**
This issue would have been a lot easier without... **Marketing**

Up Front

Rules eh? What's going on? As game publishers become increasingly professional, the one area of their games that doesn't seem to reflect that is the rules-writing. Last month it was *Throwing Stones*, this month it's both *Legend of the Five Rings* and *Middle Earth: The Wizards.* All three of these systems have impenetrable rules that are going to put off anybody but the most dedicated player from bothering with them. It's as if they write rules as the last thing they do before releasing a game and don't bother to properly playtest them in the rush to hit deadline. Or am I just being cynical? Come on games companies, it's about time you started doing some proper playtesting of the rules as well as the systems.



Illustration Simon Gurr



If you're submitting material to **arcane** send it in an envelope clearly marked 'freelance submissions' to the address on the top left.

I know we're going to get some flak for putting *Middle Earth: The Wizards*, a collectable card game, on the cover of a 'roleplaying' magazine but I just want to say one thing about this decision. ICE is one of the most significant RPG publishers there is. By their own admission, *ME:TW* is their most important release in years. I hope you can see the connection here. **arcane** *reflects* what happens in the world of roleplaying, whatever we might personally think about CCGs, they are here to stay and we will not ignore them.

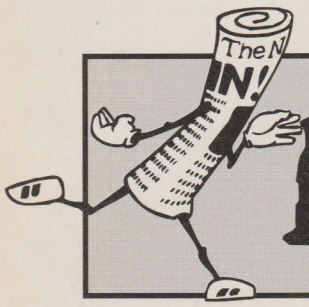
And on the subject of CCGs, roleplaying games and the kind of coverage that **arcane** gives the gaming hobby, we've finally got around to collating the results of the survey that some of you may have seen in **arcane** 1. We think you'll find them interesting. As a teaser, did you know that 76% of you own or have access to a PC? You'll find the complete results on page 23.

And finally this month, a word or two about submissions to **arcane**. Every week we get between ten and twenty unsolicited articles in the post from people who want to write for us. Now, we welcome them all and don't want you to stop sending them, but as you can appreciate it creates a lot of work for us to get through. So in the spirit of understanding I want to offer you a few words of advice on how to go about submitting material to make sure that nobody's wasting their time.

Firstly, I strongly recommend that you take a long, hard look at the way we do things at **arcane** before you send something to us. Do we ever print system specific scenarios? No. Are you therefore wasting your time sending them to us? Yes. The sort of material that will impress us is good, strong well thought out features, or sample reviews of games. And don't make them too long. Given that I have to read an average of three of these every morning, I usually only get about halfway through before I give up. So don't send us something with all the good stuff saved to the end.

If you have a feature idea, send us a 500 word proposal for it. Include an introductory paragraph so that we can assess your style and then tell us what the rest of it will be about and how you'll structure it. Once again, take a look at how we do things and copy it. Think of some text to put into boxouts. What will you say in the margin notes? What pictures will the feature use? What's the headline? The easier you make it for us, the better your chances of getting published. I look forward to reading them.

Steve Faragher
Editor



DESPATCHES

Dragonlance: Fifth Age

Dragonlance: Fifth Age is to be adorned by the original and evocative artwork of Dawn Murin, who previously worked on the *Ravenloft* and *Planescape* campaigns.

The coming of a new age brings sweeping changes to the world of Krynn. Will TSR's forthcoming roleplaying system have a similarly revolutionary effect on the gaming community?

In forthcoming *Dragonlance* novels you can expect to meet such diverse characters as a fallen knight, a rogue mariner and a dwarven cleric with a sense of humour.

DESPITE THE INITIAL misgivings of some, *Dragonlance* has proved to be one of TSR's most enduringly popular campaign worlds. Perhaps it's something to do with the emphasis on those most fascinating of mythical monsters, dragons. But now, as the latest of the accompanying novels chronicles the end of the fourth age, TSR, rather than releasing yet another campaign expansion, are set to launch an entirely new roleplaying system.



The idea behind *Dragonlance: Fifth Age* is to increase the game's drama and create a more literary atmosphere while dispensing with all that tedious scrutiny of rules and tables. It's not the first system to claim to do this but, as designer William W Connors states: "Simply making a game 'rules-light' doesn't make it better for roleplaying. There still comes a time when the rules get in the way of drama and characterisation." While its rules *are* simpler than those you'll find with other systems, *Dragonlance*'s major innovation is one that would gain approval from a management consultancy: delegation.

Many of the tasks traditionally belonging to the referee are now left up to the players to perform. This leaves the referee free to tinker with the game's pace and dramatic tension – *Dragonlance* promotes the optimistic tenet that there's a novel within each of us. To further speed up play, a more free-form approach is used for many previously rule-bound aspects of the game, for instance movement rates and the passage of time (Einsteinian roleplaying, anyone?). Of course, most sensible *AD&D* referees have been pretty laissez-



Since the gods deserted Krynn, there's more call than ever for some sturdy heroes to help put things to rights.

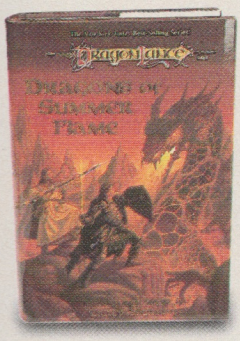
That was then, this is now

Don't be surprised if you notice a few changes since you last visited Krynn...

At the end of the Chaos War, as chronicled in the novel *Dragons of Summer Flame*, the world of Krynn is changed for ever. The stars are scattered into new constellations, the Red and Silver moons have gone, replaced by a pale gold satellite, and a new red star shines in the heavens.

The people of Krynn believe that the gods have withdrawn and are no longer present in their universe. With the passing of the gods, they believe that magic (a gift from the gods) is dying too, and that miracles are no longer available to clerics.

Fearful of their loss of power and worried that they will die as a consequence, the draconians and dragons panic. At the suggestion of Malystryx, a huge red dragon from across the sea, they attempt to consume each other in a bid to steal each other's essence. So begins the Dragon Purge.



Krynn's gods are out of season.

Some people try to recapture the old magic, finding that while lesser magics work, greater magics require a source of power. Previously this came from the gods; now it can be gained from magical artifacts – a diminishing resource.

Now there is no divinity save for the power in people's hearts. In an epiphany Goldmoon discovers the untapped power of the heart, and realises it can be used to power miracles. People and dragons also learn to use the sorcerous, primordial magic of Krynn, a power much more difficult to tap into than the magic provided by the gods.

Raistlin is freed from his imprisonment in the void, and retires for an ageless sleep. His nephew Palin marries the orphan Usha. Her claim to be the offspring of a union between Raistlin and an Irda ogre, and therefore Palin's cousin, is shown to be false.

While the dragons of previous ages measured around 250 feet in length, those of the fifth age are between 400 and 500 feet long.



Sharpen your steel. The War of Chaos may have been won, but there're still plenty more battles to be fought.

Among the newcomers are Malystryx, 'queen of the dragons', the biggest red dragon ever seen, the blue dragon Khellendros, Beryl the green dragon, Sable the black dragon and Gellidus the white (though her name may yet be changed).

Once the world was the domain of the dragons, but they were forced from their territory because the gods favoured Krynn's humanoids. Now that the gods have gone, the dragons intend to reclaim their land, exterminating and enslaving the humanoid races currently existing as small pockets of resistance. Malystryx, though, has even bigger plans...

faire about this sort of rule for some time, but it'll be nice to see the attitude confirmed in print.

Free-form movement is one thing, but *Dragonlance* takes things much further by applying this philosophy to the use of magic. Dispensing with endless spell lists, classifications and memorisations, TSR have gone for a much simpler points-based system. Characters have magic points. Spells cost points to cast. The more powerful the spell, the more points it requires. If you have the points, you can cast the spell. Easy. Well, not quite, since the overall power of magic in the fifth age is less than it was in times of yore, but any difficulties are experienced by characters in the game world, not by players in this world we're pleased to describe as 'real'.

The role of chance in this brave new Krynn is manifested in a different way, too. Specifically, there's no more dice rolling. Instead – stop me if you've guessed what's coming next – success or failure is determined by recourse to a deck of cards. *Dragonlance* comes with an 81-card Resolution Deck, and each player holds a hand throughout the game. Whenever the results of an action have to be resolved, the player in question plays a card and the outcome is determined by its value. A consequence of this method is that players can save their better cards for use at pivotal plot junctures or particularly hairy moments. Overall, the system de-emphasizes the random element and should promote faster, more plot-oriented adventures. It should also prevent upsettingly random, pointless deaths.

"A more free-form approach is used for many previously rule-bound aspects."

With the coming of the fifth age the gods of Krynn, including the gods of magic, have departed. This rather puts the kibosh on clerics and traditional wizards. Spell casters now follow one of two new paths: sorcery or mysticism. Sorcery derives from primaeval forces that have permeated Krynn since the beginning, before the time of the gods of magic. Exponents of sorcery will find their powers limited to affecting non-living matter.

Characters following the path of mysticism will no doubt be popular with hippies and anti-road protesters. Mystics draw their magical powers from life itself – a true mystic must master the power in his heart before attempting to lord it over the world at large.

The great war between good and evil wyrms, the Dragon Purge, has decimated their numbers. Only fifty or so are left on the continent of Ansalon, but they are far from an endangered species: the surviving dragons are bigger and badder than ever. Nations have already fallen before their might, and their arcane powers (dragon powers never before witnessed on Krynn) are causing tumultuous changes in both geography and climate.

Dragonlance: Fifth Age could well be a dynamite combination: a modern, roleplaying-friendly rules system and a tried-and-tested, well-loved setting. Expect a full review soon.



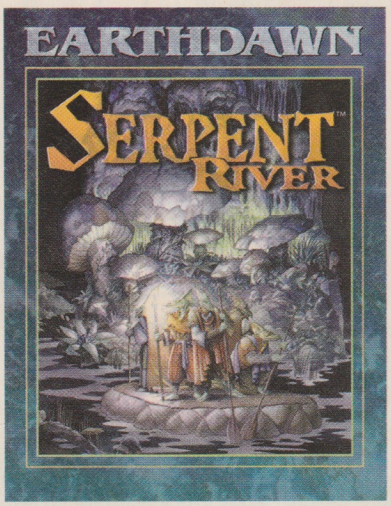
The word 'draconian' derives from Draco, an Athenian statesman who proposed the death penalty for most criminal offences.

COMING SOON

Serpent River & Threats

FASA go boating and get frightened

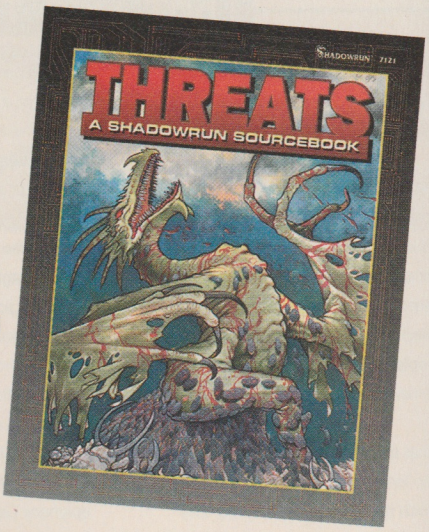
Two new sourcebooks from FASA will be published in May: *Serpent River* will describe the many strange communities living along this *Earthdawn* river, including the t'skrang and others who live under the Throal Mountains. Though the five trading houses of the t'skrang control the Serpent River, even they cannot protect travellers from the menacing creatures that lurk in its depths and the pirates who plague the river's banks. As well as offering tales of the dangers that lie along the river's length, *Serpent River* also promises to highlight the powers behind those amazing riverboats.



The secrets of the river are revealed for those who would dare travel it.



Threats is a sourcebook for the second edition of *Shadowrun*. Everybody wants to rule the world, but the entities described in this sourcebook have the power to do it. These opponents – human, metahuman and otherwise – entertain global schemes and far-reaching scams that threaten all of humanity. Entities from published *Shadowrun* fiction and products, as well as totally new opponents, will appear. You can expect reviews just as soon as these little beauties arrive...



Of Cardboard and Elves

Our regular Games Workshop round up

TERRAFORM YOUR *WARHAMMER 40K* worlds with Games Workshop's terrain pack, scheduled for release on March 4th. The pack contains a *Necromunda*-style cardboard building complex known as the Imperial Firebase. This 10" x12" structure incorporates a landing pad, tower and walkways, and will cost £12. Expect to see many more cardboard wonders before the end of the year. Meanwhile, hardbitten *Necromunda* players can expect the arrival of the first Outlander gang, the Spyrers, in late February, with the Redemptionist Crusaders following in late March.

At the present time, no new army books are planned for release before May, but intelligence continues to filter through about the shape of armies to come. Those renowned treehuggers the Wood Elves are to have their ranks bolstered by a host of new special characters, including an awesome Treeman hero desperate to give his foes a taste of the birch. The real nutcases, though, come in the shape of the two Avatars of the Elven gods, who manifest themselves in mortal form in the *Warhammer* world as the embodiment of Elven power. The first of these is Orion, king of the wood, who is a cross between an Elf and a stag. As Elven war lust incarnate, he is supernaturally hard. The other supreme being is his wife Ariel, Madge Queen of Loren. An Elf with the ability to double in height and sprout moth-like wings, she is weak in combat but is a powerful sorceress who can control the forest with her magic. Yet it seems that the Wood Elves have cunningly delegated much of their grim infantry combat to the new race of Dryads. These stunted Treemen can stem an enemy advance by taking on aspects of various tree types giving them for example, oak-like toughness or willow-like agility.

Finally, sources have contacted **arcane** and suggested that the menace of the 'Borg-like-entity' (one of the new *40K* races, as announced in **arcane** 3) will threaten the Imperium from the Western Galactic fringe. The vigilant can uncover further evidence of this new race on page 32 of the *Imperial Guard Codex*. Here, in obscure reports from the Halo Zone warning of worlds inhabitated by ghosts and places not for living men, are the first references to the existence of these fell beings in the *40K* universe.

WIN Outlanders

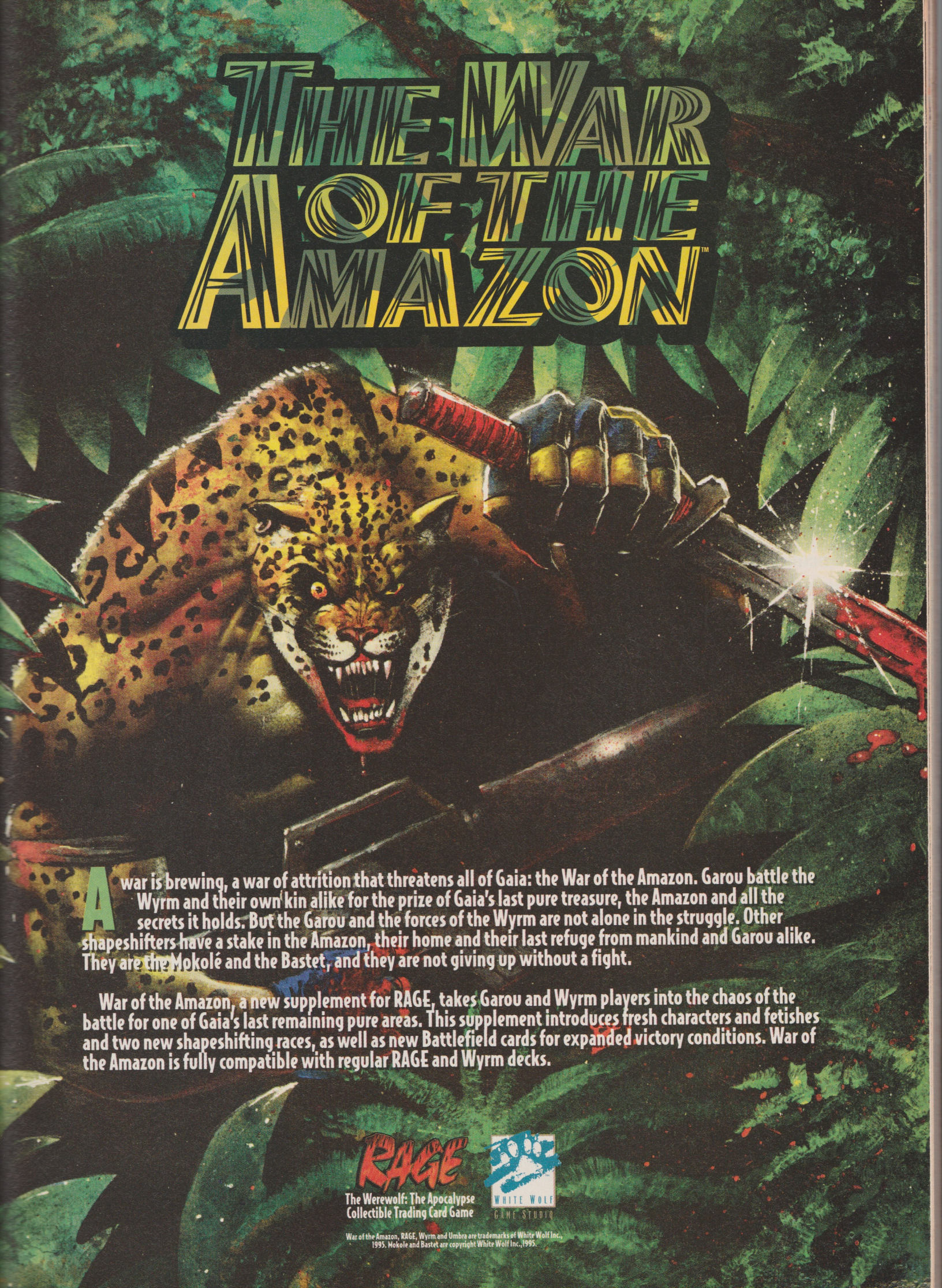
win! arcane COMPETITION in association with GAMESWORKSHOP

To celebrate the release of the rather excellent *Outlanders* (reviewed on page 78), Games Workshop are giving away 10 copies of the boxed set to the first 10 **arcane** readers to write in and correctly tell us the names of the six gangs described in the original *Necromunda* game.



Send your entires to: 'I wanna live in the Badzone competition', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW bearing in mind the following rules.

1. First come, first served on this occasion.
2. Employees of Future Publishing or Games Workshop will be brutally and publically punished if they try to enter.
3. The editor's decision is glorious and final.



A war is brewing, a war of attrition that threatens all of Gaia: the War of the Amazon. Garou battle the Wyrm and their own kin alike for the prize of Gaia's last pure treasure, the Amazon and all the secrets it holds. But the Garou and the forces of the Wyrm are not alone in the struggle. Other shapeshifters have a stake in the Amazon, their home and their last refuge from mankind and Garou alike. They are the Mokolé and the Bastet, and they are not giving up without a fight.

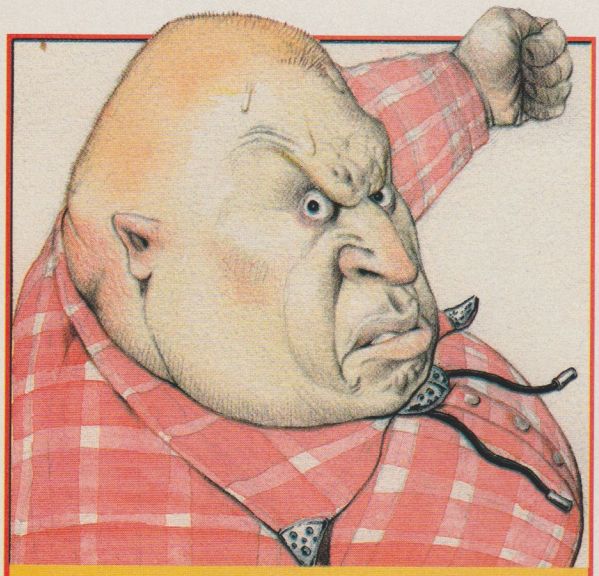
War of the Amazon, a new supplement for RAGE, takes Garou and Wyrm players into the chaos of the battle for one of Gaia's last remaining pure areas. This supplement introduces fresh characters and fetishes and two new shapeshifting races, as well as new Battlefield cards for expanded victory conditions. War of the Amazon is fully compatible with regular RAGE and Wyrm decks.

RAGE

The Werewolf: The Apocalypse Collectible Trading Card Game

WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO

War of the Amazon, RAGE, Wyrm and Umbra are trademarks of White Wolf Inc., 1995. Mokole and Bastet are copyright White Wolf Inc., 1995.



Seymour J Clancy III's great outing

Ridiculing roleplaying role-models is the only game Seymour plays...

It do appear that BLASPHEMING is jes' not good enough for some people. Not content with so-called 'alternative' comedy, with its cleverly composed vocabulary and generous garnish of GENITAL references, ah have learned that one of these 'funny' fellas has nah decided to involve his sayelf in 'alternative' pastimes. Indeed, it has been brought to mah attenshun that wise-cracking, nineties-man BEN ELTON has been seen on the television participating in the dastardly divershun of DYNAMOES & DOODLEBUGS.

The garrulous gasbag appeared sayveral years ago on the popular culture TV magazine *South of Watford* where he played a female dwarf in a NASHUNALLY BROADCAST version of DON JUANS & DUCHESSES. The dwarf died. Ah think. These damning alligators concerning the participashun of a hero of ha-ha in the 'game' of DUCKS & DUMPLINGS will shorely now bring downfall to this once highly respected loud-mouth and politically correct to the point of infuriation STAND-UP COMIC GENIUS. Why he couldn't jus' stick to singing beautiful ballads is beyond me. Those haunting melodies lahk *Candle in the Wind* and BENNY! BENNY! BENNY! Benny and the Jets (*Snip* – Ed.)

Seymour is indebted to the lynx-eyed Alexander F Simkin (no relation) for his assistance in the Outing. An **arcane** T-shirt is on its way to the venerable institution in the heart of England from which this mighty mole operates.

If you know of any other personalities in the media spotlight indulging in roleplaying – Hilary Clinton, perhaps? – please let Seymour know. He will appreciate your support.

Holiday

Labyrinthe have been running live action roleplaying adventures every Saturday and Sunday since moving to their permanent site in Orpington, Kent back in 1986. That year saw 16,414 people dress up and participate in 1,765 adventures.

And they liked it; every year since, there has been an increase in the number of adventures run. Up to the beginning of this year, Labyrinthe boasted a total of 17,734 adventures run for 166,524 people. The secret of their success is, according to manager Jan McManus: "A smooth-running and simple game structure that still holds hidden levels and complexities that will take many missions to master."

As well as their regular weekend events, bank holiday specials and school holiday adventures for younger players, this year they will be starting a new line in Science Fiction adventures, beginning in March. Labyrinthe also have a record four 'Rainbows End' holidays and seven Theme Days planned for 1996. And, to celebrate their tenth anniversary, the country's leading live-action roleplaying society is offering one **arcane** reader a FREE, WEEK-LONG LIVE ROLEPLAYING HOLIDAY IN THE LAKE DISTRICT, to be taken from the 10th to the 17th of August this year. And if you don't win that one hundred runners-up will take part in live roleplaying adventures at Labyrinthe. If you're not a live-action roleplayer, but would like to give it a try, these are the people to do it with.

So if you want to win one of these fantastic prizes all you have to do is answer these two questions...

You'll be amazed at how involving a session at Labyrinthe can become.



win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Labyrinthe Live Roleplaying Holiday

"How many adventures have Labyrinthe run from 1986 to 1995?"
"How old will you be on the 1st of June 1996?"

You see, the minimum age for the holiday event is 18 – if someone younger wins the competition, they will receive an equivalent number of free adventures at Labyrinthe's main permanent site, where adventures for younger people have been regularly run since 1989.

Send your answers directly to Labyrinthe, PO Box 225, Orpington, Kent BR6 7SX. They will pick the winners and sort out the prizes. The usual rules apply: no double entries, no Labyrinthe or Future Publishing employees, and no arguing about the results. The winners' names will be published in **arcane**.

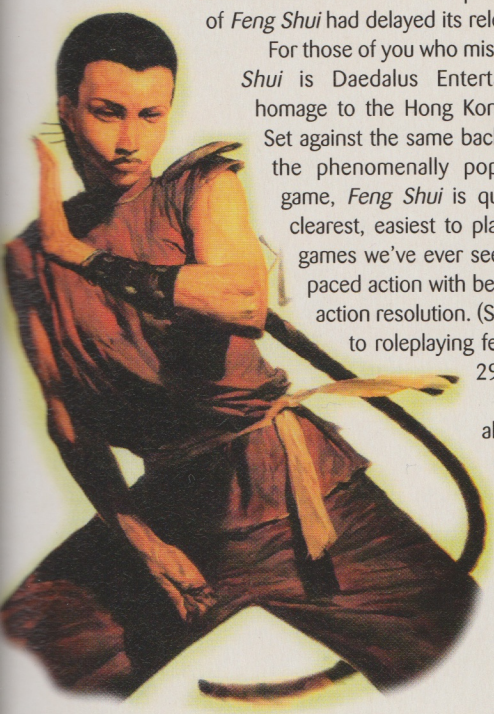






Feng Shui

WE REVIEWED IT in **arcane** 1 and awarded it a thumping 9/10, not to mention the fabled **arcane** seal of approval, so we were understandably rather miffed to discover that problems with the printing of *Feng Shui* had delayed its release.



For those of you who missed the first issue, *Feng Shui* is Daedalus Entertainment's roleplaying homage to the Hong Kong action movie genre. Set against the same background as *Shadowfist*, the phenomenally popular collectable card game, *Feng Shui* is quite simply one of the clearest, easiest to play and best roleplaying games we've ever seen, combining furiously paced action with beautifully straightforward action resolution. (See our beginner's guide to roleplaying feature, starting on page 29, for more details.)

The good news for all of us, then, is that *Feng Shui* has finally made it out of its temporary doldrums and should be available in Britain and Europe very shortly. We hope you've been good and saved some of your Christmas money...

COMING SOON?

Magic: The Gathering CD-ROM

Probably the most-discussed and eagerly awaited computer game in some time may finally be on its way.

Based, as you may have gathered, on Wizards of the Coast's billion-selling card game of the same name, the computer version will enable you to face down either human or computer opponents in *Magic* duels, winning cards and building a 'virtual' deck as you go. The game is being designed with network play in mind, and there is expected to be an on-line site that will allow play over the Internet.

Initially *M:TG* CD-ROM was scheduled for a Christmas '95 release. Several apologetic press releases later the game still isn't with us. However, good news has filtered through to **arcane**. Sid Meier, the design genius behind *Railroad Tycoons* and *Civilization* (to name but two) and founder of Microprose, has taken charge of the troubled project and we can expect to see some results by April or May. The game remains substantially unchanged but will now run under Windows '95.

MAGIC The Gathering™

COMING SOON

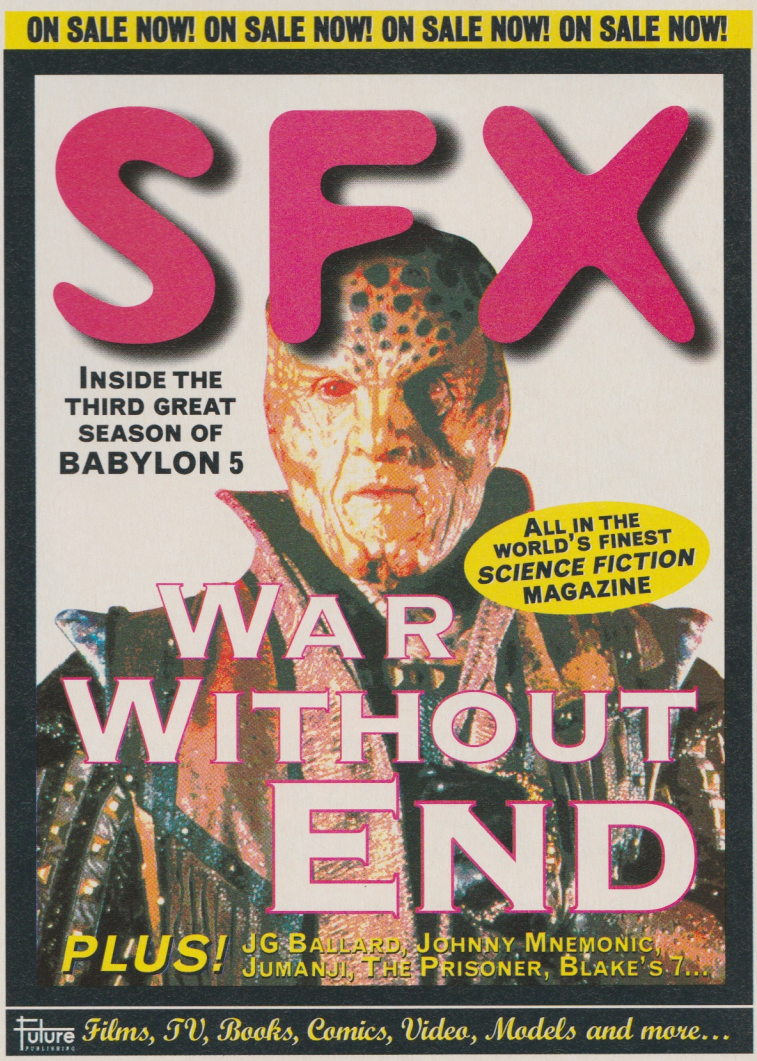
An RPG Oddity

If **arcane** 2's Ten Bizarre Skills feature had you chuckling, then you'll probably get a laugh or two from *Magik!: The Oddity*, an RPG due in the summer from Third Winter.

The designers' aim was to create something that doesn't take long to play but has as much depth as longer games, something that is easy to learn without being simplistic, engagingly complex without being incomprehensible, something that doesn't take itself too seriously. The resulting Gordian knot is *Magik!*.

Some of the game's elements might conjure up a tingle of deja vu – mages, priests, planes of existence – but spells such as Clarence's Musical Spoons and Zepcon's Tiny Shed should give you an inkling of the game's true flavour. The planned 110-page rulebook will contain an introduction to roleplaying, information on character generation, player and referee guides, books of magic and religion, equipment lists, a guide to the game world, a city guide, colour maps and, of course, a bestiary.

So if you want to join the Pro Vampire Activist Group or the Suicide Corps, if you hunger for knowledge of Travis Pimpernickle's Philosophical Debates, or just want to know why hamster smuggling is punishable by death, watch out for *Magik!: The Oddity*.





If you have any queries concerning any of our products please write to us at the address below or phone using one of our local rate hotlines and quoting RCN: 0345 125599 (UK), +44 141 226 5205 (Republic of Ireland) 9.30am - 6.30pm, Monday to Friday. Wizards of the Coast UK Ltd. PO Box 1562, Glasgow G2 8BW.



... a big crusher squished one, then there were four.

RoboRally is a fast paced board game for 2–8 players, aged 15 years and upwards

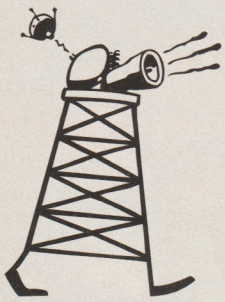
R.R.P. £29.99

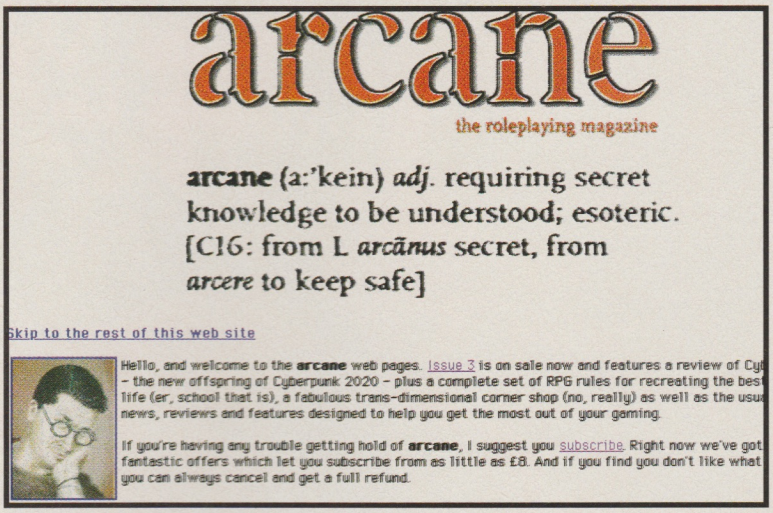
GARFIELD GAMES

Wizards OF THE COAST

infinity beckons...

The Internet. It's rather jolly and crammed full of roleplaying stuff, we've found





Log on to the **arcane** home page and take a gentle, lazy meander along the SuperInfoCountryRoad™ with us as your companion and guide.



Futurenet, Future's Internet site where our home pages are situated now has a silly password system. We're sorry about that, but please do persevere and get in touch with us.

AS WE REVEAL in our survey results on page 23 this month, more than 30 per cent of you have some kind of access to the Internet and that's a number we think will continue to grow.

So if you're one of those 30 per cent, welcome to the regular **arcane** web pages where we hope to entice you to visit our site and give an unashamed plug to some others that we've enjoyed visitng this week.

For the rest of you, we can only hope that what you'll see here will convince you that the Internet is worth getting involved in. There's more information on the Internet about roleplaying than on practically any other subject, we're only scratching the surface here, so we reckon it'd really be worth your while to join us...

arcane is a fully paid-up digi-protagonist of the on-line multimedia revolution. If you want to know exactly what we mean by that, check out our web pages at `http://www.futurenet.co.uk/` and take a look. We're currently offering a number of services for roleplayers eager to communicate, including reader ads and contacts, and we hope you'll be impressed.

The rest of the site

The arcane Forum
Share your views on roleplaying – its past, present, future and anything else you feel like talking about – with us and other gamers.

Contacts
Having trouble finding gamers in your area? Our Contacts page is designed to help you get in touch, wherever you live.

Reader Ads
Looking for an out of print Traveller supplement? Want to sell that incredibly rare Magic: The Gathering card you just acquired? Post a message here.

arcane Wants You!
If you're a writer or an artist and you're interested in working for **arcane** as a freelancer, we want to hear from you.

arcane links
Take a look at some of the best sites from all around the world and some of the worst from Norwich.

The Forum

if you haven't looked at our Forum recently, you'll be missing debates on the future of roleplaying; which games to recommend to beginners and many more. It's quite straightforward: when you've read what other contributors have to say, you can post your own opinions for everyone else to read, join in a conversation, start an argument or propose a new topic.

WE ALSO OFFER the following exciting options

The arcane survey - tell us what you thought of **arcane** and you'll help us to shape future issues. If you think we're not catering for your playing tastes, let us know.

Contacts - our service is designed to put you in touch with other gamers in your locale: look for a club or advertise yourself to an existing group in this space.

Links – The fastest-growing section of our site. Large unwieldy lists of inscrutably named websites can be time-consuming, so besides providing the actual links we also try to give you some indication of what you can expect to find at the other end.

Although it's still in its early stages, **arcane**'s web site is continuously expanding and evolving. Piece by piece we're trying to build the most complete and reliable guide to roleplaying resources on the internet.

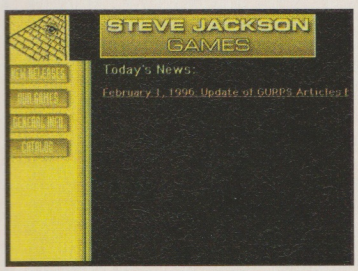
Hot Sites

Point your browser here. If you have one...

Steve Jackson Games

http://www.io.com/sjgames/

Credit where credit is due. Steve Jackson must be numbered among the first gamers to be aware of the possibilities of the Internet and his company's newly redesigned home pages are a treat. If you have an interest in any Steve

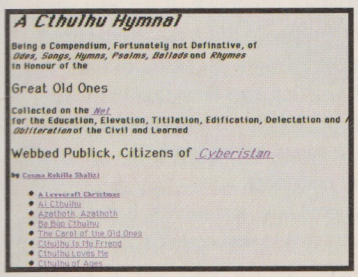


Jackson game, you'll find support material aplenty for it here. Card listings for *INWO*, gaming articles of all kinds from *Pyramid* magazine, a complete *GURPS* bibliography and all the latest news are just part of this excellent and informative web site. If only all game companies had the same foresight.

Cthulhu Hymnal

http://www.physics.wisc.edu/~shalizi/cthulhu-hymnal.html

If you thought that the most frightening thing about *Call of Cthulhu* was the hideous array of other-worldly monsters, you'd be sadly mistaken. We remember that early *CoC* supplements had the occasional humorous song along the lines of *The Great Cthulhu* (sung to the tune of the *Chattanooga Choo-Choo*): 'Pardon me boys, is this the lair of Great Cthulhu?' went the first line, if our memory serves. And that was all right, as it goes. But now we fear you must be warned,



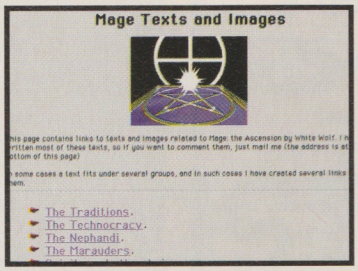
somebody is COLLECTING these songs, and publishing them on the Net. We are very afraid. One last example to convince you (sung to the tune of Simon & Garfunkel's *Cecilia*):

"Cthulhu, you're breaking my mind.
My sanity's vanishing daily!
Oh, Cthulhu, I'm down on my knees
I'm begging you, please – go away,
Go away!"

Anders Mage Page

http://www.nada.kth.se/~nv91-asa/mage.html

An interesting and stimulating page devoted to White Wolf's *Mage: The Ascension*, this has



lots of home-written source material that you may well find worth browsing through...

Heaven

http://www.acsu.buffalo.edu/~rconnor/heaven.html

Robin Connor's home page provides a rich and varied look at roleplaying games through her own experiences. There's lots of



worthwhile information here among the personal musings and a set of links to other sites of interest that could keep you up well into the wee small hours of the night and produce a rather shocking phone bill.

What's So Funny?



Comedy Review is a new magazine about comedy.

It covers every single aspect of the vast, funny things-encrusted domain that *is* comedy today.

Your life will be a filthy, stinking, miserable mess without it.

Debut Issue On Sale 8th Feb

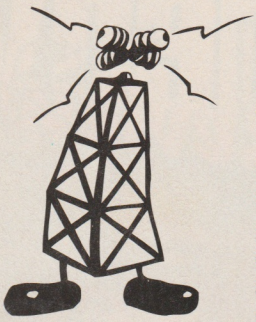
Future Publishing

Preview the mag on:
http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/comedyreview.html

COMING SOON

Generation Gap

Don't point that finger at me, sonny boy.



Last month we thought *Cybergeneration* was so brilliant that we stuck it on our cover, made it our lead review and awarded it a score of 9/10 and the universally admired **arcane** seal of approval.

Following on from *Cyberpunk 2020*, *Cybergeneration* is set in 2027 and tells the tale of a mysterious plague that's sweeping the world, causing adults to dissolve into a messy goo. It's effect on children, though, is to cause them to develop weird powers. The sinister corporations, having already dealt with the cyberpunk threat, decide that the kids must be quashed before they become uncontrollable. The game casts you and your friends as the kids, on the run from the law.



Smoking cigarettes isn't hard enough for the youth of tomorrow – they have smoking fingers, too.

The system is neat and very approachable, and the *Cybergeneration* rulebook is commendably laid out, with plenty of careful thought having gone into how it will be used by referees. The emphasis moves away from the heavily combat and hardware-orientated *Cyberpunk 2020* system to one that encourages more roleplaying.

Now, R Talsorian have announced *Generation Gap*, the *Cybergeneration* referee's handbook. It includes tips for both players and refs on how to run a campaign based around kids, lots of source material about life in the ISA (Incorporated States of America, fact fans), guidelines on corporate life in the future, essays on creating your own new CyberEvolved and Yogangs, and information on how to run a CyberRevolution campaign.

That review? Well it could be next month, it could be the month after, we'll just have to wait and see. But it'll be soon, pilgrim. Real soon.

One of ten complete beginner's sets of AD&D could be yours...

To tie in rather neatly with our beginner's guide to roleplaying in this issue (starting on page 29), we've negotiated ten complete sets of the following to give away to ten lucky readers.

We've got all the basic rulebooks you need to play *AD&D: The Dungeon Master's Handbook* that provides referees with essential information on how to run a fantasy game, the *Player's Handbook*, a reference work necessary for the players in your brave new campaign, and a copy of the *Monstrous Compendium*, which will provide you with years' worth of hardy opponents for your new-found heroes. On top of these three fantastic books, we're also giving away ten copies of *Night Below*, a complete campaign for beginning *AD&D* players that we rate so highly it just won our **arcane** seal of approval (see the review on page 66).

So what you're getting here is *absolutely everything* you and your friends need to start playing *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*, the world's most popular roleplaying game. (OK, not everything – you'll need some dice, too.)



You must be getting pretty nervous by now, thinking to yourself: "If they're giving away stuff this good, the questions are bound to be really hard." Not so, friends, we want to encourage people to roleplay, not put them off.

So we're not going to ask a question; just write in to us and demand your set. We're going to leave this competition open longer than normal to allow our overseas readers time to enter, and when it's closed we'll draw ten entries out of a bucket.

So send those demands to Start me up – if you start me up I'll never stop, **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, England.

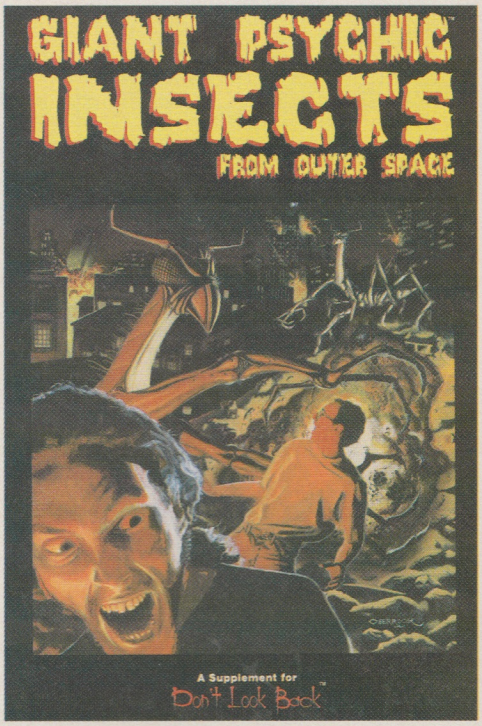
THE RULES

1. Only *one* entry per person. Multiple entries will be noticed (even if you try using a false name – we're hip to that old ruse) and *all* your entries will be thrown out.
2. The competition ends on 30th April 1996.
3. No employees of TSR or Future publishing will be allowed to see another dawn if they enter this competition.
4. The Editor's decision is final. Whatever it is.

Aaargh! It's eating my brain

A collection of oddities from Mind Venture Games.

COMING SOON



MIND VENTURE GAMES, the producers of the wonderfully weird *Don't Look Back* (the RPG set in a world where politicians re-write history, where the media dictates the truth, and where benevolent institutions shroud wicked deeds behind sacred robes), have a new bi-monthly release schedule for this year to support the game.

Following the January release of the second edition of *Don't Look Back* and the supplement *Giant Psychic Insects from Outer Space*, a compendium of adventures for the second edition called *The Strange Files of Dr Sorcis* is due for release in March. And in May comes the *Don't Look Back Guide's Pack* for referees in this 'modern world with... supernatural, paranormal and conspiracy elements'. Strange stuff indeed. Still, at least it's only make believe.

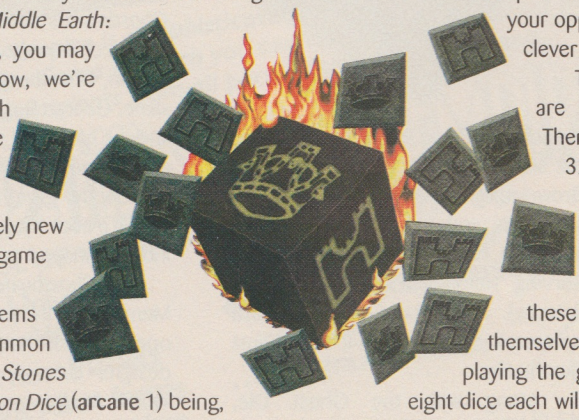
COMING SOON

Dicemaster

Something dicey from Iron Crown.



IRON CROWN Enterprises have been bitten by the collectable bug. Not content with *Middle Earth: The Wizards* (which, you may have noticed by now, we're reviewing this month – page 62) they've also decided to leap wholeheartedly onto the comparatively new collectable dice game bandwagon.



Dicemaster seems to have more in common with *Throwing Stones* (**arcane** 3) than *Dragon Dice* (**arcane** 1) being, as far as we can tell, the sort of game where you use the dice to roll up and play a character rather than following the wargame hybrid mould of *Dragon Dice*. The press release promises that players of the game will be able to 'travel afar, explore sites, battle monsters, discover treasure, acquire artifacts and challenge your opponent with all sorts of clever trouble'.

Two initial game sets are planned for release. There will be a *Basic Set* of 32 dice, selling at $24.95, and a *Wilderness Set* of 26 dice, selling at $19.95. Either of these will be sufficient in themselves for you to get on with playing the game. Booster sets of eight dice each will be on sale soon after for $7.95. The Boosters will be compatible with either of the other two sets.

We look forward to seeing the latest example of this new phenomena, and, of course, reviewing it, in the very near future.



Famous for 15 Minutes

IT IS UNUSUAL for the hobby of roleplaying to be treated as an ordinary part of everyday life; most people seem to consider the revival of the stone-age tradition of interactive myth-making to be a rather strange thing to get involved with.

Not so in Italy, it would appear. Lorenzo Trenti of Castelfranco writes to tell us of a top roleplaying rapper from his parts who goes by the strangely anglicised name of Frankie HI NRG. We've never heard of him, but then Italian rap music is probably less mainstream than roleplaying, in Britain at least. Nevertheless, Frankie is big news in Italy and in his rap, *Libri di Sangue* (translation: *Blood Books*), the Latin lyricist perceptively notes that 'the world seems like an RPG guided by a wicked referee'.

Not only is this another example of our pastime emerging into popular culture, it's also a perfectly valid philosophical stance, so far as we're concerned. Anyway, for his trouble, Lorenzo gets a spunky **arcane** T-shirt to promenade in on a Sunday afternoon. Who said the British can't show the Italians a thing or two about fashion?

There's an **arcane** T-shirt in it for you, too, if we publish your observations of roleplaying emerging to the level of public awareness in any medium.

Write in to us at
15 Minutes, arcane,
30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW
and we'll augment your summer collection of top tops.

RETRO

Ghostbusters

Designed by Sandy Petersen and Lynn Willis, with Greg Stafford

West End Games, $16.95 First published in 1986

This month's look at the noble and mighty roleplaying games of yore focuses on West End Games' *Ghostbusters*. James Wallis explains why it's one of the few tie-ins that retains the spirit of the original movie.



THE RELATIONSHIP between RPGs and films has had a chequered history. In the early 1980s TSR published the lamentable *Indiana Jones* RPG and two modules for *Star Frontiers* based on *2001* and *2010*. ("I'm sorry, Dave, I can't play that.") More recently, West End have been treating us to *Masterbook* expansions based on *Tank Girl*, *Species* and – it's that hat again – *Indiana Jones*.

Sandwiched between TSR's efforts and West End's later releases, like gentleman's relish between slices of Mighty White, lie two of the best RPGs ever published. I refer, of course, to *Star Wars* and *Ghostbusters*.

"Do what?" I hear you say. "*Star Wars*, okay, but *Ghostbusters*?" Indeedy. Sure, lines like 'don't cross the streams' or 'okay, so she's a dog' lack the resonance of 'may the Force be with you', but Obi-Wan was always too po-faced. There's a man who deserves a good sliming.

Designed for West End Games by Chaosium, *Ghostbusters* is simple, fast, and it works. It's also incredibly easy to learn. Not since *Basic D&D* has any roleplaying system been so obviously targeted at the new gamer. The entire set of rules is explained on two sides of paper. In big type. With pictures.

They go like this: Ghostbusters have four Traits (Brains, Muscles, Moves and Cool), and each Trait has one Skill attached to it. You get to make up the skills; anything from 'Play Cello' to 'Shoot .44 So That Blood And Gore Splatter Everywhere'.

Traits and Skills indicate the number of dice to be rolled against a difficulty number set by the GM (Ghostmaster) for an attempted task. One of these dice must be the Ghost Die, a nifty thing with that ghostly logo in place of the '6'. If you make the roll and get a Ghost, something supernaturally good happens. If you fail



the roll and get a Ghost, then you're in the slime. Bolted onto the system are Brownie points, which are combination hit points and luck points. Oh, and everyone has a Goal (Money, Fame, Serving Humanity, Sex or Soulless Science). That's about it. Simple, fast, no messing, get-on-with-it stuff – just like the film.

Along with the Ghost Die, *Ghostbusters* also has groovy equipment cards – you get three per character. These include proton packs, PKE meters, bullhorns ('allows user to make more noise than anyone else'), Tobin's Spirit Guide, Alpine gear, and a beach-kit ('triples fun at beach'). And paperwork: franchise contracts to be signed, disclaimers to give your clients, release forms – and best of all, there're even Ghostbusters Inc business cards. Cool stuff.

The best thing about *Ghostbusters* isn't the components or the fact that it is fun to read. The game is genuinely hilarious to play, in a way that *Paranoia* never was. It captures the tone of the movies perfectly, and makes it incredibly easy to get into wise-cracking-character mode. And somehow, when you're wearing that jumpsuit, with an unlicenced nuclear accelerator strapped to your back, do-or-die humour follows naturally. This is heroic comedy, and it really works.

Alas, most of the supplements for *Ghostbusters* were lacklustre and, like the second movie, the game's second edition, *Ghostbusters GBI*, was a pile of slime. George Bush became president, and the old world order disappeared in a thousand points of ectoplasmic light. Somebody gave Mark Rein-Splotch-Hagen a book by Anne Rice. The games industry moved on.

Is *Ghostbusters* really a classic? Members of the jury, consider this: its open-system has influenced game designs ever since, including *Star Wars*, *Shadowrun* and White Wolf's diametrically opposed *World of Darkness* series. All this, and it's still the only RPG in which you can snog Sigourney Weaver.

The verdict is yours.



Ghostbusters designer Sandy Petersen also wrote *Call of Cthulhu* and designed some levels for the computer-classic *Doom*. The same combination of horror and extreme violence appears in *Ghostbusters*.



Sandy Petersen also wrote an episode of the *Ghostbusters* cartoon series. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it's the one in which Great Cthulhu rises from the ocean and attacks New York. We're not making this shit up, you know.

FROM THE KING OF HEROIC FANTASY

DAVID GEMMELL

THE HAWK ETERNAL

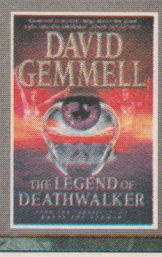
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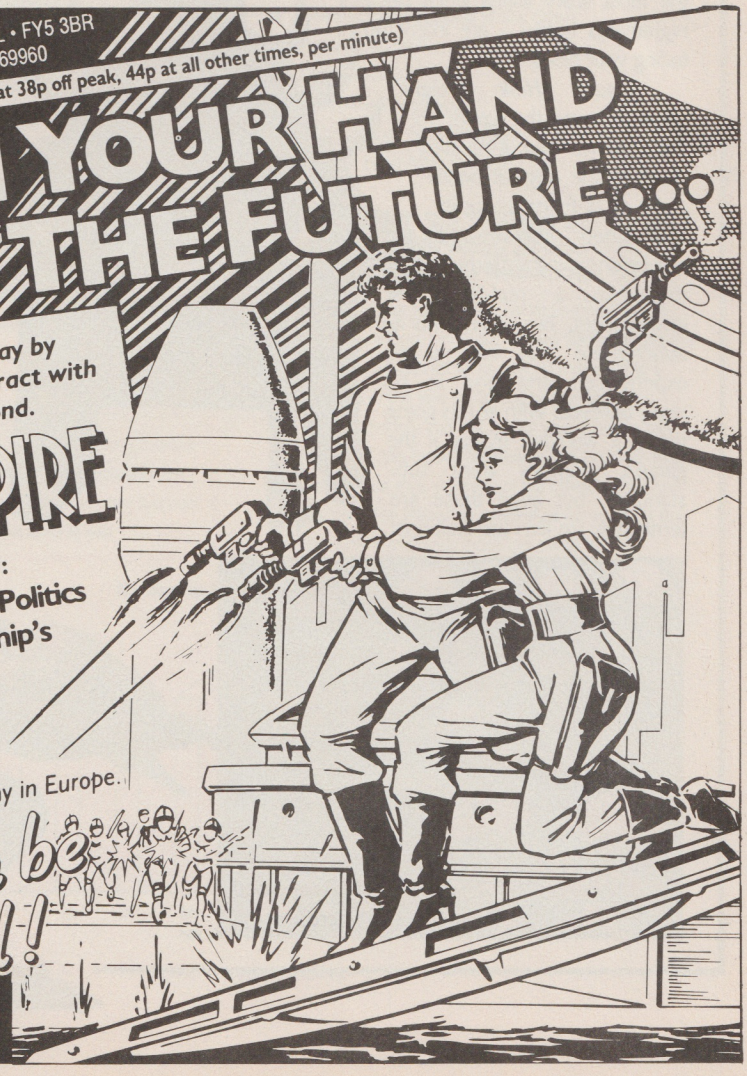
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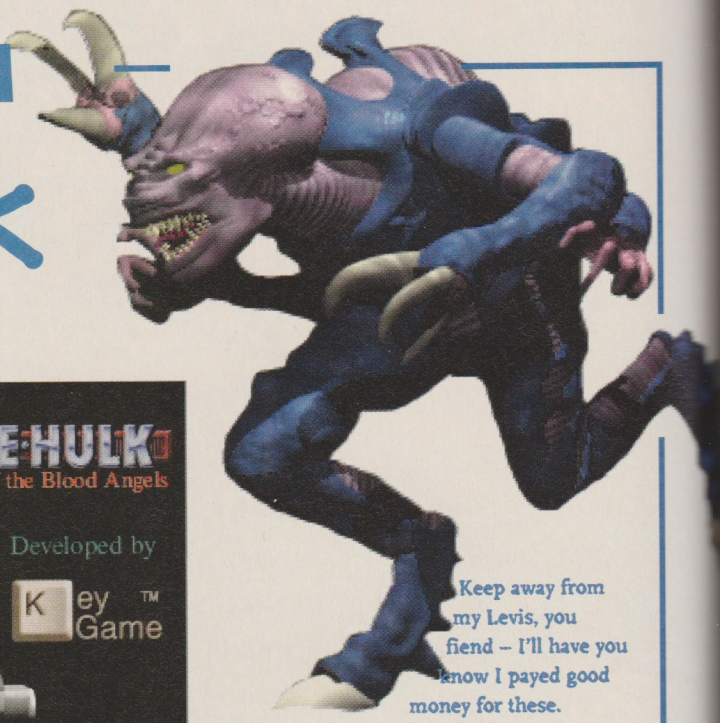


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COMING SOON

Space Hulk



Keep away from my Levis, you fiend – I'll have you know I payed good money for these.

Who needs a vivid imagination?



UP TILL NOW YOU have had to rely on your imagination to get the most out of Games Workshop's projects. If you wanted atmosphere you had to persuade your stereo to provide it. The arrival of *Space Hulk* is changing all of that. In its 3D0 incarnation it's already outselling every other title. And releases for the PC, PlayStation and Saturn are imminent. This is possibly the first time that this sort of game has ever really, *really* worked on a computer. And it works in style.



You control a group of fearless, combat-hardened Terminators with a variety of missions to fulfil. The even more combat-hardened and scared-of-nothing (particularly blokes in tin suits) Gene Stealers – surely the most scary aliens since Geiger's nightmares began – are intent on foiling your plans.

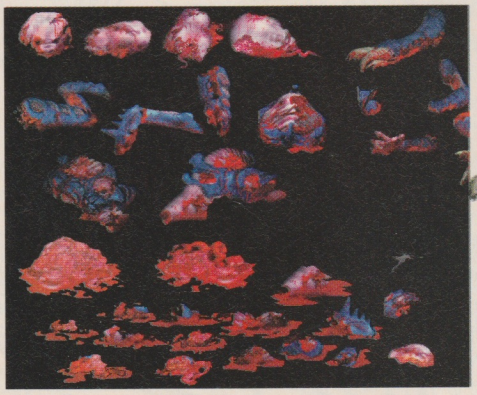


Space Hulk reigns supreme over the genre for two reasons. One, it remains close to the original board game at all times, using its established rules and regulations and transferring them to a real-time environment. Two, it imposes an atmosphere that has to be experienced first-hand to be really believed. With all this going for it, it wouldn't matter if the game's graphics were sub-standard, but even these are terrifyingly life-like. Just wait until you come face to face with a Gene Stealer in a dark corridor.

Space Hulk is a total experience. You'll never go back to the board game after this, not once you seal a door and back away from it, covering your mates as you go, only to see some bloodthirsty alien rip through it and attack you.

The PC version also features a multi-player mode in which up to ten players can attempt a mission, with one taking the role of leader.

Space Hulk is invading 1996 with a vengeance, and no right-thinking PC, 3D0, PlayStation or Saturn owner can afford to be without it. Destined to be a classic.





Back on the road

TRAVELLER
The New Era

It might be all over for Game Designers' Workshop (see despatches, **arcane** 3), but *Traveller*, the company's most famous game, looks set to keep on rolling. As reported last month Mark Miller, the game's inventor, intends to revise and re-publish *Traveller*. Now he has given the go-ahead to British company Azinko Korp Unlimited to produce a CD-based *Traveller* computer package.

The ambitious project is the brainchild of Azinko's Steven Humphrey, who aims to collect the *Traveller* product range into a multimedia database. The proposed CD-ROM is expected to contain a character generation system, starship and vehicle designs, a cut-down version of *Fire, Fusion and Steel* and a basic *Star Atlas*. It's intended to act as both a referee resource and a set of conventional computer games in its own right, providing referees with the chance to play-test designed scenarios. On-line access to a *Traveller* website, providing further resources and player interaction, will also be included.

For more information, call Stephen on 01202 526603 or contact him via e-mail: sjhumphr@bournemouth.ac.uk.

SURVEY RESULTS

Here are the results of the arcane jury...

Some of the copies of issue 1 of arcane sold in the British Isles included a survey form tucked inside. It contained all sorts of questions games as well as having lots of subtly-worded demographic questions for our advertising department to get excited about. So here we present the more interesting answers to our questions about how old you are and what your favourite games are, as well as providing some insight into the technological state of the nation.

TOP TEN RPGS

most played ✪ (most liked) ✪ game ✪ publisher ✪

1 (1) ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons*** TSR
2 (2) *Call of Cthulhu* Chaosium
3 (5) *Vampire* White Wolf
4 (3) *Shadowrun* FASA
5 (6) *Runequest* Games Workshop
6 (4) *Cyberpunk* R. Talsorian
7 (7) *Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay* Hogshead
8 (10) *Middle Earth Roleplay* Iron Crown Enterprises
9 (–) *Generic Universal Roleplaying System* Steve Jackson Games
10 (8) *Traveller* Games Designer Workshop

Bit of a two-horse race this. While *AD&D* is still well out in front in terms of playing time (27% of respondents said they regularly play, compared to the 18% who play *Call of Cthulhu)* it's very much neck and neck as to which of the top two is held in the highest esteem (32% and 30% respectively). Indeed, the tension in the office as the results came in was almost palpable. Further down the chart, it's all a lot closer still, with *Star Wars* just being edged out of the play charts despite its popularity.



YOUR COMPUTERS (AND OURS)

With 30% of respondents claiming Internet access, it came as no surprise to learn that 46% of **arcane** readers own a PC and a further 30% have access to one. But only 3% own an Apple Mac and a mere 5% more can get to one. Indeed, we've got more Apple Macs in this office than you lot put together. And Andy's got a PC with Internet access, a CD player, *Star Trek* samples and everything.

Of the games orientated machines, the Amiga is popular; 24% of you have one, and 9% of you know someone who's got one. 29% own a 16 bit console, 6% have a 32 or 64 bit console and one person admitted to possessing an 8 bit console. That's not very many bits, is it mate?

4% own an Atari and 2% have a Gameboy but only one person has an Acorn Archimedes. A few individuals are struggling by with rather outdated hardware; there was even a reported sighting of an Amstrad. And a 48k Spectrum, although we weren't sure whether this response should be counted as valid; we did say 'computers', not 'glorified abacuses'. Another individual had a 'Sun', but we don't even know what that is. Maybe they found it digging in the garden on the site of a Roman ruin or something. Only one person had a Playstation, although this was three months ago, before they were readily available in this country. We suspect a few more people have got one by now. And maybe that Spectrum has found its way to the municipal dump as well.

TOP TEN CCG'S

most played ✪ game ✪ publisher ✪

1 ***Magic: The Gathering*** Wizards of the Coast
2 *Star Trek: The New Generation* Decipher
3 *Illuminati* Steve Jackson Games
4 *Spellfire* TSR
5 *Jihad/Vampire* Wizards of the Coast
6 *Rage* White Wolf
7 *Bloodwars* TSR
8 *Shadowfist* Daedalus
9 *Doomtrooper* Heartbreaker
10 *On the Edge* Atlas Games

MAGIC The Gathering™

Magic won this, as you can see. What you can't see is that it won by a long, long way. Richard Garfield's game is still four times as popular as its nearest rival, getting a massive 36% of the vote compared to *Star Trek's* 9%. Don't forget, though, that this survey was done a couple of months ago. We expect *Shadowfist* (2% here) to do a Michael Jackson style storming of the charts soon. And *Middle Earth: The Wizards* is definitely another tip for the top. Strangely *Top Trumps* didn't get a look in.

Readership Age Distribution ?



So just how old are you? Well, according to the survey, the average arcane reader is 24. The bar chart to the right shows the ages of our readers in groups of three years (for example, eight responses came from readers aged 11 to 13).

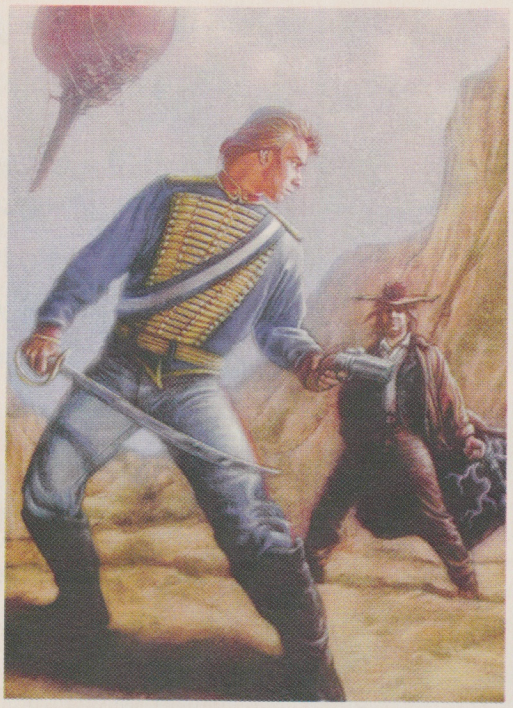
As you can see, the bulk of you are between the ages of 14 and 31, with the most common age being between 20 and 22 – a testament, probably, to the popularity of roleplaying among university students. The oldest reader who responded, though, was 48.

COMING SOON

Sixguns and sorcery

How the West was fun...

Castle Falkenstein is R Talsorian's excellent alternative history steampunk roleplaying game. Mixing faeries and victorians with steam power and magic, the game has so far created a uniquely European roleplaying experience of what might have been.



Now all that's set to change. R Talsorian are working on a sourcebook that will mean you can play *Castle Falkenstein* in the good ol' US of A. Except that, as you might imagine, it's not quite the place you remember so fondly from the John Wayne westerns. For a start, North America is divided into five separate countries: the United States of America, the Free State of Orleans, the Republic of Texas, the Twenty Nations Confederation, and the Bear Flag Empire of California. We strongly suspect that that won't be an end to the game's weirdness.

Sixguns and Sorcery promises to be a comprehensive sourcebook for North America in the Steam Age, and will be released soon. Just as soon as it is, we'll review it.

Is that thing loaded?

Win a copy of *Point Blank: Redemption Through Violence.*



win! arcane COMPETITION in association with Gamecraft of Liverpool

Despite the fact that we gave it a bit of a knocking in our review, (see page 73, **arcane** 2), Northern Ireland producers Wasteland Games have stoically supplied **arcane** with ten copies of their 'fight film' roleplaying game *Point Blank: Redemption Through Violence* to give away as competition prizes. They believe that *Point Blank* is as good as *STOCS Lite* 'at what it tries to do' and would like to ensure that the game gets a second hearing.

While we reviewed *Point Blank* as part of the *STOCS Lite* package, and while it is based on the *STOCS Lite* rules system, *Point Blank* comes complete with its own campaign setting, and Wasteland Games are keen to point out that this is a stand-alone game; no other Wasteland products are needed to play it.

So, to win a copy and try it out for yourself, simply send us the answer to the following question:

What is the nickname of Chow Yun Fat's character in the John Woo film *Hard Boiled*? (Clue: it ain't Vodka.)

Send your entires to 'On the rocks', **arcane**, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW.

And, as usual, there are regulations you would be well advised to heed:

1. You only get one go. If you have two, we'll have one back at you.
2. Nobody associated with Wasteland Games or Future Publishing is eligible for entry. And anyway, we've already got a copy.
3. The editor plays a Caligula-esque role in all things **arcane**.

Concatenation of conventions

Time to come out of winter hibernation and start fraternising with the gaming world at large as March heralds a flurry of convention activity.

Lugcon is taking place on 8-10th March at the University of Limerick. Featured games include *Magic, AD&D, Call of Cthulhu, Everway, Over the Edge, Cyberpunk 2020, SLA Industries, Warhammer FRP, Ars Magica,* and *Vampire*. £5 will get you through the door (each competition event costs a further £1), but on-site accomodation is free. There'll be quizzes, trade stands, WotC trading and events, and a seminar given by *Psychobabble* fanzine.

Reed Hall, Exeter University plays host to *Ex Uni Con III* on 9-10th March. For further info send an SAE to Rik Stewart, 25 Victoria Street, Exeter, Devon EX4 6JQ (email: r.stewart@exeter.ac.uk).

The *Flagship PBM Convention* returns on 16th March at Birmingham's Motorcycle Museum. PBM companies big and small will be in attendance, many running demo games and featuring new launches. There'll also be a GM panel and an auction. Entry is £3 on the door or £2 in advance. Call 01395 276632 for details.

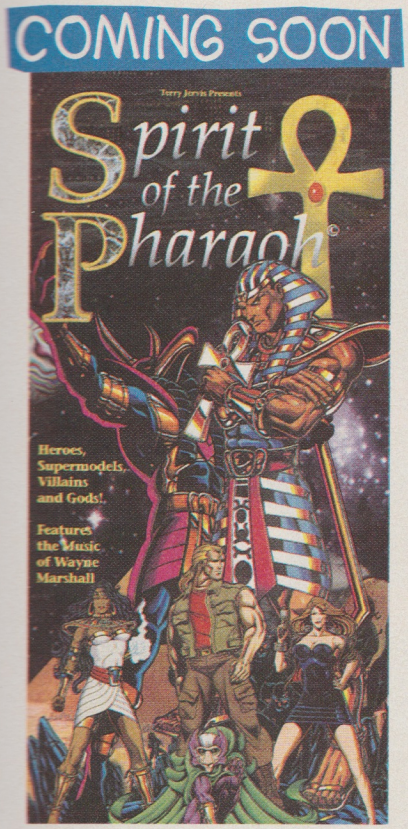
The same day sees the launch of *Polycon AC1*, first in a series of RPGA charity events, at Cambridge Regional College. Admission costs £2, £1.50 to RPGA members and £1 for under 16s. Profits are going to the Addenbrookes Neurological

Spirit of the Pharaoh



Can't say pharaoh than that.

STAND BY FOR an Egyptian invasion. *Spirit of the Pharaoh* is the collective name for an imminent influx of fantasy games and associated merchandise goodies from game designers, Future Promises.



Spirit's plot concerns the pharaoh Ra'Mun, who escapes from his Netherworld prison to share the body of hunky pop star Raymond. Together with Raymond's girlfriend Marie (who, by virtue of some Egyptian-style sorcerous shenanigans, also happens to be Neferkari, Ra'Mun's ancient bride) and assorted allies, Ra'Mun must search the modern world to unearth the scattered pages of the Book Of Spells before he can take on the might of Seth, God of Chaos. Also opposing our heroes is Lord Welton, an evil English aristocrat and industrialist who is searching for the secret to immortality.

So far, the characters appear in a board game and episode one of an animated cartoon, available on video. Future releases include a roleplaying game, a collectable card game (natch), further video episodes, a comic book, a magazine, a calendar and pogs.

The merchandise is already available (again, natch). It includes assorted types and sizes of T-shirt, a record bag, a jacket, a ski hat, a baseball cap, a key ring and a *Spirit* poster. Popster Wayne Marshall's record *Spirit* accompanies the onslaught. Reviews to follow shortly, we expect.

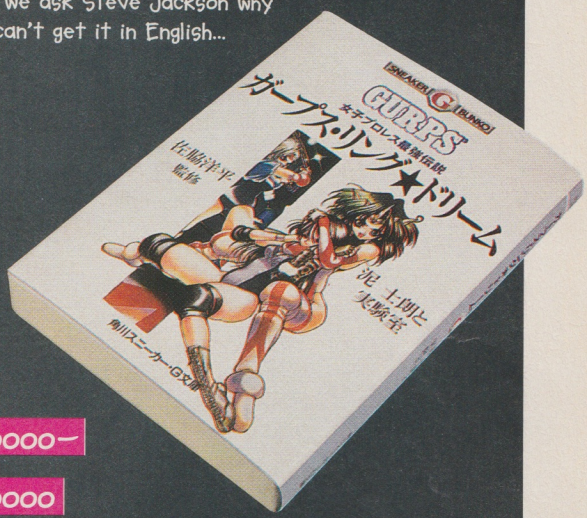
Equipment Appeal. You can take part in a number of activities: an *AD&D* open, a *Dragon Dice* tournament, a *Star Wars* tournament, two *Magic* events, wargames, a *BattleTech* event, *LaserTag* and *University Challenge* – an *AD&D* competition between college teams. You can also expect to see trade stands, a bring and buy sale, and game demos. Some tournaments have limited places, so you'll need to book in advance. Contact Meachelle Moss on 01480 351912.

Itinerari Fantastici takes place in the Sports Palace (Ruffini Park), Turin, Italy on 12-14th April. Featured RPGs include *D&D, AD&D, Cyberpunk 2020, MERPS, Vampire,* and *CoC.* CCG games include *Magic, Star Trek, Doomtrooper* and *Spellfire.* There'll also be the chance to play various boardgames. There'll be live-action roleplaying, murder parties, demos, dealers, a beginners' table, a flea market, a free game library, comics and animations. Admission costs 7,000 lires (15,000 for all three days). Contact Itinerari Fantastici Organizing Committee, c/o Games Centre, Centro Commerciale, La Rinascente, via Lagrange 15 10123 Torino, Italy, or email Ffaenza@mailbox.icom.it.

next month in arcane

Turning Japanese

Our special correspondent in Japan tells us why this book *GURPS: Ring Dreams!* (the *GURPS* supplement of young, female wrestling) is so popular over there. And we ask Steve Jackson why we can't get it in English...



Woooo–Woooo

Our encounter features The Train, a versatile location for horror, murder mystery and espionage thrillers. It'll be the usual superb blend of floorplans, NPCs and adventure ideas, all rolled into one comprehensive package.

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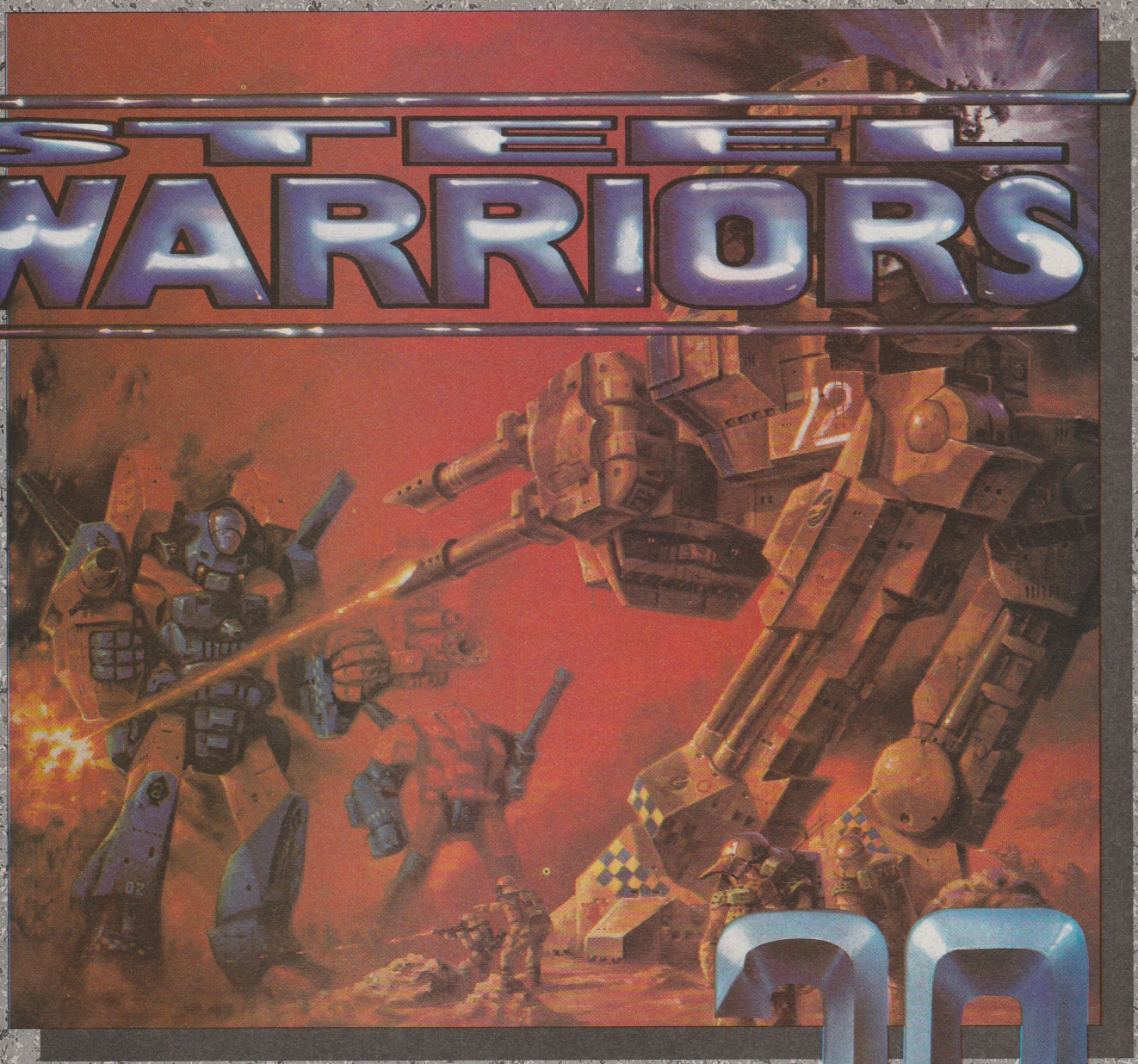
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COLUMN

Will Computer Games Ever Replace Roleplaying Games?

Are RPGs a species on the verge of extinction? Is their ecological niche about to be claimed by their more technologically advanced cousins, computer games?



Andrew Rilstone

Andrew is the editor of *Interactive Fantasy*, the journal of roleplaying and story-making systems, and is also a regular contributor to arcane.

Well, so what if they are? Aren't computer games just a newer and better way of doing the same things as RPGs? They gratify the same sorts of fantasy and SF daydreams. They are easier to get into (none of that tedious scenario-writing or character-design). They have prettier graphics, better sound effects, higher budgets, more street-cred. There are more to chose from. If they replaced RPGs would anyone really care?

I would, for one.

Computer games are great at what they do. They give you the illusion of speed and motion, and test your skill and dexterity (which, in our case, we have not got). They immerse you in the action. I've seen *Doom* players flinch when a monster attack them; I've seen *Wing Commander* players duck to avoid oncoming asteroids. You don't get that sort of involvement with an RPG.

But 'that sort of involvement' isn't why I play RPGs. I play them for a completely different sort of involvement, a sort that computers simply can't deliver.

Computers can't talk. Oh, they have 'speech synthesizers', but have you ever tried having an intelligent conversation with one of those fireball throwing imps in *Doom*? Did you ever try answering that smug barman back in *Wing Commander*? Roleplaying *means* getting into character. Bluffing your way past the two incredibly stupid were-kangaroos who are guarding the treasure. Flattering the king *just* enough so that he'll relent from having you boiled alive in margarine. Screaming, "C'mon Cthulhu – take me!" at the guy with the long slimy tentacles.

It means, in short, playing a role. Until computers master natural language, computer roleplaying will be a contradiction in terms.

Computers can't be creative. They can't cope with the amazingly complex solutions to a perfectly simple problem that player characters routinely come up with. I once heard a *Star Wars* PC ask if there was any good reason why he shouldn't disguise his starship as an asteroid. The menu option for that particular tactic seems to have been inadvertently left out of the *TIE Fighter* computer game. It also (mysteriously) fails to cover the possibility that a group of PCs might want to jump starship and join a travelling circus. This sort of thing is simply ruled out of court in computer games: human referees cope with it without batting an eyelid.

"Oh, sure," you say, "this is all true – for the moment. But a Playstation would have been far-fetched science fiction in 1976. Just imagine what the boffins will have come up with by 2016!"

You may have a point. We all read *New Scientist*. Some people really do think that we will live to see the implementation of true artificial intelligence on a computer. Not chess-playing programs; not starships that can learn your dog-fighting tactics and blow you up in an even more irritating manner than they do at present, but truly sentient neural networks capable of original ideas. It's a mind-boggling thought. Would such a machine be able to demand human rights or stand for chairperson of the Women's Institute?

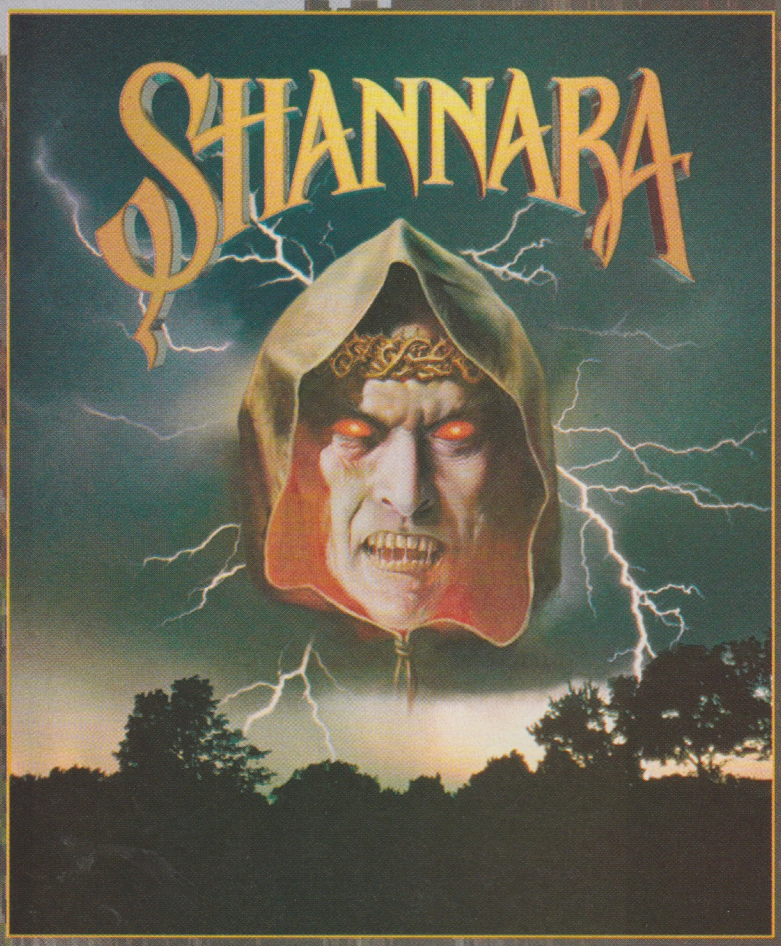
But here's another question for you to ponder: is it remotely likely that the first use to which these fabulously clever and fabulously expensive AIs will be put is refereeing roleplaying games? Isn't that a bit like saying that in the exciting future of 1996 everyone will have a space shuttle in their garage?

Look, I'm not knocking computer games. I waste far too much time playing them to want to do that that. I've lost count of how many times I've been blown to bits in *X-Wing*. Each time it happens I say something extremely rude, thump the table, re-load my character, and try again. After 17 or 18 tries I sometimes even manage to finish a mission.

Mind you, I've been blown to bits in roleplaying games, too. It leaves me feeling slightly numb, slightly dizzy. When I recover, I often look back on my character with a satisfying sense of completion, as if his life and death make some sort of whole. But I still feel sad: like I did when Jean Grey or Thorin Oakenshield died.

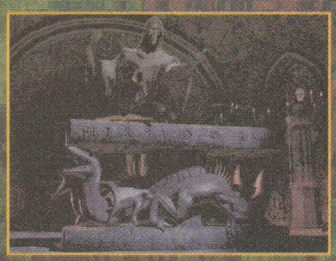
That is why computer games will never replace RPGs.

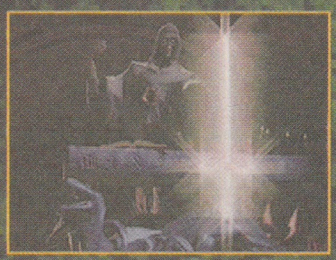
SHANNARA

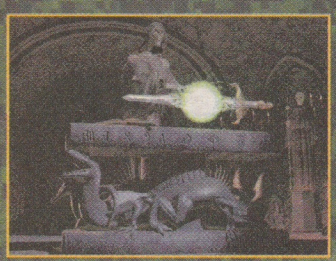


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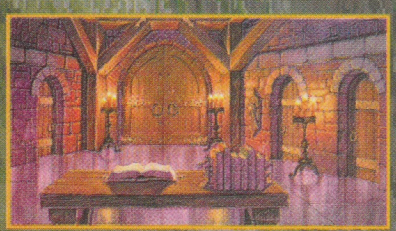


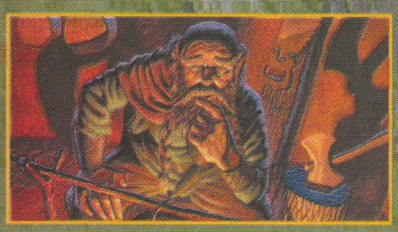




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START HERE...

Maybe you've played a few collectable card games or you've been an avid wargamer for some time, and you're wondering what it is that your friends actually do every Wednesday night. Perhaps you just happened to pick up a copy of arcane out of curiosity. Whatever the reason, you've heard about this 'roleplaying' thing and it sounds interesting. So what's it all about, how do you get into it, and why should you bother?



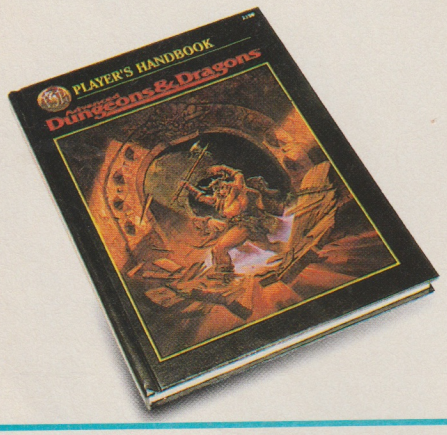
Illustration by Keith Jackson

ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS

Publisher: TSR
Background: Generic fantasy

OK, it's not the cheapest system around - you'll need to splash out on the *Player's Handbook*, the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and the *Monstrous Compendium*, and that's before you've bought any adventures - neither is it the simplest or most elegant. So why should you try *AD&D* if you're just starting out with roleplaying?

Because it's the best there is. Unlike



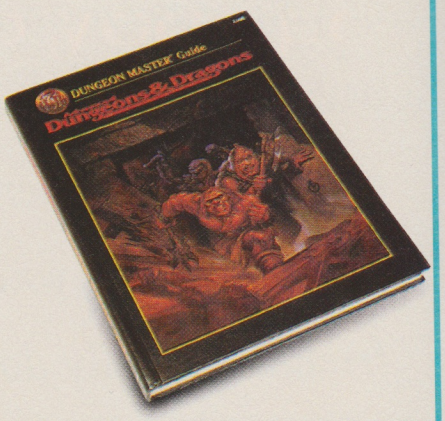


many of its rivals, *AD&D* isn't restricted by any particular film or novel setting, rather it draws on myths and legends from all around the world. Arabian, mediaeval European, Norse, Oriental – your games can have whatever feel you like.

And although the rules do loosely model reality (a reality of magic and monsters, natch), they're not so pernickety that your games are going to get bogged down or your characters feel strait-jacketed. It might seem like an awful lot to take in, but the core set absolutely necessary for play is small, and you'll be surprised at how quickly your games begin to flow. Once you're hooked, you'll be glad of all the extra rules; before long you'll be looking covetously at the supply of supplements that TSR seem to be haemorrhaging every month.

Above all, *AD&D* is designed for fun. Referees are encouraged to improvise, players to act heroically, imaginatively, outrageously. Go on, do your mind a favour.

Cliff Ramshaw



MIDDLE EARTH ROLEPLAYING



Publisher: Iron Crown Enterprises
Background: High fantasy based on the works of JRR Tolkien

Thanks to the Tolkien link, *MERP* is one of the most attractive RPGs around for beginners. The thought of playing out scenes from *The Lord of the Rings* is enough to encourage new players to read through the game's guidelines, which anyone who has any experience at all of RPGs will find easy to grasp.

The usual level system implemented in most games operates here, but players often discover that, while surviving the first few character levels is difficult, established characters become invincible. The discrepancy between low-level adversaries and the top brass leaves a mid-level wasteland. This inevitably leads to a brash attack on Mordor to liven things up, resulting in several dead characters, bruised egos and some annoyed players.

There are, however, good support modules and some excellent character books available that can be used by referees, while players have access to a respectable range of races and professions when it comes to character generation.

The latest *MERP* release is supposed to sort out some of the problems that magic caused in earlier versions – namely, its over-frequent use, which did not sit well with Tolkien's literary works. Problems like this, and the inadequacies of the combat system – such as the lack of any mechanism for dealing with fatigue – can easily be overcome using players' own modifications and the integration of other systems, such as *Spell Law* from *Rolemaster*.

A system that can grow with the players' experience, *MERP* allows depth and extra dimension to be added to characters – character backgrounds and secondary skills, for instance. Despite some shortcomings, once played, *MERP* is hard leave behind.

David Taylor



You should bother to get into roleplaying because it's immense fun. It's also one of the most rewarding, exciting, and absorbing hobbies in the world, combining the best elements from other forms of entertainment – such as books and films – with those of traditional and computer games. All you really need is some friends, some imagination and a little spare time. And once you're hooked, you'll be hooked for life.

Still sounds interesting? We thought it might, which is why we've decided to bring you this beginners guide to the hobby. As well as explaining what roleplaying actually is and how to go about getting involved, we've spent hours talking to other gamers and arguing amongst ourselves to decide which are the best rules systems for new players. In the end we chose six, and you'll find them described over the following pages. For each of our recommendations we've included a brief description of the game itself as well as a discussion of its good and bad points. Finally, we asked a couple of the hobby's most successful and well respected games designers for the advice they'd give to newcomers to the hobby.

So what is roleplaying?

Believe it or not, probably the toughest thing to explain about roleplaying is what it actually *is*. Although there are some similarities, roleplaying games are unlike almost any other type of game you may have played before, involving some concepts and ideas that can take some time to understand. Don't worry too much, though, because you've got one big advantage. You've already played one.

Remember those games of Cops and Robbers or Cowboys and Indians (or whatever other variation you came up with) that you played as a kid? That was roleplaying. Simple, unstructured roleplaying, admittedly, but roleplaying nonetheless. You and a bunch of your friends pretended to be the 'good guys', while your brother and his mates played the part of the 'baddies'. You then proceeded to play out your roles, which in this case probably meant joyfully massacring each other.

Although they're more sophisticated (and far more satisfying), modern roleplaying games have the same concept at heart. Each player takes the part of a character in a fictional game world and acts out their role. Rather than running around and physically performing the actions of their characters, though, the players simply describe what they're doing and saying, effectively making up a story as they go along.

In order to give the game structure, one person acts a referee. The degree of control that the referee has over the story varies greatly from one roleplaying group to another. In some the referee leaves the players very much up to their own devices, whereas in others the ref will have a very specific plot in mind and guide the group into the story he or she has created. In any case, this person acts as the senses of the players' characters, describing where they are, what they see and hear, and the effects of their actions. In addition, the referee takes on the parts of anyone (or, indeed, anything) that the players' characters encounter.

For practical purposes, nearly all roleplaying games assume that the players are working together as a group. So if the players decide that their characters go to the pub, the referee plays the part of the barman and any customers that they talk to. If they pick a fight with a gang of unemployed asteroid miners, the referee decides how the miners react and, if a punch-up ensues, describes the actions that they take.

This is the key to what makes roleplaying such a fascinating and involving experience – you and the other players have almost complete freedom of choice, unimpeded by the abstract (and often unreasonable) restrictions and rules of other types of game. If you've watched a film or read a book and at some critical point though 'there's no way I'd do that' or 'why don't they just…' then you'll love roleplaying. Because here the actions of the heroes are completely up to you, and it's your and your team-mates' choices that will decide the outcome.

Which brings us to the rules. The truth is that it's quite possible to play a roleplaying game without any rules at all – the referee and the players just decide amongst themselves what happens, just like in Cops and Robbers. The problem with this approach is that it can easily degenerate into the same kind of 'I shot you! No you didn't!' arguments that no doubt plagued your childhood games. The other potential drawback is that nobody's imagination is limitless, and creating your own fictional world can be quite a task.

Despite their somewhat unsettling size and apparent complexity, roleplaying systems are actually designed to help you by alleviating one or (more commonly) both of these problems. The rules themselves perform two main tasks. They allow you to define both the player characters and the game world in an internally consistent manner – just how strong is your dwarven warrior? – and they present a system for resolving actions whose outcome is uncertain or variable – will the dwarf be able to smash his way through that oaken door?

Most games achieve this by describing a person or thing with numbers – a character's strength might be rated from one to six, say – and then using dice to resolve actions – to break down the door you might have to roll the value of your strength or less on a six-sided dice. Although roleplaying game rules might seem very complex, their bulk is usually used to define the relevant numbers and what they mean, and during play you don't have to worry too much about them. In fact, it's normally only the referee who actually needs to read them in the first place.

In addition, most roleplaying systems belong to a specific genre, the most popular being fantasy, science-fiction or horror – and many are set in a unique game world. As well as

Jargon buster

As with most hobbies, roleplaying games often seem to have a language of their own. Here's a quick arcane guide to the terms that pop up the most…

Adventure: A single story in a roleplaying game, normally with a specific plot and often featuring a set goal. Also called a scenario.

Campaign: A series of connected adventures in which the players normally use the same characters.

Character: Literally, any sentient creature in a roleplaying game. Characters are normally divided into two types – those controlled by the players (often referred to as Player Characters or PCs) and those controlled by the referee (often called Non-Player Characters or NPCs).

Dice: Most roleplaying games use the 'xDy' notation for dice, where 'x' is the number of dice to throw, and 'y' is the number of sides of the dice. For example, 3D6 means 'three six-sided dice'; 2D10 means 'two ten-sided dice' and so on.

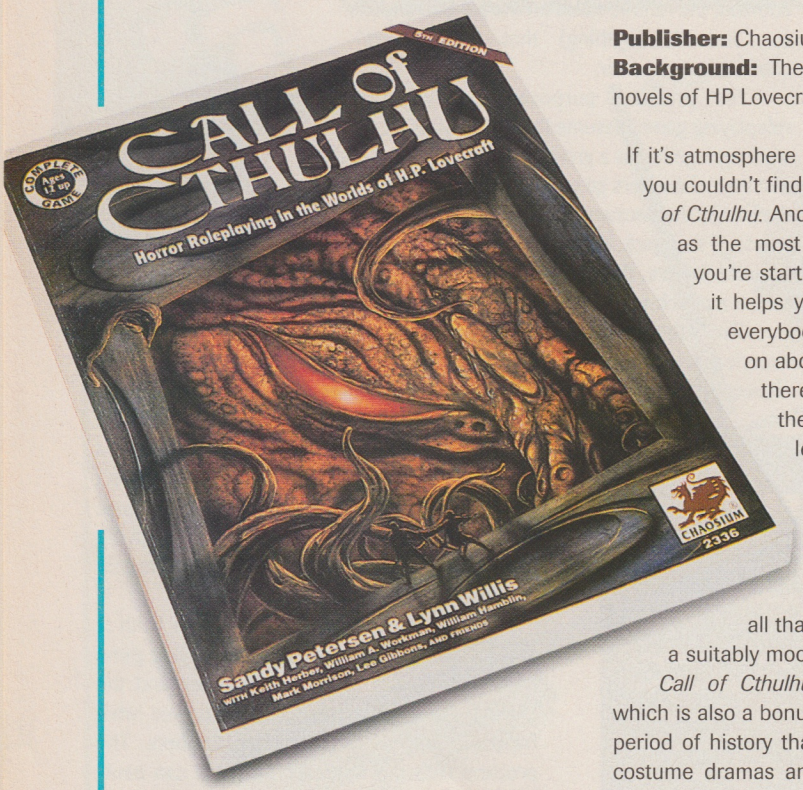
Hack 'n' Slash: A style of roleplaying in which the main aim is to kill 'the bad guys' – be they monsters, aliens or whatever – with little emphasis placed on plot or characterisation.

Referee: The organiser of a roleplaying game, also commonly referred to as a DM (Dungeon Master) or GM (Games Master).

Roll-playing: A style of roleplaying that places heavy emphasis on the rules and mechanics of the game rather than the plot and characterisation.

RPG: Role Playing Game. Other acronyms include CRPG (Computer Role Playing Game) and LARP (Live Action Role Playing, a form of roleplaying in which the players play out their characters' physical actions, like actors on a stage).

CALL OF CTHULU



Publisher: Chaosium
Background: The 1920s and the horror novels of HP Lovecraft

If it's atmosphere you're looking for, then you couldn't find a better game than *Call of Cthulhu*. And atmosphere strikes me as the most important thing when you're starting to roleplay, because it helps you to understand what everybody else has been going on about. That sense of 'being there', of getting involved, the tension as you wait to learn whether your character will live or die, that vital ingredient that makes roleplaying the best game ever – all that is greatly enhanced by a suitably moody atmosphere.

Call of Cthulhu is set in the 1920s, which is also a bonus for the beginner. It's a period of history that, thanks to films, BBC costume dramas and the like, you'll know well enough to be able to visualise and understand. By the same token, it is just far enough removed from the present day to allow your the freedom to be fantastical without shocking the players into disbelief. And, since the subject matter is horror, you'll find that very easy to get into as well and for the same reasons.

The last good thing about *Call of Cthulhu* for the novice is that it has one of the easiest rules systems of any RPG. It's not necessarily the simplest system, but it's one that is very easy to understand and use. As a bonus every book of *Call of Cthulhu* comes with a small sample adventure (*The Haunted House,* or *The Haunting* as it's now been re-titled) that still remains one of the best and most successful I have ever run for novices.

And don't worry if you know next to nothing about the author HP Lovecraft. Neither did I when I started running this game, and to this day I've only read a handful of his books. It's the horror and suspense that count here, not knowledge of a specific background.

Steve Faragher

THE WORLD OF DARKNESS



Publisher: White Wolf Games
Background: Modern-day gothic horror

The World of Darkness is a common setting for five games produced by the White Wolf design studio: *Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage*, *Wraith* and *Changeling*. They fall into the category of supernatural horror, but the twist is that the player characters are not fighting the monsters, they *are* the monsters.

Vampire is recommended for beginners because it is the easiest of the five to play. The rules are coherent and simple, with none of the complicated options found in the other games. They can be used to resolve most actions quickly and efficiently. The only drawback is the game's combat system, which is cumbersome and time-consuming to implement.

Vampire, with its emphasis on character and atmosphere, is the perfect introduction for players to the storytelling aspect of roleplaying games.

White Wolf provide copious advice on how to develop the theme and mood of an adventure, and even suggest a soundtrack to accompany play. *Vampire* has the most vividly realised setting of any game world. Its epic backdrop is suitable for almost any kind of storyline, ranging from stylish horror to doomed romance. With such a wide scope and richness of detail, topped off with beautiful and highly evocative artwork, this is the best-looking and best-supported game available.

The vampire has always been a popular, captivating figure, a heady mix of danger and romance. If you ever wanted to play the hero of an Anne Rice novel, this is definitely the game for you.

Caught up in an eternal jihad, struggling to hold on to your humanity, in this game you'll find your imagination and emotions fully engaged (and it's bloody good fun as well). Everybody should be able to get their teeth into this one.

Mark Barter



allowing them to keep the rules to a manageable level (you don't need the statistics for laser cannons in most fantasy worlds, for example), this also means that you don't have to create your own fictional setting completely from scratch – you can use someone else's. By providing a basic setting, and often a specific premise for the players, a system frees you to concentrate on the plots, stories and characters that are the core of roleplaying.

How to get started...

Okay, by now you should have an idea of what roleplaying games are and roughly how they work. The next step is to start playing. But how?

As with so many things in life, there are two ways of going about this. In the case of roleplaying, you can start off as a player, or take the plunge and become a referee.

...As a player

If you get the opportunity, this is certainly the easiest way of becoming involved in roleplaying. The problem is that you have to find an existing group to join. If you're very lucky, you might already know of one, or a friend might have decided to referee a game and asked you if you want to play, in which case your problem is solved. Otherwise, you're going to have to go out and look for one.

There are several places to try. For a start, if you've got a local games store, go along and see if they've got a notice board. Many do, and you'll probably find at least a couple of people or groups who want players. Even if you don't (or if there's no board), try chatting to the owner – most people who run roleplaying stores are involved in the hobby and might well know of some local groups or even a club you could join.

You can also try local universities, most of which will have a roleplaying society. There's a chance that non-students won't be allowed to join, but even then you might meet some friendly gamers who'll happily let you play in one of their 'private' games.

Finally, **arcane** can help. Our reader ads section (see page 92) is free, and specifically designed to help players find other gamers in their area. If you have access to the World Wide Web on the Internet, you can also post a message to our on-line Contacts page at our site, which can be found at http://www.futurenet.co.uk/

When you're starting off in this fashion you're trying to get some experience. So don't be picky about what system (or even what genre) a group is playing, and don't worry too much about the rules. An existing group will be able to explain what you need to know as you go along.

If you do find a group, the most important thing to bear in mind is that roleplaying is a co-operative and social hobby. One of the things that makes roleplaying games so different to other types is that there are no winners and losers. Although the character you play and the group as a whole may have specific goals or objectives, the enjoyment comes from how you achieve them. In roleplaying, it really isn't the winning but the taking part that counts. So take things easy, and enjoy yourself.

Finally, remember that roleplaying is as varied as the people who play it. Watch ten groups playing TSR's *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* system, for example, and you'll probably see that many different games. So even if the game you join turns out not be to your taste, it's almost certainly worth hunting down another one.

For some more advice about starting out in this fashion, see Steve Jackson and Richard Garfield's comments.



Steve Jackson

is the founder of Steve Jackson Games, and has been involved in roleplaying for more than 20 years. He is the designer of a wide variety of games, including *GURPS, Car Wars* and *Illuminati: New World Order.*

"ROLEPLAYING, LIKE SEX, should not be learned from books. It's far better to find an experienced, friendly group and ask if you can observe (I am talking about *roleplaying* now). It really doesn't matter at all what they are playing. However, the closer these people are to your own age and interests, the more likely it is that their particular flavour of roleplaying will appeal to you. If you're 12 years old (or 20 with a few beers in) then hack 'n' slash *Dungeons & Dragons* is a Very Fun Thing. If you like to wear black and look sinister, well, something in the Gothic line will probably work better for you.

"So where do you find a roleplaying group? Ask at a hobby shop, visit a convention, ask your friends. But don't try to judge it from a book – any book. It has to be seen to be understood."

...As a referee

There's no denying that this is the tougher of the two options. The referee is the person responsible for actually running a roleplaying game. He is often the person who organises the sessions, and is the only one who *has* to read the rules for the game being played. We're not trying to put you off here, you understand, it's just that it's important that you realise from the start that you're going to have to put some effort in.

On the other hand, the referee's role is often far more satisfying than that of player and has significantly more to offer. Deciding to referee a game of your own means that you can start roleplaying even if you can't find an existing group, and you have far more choice over what genre to play in and what style of game to run.

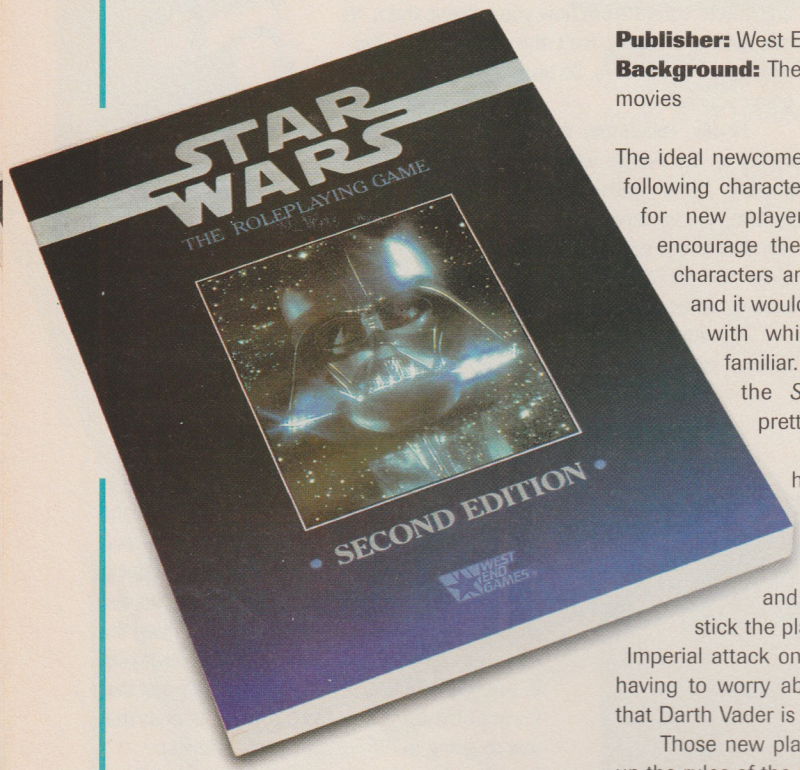
Before you start playing, though, you're going to have to do some work. There are two tasks that face you. You have to decide what game to play, and you have to find yourself some players. The order in which this is done is largely up to you, but it's normally a good idea to combine the two.

Roleplaying groups vary considerably in size, but a good number is three to five players in addition to the referee. That way there'll be sufficient people to ensure a variety of characters, but not so many that it becomes difficult to keep things under control (or to fit everyone around a table).

For players, your best bet are your friends. After all, if you're the kind of person who's interested in roleplaying, there's a good chance that they will be too, at least after you've explained the idea to them (or given them this feature to read). Refereeing a roleplaying game can be a taxing job, especially to begin with, and it helps if you're doing it with people that you feel comfortable around. Finally, you will make mistakes – everyone does – and friends are likely to be a bit more forgiving.

Having said all that, roleplaying is a social pastime, and it can be a great way to meet like-minded people. Don't be afraid to use the same

STAR WARS: THE ROLEPLAYING GAME



Publisher: West End Games
Background: The Empire of the *Star Wars* movies

The ideal newcomer's RPG would have the following characteristics: it would be easy for new players to learn; it would encourage them to create interesting characters and play them to the hilt; and it would be set in a background with which they were already familiar. Nothing is perfect, but the *Star Wars* RPG comes pretty close.

Just about everybody has seen the movie trilogy, so everybody knows the difference between X-Wings and TIE fighters. You can stick the players in the middle of an Imperial attack on a jungle planet without having to worry about whether they know that Darth Vader is not a good guy.

Those new players will be able to pick up the rules of the game in ten minutes flat: if they can add up the scores on a handful of six-sided dice, they can play the game.

And what's more, they won't have to spend the first half hour working through a character generation system. The game provides players with off-the-peg character templates that they can choose from, giving them an immediate handle on their characters. And roleplaying? Once you put an idealistic Minor Jedi on a starship along with a cynical Pirate and an irritating Kid, I can guarantee that even a group of complete neophytes will be roleplaying (read: bickering) before the scenario has even begun.

It must be said, though, that the referee has to work hard to create a fast-paced, action-packed and over-the-top scenario that will challenge the near-invincible PCs and successfully conjure up the atmosphere and feel of the films. This means that, although *Star Wars* is an admirable game for new *players*, it is not the best choice for someone who has no experience of refereeing a game.

Andrew Rilstone

FENG SHUI

Publisher: Daedalus Games
Background: Action movies, especially those made in Hong Kong

Action movies may not be at the pinnacle of the cinematic artform, but they certainly *are* fun. Imagine being in the middle of *Die Hard*, *Indiana Jones*, *True Lies*, *Reservoir Dogs*, *Predator* or *Aliens*. Now add the non-stop pace of Hong Kong movies like John Woo's *The Killer* and *Hard Boiled*, and you've got a heady mix of death-defying stunts, guns, explosions and nasty bad guys. Welcome to the world of *Feng Shui*.

This is one of the best roleplaying games I've ever seen, and it has a lot to recommend it to beginners in particular. For a start, everyone's seen the kind of movies that *Feng Shui* is based on, so players will be able to immediately grasp the style and atmosphere of the game. Not only this, but the rules are incredibly simple and very easy to pick up – you'll have them down pat in no time.


Illustration © Brian Snoddy

Perhaps the most impressive thing about *Feng Shui*, though, is not the rules themselves but the way in which they have been written. The book is a joy to read, being at once clear, well designed and amusing. Everything is geared towards creating the right atmosphere, and the rules are full of great advice for players and referees alike. Simply put, this is what roleplaying is all about. The only downside is that because it's brand-new, the system currently lacks support. Daedalus have an impressive list of adventures and supplements planned, though, so this won't be a problem for long.

Andy Butcher



methods discussed in the players' section above to find yourself some likely guinea pigs... sorry, players.

As far as the game system goes, you've got a vast number to choose from. Although fantasy, science fiction and horror remain the most popular, there are roleplaying games available covering just about every conceivable genre – and probably a few that you hadn't thought of. For every system, there are fans who firmly believe that it is the ultimate roleplaying game. While this variety is one of the great things about roleplaying, it can also be very confusing when you're just starting out.

The first thing to decide, then, is what genre most appeals to you and, if you've already found some, to your players. Basically, just pick the one that you most enjoy, the one that fascinates and inspires you. The more familiar you and your players are with the general setting of the game, the easier it will be for all of you to get involved.

Over the course of these pages we suggest six games that we feel, for one reason or another, would make good introductions to roleplaying. We're not saying that these games are perfect – they all have their problems – or that they're any 'better' than the huge range of alternatives, just that they have definite advantages for those new to the hobby. If none of them appeal to you, pop along to a games store and take a look at what's on offer. Once again, remember that most of the people who run these stores are gamers themselves and will probably be able to offer you some advice.

When you've made up your mind, the next thing you have to do is read the rules. If something seems unclear or confusing, don't worry about it for now. It's more important to get a general feel for how the rules work than to learn them back to front. When you've read them once, go back and take another look at any parts that didn't seem very clear – they'll probably make a lot more sense now. Then work your way through the rules for creating new player characters a couple of times, generating a few as you go. Finally, try experimenting with the way the rules deal with various actions by attempting to do things with the characters you've just created – have one try to climb a wall, or smash a door, or whatever, then throw a couple of them into a fight against each other.

When you feel comfortable, get your players together and help them generate some characters. Take your time explaining things to them, and be sure to answer any questions they may have. Once this is done, you're ready to play.

Most systems include at least one adventure for starting characters, so try this first. The main aim here for both you and your players is to get familiar with the way the game works. Keep things simple, and don't worry about making mistakes. In a single hour of play you'll learn far more about the game – and roleplaying as a whole – than in weeks of reading the rulebook.

Help me!

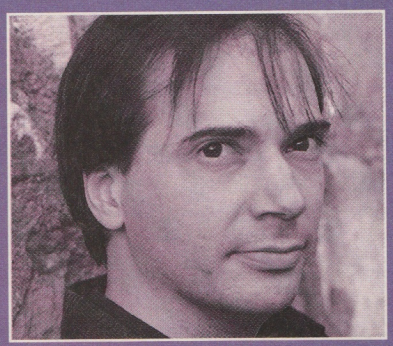
By now you might be wondering just why anyone would ever want to referee a roleplaying game. Well, it can be a lot of work, but the rewards far outweigh the effort. Not only will you enjoy yourself, but – and this can be a terrific buzz – you'll be largely responsible for the enjoyment of everyone else. There's nothing quite like the feeling you get from seeing your players completely absorbed in the world that you and they have created.

Still, it's not always easy, so don't be afraid to look for help if you're unsure about something. The first people to turn to are your group. Encourage the players to talk to you about the game – what they like and what they don't, and any ideas or suggestions they might have. Roleplaying is a co-operative hobby, and the more feedback you get from the players the more you'll be able to tailor the game to everyone's taste, meaning everyone will have a better time.

Even when you're refereeing a game yourself, it's always a good idea to try and find other groups in your area. Most of the things that are important in a roleplaying game are completely independent of what system is being used, and there's nothing that gamers like to talk about more than gaming. Other referees can be a mine of helpful advice and good ideas.

Also, as a roleplayer and especially as a referee, you'll find a useful friend in the Internet. If you're lucky enough to have a computer and access to the Internet you've got a vast resource at your fingertips. There's at least one E-mail list for every roleplaying game system around. There are also dozens of newsgroups about roleplaying, and an almost limitless number of World Wide Web sites dedicated to the hobby. Here you can get help and advice from other gamers on everything aspect of roleplaying, from specific rules to general roleplaying concepts. You can find adventure and campaign ideas, and for some systems you can even download complete new supplements, ready for play.

And, of course, don't forget **arcane**. The whole point of this magazine is to provide help, advice and inspiration to all gamers. We'd love to hear from any new roleplayers out there – see **arcane** Scribblings on page 94 for details on how to get in touch with us.



Richard Garfield

is the designer of the collectable card game *Magic: The Gathering*, and has been a roleplayer for many years.

"THE BEST WAY to start roleplaying is with a group of people who already know how to do it. Then you don't have to worry about the often intimidating rules. Any experienced group should be able to shelter you from the rules – you don't have to read them until you want to.

"During the first session keep your eyes and ears open, and try not to disrupt the game with radical playing. Roleplaying is largely about the atmosphere the group creates, and a group that is allowing you to learn with them deserves to have their atmosphere respected. Once you understand the game and atmosphere they like you will find that you can assert your own character into the game more freely. Until then ask advice and take suggestions.

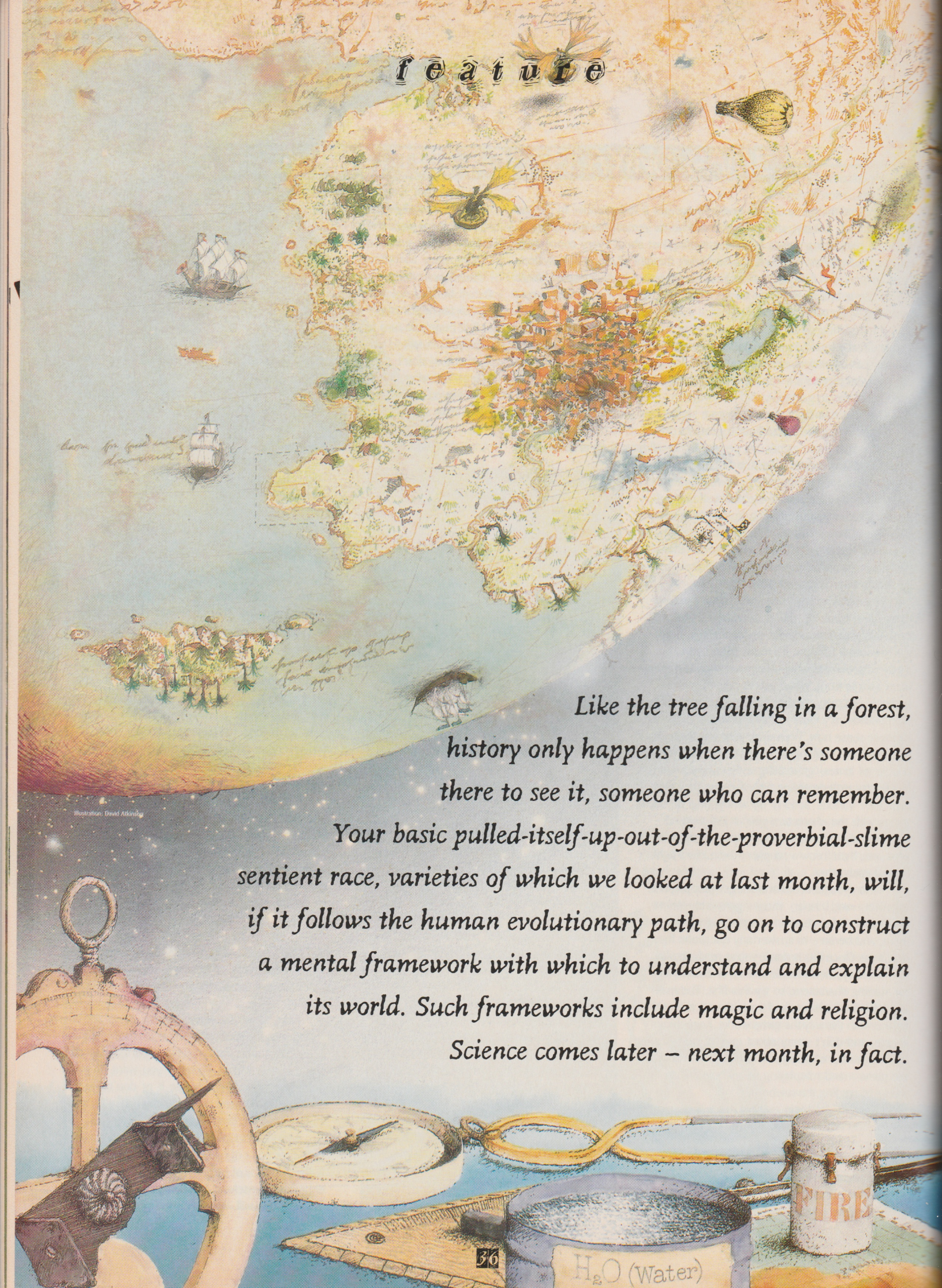
"Finally, roleplaying changes a lot from group to group. Be sure to try a different group if you find the first one not to your taste, but see that roleplaying might be something you would like to do."

The cardinal rules

Finally, regardless of what gaming system you use, there are two things you should always bear in mind.

First, this is *your* hobby and, more specifically, the game you play is *your* game. One of the best things about roleplaying is that it gives you the freedom to do what you want. If you don't like something, change it or don't use it. The rules are there as guidelines; they're not commandments from on high.

Most important of all, though: never forget the whole point of roleplaying games. This hobby is about groups of people having a good time and enjoying themselves. In short, it's about having fun. And you will. We guarantee it.



Like the tree falling in a forest, history only happens when there's someone there to see it, someone who can remember. Your basic pulled-itself-up-out-of-the-proverbial-slime sentient race, varieties of which we looked at last month, will, if it follows the human evolutionary path, go on to construct a mental framework with which to understand and explain its world. Such frameworks include magic and religion. Science comes later – next month, in fact.

Illustration: David Atkinson

World builder part 4: History Magic and Religion

History

Since history kicks off with the awakening of intelligence, you can keep your own written time-line relatively brief. Forget about boring geological time, which is all jelly fish, trilobites and sedimentary rocks, and concentrate on the interesting, recent stuff – wars, kings, plagues and so on.

You can minimise your work by bearing the following in mind about history: dates aren't actually that important, and neither are the facts. (Apologies to any anal-retentive historians.) What matters most is what the people of your created world remember.

The boring bits don't have to be detailed at all. Hurrah! Focus on the big picture, and spice it with those kind of events we all remember from otherwise dull history lessons. Harold getting the arrow in his eye, that king getting a red hot poker somewhere worse, Henry VIII being partially eaten by his lap dog – it's these kind of events that give history the ring of authenticity.

Too often you'll get this kind of thing in time-lines: "10,000 years Before Now humans found the settlement at Mammoth's Jaw." No, no, no. True in the context of the game world, perhaps, but boring. How about: "10,000 ago Gottri the Hunter was hunting mammoth when 100 screaming goblins came over the hill. He slew them all with the jaw bone of the mammoth and founded the city of Mammoth's Jaw, which he built in a day."

It doesn't matter if this is a kind of compilation – some bloke making bone weapons around this time, some skirmishes, a legendary name being projected backwards, a few lies. Never let the facts ruin a good story. Look at Romulus and Remus.

As you near the campaign's present you'll need to be more accurate, though history is still an interpretation of events, not an objective account. Dwarves and Elves might have very different versions of The Recent Incident That Made Them Not Very Friendly.

Elements to include in histories are: kingdoms being founded; wars; disasters (natural and unnatural); significant technological or sociological changes; famous people doing stuff; and so on. But these elements are not enough on their own. Elaborate.

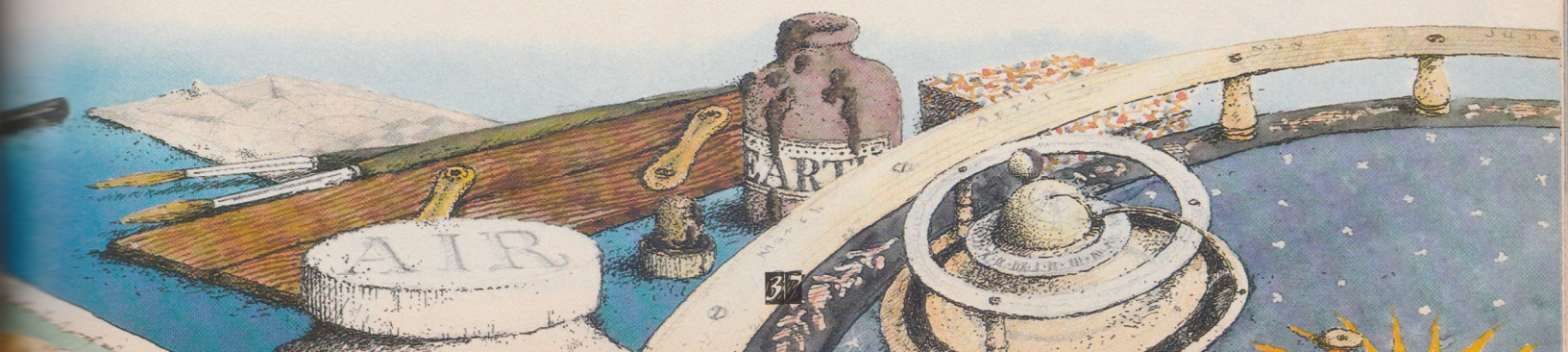
When you get to really recent history, be sure this has some kind of impact on the player characters themselves. It should be intertwined with their lives where relevant (conversely, though this is a separate article, the PCs' personal histories should be hooked closely into the world). If, say, a devastating fire swept through Mammoth's Jaw ten years ago, any resident would probably have the physical or psychological scars to prove it.

> "Magic: the art of controlling the forces of nature by supernatural means such as charms or ritual. The central ideas are that like produces like (sympathetic magic) and that influence carries by contagion or association; for example, by the former principle an enemy could be destroyed through an effigy, by the latter principle through personal items such as hair or nail clippings. It is now generally accepted that most early religious practices and most early art are of magical origin." – *The Hutchinson Concise Encyclopaedia*

Magic

Does it exist or doesn't it? It needn't be a case of 'fantasy: yes', 'SF: no', and 'maybe' is a valid answer. If it only has subtle effects magic could exist but be impossible to prove; or, if it's widely believed to be true, it might not exist but be impossible to disprove. If magic does exist, or even if people only think it exists, you'll need to decide how it works. Gift of the gods? Some kind of psi power? Channelling of some kind of arcane force? Don't let your rules system pin you down to one approach. Decide now. Make the mechanics fit later (see the *Mechanics of Magic* box).

Tribal cultures often exhibit some kind of shamanism. It's a world view in which spirits inhabit just about everything, and the shaman's role is to go into trances to talk to them, drive off 'demons', escort →



The mechanics Of Magic

Jack Vance has got a lot to answer for. Gary Gygax was so impressed with the magic system in Vance's *Dying Earth* books that he incorporated it wholesale into *Dungeons & Dragons*. It's been there, and in variants in many other game systems, ever since. And it sucks.

What it leads to is the Golf Bag Syndrome. You know: "And lo! Malachi the Magician drew out his five iron – a fireball spell!" Malachi tees up, swings and then puts the spell away until tomorrow. Spells are one-shot tools, and they come in lists. Some systems improve on this a bit by providing 'spell points'. Wizards can then cast their spells until they run out of x.

The Holy Grail among magic systems is the free-form, improvisational system *that works*. Lists are easy. Guesstimates are harder. But...

***Fantasy Hero* doesn't force a specific system on you. You can design your spells as you wish. You choose from effects (Energy Blast, Ego Attack, Summon), customise them how you like (Delayed Effect, Uncontrolled, Armour Piercing), then limit the spell (requires Incantations, has Side Effects, only works in darkness). That just gives you a list with a near infinite number of spells, however. Judicial use of the Variable Power Pool can improve on that. Now you can cook up spells on the fly.**

***GURPS Magic* provides an (optional) improvisational magic system. Wizards are skilled in various 'verbs' (Communicate, Protect, Weaken and so on) and various 'nouns' (Air, Illusion and Creation, Animal and so on). If a wizard wants to light his campfire, for instance, he rolls against his Create and his Fire abilities. As with *Fantasy Hero*, the referee has to make decisions on the fly, but the system is not so complex that it's unmanageable.**

Finally (though no doubt there are other systems out there with which I'm unfamiliar) there's *Pendragon 4th Edition*. With this game, all magic is essentially improvised. Spell casters have skills in certain areas (such as Divination, Summon Faerie Creature, and Weather Control). A spell caster decides what effect he wants, the referee decides how much Life Force it'll cost, and the player rolls the dice to try to meet that cost. The number of dice rolled is determined by circumstances. The player gets some dice for his own Life Force, some more depending on where he is (in the city, or in a stone circle where ley lines cross, for example) and some more depending on what day it is (Samhain, the Year's End, is better for Necromancy, for instance). The system involves you chucking quite a few D20s around, but it works well.

If you're sick of magic being nothing more than Sleep spells and Lightning Bolts, take a look at any of these rulebooks for ideas. Even if you stick with your core system, you can borrow from others and bolt the best bits on.

Pratchett on gods: "They clearly must be created by their own believers, because a brief resume of the lives of most gods suggests that their origins certainly couldn't be divine. They tend to do exactly the things people would do if only they could, especially when it comes to nymphs, golden showers and the smiting of your enemies."

← the souls of the dead and so on. Symbolism is a strong element of shamanism, with totems, taboos and (in the shaman's case) masks and tattoos playing vital roles.

Unless the shaman is a fake, the symbolism should probably be a part of the mechanics of the magic system; so it won't work without all the trappings and rituals. This also helps the players. If they're supposed to pray for the spirit of a slaughtered animal, they'll remember to do so if the last time they forgot they spent their next night's dream battling the spirit of the dead animal. Or whatever.

For ideas on how to incorporate shamanism, try to get hold of a copy of *Cults of Prax* (or more likely, *Gods of Glorantha*), and take a look at Praxian cults generally (which have a very native North American feel) and especially at the ancestor-worshipping cult of Daka Fal.

A simple form of shamanism – communion with the dead – takes place in the fairly 'hard SF' world of Helliconia (chronicled in a series of books by Brian Aldiss). And it's dealt with effectively by Robert Holdstock in a short story in *The Bone Forest*, in which a shaman affects the world by his cave paintings. (See any of Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* series for further ideas.)

The idea of symbolism was taken even further with the mediaeval view of magic, which hinged on sympathetic magic – the idea that 'like produces like' – and upon a solid belief that the macrocosm (universe) affected the microcosm (man). Astrology was a potent force: everyone believed that the stars affected their lives (indeed some people still do).

Chivalry and Sorcery was one of the few games to incorporate these ideas, and is worth getting hold of simply as a sourcebook for mediaeval magic. People born under the influence of Mars, for example, are more warlike, and Mars has associations (a colour, a metal, an animal and so forth) that a wizard can use to operate effectively in the sphere of warlike magic.

It is important to note that in the 'real' mediaeval and Renaissance worlds, these correspondences are more than the 'material components' which many games nod towards. They are essential. They are the very levers by which magical power is operated. For instance, you



might only be able to cast such and such a spell when the planets are aligned in a particular conjunction.

Though this idea of correspondences is common (voodoo dolls being a popular example), it isn't universal, especially in fiction. Pratchett takes a tilt at the pomp of it all in his *Discworld* books where he points out that the Rite of AshkEnte doesn't need... "Dribbly candles, thuribles, green smoke and all the other tedious paraphernalia of traditional High magic. In fact, it can be performed by a couple of people with three small bits of wood and 4cc of mouse blood; it can even be performed with two bits of wood and a fresh egg."

David 'potboiler' Eddings gives us 'the Will and the Word' – a system by which you just want something to happen and then make it so. And Elric's magical power comes from what? Raw chaos? The chaotic demon lords themselves? Whatever it is, it's mostly to do with summoning, and it's definitely 'eldritch and unnatural'.

Of course, magic is unnatural pretty much by definition, but to what extent you display that – in everything from the way that it works, to the way that the society accepts/reviles it, to the impact that it has on the caster – is up to you. Tim Powers does a great job in *The Anubis Gates*, and similar ideas crop up in his other books. His sorcerers are so unnatural, so 'drawn by the moon', that they forfeit the ability to contact the earth without pain. As a result, they are forced to wear high-sprung shoes, stilts and so on. Sound silly? Read the book.

These then are some of the possible ways of handling magic. You still need to decide how it manifests itself and how it 'charges up'. Myself, I'm a fan of making the magic itself – though not the rituals – invisible, and having the energy drain straight out of the caster. But I like Renaissance period campaigns. Different genres will use different approaches. The energy source could be the sun, the moon, the caster's blood (or someone else's, of course), a mysterious 'essence' – whatever. It doesn't matter what it is, but you should have an answer.

If you have some idea of how the public react to magic and you know how difficult it is to use, then you can work out how it will fit into the world as a whole. Are wizards burned at the stake? Are they sorcerer kings? Are they (shudder) counsellors to kings and pointy-hat wearing adventurers?

Religion

Whether the deity or deities exist or not only really matters if their priests exhibit magical powers or if the deities themselves have a direct impact on the world – appearing in it, for example. Otherwise, a religion that does have a 'real' deity and one that doesn't could be identical. It's usually the followers that do stuff – they form the socio-political unit of the deity's religion.

Though Freud (or was it Jung?) reckoned that developing minds went magic–religion–science, religion (minus the magical clerics) can be as relevant in SF as in fantasy. In fact, in *GURPS Religion* – worth getting for reference, if not for 'an enjoyable read' – Net shamans are postulated: "They went into cyberspace and claim to have found God." Hmmm.

And what about *Dune*? There we get a religious jihad on the desert planet Arrakis. It's religion as politics, basically. And that's what's most interesting about the role religion plays. Not whether the cleric of Thor can cast 'Predict Weather'. What really matters is the impact religion has on society.

In mediaeval Britain (rather less so today), the Catholic church gave the nation its moral laws and its daily and yearly rituals. It also provided most of its historians, so the Church had a firm hold on propaganda.

If the deities are definitely, observably real, you'll need a pretty good excuse for atheists. You'll also need some kind of creation myth, and some stories about what the gods did, where they live and so on. In fact, this is also true if people only think that their deities exist.

Whatever, don't be too keen to embrace the pseudo-Greek, pseudo-Norse pantheons. Thunder Bloke, War Bloke, Underworld Bloke & co seem to exist everywhere. This is okay if you develop the idea, but it doesn't work if, sociologically, deities are as important (or unimportant) as minor pop groups. ("Yeah, I'm really into Magma Bloke. Been to all his ceremonies.")

Try monotheism, where everyone worships the same deity, but in different ways (sound familiar?). Or use only some kind of druidism as a central fixture, instead of having it as a bolt-on extra. Or use shamanism.

Religion is rarely just a hobby, but a whole thought-framework that affects the way people perceive the world. Again, required reading are *Cults of Prax* and *Cults of Terror*. A priest in Glorantha is not the bloke in the party that nobody wants to be who casts healing spells with monotonous regularity. Priests are one of *the* most important strands in the fabric of Gloranthan society.

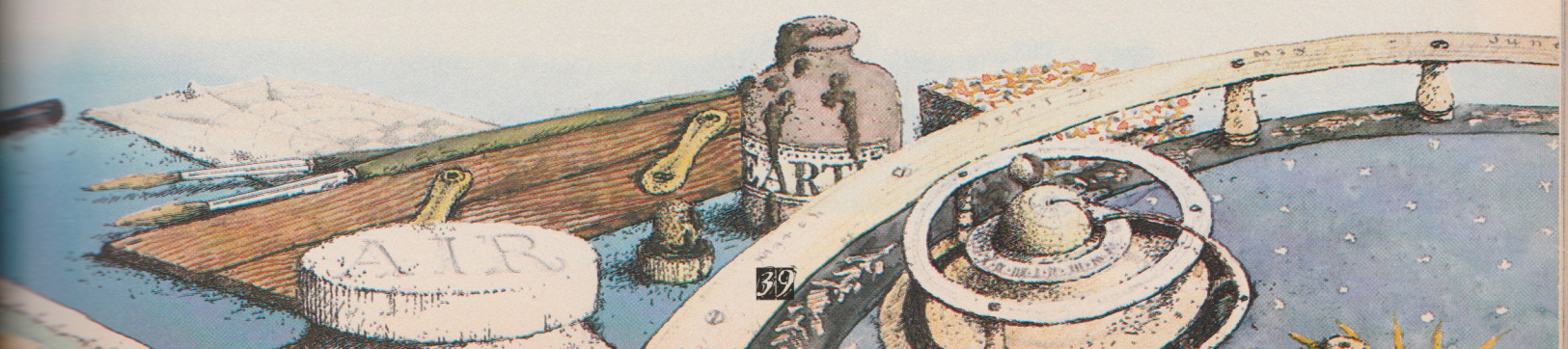
How you handle miracles or magic is trickier. They should certainly be related to the priest's faith. *Pendragon* handles this reasonably well: among Christian priests, only those sufficiently Chaste, Forgiving, Merciful, Modest and Temperate can perform miracles.

One yardstick for measuring any religion you're setting up is this: does excommunication – in whatever form – matter? If religion is going to have any kind of major role in your created world, it should. If it isn't, fine. But be sure to have some other kind of mental framework worked out to replace it. If not magic, then science. For ideas about that, see next month's installment.

Arcane's Top of the Gods:
1. Storm Bull, berserker god of Prax, Glorantha
2. Odin, Norse mythology
3. God*
4. Offler, Discworld
5. Some bloke with a dog's head, Egyptian mythology
(*Benedict Spinoza's version)

And Next Month

We get empirical, rational and logical as we deal with world views that don't refer to supernatural explanations.



And Now...

or 'When th

Gideon Kibblewhite explains how a bit of meteorolog



"During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country; and at length found myself, as the shades of evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher."
– from *The Fall of the House of Usher*, by Edgar Allen Poe

Imagine a motorcycle accident. You're doing 50 down a dark and winding country lane in pursuit of another rider. Without warning a deer runs into your path. You swerve and brake hard, but your reactions are too jumpy: the wheels lock and you are thrown tumbling and skidding across the gravel as the bike slams on to its side. The engine revs wildly before cutting out. Silence falls.

A bad accident. How do you feel?

You are numb with shock. You have taken several severe blows to the head, your arm is broken and you cannot feel your left leg. Judging by the searing pain when you gasp for air, a few ribs may be cracked. Your gloves and the entire left side of your leathers have been ripped open by your slide along the road, exposing raw, burnt flesh that's pitted with gravel.

Pretty nasty, eh? But there's something missing. Wouldn't it be so much worse if this happened in the middle of the freezing winter?



"The preacher wore no veil protection from the searing air. He had even dropped the catchtube flap of his stillsuit. His face lay open to the sunlight and the heat shiverings which lifted off the square's paving blocks in visible waves."
– *From Children of Dune*, by Frank Herbert

You are lying on icy tarmac, in a pool of rapidly cooling blood. A bitter wind bites at your tattered clothes, paralysing your shredded fingers. You can't move for the pain, yet you can't stop shaking with the cold. If shock and loss of blood don't kill you, maybe exposure will...

That's much more like it – now things really do look unpleasant. It will take a great act of providence if you're going to survive this little scrape. See how much more vivid the weather has made things? Not only has a serious situation become much worse, but the added dimension of the cold has made it seem all the more real.

Many great writers, artists and film-makers use the weather as part of their armoury to achieve a variety of effects (see the *Lords of the winds* box for some examples). There is no reason why you as a referee shouldn't do the same. How far you take it is up to you – it's your story, after all – but just a few strokes of the brush can bring colour to a previously grey world and make a merely exciting set-piece gripping.

Blowing hot and cold

There is no better time to introduce a description of the weather than when a party of adventurers comes to a place for the first time. Doing so imprints the place on the mind. The depiction of a magnificent city is made complete if the sunlight is reflecting off its many spires of burnished gold, and if its wide streets offer cooling shade; another plane of existence feels suitably alien if it has green skies but no discernable weather at all; and the sight of a tavern becomes even more heart-warming on a wet and windy night. The more fully realised a location in your own mind, the greater the impact it will have on your players.

Any description you give, however short, also reminds players that they have arrived somewhere significant, and that anything might happen. And by tying the weather into events in your game world, you can create a mood. Travellers arriving at a town on a bright summer day, for example, may at least hope for a relaxing time of rest and sightseeing; but those reaching it in the middle of a dark and stormy night have cause for uneasiness.

King Lear and friends

The Shakespearean storm is a classic example of the use of weather to magnify an atmosphere. A storm is a sure sign that all is not well: nature is somehow out of joint, the balance has been upset, the gods are angry. It's an omen that accompanies foul deeds: murder, the toppling of a king, or the creation of an abomination. Whatever the significance, players will have been made wary.

Having already given a warning that a night's rest is far from assured, you still have all the tentacles of the storm at your disposal. Temperature, air movement, sound and gloom: they are the allies of horror and suspense. Use them... to deceive, to confuse, to hide, to unnerve. Whatever mystery or horror it is that lurks in the town, the storm makes it more difficult to combat. It also reinforces the idea that whatever it is, it's bad.

"See how much more vivid the weather has made things? A serious situation has become much worse."

Weather conditions don't have to conjure up evil atmospheres, of course: they can equally be used to create pleasant ones. An elven hideaway might enjoy balmy, starry nights scented with blossom... Even a clichéd atmosphere can be effective because it provokes an immediate response.

You can further accentuate mood by using the weather as a cause of delay. If a great battle is about to be fought, and the

THE WEATHER

WIND BLOWS'

wizardry can add atmosphere to your gaming sessions.

two sides are girding their loins, describe the weather. Some of the players will be itching for a fight, others may be less than keen at the prospect; in any event, draw out the agony with a description. The description itself can add power to the scene. There is, for instance, the classic hush before a battle when there is no sound at all save that of the horses snorting and stamping, and the wind howling in grizzly parody of the screams of those about to die.

By using the weather like this you can affect the pace of events. Longer term weather patterns can do this as well, and you can use them to fit an unfolding story. A long hot summer ending with a storm; days on end of dreary greyness; a big freeze followed by a thaw; a season of drought or flooding – just by thinking of accompanying weather, ideas on how to handle the plot spring to mind. Players may feel they have control of their destinies, but by pacing the game in this way it's you who pulls the strings.

Elementary, dear player

In many classic stories heroes must battle at least some of the elements if they are to survive and win the day, and it is always worth keeping a few blizzards and avalanches in reserve just in case things are looking a bit too easy for your adventurers. If nothing else, this sort of behaviour will keep them on their toes and remind them that they are feeble mortals when compared with the might of the elements. Anything they gain can be easily snatched away.

> "The storm had been blowing from the west for three days, bringing with it snow and particles of ice from the Barriers. It filled the world with howling energy, transforming it into a grey-white darkness, like a great voice that no man could withstand."
> – from *Helliconia Spring*, by Brian Aldiss

And any player who upsets the gods should beware, for they have the ultimate arsenal at their disposal. A mercenary given to rape and torture may find that fate does not smile on him. Picture it: there he is, battling with a foe on the edge of a precipice – one slip and he might fall. It wouldn't take much: a freak gust of wind, perhaps, or a patch of ice…

The weather doesn't have to be a constant stream of bad news for players, of course. Indeed, if the dice rolls aren't on their side, you can occasionally use it to get them out of trouble. A fair wind will carry their ship far from danger, and a few weeks' rest in a sunny island paradise will do wonders for their hit points as well as their tans.

Lords of the winds

There are many great moments in cinema and literature that wouldn't be the same if the elements didn't play their role. Here are three famous examples:

The Mist

In Stephen King's short story (which can be found in his collection *Skeleton Crew*), he uses the weather both as the basis for a story and as an instrument to wind up the tension.

The story begins on the last day of a still, deadly hot heat wave. A huge storm breaks that night, felling trees and bringing down power lines throughout the area, cutting it off. The next morning is fresh and bright, but rolling over the lakes comes a strange white mist, towering and solid like a cliff. The mist envelopes the town and out of it emerge strange creatures that carry off most of the inhabitants – or so we believe.

The story focuses on a group of survivors trapped in a supermarket. The siege is memorable for the silence of the fog – silent except for the unearthly noises of the monsters it hides.

The Lord of the Rings

Tolkien, as much as any other writer, used the weather to great effect in the telling of his stories. *The Lord of the Rings* is full of examples. If it hadn't been for bad weather, the heroes would never have had to enter Moria, Gandalf would not have died after his confrontation with the Balrog, and the course of the plot would have changed dramatically.

Perhaps the best use of weather in *The Lord of the Rings* occurs towards the end of the final book, when the city of Minas Tirith is besieged. Sent from Mordor, an evil cloud hangs over the fortress, making it dark as night and putting fear into the hearts of its defenders. During the pivotal battle that follows the wind changes, the clouds are shredded and the good guys win through.

Bladerunner

Grim weather pervades Ridley Scott's masterpiece, adding to the bleakness of his future vision, but it's at the climax of the film that we see it play an important, symbolic part.

Accepting his fate after saving the life of the man sent to kill him, the last of the androids lies down to die in the pouring rain. The rain washes away the blood and grime that he has accumulated during his crime spree as he struggled to survive. Any tears he might shed are lost among the rain drops.

The H
The M

Is there a place for acting in roleplaying? Or is
at other players' expense? Lee Brimmicombe-W

I have bad memories of a game I once botched...

You understand this was ten years back, when I was a rookie referee with a God complex, obsessed with the cleverness of my storylines and eager to impose my will on the players. Of course, I hadn't accounted for my players' capacity for throwing spanners in the works. I remember that one of them, James, sat grinning throughout the game while the other players looked daggers at him. I'd just spent the past couple of hours arguing, in character, with his space pirate, trying to persuade him to bite the story hook. James owned the only spaceship in the game, so the adventure hung entirely on his collaboration; which was why, into the seedy spacers' bar where he and the other player-characters hung out, I sent the local crimeboss's flunky to offer a job. With threats and promises, I would kick or cajole him into accepting a lucrative mission.

The hook, I thought, was foolproof. I hadn't imagined for even a moment that James would, or could, refuse. Which was why I was caught with my pants down when he upped and stonewalled me. It wasn't pretty. He refused all persuasions and threats on principle and would involve himself only on the most ridiculous personal terms. After two whole hours of trying to get him somehow, anyhow, to take the job and launch off into the adventure, he was still balking. He was also beginning to bug the hell out of me and the other players. Eventually, I'd had enough and in frustration stopped the game.

"I'd allowed a contest of wills to derail a scenario"

There's no excuse: it was my own fault. I'd allowed a contest of wills to derail a scenario before it had even started, and from that game I learned an important lesson about trying to impose a storyline on players. But the real surprise came later. Talking to James over a pint about his stroppy attitude in that game, he replied with utter sincerity: "Well, I was acting my role. If my character couldn't get his own way, he wasn't going to play along. I was just being true to my character." I was gobsmacked by the implications. I couldn't believe that someone would

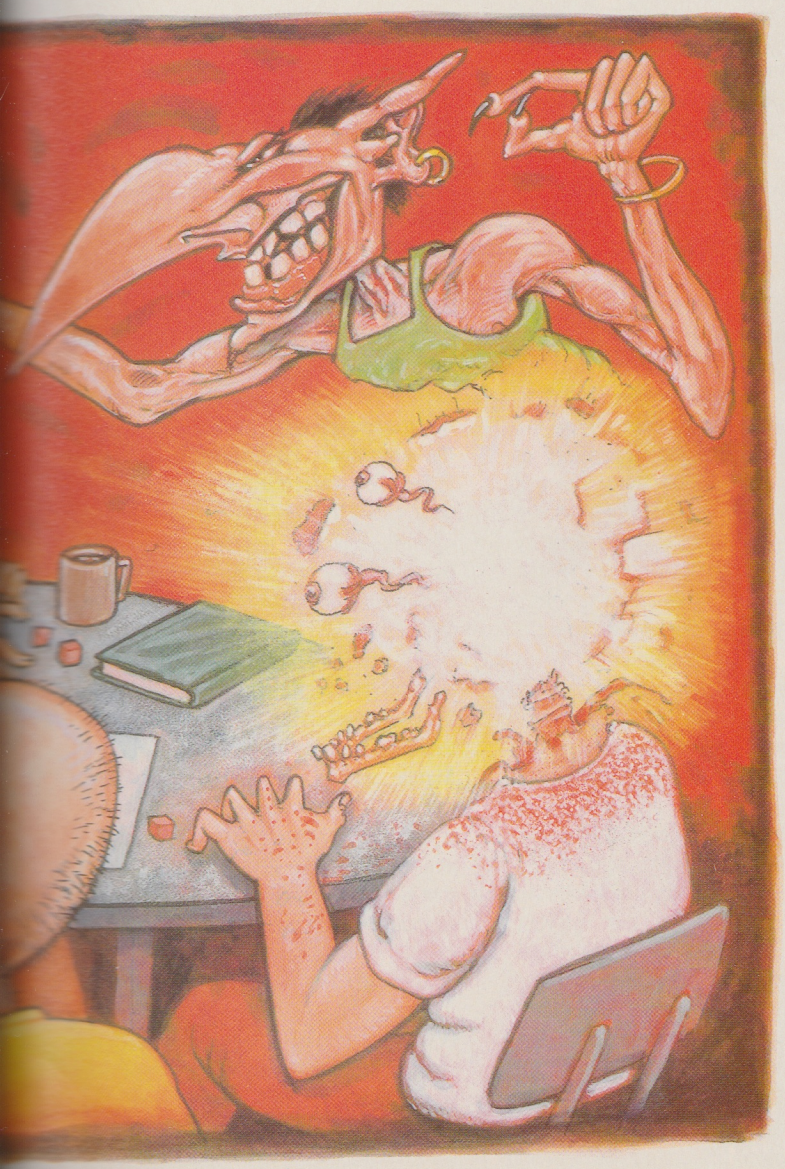


illustration: Stephen Lillie

1 That roleplayers are becoming more sophisticated is a polite euphemism for saying that roleplayers are becoming older, more experienced and adept at their hobby. It also means that they are more established in their habits, less liable to change them, and more likely to pass bad ones on.

CART Of
ATTER

just an excuse for inconsiderate grandstanding
d sticks two fingers up at the would-be thesps...



2 As an example of how an appropriated technical vocabulary can mislead, the term 'roleplay' means different things to a psychologist than it does to a roleplayer. Roleplayers don't play a role in the sense of playing a father, son or mother, as a psychologist would define their roles in everyday life. Instead they play characters who are separate from themselves, often with defined traits and abilities. Maybe the more accurate term to use for this process is 'character play'.

immerse themselves so completely in their character and act so unreasonably that they were prepared to obstruct the game for everyone else. It didn't make sense; after all, this was a game, not theatre. The object was for everyone to enjoy themselves, wasn't it?

This was my first, brutal introduction to a type of roleplayer I've met many times since: players who feel the most important thing is to 'be true to their character'. They're a strange breed, with styles of play that vary from the Stanislavsky crowd, who try to method act their role, to the Bolshie Brigade, who simply define rigid codes of behaviour outside of which they won't step. Whatever 'flavour' they come in, and despite all the differences between them in terms of temperament, rapport and ability, they all seem to share one trait: they put the veracity of their characters, of their role, before the quality of the game.

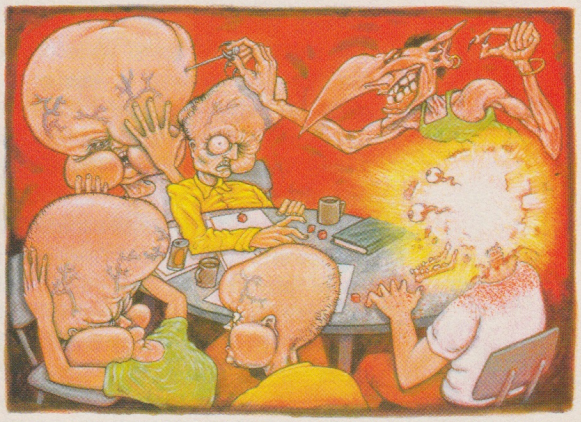
I have a problem with that. A big problem, in fact.

It's funny how so many roleplayers, afraid of being found out as sad bastards, and desperate to validate their hobby, prefer to describe it as a form of acting. Comparisons with the theatre are the most frequent. Roleplaying games are defined as 'improv. theatre with a referee', players are analogous to actors, and the acme of roleplaying is the total immersion of a player in his role. This is fine as far as it goes, but the simile is seriously flawed. Roleplaying games aren't theatre, players aren't actors, and the technical language of performance, when applied to roleplaying, is being used out of context and is misleading. What's more, comparing roleplaying to theatre opens up a can of worms by implying that players should act their roles rather than play them.

The distinction between acting and roleplaying, between the Performer and the Roleplayer, is important. Gameplay – a term that encompasses all forms of action

"They put the veracity of their role before the quality of the game"

and interaction within the structure of the roleplaying game – is paramount. Acting is just one aspect, one facet of the gameplay, and for me it's something of a selfish luxury the game can't afford. Players who try to act rather than roleplay are putting their enjoyment first, before →



do with the lack of a proper vocabulary for the roleplaying medium – a proper technical language, if you will. So much of our roleplaying vocabulary has been borrowed from elsewhere, from psychology (sidebar 2), from wargames, and particularly from the movies and theatre, it's inevitable that a lot of excess baggage has been trailed in with it, leaving messy marks all over the place. For instance, when referees talk in terms of scenes, camera shots and cuts, it seems a logical corollary to many players that they must be taking part in a movie

"Acting, in the sense of pure character play and nothing else, is in my experience a sterile dead end"

← that of the rest of the participants, and threaten to turn a group social activity into an excuse for individuals to grandstand at each other's expense.

At the risk of sounding paranoid, my fear is that as roleplayers become ever more sophisticated (sidebar 1), the notion that roleplaying games should be a performance, or that immersion in a role is 'good' play, will gain sufficient currency to become the standard by which roleplayers (or even journals such as this) judge others. This isn't quite as far fetched as it sounds. Over the years I've encountered plenty of snobbishness within the hobby, particularly manifest in the sneering attitude of some roleplayers and writers towards the hack'n'slash style of game.

Before I go any further, it's worth pointing out that any argument about what constitutes 'good' play in a roleplaying game is pointless. Most people rightly consider 'good' roleplaying to be whatever pushes their buttons – hey, if it's fun, anything goes! However, 'bad' play is easier to identify. My rule of thumb is that it's whatever takes the enjoyment out of the game, and it's my contention that acting, in the broad sense of a performance or in the narrow sense of immersion in a character role, does just this. Attempts to 'elevate' the game to a performance art at the expense of the story or the sheer fun of roleplaying are, frankly, a bunch of arse!

It's unclear why the idea that acting equates with 'good' play should have gained so much currency. Maybe it has to

3 Improvisational theatre is radically different to roleplaying. In the theatre, improvisation is primarily a tool for helping actors explore aspects of character. As a performance art it's very limited. On the whole it tends to be shapeless and sketch-like, and because improvisation takes place without a director or referee, it's hard to sustain any kind of narrative. Most attempts at a story either finish quickly, digress off into other areas, or are vulnerable to being 'hijacked' by grandstanding actors. This lack of coherence is why most improvisation, as a performance art, so often disappoints.

experience and are therefore required to act their role.

With the emphasis, at least in some parts of the hobby, on acting, something, somewhere down the line gets lost: the essential truth that roleplaying games are first and foremost a storytelling medium, an interactive narrative, if you will. It's bleeding obvious, isn't it? Before you ask me to tell you something you don't already know, here's the kicker: I believe the story is not a means to an end (that end, for want of a better definition, being 'fun'), *but is an end in itself.*

Think about this a moment; it's pretty profound stuff. The way I see it, so much of the gameplay depends on the story. So much of the enjoyment of roleplaying depends on there being a progression from the beginning to the middle and (maybe) the end of a story. By comparison, acting is an afterthought. Indeed, acting, in the sense of pure character play and nothing else, is in my experience a sterile dead end. When players begin to emphasise performance over the requirements of the story, then the narrative begins to fall apart, the driving force behind the gameplay fails, and the fun stops.

Admittedly, performance in the theatrical sense is tough to pull off in a roleplaying game. For starters there's no audience other than the players themselves. In the absence of a stage and props, the game mechanics break up the flow of interaction and make it hard for a player to effectively perform. However, 'Performers' – by which I mean those players who want to 'act' their roles – have one important trick up their sleeves that's guaranteed to frustrate the referee: the ability to immerse themselves in their character. When players talk of 'acting' or 'getting into the role', it's this process that they most frequently refer to. Here we run into the limitations of the roleplaying vocabulary again. Stage actors 'getting into character' are describing something completely different from roleplaying. Actors work from a predetermined and practised script. Their job is to flesh out their role in the drama and communicate it to an audience. Roleplayers, however, have no script or audience. Instead they have a part to play in a narrative that is being guided, at least in part, by a referee. The rest is improvised and determined by the players themselves (sidebar 3). The narrative, the *story*, is the critical point at which the referee and players interact. Immersion in a role without being mindful of the needs of the story can cut a player off from this point of contact.

It's in the key area of character conflict that we see the difference between the Roleplayer and the Performer. Roleplayers, mindful of the story, will resolve conflict in such a way that both benefits them and advances the story in some fashion, while Performers, wrapped up in their roles, are less willing to compromise with the needs of the story or to do anything that doesn't square with their personal agendas. Whereas Roleplayers will try to keep the game and the story open, Performers, by refusing to be taken anywhere but in the direction their characters want to go, reduce the options available to the referee and players. In this fashion Performers can be a source of inertia, of drag on the flow of the game.

Of course, it's easy to make sweeping statements which polarise players into Roleplayers and Performers when for the most part there are no such things. All of us, even obstructive individuals like James, are just roleplayers trying to enjoy their hobby as best they can. However, the heart of the matter is that good roleplaying – however you wish to define it – is a collective activity that should ideally give everyone equal enjoyment. My view is that if your character play is self-serving to the detriment of others, then you need to change your act. For the truth is there are no Roleplayers or Performers in roleplaying – just generous players and selfish ones.

#4

The fourth in a series of collectable encounters presented in

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PULL OUT & KEEP ENCOUNTERS



Stormburg

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Stormburg

The helicopter thrashed its way through the heavy storm, buffeted by strong winds, lashed by heavy rain, its cabin lit by intermittent flashes of lightning. I turned to the old, bearded man sitting beside me in the co-pilot's seat. "Are you sure we're heading in the right direction? Shouldn't we land until the weather clears?"

He shook his head and pointed into the darkest of the weather. "To the eye of the storm."

Suddenly a dark shape loomed ahead of us, and was gone. Winged, with a long, sinuous neck, and teeth. The helicopter plunged as I fought to regain control. "What the hell was that?"

"Perimeter defences. We're nearly there. Look!" The clouds parted and an incredible sight met my eyes. At the centre of the storm, surrounded by tumbling clouds, but floating in serene, still air, was a city. Towers and spires in a profusion of styles glittered in the unexpected sunshine. The bottom of the city was bare rock, flickering with blue lightning that ran about in ever more urgent patterns. The helicopter's altimeter read 5,000 feet.

This was Stormburg, the city that the old man had sworn could offer the employment I craved. "We must hurry," he said. "The city is preparing to phase."

"Phase?"

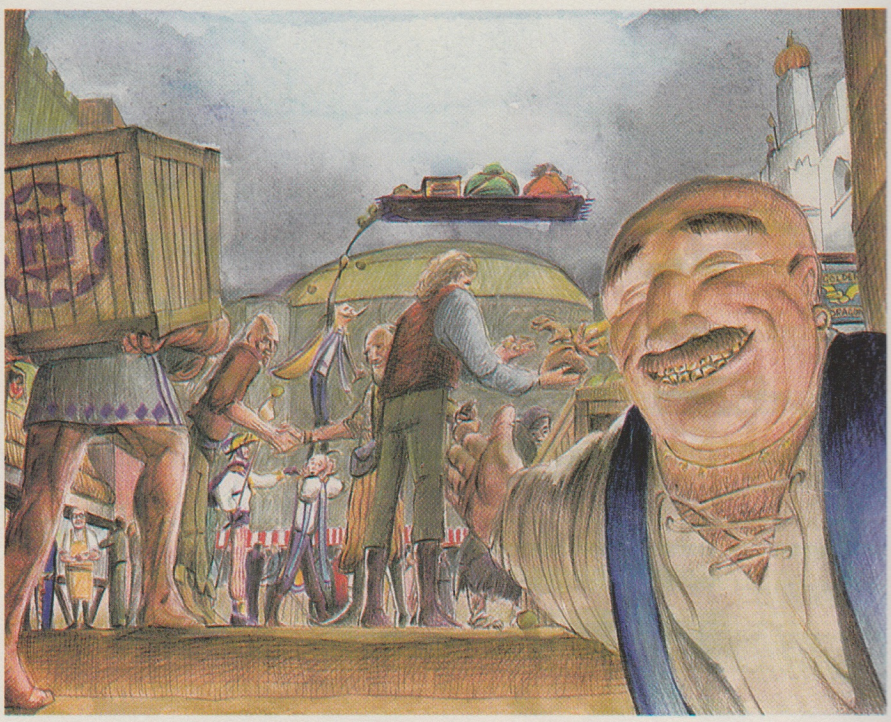
"To another dimension."

The City on the Rock

Stormburg is a round city with strong stone walls. By some strange magic, people who live in Stormburg remain at the age they were when they arrived. However, if they leave they begin to age normally. This has led to a situation where most inhabitants are very reluctant to leave, and yet the city requires supplies from the worlds it passes through. Therefore the inhabitants are always on the lookout for likely recruits who will promise to serve the city in return for permission to live there.

Beyond the city walls are various slum dwellings and stabling for the great dragons. Inside, the buildings are clustered closely together. A few great buildings stand out: the Godhouse, the University, and the Citadel that crowns the city. The rooftops form a fascinating tangle of spires, towers, domes, overhanging gargoyles, slopes and flat gardens. The students hold an annual roof race, the object being to get from one side of the city to the other without ever once touching the ground.

At ground level the city is a confusing tangle of twisting, sloping cobbled streets. It is divided into four quarters, but there are no firm divisions between them. Technologically the



Illustrations ©Simon Carr & arcane

The System

You're a smart person, right? We don't need to patronise you with detailed rules on how to translate these people and events into your own system, do we? But, just in case you're uncertain, here's a couple of tips. Whenever we do a character description (though there aren't too many in this scenario), we'll say something like 'Doctor Bloggs has a fine, incisive mind and this is complemented by a strong, athletic body. As a child, however, he suffered from a rare lung disorder that means he has difficulty in sustaining effort. He is also prone to making rather impulsive decisions.' In game terms this would mean that Doctor Bloggs has above-average strength, intelligence and dexterity, and below-average constitution and wisdom. Exactly how much above and below average is up to you and the strength of your party of adventurers. This is also the case in systems that use levels. Give the encounter's characters the sort of levels that will make them a challenge for your players. You'll find similar descriptions of all important physical objects, such as 'the door is paper-thin' or 'this glass is bullet-proof'. Now stop reading this wibble and get stuck in.

city is at Renaissance level, with telescopes, black-powder weapons and banking.

The Temple Quarter is where the nobility of the city live, and it is less cluttered than the others. The Godhouse itself stands in a flower garden, and there is some space between the buildings. This area is regularly patrolled, and anyone caught acting suspiciously will be arrested.

The Student Quarter is the home of the great University. Many People from diverse worlds come here both to teach and to study, and it is said that it is the repository of much arcane information. It is also where the students live and work (after their fashion...). A place where cheap accommodation can be found, it is always noisy and bustling. Many taverns and small shops selling hot food can be found here. The students organise many noisy celebrations and pranks, which can on occasion be a little on the rough side. A theatre is situated in the Student Quarter, and it is to this area that the whole city flocks for entertainment.

Much of the Merchant Quarter is taken up with the sprawling Bazaar. People say that anything that is for sale in any world can be found here... for a price. The merchants haggle endlessly, and they always get the better of their customers. They sometimes hire adventurers to go down into the worlds and bring back exotic goods. The Golden Dragon Inn (featured in Encounters, **arcane** 2) would fit well into this quarter, and so would Mr Smith's Mysterious Emporium (mediaeval version) from **arcane** 3.

The Artisan Quarter contains many large granaries and warehouses for storage of the city's food supplies. Some say that the visible buildings are only the tip of the iceberg, and that the rock is honeycombed with supply tunnels. City Law states that a minimum of three years' supplies must be stored at all times.

In addition, many bakeries and factories are located here, as well as houses for the workers. Doctors, dentists, cobblers and other such useful professionals can be found in this Quarter. The Laboratory (from **arcane** 1) would fit in here. This is a fairly quiet area where strangers will be regarded with some suspicion.

Origins of Stormburg

Early city records tell how one day during a terrible storm the city tore loose from the hillside and was blown up into the sky, where it has been drifting ever since. Some whisper that the whole city is being punished for a sin the Mayor committed. Others say that the Mayor and the Bishop saved the city from disappearing into the mists of improbability at a time when alternate worlds were shrinking.

Rulers of Stormburg

The city is ruled by a Council that consists of the Mayor, the Bishop, the Rector of the University, a representative of the Merchant's Guild and seven elected members who remain on the Council for a period of fifty years. They meet in the Council Chamber in the Citadel at the top of the hill.

This chamber also houses a curious altar topped by a strangely shaped lump of black rock, known as the Thunderstone. Some say that this is the rock that keeps the city airborne. It is certainly true that when the city is about to phase and lightning flashes increase, the rock pulses and sparkles with light.

Travelling to and from Stormburg

Stormburg passes through many worlds. Because the city cannot produce sufficient food to feed all of its citizens it is necessary for some people to go out and collect supplies. The people of Stormburg do not like to risk themselves on these expeditions; while abroad supply hunting they make a habit of trying to recruit locals who will carry out the unpleasant task for them in the future. Such expeditions are well equipped with goods for barter, magical stones and also coin.

They travel on magic carpets, yet more than half of those sent out never return. Some are presumably lost when the city phases before they can get back; it may be that others founder in the eternal storm barrier that encircles the city. Some people have even suggested that the missing expedition parties may have absconded with the trade goods, and that they never had any intention of returning. This possibility is generally disregarded – Stormburg's inhabitants find it difficult to believe that anyone would willingly leave for good.

The city phases at irregular intervals. It has never stayed in any world for longer than a year or for less than a few hours. It is generally considered safe to leave its walls immediately on reaching a world and return within a week. Many people have been stranded in strange worlds by this overly optimistic belief.

The storm barrier around Stormburg varies in its intensity. In some worlds it is only a thin shield that can be passed through with ease. In others it is almost impenetrable. There is a theory at the University that the strength of the storm corresponds to either the level of technology or the level of scepticism of the world currently hosting the city. Certainly very few expeditions have returned from worlds with technology significantly more advanced than that of Stormburg. Those exceptional items that have been brought back are, according to rumour, stored safely in the Citadel.

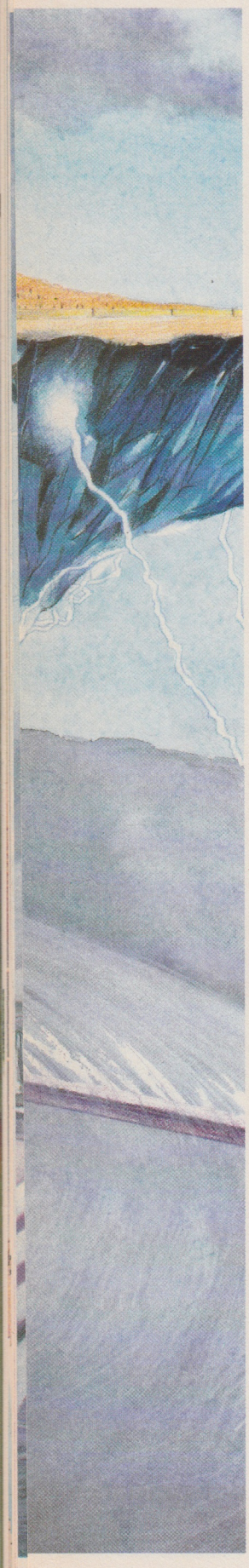
In worlds where the storm is thin, the dragons fly on double patrol, making sure that no unauthorised invasions come through. These 'dragons' were found many years ago on a swampy world without human habitation. They were easily tamed. They can neither speak nor breathe fire, and they have only two legs. There are those in the University who say that they should properly be called Wyverns, and equally fanatic factions who claim that the correct name for them is Pterodactyls. Ordinary people, and the creatures' trainers, call them dragons.

Dragons will not prevent returning citizens or the right kind of recruit from reaching the city, but they will mercilessly rend anyone else. Their powerful jaws can tear through thin steel. The city has several times had to defend itself against marauders from the worlds it passes through, and the dragons have proved their worth.

The Oath

Any new recruits accompanying an expedition returning to Stormburg, or any reaching the city on their own, must go to the Citadel. There they will be received in the Council Chamber. When they first enter the echoing room they must give their names to the clerk seated at the desk to the right of the





entrance. The clerk uses a squeaky quill pen to record the names in a ledger. The room is so quiet that the squeaks echo. This done, the candidates must walk the length of the room to stand before the Council Dais at the far end. After being examined by the assembled Council, newcomers must then take the oath.

The oath must be taken with one hand on the altar of the Thunderstone. If the city is about to phase, this stone will be pulsing and flashing, lighting the whole chamber. Newcomers must pledge the following:

"I swear I will defend Stormburg against all enemies, internal and external. When necessary I will leave the city to gather supplies in the worlds. At the end of five years I will become a loyal citizen of Stormburg, entitled to vote in her elections and to stand for Council."

If the candidates refuse to swear, they must choose to leave either by the Low Gate or the High Gate. The Low Gate leads out into the city slums, while the High Gate leads to a deadly drop.

Purges

Stormburg is little more than a mile across – with such a small surface area cannot support a high population. Few of the recruits brought in to help the city manage to stay there for five years and become citizens. But enough newcomers are integrated to keep the population pressure slowly rising. When it reaches a certain level, the Council decides on a Purge. Some whisper that the Council uses the opportunity to rid itself of political enemies.

An announcement is made that the population must be reduced. As soon as this is done, people begin denouncing their neighbours as unbelievers; murder becomes common as citizens come to realise that so long as their friends remain alive in the city, their own continued existence is in jeopardy. All criminals are expelled as a matter of course. Passage off Stormburg suddenly seems desirable rather than terrible. The purged are given the choice, as usual, of leaving by the High Gate or the Low Gate. A surprising number choose the High Gate, and plunge out naked over the seas of a strange world, hoping to be washed up on alien shores after the storm has abated. Those who chose the Low Gate must try and make a life for themselves among the cut-throats and desperadoes of the shanty town.

The Purge is a time of great frenzy. When the population has been lowered to the required level the Bishop announces that the Purge is over and leads the people in a ceremony of rejoicing. When it is not a time of Purging nobody dares to talk about the subject. They are thankfully relatively infrequent. It would be possible for someone who had been settled in Stormburg for a hundred years or so to be surprised and puzzled by the announcement.

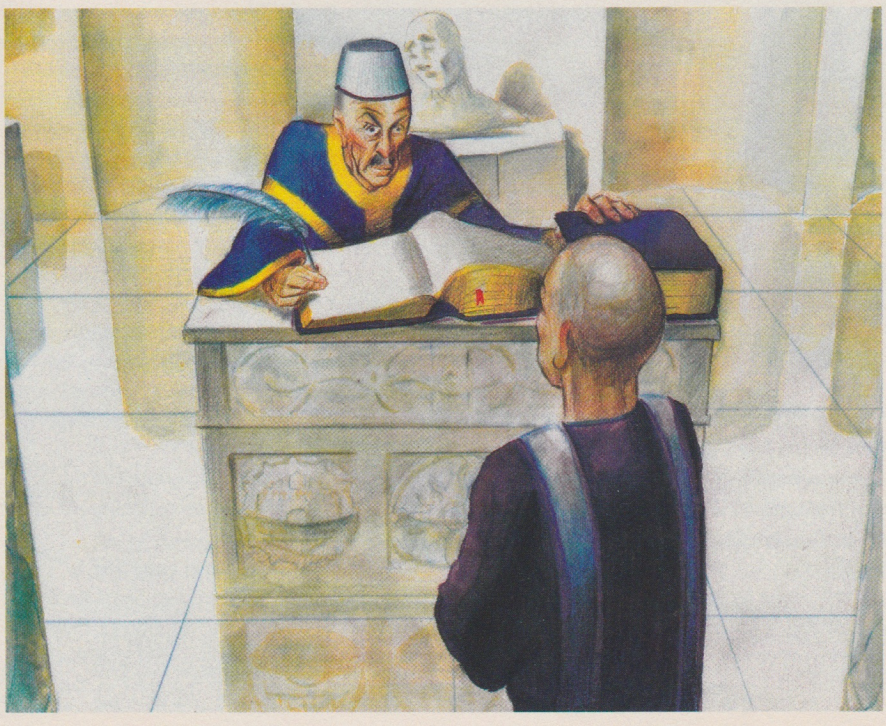
The City Guard

There is a strong police force charged with preventing disorder in the city. The police are billeted in the watch towers on the wall and can be called out at any time. They are armed with muskets and rapiers.

The Mayor

The Mayor lives in the highest tower of the Citadel, at the top of Stormburg. He is a strange, pale man, with dark hair and haunted eyes. He has no family and no close friends. Nobody ever calls him by any name other than 'The Mayor'. He has been in Stormburg since the beginning, and it may be that he knows the truth of the city's origins. He has never left the city walls, not even temporarily. Perhaps he chooses to remain in the city; perhaps he secretly knows that the storm barrier will not allow him to pass.

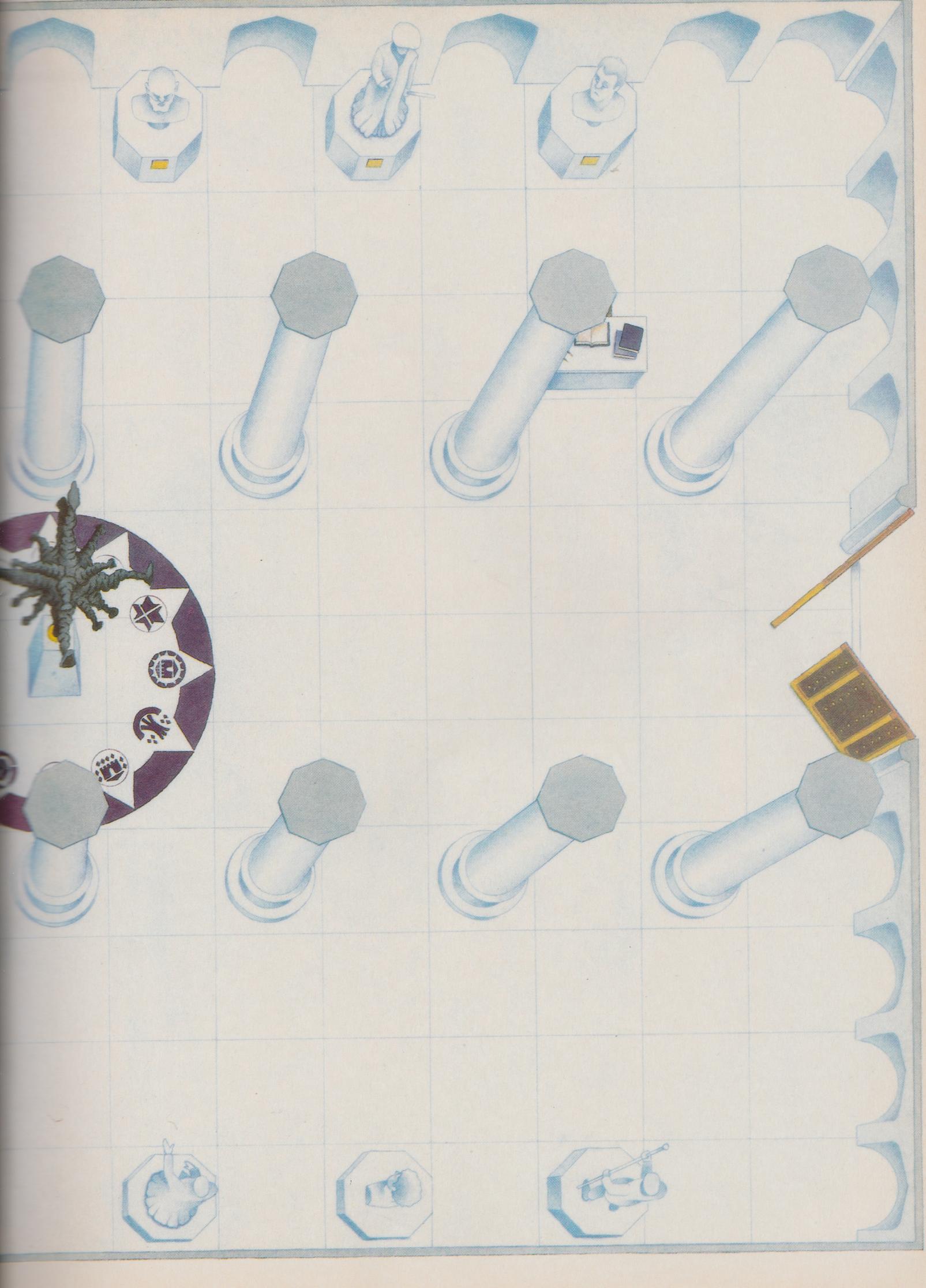
The Mayor is responsible for the continuity of policy within the city, having been on the Council for thousands of years. The inhabitants tell many strange stories about him, most blaming him for Stormburg's wanderings. Some say he lost his family when the city moved for the first time, and that this is why he insists on personally examining all new arrivals.

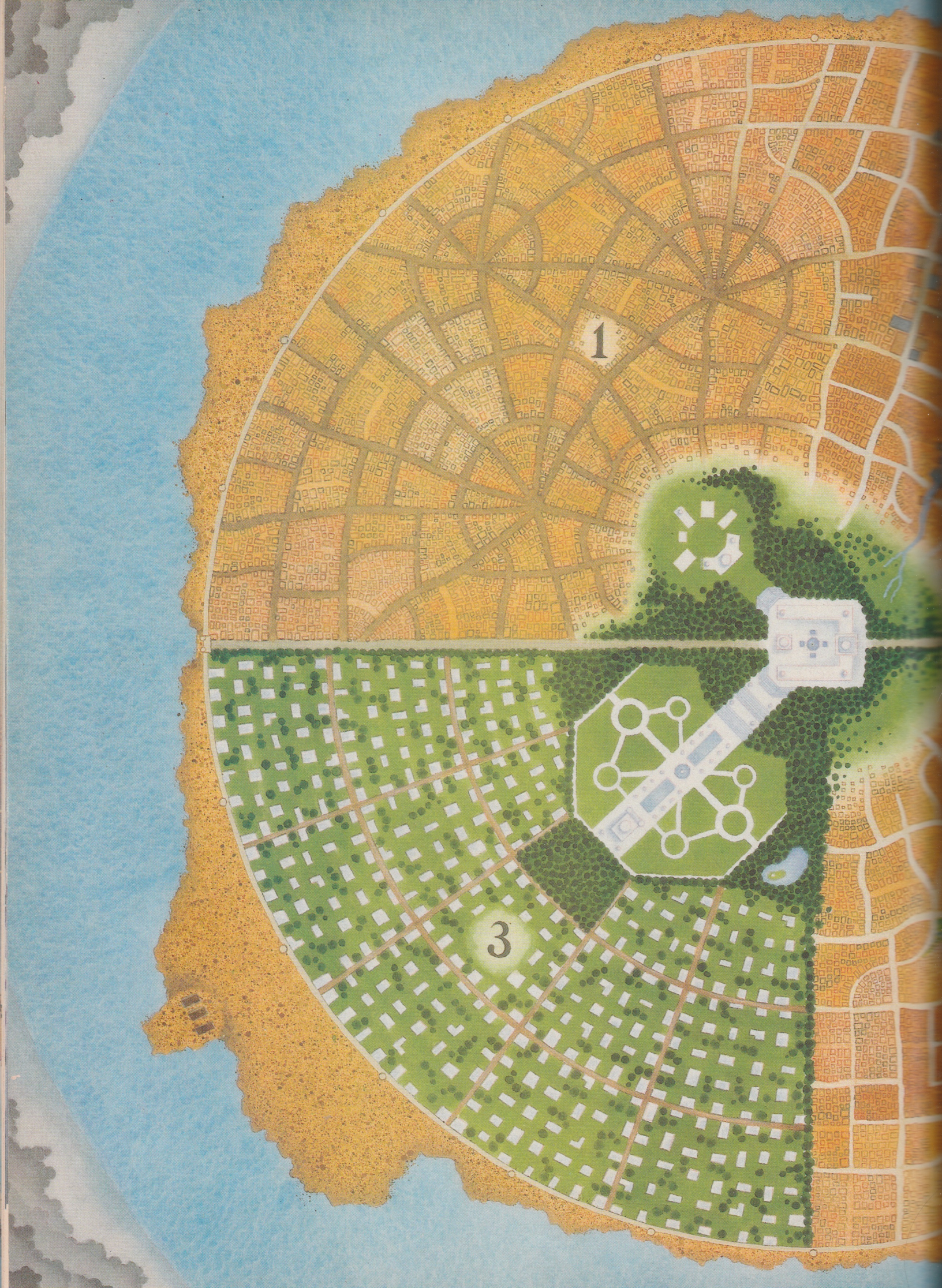


The Bishop

The Bishop is a tall woman with long silver hair and a lined face. She is most often seen clad in blue robes. Like the Mayor, she too has been in the city from the beginning, and has worked her way up through the organisation.

Her face looks kindly but in truth can be very harsh, particularly at times of Purge. She cares about nothing but Stormburg, and is prejudiced against people who came to the city from elsewhere.

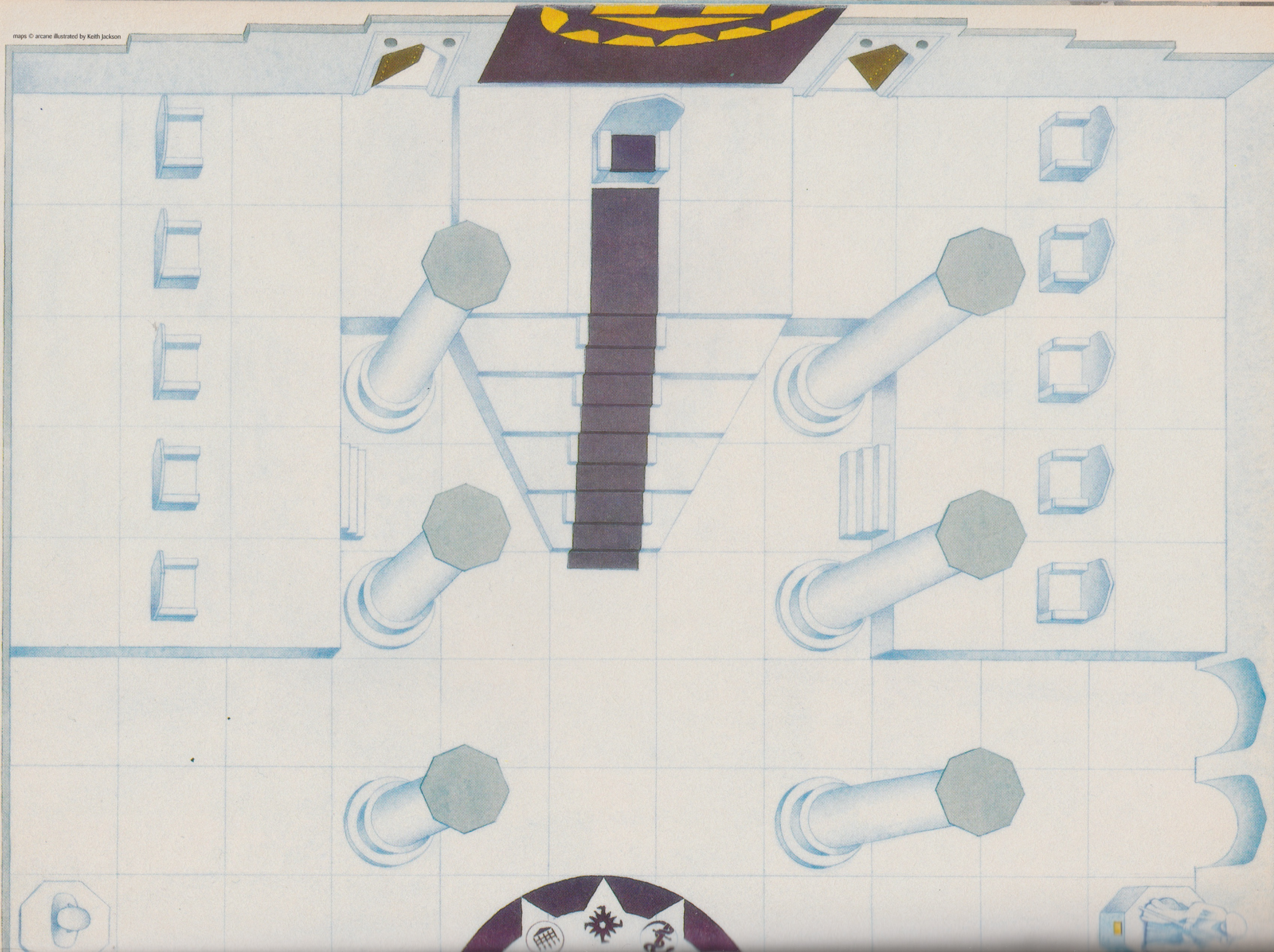



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The Rector

The Rector of the University has a Council Seat. She is a short black- skinned woman who came to Stormburg many years ago from a world known as Swan's Home. Her people lived in great cities on the edge of marshes. When recruiters came from Stormburg she was eager to go with them. She was lucky enough to survive her five years as a supplier, and as soon as she gained citizenship she enrolled in the University. She rose swiftly through the ranks and was elected Rector only 500 years after her arrival.

She is a voice for mercy on the council, and leads the faction that speaks against the Purge, and against extending the probationary time of the oath to ten years. She is very intelligent and possesses an incorrigible curiosity concerning all the worlds.

Master Tromdar

Master Tromdar is the Merchants' Guild representative on the Council. He originally came to the city as a supplier, and was lucky enough to marry into a merchant family. His skin is beige; his eyes are a sparkling blue, with an epicanthic fold; and he has red hair. A plump little man who sports a turban and dresses in colourful robes, Master Tromdar is always smiling and making promises.

The six Great Houses of Trade take it in turns to send a representative to the Council; these turns come about as factions gain and lose power within the Guild. Tromdar is a compromise candidate, having achieved his position because of a deadlock between the truly powerful houses. He represents the merchants' interests fairly well, and he understand them thoroughly. He has spent most of his long life in the Bazaars and counting houses of the Merchant Quarter.

Tromdar frequently drives the Bishop to distraction because he refuses to make up his mind quickly.

Magic in Stormburg

The city clearly floats and moves between the worlds by force of magic. The extent to which supernatural forces hold sway beyond that is entirely up to you as the referee. This decision should be taken when you're considering how you intend to use the location in your campaign.

In some versions the University might be full of wizards, in others it could be just an ordinary academic establishment. There might be no magic beyond the initial and uncontrolled magic of the city's motion.

One possibility is that the magical energy that moves the city could give rise to a buildup of magical deposits beneath the bedrock on which the city rests. This could be scraped off by low-paid workers or by criminals. They would, of course, risk falling off. This deposit could then be used to make carpets fly, or to make power stones for use as fuelling magic or for trading to the worlds.

Religion in Stormburg

As the referee you will need to make certain decisions about the religion of Stormburg. The Godhouse and the Bishop are definite fixtures of the city, but the nature of the god or gods that are worshiped will depend on the type of campaign that you're running.

In general, the religion should such that what is important is observance – supernatural powers should be unlikely to take retribution or to intervene in any way. Most people go to the Godhouse regularly, but they do so more for social reasons than as a matter of religion. Someone who never visits the Godhouse would be regarded as strange, and perhaps be the first to be cast out in a Purge. Observance is more important to the Bishop than genuine piety.



Adventure Seeds

Supplies

The players' party arrives at Stormburg and is sent out into a new world to find supplies or scout out the situation. An adventure like this has endless possibilities. At first the PCs are likely to be very worried that the city will phase to another world without them. Lull them into a false sense of security by having them get back in plenty of time for the first few expeditions they make.

You should wait until they become blasé about the possibilities before frightening them with a last-minute hair-raising return.

Elections

It is Election time in Stormburg and candidates are campaigning all over the city. Everyone is very excited – this only happens every fifty years, after all. The elections could change the balance of power on the Council.

The party could be hired as bodyguards by one candidate. Alternatively, they could be hired to assassinate a candidate.

One intriguing idea is to have a long-established citizen PC run for office. No doubt the rival candidates wouldn't hesitate to employ a dirty tricks campaign.

Elections also make a good background at any time of crisis, especially with a party that doesn't know exactly what the political realities of the situation are *[sounds like the Tories – Ed]*. The Mayor will not allow too much actual political change to occur, but it is the Bishop who will often prove to be the real villain.

Purge!

A Purge is announced by the Bishop, and the party is plunged into a struggle to survive in the suddenly tumultuous atmosphere. This strategy is effective for use in a long-term campaign when the PCs are starting to become complacent about their places in the city, especially if they've not been attending the Godhouse.

The Purge can be combined with any plot concerning the Bishop. To avoid the Purge the PCs might have to act in ways they would not ordinarily contemplate. If they are suppliers, they may be approached by frightened citizens trying to buy passage to the comparative safety of the outside world. How safe it really is, and whether the PCs are aware of the risk level, is at the referee's discretion. Purges always lead to interesting moral choices.

Stealing the Stone

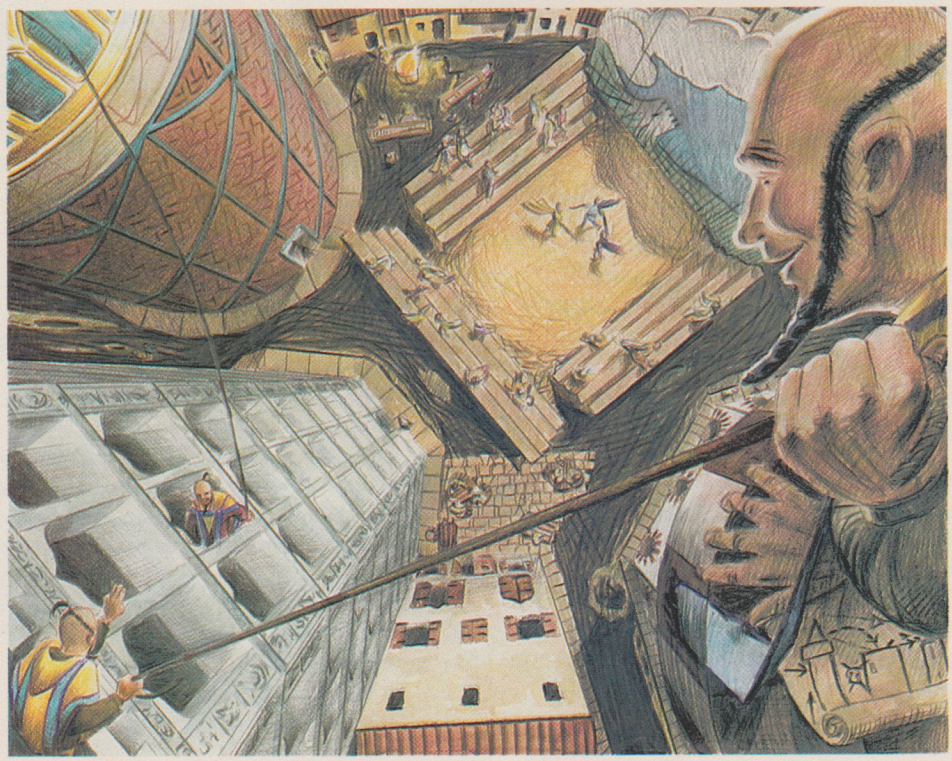
The Thunderstone is just sitting there in the Council Chamber. The PCs could steal it. Alternatively, they could be called in to investigate why someone else has stolen it.

If it is true that the Thunderstone is keeping the city floating, then what will happen if someone tries to remove it from the rock? Would the city crash? Would it drift gently downwards, coming to rest on the ground of a world where it is forced to integrate into a new society?

Ageing

Nobody who lives in Stormburg ages at all. Consequently, there are few children – after a few hundred years of being eight years' old most people decide to leave the city and grow up.

One apparent thirteen year old has been going out with supply parties for the last hundred years and has managed to



grow five years older in that time. Now she wants to come with your group, and although she's been in Stormburg since the beginning and possesses an awful lot of knowledge, emotionally she's still an adolescent.

The City Campaign

Begin this campaign with the PCs new to the city. Intersperse it with adventures on interesting worlds and returns to the city. Slowly introduce them into political intrigues, perhaps involving corruption in the Council. Make sure that the sides are not too black and white. The Rector wants a better deal for the suppliers, but the Bishop is right when she says that this will lead to more frequent Purges because of overpopulation.

Eventually the PCs can expect to gain political power in Stomburg, and then they'll have to deal with the intricate relationships on the Council.

A Party with Guns

Guns will work in Stormburg, but ammunition for anything better than a musket is not available, and PCs would be well advised to conserve it.

Across the Planes

If as referee you do not want Stormburg to cross an infinite number of worlds, then develop a dozen or so in detail and work out a random path the city can take across them, interspersing an occasional new one. The city can move entirely at your discretion, or you can roll (or draw a fortune card) every day to see whether it will remain where it is or phase.

Missing from the Tunnels

The storehouses and granaries of the Artisan Quarter are connected to underground storage tunnels. One day the horrified keepers announce to the Council that the city's vital supplies have been disappearing for some time from the deepest parts of the tunnels. Strange signs have been noticed down there in the dark. Only the party are sufficiently trustworthy to investigate.

There are many possible reasons for this disappearance, and the referee should select one based on what best fits into the campaign. Perhaps deep inside the rock there lurks a monster, disturbed by new tunnelling activity. Or there could be a monster from a recently visited world, one that managed to attach itself to the rock. It could be that the slum dwellers have succeeded in digging deep enough to connect to the supply tunnels. Or perhaps some arcane cult is holding secret ceremonies in the depths, where they are sacrificing, rather than pilfering, the food.

The Roof Race

The students hold an annual roof race. Anyone who wants to enter is allowed to do so. The race starts from the University at dawn. The object of the race is to make a circuit of the city without touching the ground at any point. This is sometimes varied by combining the race with a treasure hunt, so that the runners must solve puzzles whose answers lead them from one point to another. Sometimes the competitors are expected to bring souvenirs of the different places they have visited. Competitors are expected to at least try to avoid damaging the places they pass through.

Athletes run the race in pairs, and both members of the pair must finish and swear that neither of them have touched the ground.

The prizes are different every year. There is always a commemorative cup inscribed with the race winner's name, along with other riches. Sometimes these include citizenship for a probationary citizen winner, or sacks of gold or strange works of art. Occasionally, a particularly attractive student (of either sex) may declare that they will grant their favours to the winner.

Referees who would like to involve their players in the roof race should make sure that the prize is something which one or more of the party's members will find enticing. Additionally, the race will be more effective if you make sure that some of the party's rivals also compete. The race gives two rival groups plenty of chances to hinder each other. The party might divide into pairs, or alternatively the pairs might be selected randomly. The PCs could find themselves teamed up with strangers, or even enemies.

Other competitors may include people who have been winners in previous years and consequently know all the different routes. There is much discussion of the routes before the race begins.

The streets are always full of interested onlookers. Many of the people in the more respectable parts of town lock their windows and put broken glass on the tops of their walls to discourage racers. Others leave their windows open to encourage the racers to pass through, and then, once they're inside, try and delay them by various tactics. Flat roofs may look enticing from a distance, but they may be used for a variety of purposes, including growing food. In order to finish the race the athletes must leap across a wide gap and swing from a gargoyle.

Anyone completing the race gains a great deal of honour and respect. The winner is famous, at least temporarily. There is a board at the University engraved with the names of the winners of every race for the last five hundred years. Many people wait at the end of the course ready to pelt the winner with flowers.

Next month

And it went chuff-chuff-chuff-chuff-chuff down the track. Yes, the most romantic and glamorous form of transport yet devised, the train, makes its **arcane** debut.

The perfect setting for espionage thrillers, gruesome murder mysteries or bone-chilling ghostly encounters, next month's encounter will provide you with floorplans, plenty of quirky NPCs and a collection of adventure seeds that'll have you crying with uncontrolled glee. Probably.



The young prince listened intently as the grizzled old magician described the contents of the magic scroll.

"Wisdom there is written here," said the grimy mage. "Find you here reviews of games for the Amiga home computer. Speris Legacy, World Golf, Star Crusader and Player Manager 2 – Extra are here. There are tips and cheats, also, for a great many more games. And features on war games and a special pull-out supplement that will enable you to overthrow your father, the king."

"Sounds good to me, Mage," said the Prince with a grin, "How much do you want for it?"

"I can accept nothing less than half your kingdom for advice of this magnitude," replied the filth-flecked old conjurer.

"Half my kingdom?" exclaimed the young prince. "Get thyself stuffed – I could buy a copy of AMIGA POWER for four-and-a-half groats. Not only does it have everything your magic scrolls have, but it's also got two disks full of demos. I'm off down the newsagent's. Half my kingdom, pah. Magicians, tch, I don't know."

He stood to leave but, sadly, he never made it to the shops. As he crossed the threshold of the wizard's dysmal hut he was transformed into a mallard.

Make ye not the same mistake. Seek ye not advice upon Amiga games from treacherous magic users – go ye hence instead unto the newsagent's on the corner and buy yourself a copy of AMIGA POWER. The March issue is out now. We expect.

Buy! Buy! Buy!

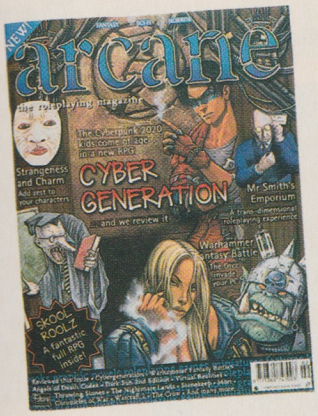
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Issue 1 featured the games *Shadowfist* and *Feng Shui*, had an excellent beginner's guide to *Magic* deck construction, started the Worlbuilder guide and had strange goings on down in The Laboratory.



Issue 3 had a complete, free RPG called *Skool Roolz*, reviewed *Cybrgeneration* and *Warhammer Fantasy Battle CD-ROM*, had a feature on making your characters more quirky and featured Mr Smith's trans-dimensional Emporium as our encounter.

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Issue 2 explored *AD&D: Skills & Powers*, previewed 1996's big releases, interviewed Richard Garfield (*Magic*'s inventor) and starred The Golden Dragon Inn, a 16-page Encounters special.





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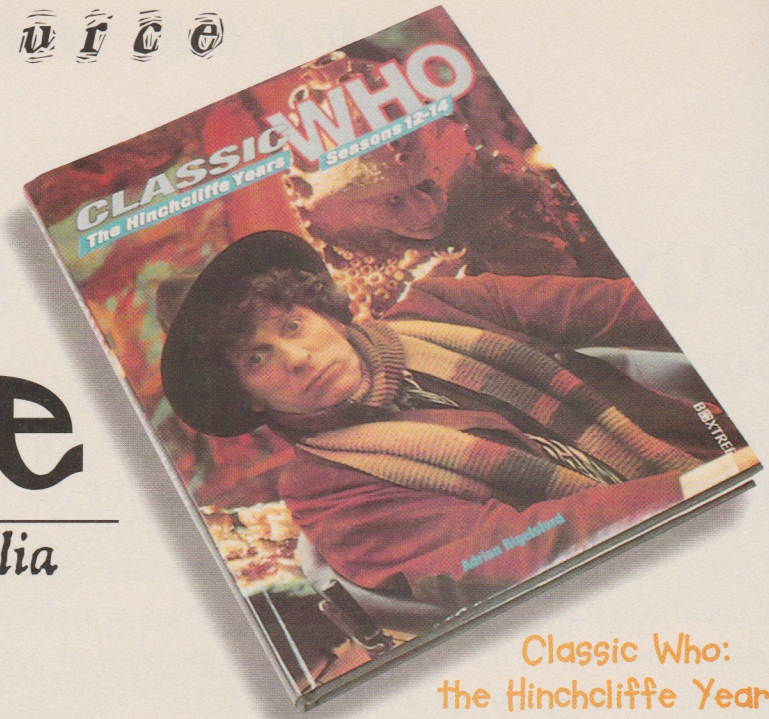
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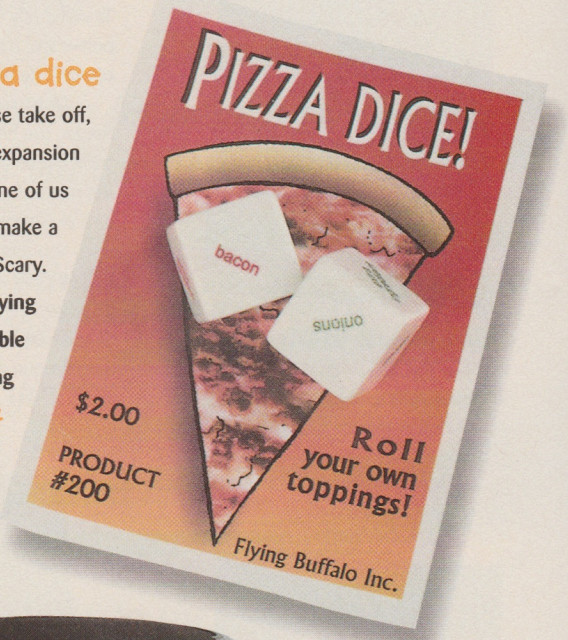


Deluxe dice

Flash dice for show-off paladins and the like. **Supplied by Hobbygames, available from all good gaming stores.** £1.50–£2.50

Pizza dice

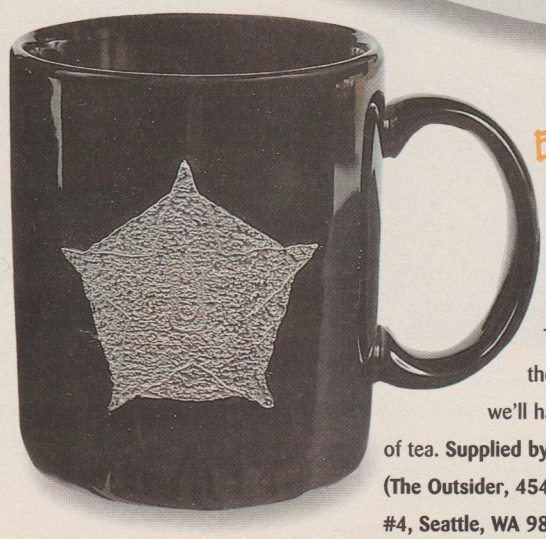
If these take off, there'll be expansion sets, and soon none of us will ever have to make a decision again. Scary. **Supplied by Flying Buffalo Inc, available from all good gaming stores.** US$2





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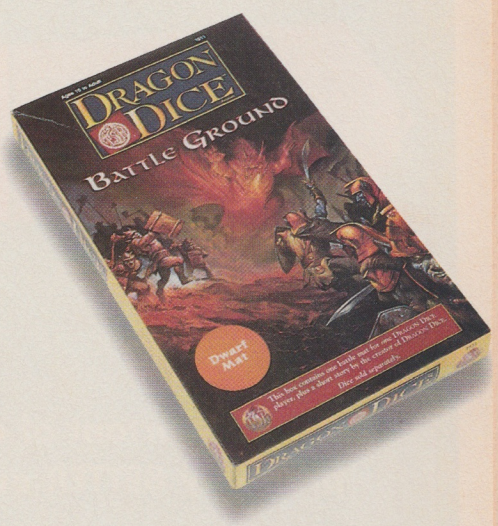
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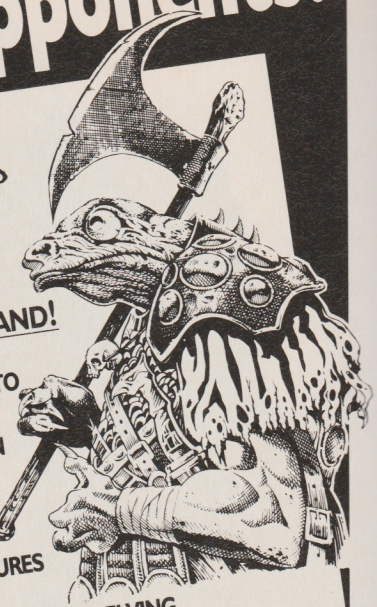


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The Month In Games

And what a month it's turning out to be...

ANOTHER BUMPER BATCH of gaming delights gets a good going over this month. Of particular note are *Middle-earth: The Wizards*, ICE's first foray into the CCG market, *Night Below*, TSR's biggest dungeon ever, and the oriental-flavoured CCG *Legend of the Five Rings*. Our policy is to review honestly, fairly and incisively all the major roleplaying, CCG and related game releases. If it's praised in **arcane** you know you can buy it with confidence; if we slate it, well... it's your money.

All of our reviews are written by experienced gamers and independent, professional journalists; people who play the games you do. We're not owned by a games company, and we can't be bought by bribery or by advertising revenue. If you want to read definitive reviews of games and expansions, welcome to **arcane**.

(And while you're here, a note about prices. A lot of stuff reviewed in **arcane** is imported from the USA by a number of different distributors, so the prices we've given must be viewed as guidelines only. Vagaries of the free market or something...)

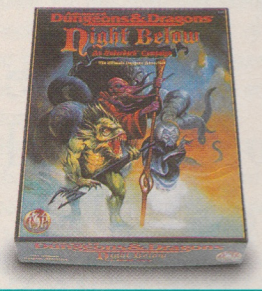
Pick of the month



"A far stronger strategic element than most CCGs."

Middle-earth: The Wizards

Page 62



"If you've never refereed before you'll be an expert before the climax."

Night Below

Page 66

The Icons

Each review in **arcane** is identified with a rather nifty icon showing what kind of game it is. Here's what they mean:



Roleplaying systems



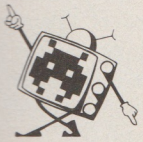
Collectable card games and expansions



Board games, miniature systems



Dice games and expansions



Computer games and utilities



Books and supplements

The Scores

Everything reviewed in **arcane** gets a mark out of 10. Here's a guide to what the individual marks represent...

Score 10/10 Perfect. There's simply nothing better.

Score 9/10 Excellent; a classic. Highly recommended.

Score 8/10 Very good, with few problems. Recommended.

Score 7/10 Good, but not exceptional.

Score 6/10 Above average, but not without problems.

Score 5/10 Average, or a mixture of good and bad.

Score 4/10 Below average, but not without merit.

Score 3/10 Poor, crucially flawed in some way.

Score 2/10 Very poor; should be avoided.

Score 1/10 Appallingly bad, no redeeming features at all.

arcane seal of approval

Each month we fight and argue among ourselves to select that one extra-special product most deserving of your money and the coveted **arcane** accolade.



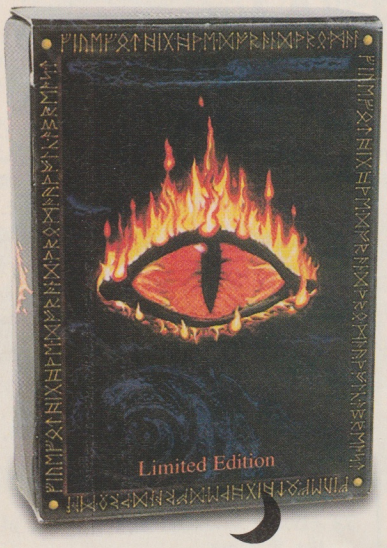
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70 AD&D: Joshuan's Almanac & Book of Facts
66 AD&D: Night Below
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A collectable card game

Middle Earth: The Wizards



76-card Starter Decks £7.95 **15-card Booster Packs £2.30**

Iron Crown Enterprises 001 800 325 0479

Out now (Unlimited Edition due in April)

They've already sold over 45 million cards in the states, but just how strong a hand is ICE dealing?

The basic set of *Middle-earth: The Wizards* is one of the largest ever released, with over 450 cards – most collectable cards games start with only 300.

In Tolkien's Middle Earth the wizards, or Istari, were five Maiar sent into the world by the Valar. Their task was to aid the Free Peoples in their struggle against the evil of Sauron, but they were forbidden to dominate the peoples or use their own power to fight directly against the Dark Lord.

Of course, in Tolkien's works at least, semi-divine entities of immense power are only human after all, and so the five disagreed on the best way to accomplish their goal. By the time of *The Lord of the Rings*, only Gandalf remained true to his original purpose, finally uniting the world against Sauron and being reborn as Gandalf the White.

Thinly veiled biblical allegories aside, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* casts each player as one of these five Istari, intent on saving the Free Peoples in his own manner. The game can be played in two ways, as the Starter game or the Standard game. In both, the basic aim is the same: you must earn Marshalling Points by bringing certain cards into play. Once you've achieved particular conditions you can call a Free Council, and the player with the most Marshalling Points wins. You can also win by removing your opponent's Wizard from play, or by destroying the One Ring, but a Free Council is the most common (and simply) achieved method.

During the course of a game of *Middle-earth: The Wizards* your heroes could end up facing anything from a pack of lowly orcs to a Balrog...



The Starter game uses four basic types of cards: Characters, Sites, Resources and Hazards. Character cards represent the key individuals whose actions directly affect the fight against Sauron. Sites are specific places in Middle Earth, such as towns, ruins, dwarf holds and so on; there are also four special Sites called Havens, which represent the only places in the world that are safe from the evil of Sauron. Resources represent either favourable events or the items, factions and allies that the Wizards are trying to bring under their influence, while Hazards represent the evil creatures and powers of Sauron. Got that?

"Although it's intriguing, absorbing and often very enjoyable, rarely is it much fun."

You start with some characters already in play, a Play Deck of up to 10 more Characters, an equal number (25 to 50) of Resource and Hazard cards, and Site cards in your Location Deck. Play proceeds with groups of Characters, called Companies, moving to Sites and trying to bring Resource cards into play to earn Marshalling Points. Your opponent plays Hazard cards to stop you.

The Standard game adds a number of new rules to this basic format, extends



the game length and uses a new type of card, called Regions. One of the key limitations of the Starter Rules is that Companies can only move from a Site to its nearest Haven, from a Haven to another Haven, or from a Haven to a nearby Site. Because hardly any Resources can be brought into play at Havens, this essentially means that each company can only do anything useful once every other turn.

Region cards change this by allowing Companies to move directly from one Site to another, without having to visit a Haven in between.

Middle Earth: The Wizards is certainly not without its problems. For a start, the game is complicated. No, make that very complicated, a situation only exacerbated by the poor rulebook. To be fair, the nature of the game makes it hard to explain clearly, and all the rules are in the book somewhere, but the booklet is structured so poorly that you can easily end up being hopelessly confused. Especially when it comes to the dice.

Yes, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* has the somewhat dubious honour of being, to our knowledge, the only card game other than *INWO* to make use of dice. Rather than involving a simple comparison of values, most actions in the game are resolved by the throw of two six-sided dice, with values being modified by the innate abilities of your characters and any other cards being played. Unfortunately, every different type of action has different rules for what the scores mean – sometime you have to exceed a number, at others you simply have to equal it, and so on.



Perhaps the biggest problem, though, lies with the Region cards. After only a few games using the Starter rules you realise that you really need to use Region cards, but that's where things start to break down. For a start, there are 52 region cards in all, and although ICE claim that a single box of booster packs will contain all of them, that's still a lot of cards to buy. Even if you do collect a complete set, you then face the task of using them.

To move from one Site to another you first have to find the Region cards for your current Site and the destination. Then, unless you're a complete expert on the geography of Middle Earth, you have to consult the tiny map in the rulebook (which is indexed numerically, not alphabetically), and find the regions connecting the two, then find those cards and check that the move is legal. And you have to do this for every Company you want to move from one Site to another, every turn.

The truth is that *Middle Earth: The Wizards* is a combination of card game and board game, but for some reason ICE weren't prepared to admit it. The whole concept of the Region cards is fundamentally flawed: all you really need is a decent map to refer to. The forthcoming player's guide will include one, but you can't help wondering why ICE didn't just release it separately and skip the whole Region card fiasco.

Likewise, my other main criticism lies with the basic concept of the game. At its heart, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* is a race – you're trying to get enough Marshalling Points to win before your opponent. Although you can interfere by playing Hazard cards, their main purpose is to slow your opponent down. If you succeed, you don't get to see what they were planning to do, and thus you gain little satisfaction, while your opponent simply gets frustrated. Basically, although it's intriguing, absorbing and often very enjoyable, rarely is *Middle Earth: The Wizards* much fun. At least, not until you've got a *lot* of cards and can start building truly nasty decks.

Having said all that, the game *does* have a lot going for it. It does an enviable job of translating Tolkien's world into a gaming format – after all, Tolkien never had to worry about game balance.

There's an undeniable appeal to having Aragorn hack his way through an orc patrol and search Moria for Narsil, and this strong element of story-telling adds immensely to the enjoyment of the game.

It also boasts a far stronger strategic element than most CCGs, and stresses careful planning and good deck design over limited tactics. It's even more impressive, then, that ICE have managed to make it playable for participants with only a starter deck each. To really get the most out of it, though, you will need to buy a lot of cards. Given the superb artwork and the familiarity of the setting, though, this is less of a chore than it is with some games.

To be honest, then, *Middle Earth: The Wizards* is a curious beast, and one on which I've found it very hard to reach a verdict. The **arcane** team has never spent so much time playing a game for review, and no single game has ever cause so much discussion, debate and argument as this one. On the one hand, it's a unique combination of the best elements of board and card games, with vast depth and huge variety. On the other, it's complex, frustrating and poorly realised.

If you're willing to put in the effort (and buy quite a lot of cards), there's plenty here to make it all worthwhile. At the end of the day, though, I for one can't help wishing that one person got to play Gandalf while the other took on the role of Sauron, leading to a far more direct and involving conflict. The structure of the game wouldn't even have to be changed that much...

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

And the players said...

BEN: The first card game that I would rather collect than actually play.

STEVE: I did enjoy it. But I won't be playing it again.

Iron Crown are already working on the first expansion set for the game, *Middle -earth: The Dragons*. Current plans include multiple cards for each dragon, representing its different aspects – Smaug sleeping, Smaug hunting and Smaug enraged, for example.



The atmosphere evoked by the Middle Earth setting is one of the game's best features – if you've got enough cards you can explore nearly the whole world.

A sourcebook for Shadowrun

Awakenings: New Magic In 2057

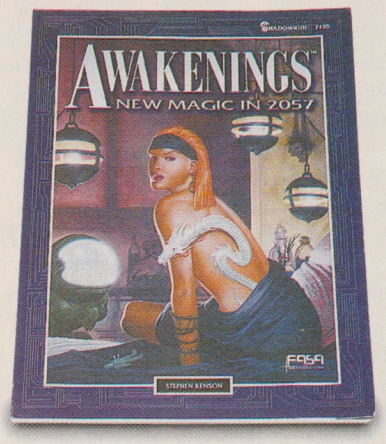
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Bored with the standard totems? *Awakenings* includes rules for Shamans who follow the paths of awakened animals.

The title says it all, but does shadowrun really need more magic?

Awakenings is the first *Shadowrun* supplement to be dedicated entirely to magic since the release of the *Grimoire*. The book is intended to give an insight into the way the people of the Sixth World see magic, as well as detailing the new developments that have been made. As such it's a combination of background material and new rules, falling somewhere between a sourcebook and rules expansion.

The background material consists of a collection of articles, all of which are presented in the usual form of electronic documents posted to *Shadowrun*'s infamous Shadowland bulletin board system, complete with 'comments' from fictional characters.




THE WAYS OF MAGIC

BEYOND THE ODD COVEN

AWAKENINGS

THE WAYS OF MAGIC

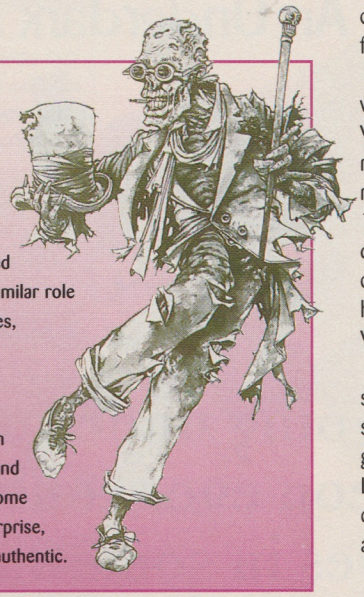
AWAKENINGS

The book begins with a beginner's guide to magic in the Sixth World: *What You Need To Know About Magic*. Although the discussion is simplistic in the extreme, it would nonetheless be useful for introducing new players to the underlying concepts of magic in the *Shadowrun* game.

The next chapter, *The Ways Of Magic*, begins with a number of first person accounts in which magicians describe how they first discovered that they were magically active, the ways in which they were trained, and how they were treated by the people around them. This is followed by three accounts of magicians who have made up their own unique traditions, quite different from the conventional hermetic and shamanic forms. The chapter closes with the story of a burned-out mage.

None of the stuff in this chapter is exactly stunning, although the concept of unique traditions is new and could easily

That ol' black magic?



Voudoun (the 'correct' spelling of Voodoo) has always had something of a bad reputation, mainly due to the wonders of Hollywood. Just about any film that's ever featured it has painted a somewhat unpleasant picture, with rotting zombies popping up all over the place, blood sacrifices, unhealthy rituals and other nasty stuff. Sadly, this has also been the traditional place of Voudoun in roleplaying games, where the use of its powers tends to be reserved for the bad guys.

Awakenings, however, paints a slightly different picture. In the book Voudoun is divided into two different schisms, the Rada and Petro traditions. Practitioners of Rada rites fill a similar role to that of shamen, acting as both religious leaders and magicians.The much rarer Petro rites, on the other hand, are the dark side of Voudoun, and are often used for personal gain or harmful ends. Player characters can only follow the Rada tradition.

In this manner *Awakenings* presents a playable system for Voudoun that meshes well with the existing magic rules and provides opportunities for both player character Voudoun practitioners and the odd bad guy for the referee. What makes this section of the book stand out, though, is the obvious research that's gone into it. Considering that Voudoun has become something of a 'flavour of the month' in America recently this may not come as a huge surprise, but it's still impressive for a roleplaying game to take the time to try and be accurate and authentic.

inspire some interesting characters. Nonetheless, it's packed with good roleplaying hints.

The Magical Arsenal is a long discussion about magic. It covers the various kinds of spells, magical items, spirits and so on in existence in the *Shadowrun* universe. Although the chapter is aimed more at interested mundanes than magicians themselves, it does a good job of explaining the basics of the magic system in simple terms, and would make useful reading for any *Shadowrun* player.

Following this comes *The Astral Advantage*, a short piece of fiction. The narrative concerns a magically active detective who describes a case on which he has worked. Although not badly written, this is probably the least impressive part of the *Awakenings* book, since it contains no more than a couple of interesting ideas about the possible uses of astral perception.

The final background chapter, *Major Mojo*, takes a look at the various types of magicians that players might run into in the course of their adventures. It explains some of their common tactics and suggests various means that can be used to defeat them.

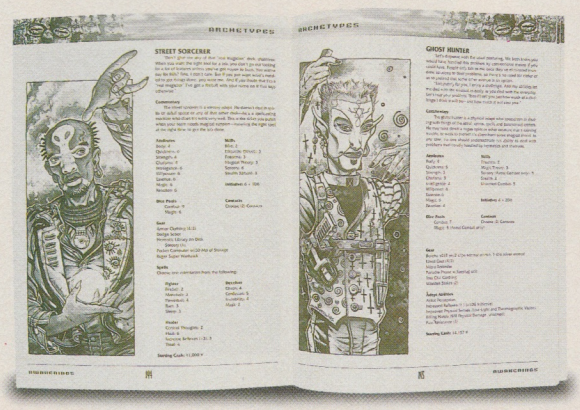
This chapter makes useful reading for both referees and players, and details some very dirty tricks that can be played by both sides. In order to fully understand what's being discussed, though, players will need a fairly good grip on the details of *Shadowrun*'s magic system.

The new rules included in *Awakenings* are split into two main sections. The first of these deals with Adepts – those characters who possess only a limited form of magical ability.

As well as some roleplaying notes and further background information, this section contains a list of new powers, specific rulings on metamagic and initiation, a discussion of geasa (which allow physical adepts to 'buy' powers at reduced cost) and the introduction of a new type of *Shadowrun* character that combines the traits of physical adepts and full magicians.

New adept powers include Traceless Walk (just like the flashback scenes in Kung Fu) and Missile Mastery which turns harmless household items into deadly thrown weapons.

"The magic system makes *Shadowrun* stand out from other cyberpunk-based offerings, imbuing the game with much of its unique atmosphere."



As well the new rules and background material, *Awakenings* includes examples of how these can be put into practise by describing a number of new magical Archetypes for the game.

The other main rules section deals with Voudoun (more commonly known as Voodoo). *Awakenings* presents a slightly more balanced view of Voudoun than is normally seen in roleplaying games (see *That ol' black magic?* box, above, for a full discussion of the subject), and includes a complete system for creating and playing houngans and mambos (male and female Voudoun practitioners).

Voudoun is similar in many ways to shamanic magic, but instead of following a single totem the Houngan worships a group of powerful spirits known as the Loa. New rules allow for the possession of characters by the Loa, a new type of spirit, and many other aspects of Voudoun.

Finally, there's a selection of new spells and assorted other rules additions. The latter includes a welcome clarification of the different magical skills available and their uses.

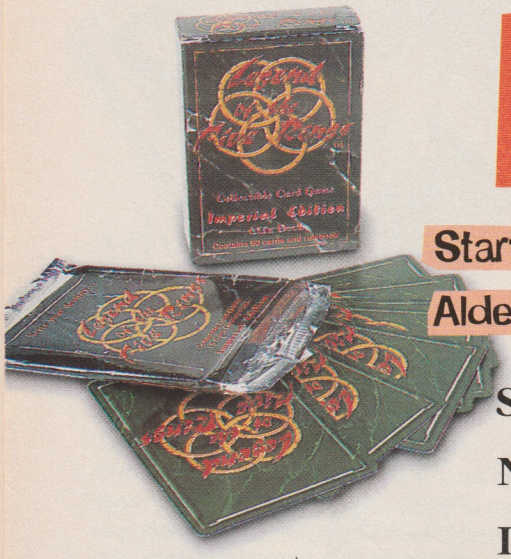
Magic in *Shadowrun* has always been something of a two-edged sword, both for characters and players. From the character's point of view, it's a very powerful weapon that makes great demands on its user. So far as players are concerned, the magic system is not only what makes *Shadowrun* stand out from other cyberpunk-based offerings, imbuing the game much of its unique atmosphere, but is itself one of the best ever to be implemented in *any* roleplaying game. Unfortunately, it's also probably the single most complex aspect of the game, and as such it's the cause of most of those annoying questions that tend to spring up during play.

Unlike the trusty *Grimoire*, though, *Awakenings* doesn't add greatly to the intricacy of the game. The new rules slot right into the existing system with a minimum of fuss. However, neither is it such an essential purchase. Although there's a great deal of interesting information here, you can't help thinking that FASA didn't have enough new rules to do a new *Grimoire*, and didn't have enough new background material to do a sourcebook. The result is a strange combination of different bits and pieces. *Awakenings* is still a good solid supplement, though, and will prove useful for all types of campaigns.

Andy Butcher

Score 7/10

Legend of the Five Rings

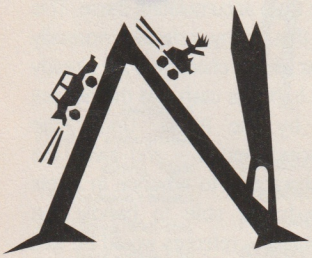


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strongholds and samurai, ninja and naginata, wizards and wakizashi it's got everything this.





So what are the five rings of the title? Well, they're a set of very rare cards, each representing one of the elements. If you have all five in your hand and you manage to play them all, you win the game. Be warned, though: in six starter decks and 12 boosters we only got two.

News of the Emperor's illness spread through the land like mist. It was cherry blossom season, and for a while it seemed that each falling blossom whispered the Emperor's name when it hit the wet black earth. In the far provinces, the daimyos of the six clans vying for power began to plot, building up their strongholds, recruiting mercenaries and seeking honour to improve their claim to the throne. Emissaries began to arrive at the capital, vying for the imperial favour with precious gifts. Armies marched against each other. The land fell into chaos...

Which rather handily is where you come in – as a potential player. *Legend of the Five Rings* (which, if you don't mind, I'll refer to as *Lo5R* from now on in order to ward off the premature onset of Repetitive Strain Injury induced by continually referring to such a cumbersome title) is a collectable card game in which you take the part of one of the six clan leaders vying to be the Emperor's successor.

Your deck of cards represents your clan. Some cards are Personalities that come in to play and fight for you, others are Holdings that generate money so that you can pay the costs of bringing in Personalities and equipping them with swords, bows and the like. Other cards include Followers, who, like Weapons, are attached to Personalities and add a bonus to their strength, and Spells that can be attached to Shugenja (wizards).

"A satisfying complexity makes it feel more like a board game or a wargame"

Most of the Personality cards that you can bring into play represent members of your own clan, split between Samurai (warriors) and Shugenja. There is also a wide variety of Ronin (masterless Samurai) and even the occasional Goblin or Naga (snake-man).

Play is turn-based and involves each of the players attempting to meet one of the victory conditions while simultaneously avoiding the defeat conditions (natch). Because there are various victory options, play is not all about sheer brute force but also involves a good deal of guile and cunning. You can win by destroying all your opponents, of course, but you can also win by being the most honourable clan.

Combat between personalities is handled on a fairly straightforward points basis. You add up the strength of your Personality and all his Followers, including bonuses for equipment, and your opponent does the same. Some cards can then be played to influence the outcome (magical bonuses from Shugenja's spells, battle tactics and so forth) and a resolution is achieved by adding up all the points. Kill your opponent and do sufficient extra damage and you'll destroy one of his Provinces. Each player starts with four Provinces and the only way that Personality and Holding cards can be brought into play is through them. As you lose Provinces, your rate of expansion slows down. Lose all four and you lose the game.

There is a satisfying complexity to *Lo5R* that makes it feel more like a board game or a wargame than a card game. Yet the actual use of the cards means that it's



What Kind Of Clan Are You?

There are six different starter decks to buy for *Lo5R*, each naturally enough representing one of the six clans engaged in the power struggle. AEG are to be congratulated on the fact that having bought just one of these decks, you can open it up and competently play one of the clans. Each of the clans has its own particular flavour, so in the interests of you buying the kind of clan you'll be comfortable with playing, here's a quick round up of each.



Lion clan. Good tough fighters with a touch of the wilderness about them, the Lions are second only to the Crabs in terms of raw power. They have the ability to make nature work with them.



Phoenix clan. Concentrating on magic, the Phoenix clan is potentially one of the most powerful, but you'll have to buy a lot of cards before you get the spells you really want.



Crab clan. Might before honour is the byword of this clan, the toughest fighters. If anybody's going to be fielding shadowy demons from the netherworld, it'll be this lot. Scuzzy scuttlers.



Dragon clan. The all-rounders, the Dragons are as good at magic as they are on the field of war. Which is to say, fairly good at both. Competently handled, this combination can be deadly.



Unicorn clan. Cavalry specialists, the Unicorns are not as strong as others, but their speed makes up for it. In the game cavalry commits to a battle much later than infantry, which gives a clear advantage.



Crane clan. The most honourable clan, the Cranes specialise in diplomacy and negotiation. They are, unfortunately, unbalanced and have far too easy a time winning the game. Oops. Ban them immediately.

a good deal easier to play in a spare moment. Having said that, for any kind of large-scale game involving more than two players you're going to need to put at least a couple of hours aside and have a pretty large table.

The cards appear initially confusing, although over time you get to understand them more quickly, and the majority of the art is lovely, setting the atmosphere and the period detail excellently. Some of the cards are superbly devious and there's plenty of scope for deadly combos to be built into your deck; indeed the game seems to have been designed extremely well and very thoughtfully on the whole.

My only criticisms of the game are these: firstly the rules are mostly impenetrable. In fairness, they do make pedantic sense when read closely, but the first time you read them they'll mean next to nothing to you and, worse still, the 'quickstart' section is laughable. When we got hold of *Lo5R* and started playing in the **arcane** office we had to abandon our first three games, one after the other, because during the course of each we discovered we'd been doing things completely wrong. Now it's our job to play these games, and we persevered until we found a great game underneath, but I wonder how many other players will bother to do the same?



Evocative artwork helps to conjure up the atmosphere of ancient Japan: honour, guile, subtlety, sorcery and out and out bloody warfare.

The second problem with *Lo5R* is that one of the clans, the Cranes, is over-powerful and unbalances any game in which it make an appearance. Unfortunately the Cranes have been designed in such a way that the best way to play them is negatively, stalling your opponents until you win by default. This turns any game in which they appear into a race to destroy them before they gain victory.

Lo5R is a splendid game, redolent with the atmosphere of ancient Japan. We've often had arguments in these pages about whether CCGs qualify as 'roleplaying'. I would encourage any doubters to have a game of this; if you don't find yourself roleplaying the daimyo of a warring province with some vigour, I'll be surprised. Best of all, this looks like a game that will last. There's plenty of scope for meaningful additions to it, and lots of room for satisfying and unusual tactics to be developed by individual players. If I see you at a convention, ask me for a game.

Steve Faragher

Score 8/10



The atmosphere of *Lo5R* is very similar to that of *Bushido*, the now out-of-print roleplaying game of feudal Japan. Luckily *Bushido* should be back out soon in a revised edition from Gold Rush Games, as reported in **arcane** 1.

And the players said...

JON: "I need more cards. Give me more. More, more, more."

ANDY: "A bit long-winded, but otherwise brilliant"

CLIFF: "It was all too confusing for me. Fun. But confusing."





Alderac Entertainment are also the publishers of *Shadis* magazine, one of America's leading independent roleplaying mags. Watch out for the **arcane** CCG soon (ahem).

A Birthright campaign expansion for AD&D

Cities of the Sun

£12.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

It might be full of eastern promise, but can this Birthright supplement keep players interested for 1,001 nights?

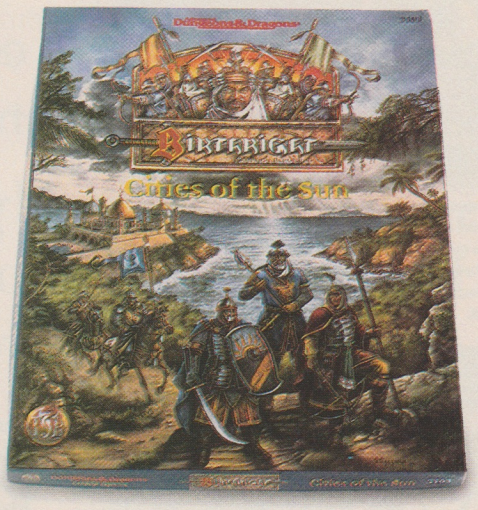
Not content with the pseudo-European mediaeval feudalism permeating most of Cerilia, the principle landmass in the *Birthright* world, TSR have produced the *Cities of the Sun* expansion to add some Arabian spice to the proceedings. Time to roll up that Sindbad character.

The Khinasi people make their home on the south-eastern portion of the Cerilian continent. Here they band together in cities, leaving the outlying plains and savannah sparsely settled. Khinasi domains are referred to as states rather than kingdoms, and noble blood is not a requisite for power. All people are considered free and equal, though some have more money and influence than others, and great store is set by a person's manners, hospitality and honour. Magic is unusually common here, its practitioners well respected, and there's also a high proportion of awnsheghlien, the semi-divine bad guys of the *Birthright* world.

With *Birthright* placing such a heavy emphasis on politics, the many states and provinces are described in detail, along with their relations to each other and the more important NPCs. New War Cards are provided to represent the Khinasi military in combat situations. Cards representing naval units are also included.



The Khinasi are a seafaring people, and new rules are provided to govern trade and warfare at sea. The means to create weather conditions, move shipping and deal with shipwrecks are given, along with details of various vessels, their costs and upkeep. The trade rules are an extension to the simple abstraction provided with the *Birthright* rulebook, while the combat rules are similar to those for land-based encounters. They take into account missile and magical attacks, as well as boarding manoeuvres. It all adds up to a simple yet robust system that should enable referees to resolve sea battles with speed and excitement. The combat rules are summarised on the large-scale colour naval battle mat supplied for use with the ship cards (its reverse acts as a map for the entire Khinasi region), and handy reference cards contain information and rules pertinent to other aspects of the region.



Cities of the Sun is rounded off with a short adventure for four to eight characters of third to fifth level. It's a highly linear affair, embroiling the players in a conspiracy concocted by one of the awnsheghlien and a ruthless noble. Besides lacking in imagination and freedom of movement, the adventure is crippled by situations where intelligent or merely wild character play will scupper the plot. To prevent this, the referee is forced into taking drastic measures. For instance, the bad guys arrive with sufficient force to overcome the players' naval expedition, whatever their precautions and backup. Worse, the one chance for testing the naval combat rules will be missed ('assume the galleys succeed in capturing the regent's ship') unless a character sits around doing nothing while everyone else goes exploring. Sadly, the adventure lets down an otherwise solid product.

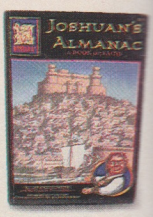
Cliff Ramshaw

Score 6/10

Joshuan's Almanac & Book Of Facts

An AD&D supplement

£7.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now



More of a *Hitchhiker's Guide* than an *Encyclopaedia Galactica*, *Joshuan's Almanac* aims to give real adventurers a few handy hints about the world of Mystara, and to give the armchair variety 'a better read'.

Written in the character of the halfling Joshuan Gallidox and his 'cadre of correspondents', the *Almanac* works its way around the world kingdom by kingdom, introduces famous people, discusses Mystaran miscellanea, dusts off some history, details events for the year 1013, makes some dodgy predictions and even carries classified ads.

The trouble with *Joshuan's Almanac* is that, like its eponymous publisher, it's a jack of all trades. It's an admirable attempt to lay a foundation on which future campaigns can be built, and it delivers some strong ideas, but these are strangled by the nature of Mystara, the book's pedantic format and its being written in character.

As a result, the *Almanac* is a fitful work. Mystara, a traditional Tolkienesque world, is sickly sweet and packed to the gills with jolly, close-harmony singing folk with big feet. The geographical descriptions form a 100-page log jam, while the correspondents' characters have all the charm of daytime TV presenters.

The jacket urges, "It only comes out once a year – grab it before it disappears." If Mystara's the place you're currently hacking your way through it may (just) be worth £8. If it's not your world, don't panic – it's mostly harmless.

Trenton Webb **Score 4/10**

Netherworld

An expansion set for Shadowfist

12-card boosters £2.20 Daedalus Entertainment 001 206 232 2519

Out now



In the world of the Secret War, the setting for both *Shadowfist* and the *Feng Shui* roleplaying system, the Netherworld is a mysterious parallel dimension that enables people to travel between different time periods. This, the first expansion set for *Shadowfist* (reviewed in **arcane** 1), adds over 140 new cards to the game.

In many ways, *Netherworld* is an example of what a collectable card game

expansion set should be. The new cards are varied and imaginative, suggesting new strategies and tactics while still fitting in with the feel of the original. In addition, the cards are such that they help balance the game, making it easier to come back from an unlucky start.

Finally, the set develops the Four Monarchs and Jammer factions, both of which are based in the Netherworld, adding enough new cards to make them playable factions in their own right – the equivalent of adding new 'colours' to *Magic: The Gathering*.

As with all expansion sets, *Netherworld* increases the complexity of the game, but otherwise there's precious little to criticise. *Shadowfist* was one of the best card games to be released last year, and *Netherworld* just makes it even better.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**



Redemption

A Collectable Card Game

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Since God is the only conceivable thing more powerful than a *Magic: The Gathering* Black Lotus, *Redemption* – a CCG based on Bible stories – was probably inevitable.

Your deck consists of good characters (Samuel, Mary, Othniel) and bad characters (Judas, Jezebel, Tony Blair), as well as various Enhancements, which boost the characters' Attack or Defence scores. Players take turns to pit a good character against an opponent's bad character. If the good character wins he saves a Lost Soul from the Land of Bondage. The first player to save five souls wins the game.

CCGs need variety. *Redemption* fails in this regard. The cards all have very similar values to each other, taking most of the fun out of collecting: it's disappointing to find that a top sinner like Judas Iscariot is no better (should that be worse?) than Pharoah. And there are very few special powers, so gameplay is repetitive and boring. Maybe they thought dreaming up appropriate ones would have been sacrilegious. ('Tap 30 pieces of silver to *betray* any *Saviour*'?)

On the plus side, the game doesn't seem to be pushing any particular version of Christianity. And it is genuinely educational. Sunday School teachers could probably make good use of it. My knowledge of the Good Book is better than most, and I didn't know who Othniel was (the nephew of Caleb, who led Israel to ➜

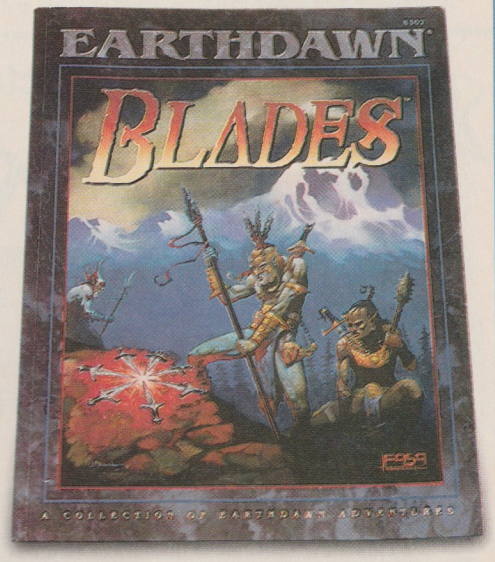
A campaign supplement for Earthdawn

Blades



£8.99 FASA Corp 001 312 243 5660 Out now

A magical weapon can be a hero's best friend, but things are not always what they seem...



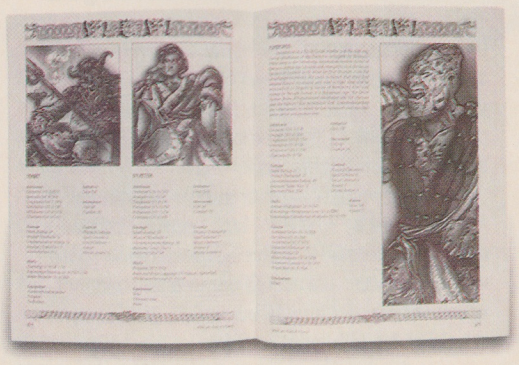
In FASA's *Earthdawn*, just because a characters owns a magical item it doesn't mean that he can make use of its powers. First he must learn specific things about the item, and then use this knowledge to magically bond himself to it. As the character discovers more of the item's history he gains access to more of its powers. *Blades* is a collection of five adventures that revolve around a set of seven magical daggers and the key knowledge that a team of characters must learn in order to use them.

Blades assumes that the party has acquired the daggers – either at the end of the published adventure *Shattered Pattern* or by some other means – and is designed to be used as part of an existing campaign. The intention is that you simply run the relevant adventure once the players decide to find out more about the daggers.

As they unearth information about the weapons, though, it becomes clear that something is not quite right. Eventually the characters will have to confront an ancient evil that threatens all of Barsaive.

The idea behind *Blades* is a good one: a series of short adventures, linked by a subplot, each designed to be played in one session, ready and waiting for whenever the players choose to embark on their fact-finding mission. Unfortunately, it just doesn't work.

It's not the adventures themselves, which are well designed and contain some great characters and locations, or the underlying plot, which is also quite clever, but the combination of the two. It's assumed that a fair amount of game time will pass between each adventure; the first is designed for fifth or sixth Circle characters, while the last will prove tough even for the eighth or ninth Circle adepts recommended by the authors.



Blades – strong characters and locations, and an intelligent plot, but somehow it doesn't all gel together.

Unfortunately, the subplot develops at far too fast a pace for this to happen convincingly. A typical group of players is very quickly going to realise that something's wrong with the daggers – the clues are far too obvious – and then, if they've got any sense at all, the players will dedicate themselves to sorting it out as soon as possible. To make matters worse, it's very hard to deal with this problem without completely re-writing the adventures. Simply dropping the subplot is out of the question, because many of the events that take place wouldn't make sense without it.

As it's intended, then, *Blades* is fundamentally flawed and won't work for most groups. There are some good ideas here, though, and taken individually the component adventures serve as useful examples of the kind of thing you should be running when your players want to learn about a particular magical item. Whether that's worth the asking price, though, is a debatable question.

Andy Butcher

Score 4/10

victory over the king of Mesopotamia, fact fans). Each card has a relevant quotation on it, and the rules warn us that if the cards ever contradict the Bible, you should stick with the Bible. Er… thanks.

Anyone want to swap the Virgin Mary and the Prophet Ezekiel for the Whore of Babylon?

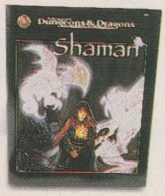
Andrew Rilstone **Score 5/10**

Shaman

A sourcebook for AD&D

£7.99 TSR 01223 212517

Out now



Shaman rewrites the earth magic *AD&D* rules. Out go the pilfered priests spells and mumbo jumbo of the *Barbarian's* and *Humanoid's Handbooks*, and in comes a batch of very different magic and brand-new mumbo jumbo.

New improved shamen come with an added ingredient: spirits. These aren't undead but echoes of the living world, reflecting everything from trees to ancient ancestors. The trick is in knowing where, when and how to look for them, because spirits can be asked for favours (spells). Importantly, spirit magic falls outside the boundaries of accepted *AD&D* spells because favours can be called in many times a day – until the 'caster' fails a wisdom check.

Shaman are a problematic bunch. Their presence insists that certain existing characters and NPCs must be reworked or anomalies endured. Their magic system is fresh but restrictive, as shaman choose their spells once and keep them for life.

To be honest, only the foolhardy would turn their freshly rolled heroes into full shamen. On the other hand, capable players could explore the foibles of shamanism as a split class. Shamen as described here, though, are most suited to NPC status, and the manual contains a dozen excellent adventure hooks.

There's no essential reason to buy *Shaman*. Its ideas and magic system are promising, but getting the most out them will be a long and painful rite of passage.

Trenton Webb **Score 5/10**



A collectable card game

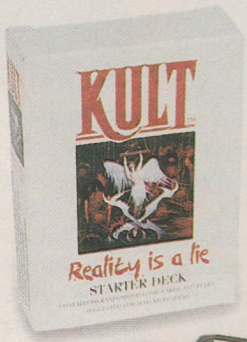
Kult

Starter £6.95 Booster £2.20

Heartbreaker 001 610 626 2259 Out now

Yet another roleplaying system inspires a collectable card game. Just for a change, though, this one's rather good...

If you like gruesome, macabre artwork you'll love the *Kult* CCG. *Kult* has a modern day horror background based on films like *Hellraiser* and *Jacob's Ladder*, and real-life occult belief systems such as the Qaballah. The idea behind the game is that God is dead, leaving the Archons and Angels of Death (angels and demons) to fight for control of humanity and the illusion of reality in which God has imprisoned us.





The cards represent an arcane Tarot deck, the Taroticum, with skulls, eyes, roses, hourglasses and crescents as suits corresponding to the magical spheres of death, madness, passion, time/space and dreams. The game uses the traditional Celtic Cross Tarot spread for its layout.

Each player chooses an Archon or Angel of Death for the centre of the 'wheel' of their layout, and places creatures and pawns around it. These are used to 'sway' population markers closer to the centre, the winner being the one to control the most markers. The game is exciting and fast, with plenty of suspense. Most games I took part in ended up as a tense fight for the last marker, with each player feverishly hoping that they would turn up that one card they needed to wrest it from their opponent's clutches.

Kult's complexity level falls somewhere between *Wyvern* and *Magic*, and it is reasonably easy to learn. The rules are straightforward, although they could do with an index. The most difficult thing to remember is what the different symbols and terms mean, although anyone who has played the *Kult* RPG scenario *Taroticum* has an advantage. What lets it down is that some of the cards are unbalanced and unfairly powerful. I would imagine that if there is ever a set of *Kult* tournament rules the list of banned cards or restrictions would be long.

My other criticism is that a single starter, although adequate to learn the game, isn't really a playable deck. For example, if you are playing an Archon you can't bring into play any creatures or pawns designated as belonging to Angels of Death and vice versa, yet a dozen or so of the cards in your starter could be ones you can't use. You are probably going to need at least three starters to put together a reasonable deck.

I have a suspicion that the main buyers of the *Kult* CCG will be *Kult* RPG fans because its closest rival CCG, *Heresy*, is better advertised and more widely available. This could damn it to obscurity, which would be a shame because it is a good, simple game with great artwork.

Lucya Szachnowski

Score 7/10

Targen's Tome: A Master's Guide to Magic

An accessory for Magic: The Gathering

£8.95 Chessex 0101 123 4567

Out now



Despite its billing as a master's guide for players of *Magic: The Gathering*, *Targen's Tome* is very much for the beginner. The interesting bits are on deck design. The nine basic types of deck are outlined, along with the key cards used to build them. These include far too many rare and out of print cards, such as the Black Lotus and, of course, those Moxes.

Next up is a run through of the game turn, detailing every step. Playing *Magic* well is all about timing and patience, and this is the single most important piece of advice in the book. The author also suggests starting by investing $20 in cards and then not buying any more until you've played hundreds of games. Oops.

The chapter on sample decks is disappointing, mainly because they are all terribly expensive. Nobody who has started playing *Magic* with fourth edition cards can build these decks. Some more practical examples that

included alternative cards would have been of much more use. In addition, since the book was written Wizards of the Coast have changed the tournament rules, rendering many of the sample decks illegal for tournament play. The mass of top tens and combinations are more fun, each with a short testimonial.

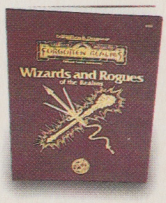
Targen's Tome is an interesting and informative read for new *Magic* players, but the rest of us will be looking for more hard and fast advice on effective decks and card combinations than is offered here.

Chris Lloyd **Score 5/10**

Wizards and Rogues of the Realms

An accessory for the AD&D Forgotten Realms Campaign

£9.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now



The title tells it like it is – this is a list of wizard and rogue character kits for the *Forgotten Realms* campaign world.

Two new classes are also introduced: Shadow Walkers and Spellsingers. A Spellsinger is a unique form of magic user with immediate access to the entire selection of spells (barring those of the Necromancy and Invocation/Evocation schools), even at first level. The catch is that casting, in the form of singing and dancing, takes much longer, and there is a chance of spell failure. Shadow Walkers are essentially thieves (sorry, rogues) with limited magic use.

The format of each kit is the same – an overview of the character's home area, a description of the native clothing, roleplaying guidelines, and a list of special abilities and disadvantages, along with stats for racial and ability requirements, proficiencies and so on. Adjustments to character mechanics are generally no more than tweaks, and as such are a little uninspiring. There are exceptions, including wizards that cast offensive spells at two levels beyond their ability, and wizards that gain intelligence-determined spell bonuses in the way that clerics gain wisdom bonuses.

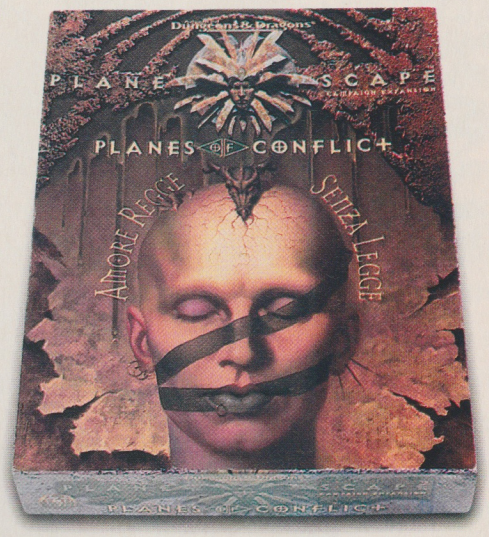
The book suggests that players should choose kits for their roleplaying potential rather than for any extra power they may yield. Better yet, players could instead consult the *Skills & Powers* tome and customise the backgrounds, personalities and abilities of their characters as they see fit.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 5/10** →

A Planescape expansion set for AD&D

Planes of Conflict

£18.50 TSR 01223 212517 Out now

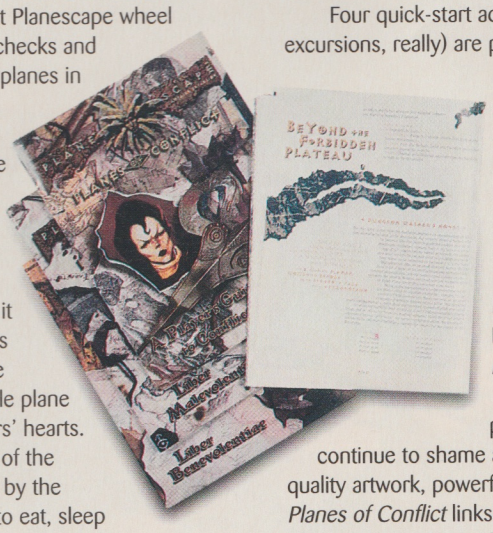


so you think that neutral means dull? you couldn't be more wrong.

Chaos and Law are extremes that define neutrality in the *Planescape* multiverse. The so-called 'neutral' planes separating these polarised forces are therefore not neutral but Planes Of Conflict, planes where Order and Anarchy vie for dominance over the multiverse.

The Beastlands, Bytopia, Elysium, Carceri, Gehenna and the Gray Waste express six very different views of extreme neutrality. For while Order and Anarchy cannot gain a foothold here, Good and Evil can. Each force influences three of the neutral planes, but with surprising effects.

This isn't to say that Law and Chaos don't try to control these planes and swing the multiverse their way, but the Planes Of Conflict remain stubbornly neutral for one fundamental reason: namely, that within the great Planescape wheel of worlds they provide the checks and balances that hold all other planes in place. As such it is in their nature to suck Law and Chaos vampire-like from the personalities of all who roam them.



Each of the six planes taps a different vein of characters' personalities as it attempts to bend them to its own blend of neutrality. The Beastlands is a bright, simple plane that stirs the beast in players' hearts. Here the moral ambiguities of the civilised world are replaced by the simplistically honest urges to eat, sleep and mate. The Gray Waste erodes the sense of purpose that is the hallmark of an alignment-based philosophy. One symptom of this is the place's ability to fade the colour from a characters clothes!

The huge *Planes Of Conflict* pack (six maps and five manuals) breaks down the nature, peoples and ecosystems of the six new worlds in true *Planescape* style – quotes, curious piccies and slang. The information, as far as players are concerned, is the common lore of the multiverse: a mixture of gossip, observation and conjecture. The referee's material, though more concise, never attempts to dictate terms, but merely provides a sufficiently firm foundation to build a game on while retaining enough freedom to give the creative referee room to work.

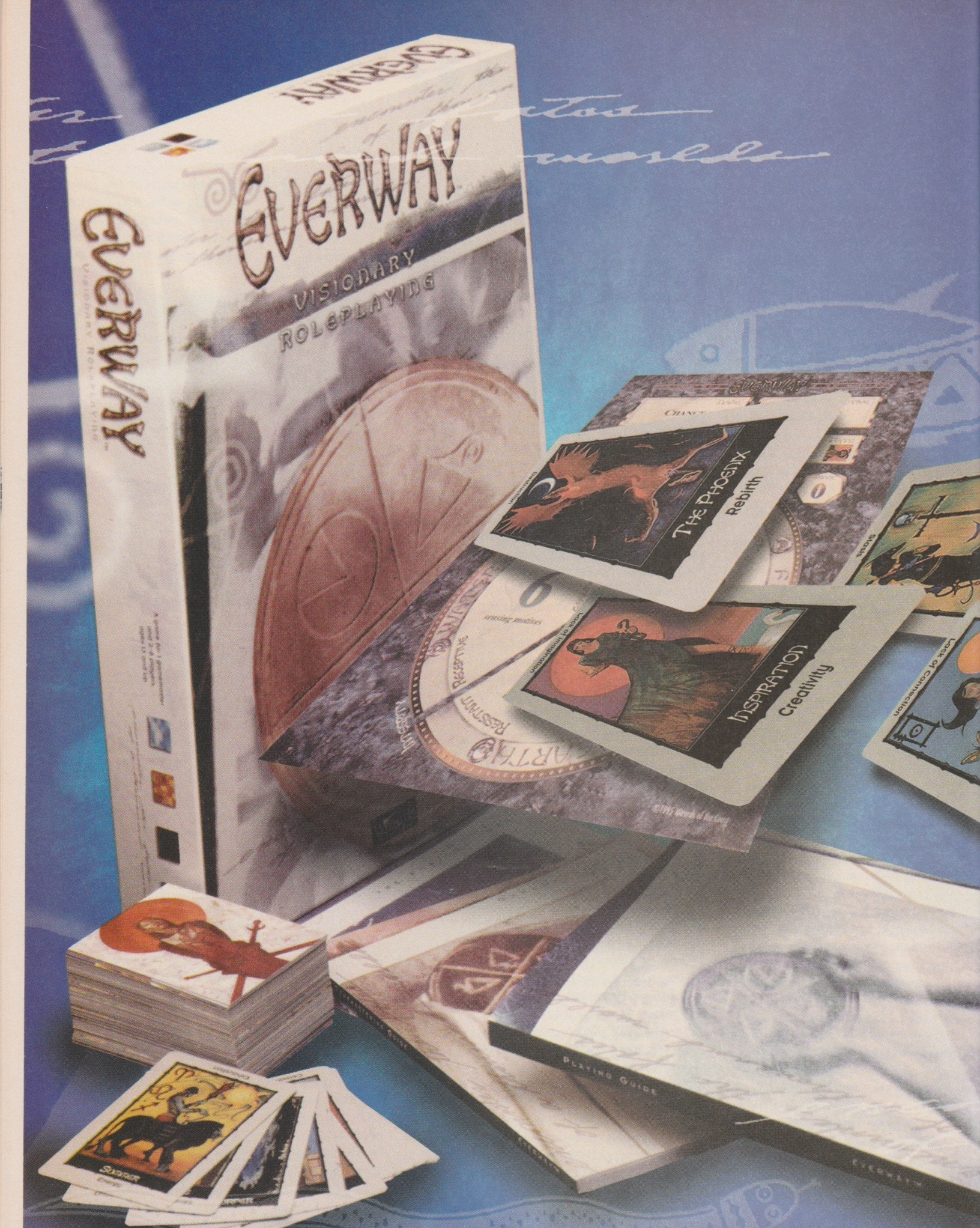
Four quick-start adventures (more like excursions, really) are provided to illustrate what the Planes Of Conflict have to offer. Three are excellent, drawing on the nature of the neutral planes to give the game and the NPCs contained within real power. One, *Militancy Justifies The Means*, wibbles on too much about the politics of conflict, but works fine as a standard *Planescape* outing.

The *Planescape* production standards continue to shame all other TSR offerings with quality artwork, powerful design and crisp text. *Planes of Conflict* links perfectly into other *Planescape* works, and die-hard cutters will instantly want to plunge their parties into all manner of neutral nastiness.

With this expansion pack *Planescape* confirms its position as the premier *AD&D* 'world'. Its hallmark is a bizarre juxtaposition of legend and nightmare. As such, *Planes Of Conflict* is an excellent, almost psychotic example of the twisted logic that makes the multiverse fun to roam.

Trenton Webb

Score 9/10



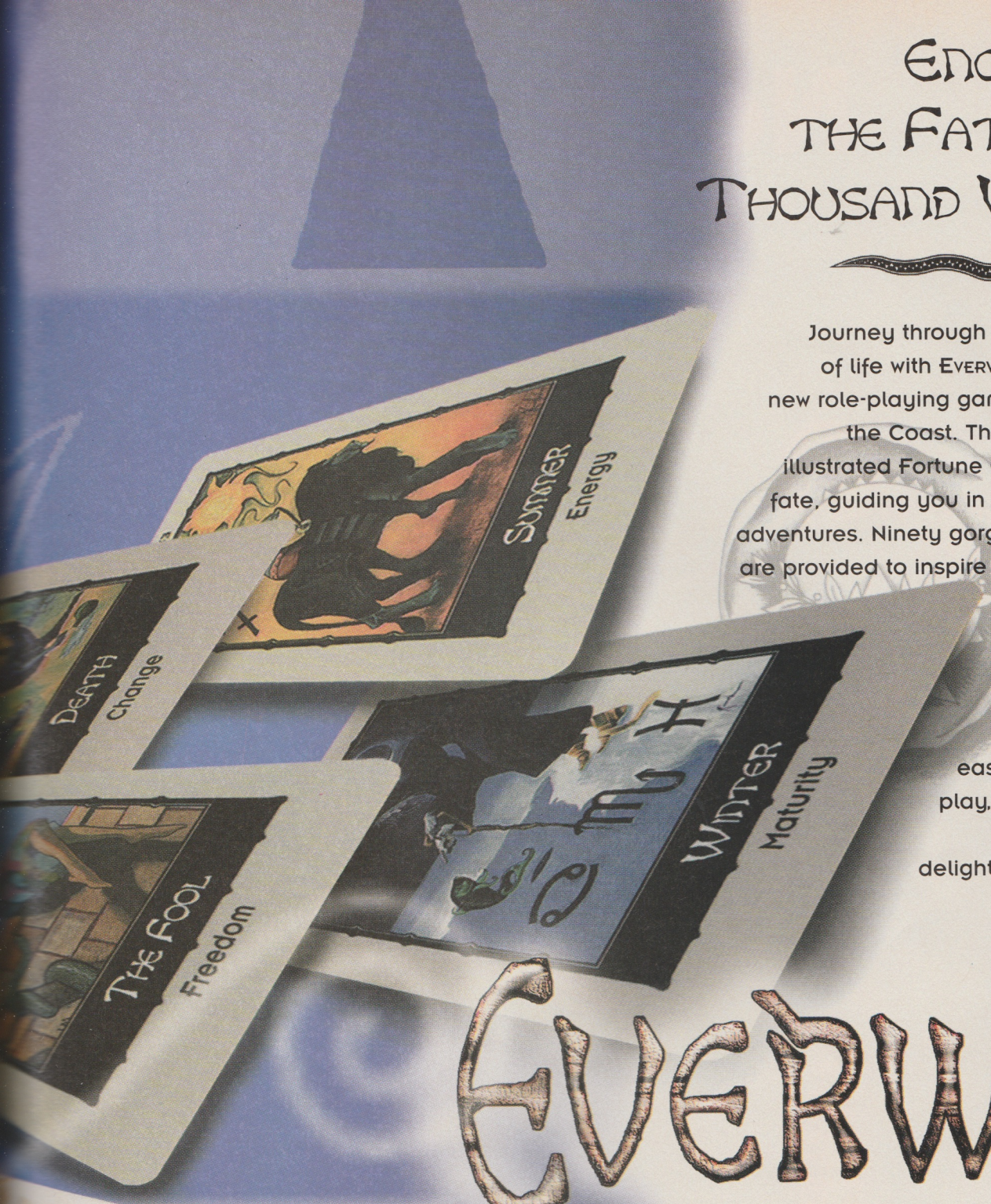
If you have any queries concerning any of our products please write to us at the address below or phone us using one of our local call rate hotline numbers and quoting RCN. 0345 125599 (UK), +44 141 226 5205 (Republic of Ireland), 9.30am - 6.30pm, Monday to Friday.

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Neon: taking the PlayStation to the limit

Edge tracks down the best coders in Germany and discovers some astonishing **developments**

If you think you've seen the best graphics PlayStation has to offer, **think again**



Voted **Magazine of the year**

NMN Industry awards

Issue **thirty** on sale **9 February 1996** at selected newsagents

Encyclopedia Magica Volume Four

An accessory for AD&D

£15.99 TSR 01223 212517

Out now



Let's face it, if you've already got the previous volumes you're pretty much committed to buying *Encyclopedia Magica Volume Four*. For a start, this final volume contains the index to the entire set (and with a total of over 1,500 pages of entries across the four volumes, an index is a necessity) and a complete magic item random determination table. Furthermore, in its extensive list of items – ranging alphabetically from Spell Books to the Zwieback of Zymurgy (crusty bread that improves the quality of wine) – you'll find all of those most interesting of *AD&D* items: swords, staves and wands. Of particular note is the sword of Babette Maelstrom: +5, +10 vs regenerating creatures, +15 vs dragons, and with the ability, among others, to create a 200d100 explosion – just once a year, though, so that's alright. "Never, ever give this item to a player!" the *Encyclopedia* cautions. Yea, right – you'd be on all day adding up all those d100 rolls.

The *Encyclopedia*, bound in a not unattractive leather-look plastic jacket, aims to cover just about every magic item in existence in the *AD&D* world. Entries have been culled from the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, the *Basic* and *Expert Sets*, countless modules and campaign settings, and *Dragon* and other magazines.

Completeness is all very well, but the *Encyclopedia* takes things a bit far. Under the entry for Swords there's a set of tables for determining the properties of Special Swords. Under the entry for Weapons there's a near identical set of tables for determining the properties of Intelligent Weapons. There are three different versions of Excalibur. Many items are tied so intimately to a specific dungeon that they'd be useless outside it; not a few are just plain silly. And once you've read about a ring of protection, do you really need official approval before introducing a cloak of protection to your campaign?

The cost for all four volumes leaves very little change from £64 – and one volume isn't much use without its pals – so only the most dedicated of collectors are likely to be tempted. Me, I'm happy using my imagination.

Cliff Ramshaw Score 4/10 →

A BattleTech & MechWarrior Sourcebook

The Periphery

£12.95 FASA 001 312 243 5660 Out now

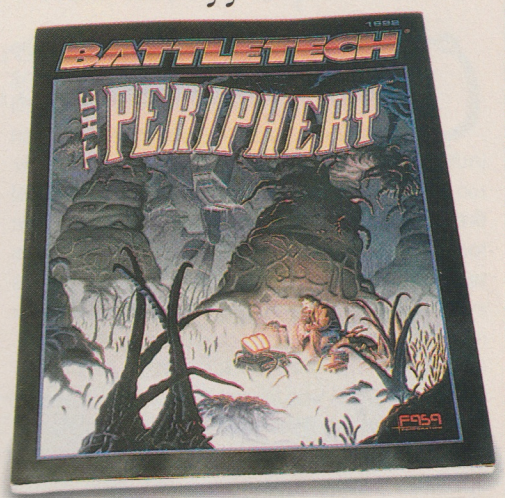
The BattleTech universe just got a whole lot bigger...

On the ragged edges of the Inner Sphere lie hundreds of rim worlds, distant from the endless fighting of the Succession Wars and the Clan Invasions, low on manpower and technology, and prey to violent raids by neighbouring Bandit Warlords and wandering pirate bands. In the year 3058, in the wake of the Truce of Tukayyid between the Clans and the Noble Houses, the Periphery states are becoming powers in the game of empire. As House and Clan prepare for the eventual collapse of the treaty, the edge nations become fertile ground for plots and warfare.

FASA, with their usual arrow-sharp attention to detail, have filled in the blanks on the border states for *BattleTech* wargamers and roleplayers alike with *The Periphery*. Running to 120 well-illustrated pages with eight glossy colour plates, the book packs a weighty punch of information, presented in the form of the ubiquitous ComStar report. The five largest periphery powers each get a section to themselves, broken down into a potted history dating back to the pre-Star League era. The histories are followed by overviews of culture, politics (noting relations with all other powers and houses, Clans included), military organisation, and finally an army list and bios on a couple of 'personalities'. Each also gets a page of the colour section to showcase uniform designs and rank sigils.

The main nations are an eclectic bunch. The Taurian Concordat follows an Anglo-French styling; The Magistracy of Canopus is an easy-going nation of pleasure worlds; the Outworlds Alliance is a rag-tag group under a loser president; the Marian Hegemony is a warped version of Imperial Rome; and the Circinus Federation is a brutal dictator state. While the historical and socio-political text is nicely done and believable, the personalities section





seems a bit of a waste of time, with no *MechWarrior* stats given for any of the NPCs.

Eight 'lesser states' are also covered, with less detail than their bigger counterparts, as well as six Bandit Kingdoms filled to the brim with assorted mech scum. Lastly, a chapter on the new findings of ComStar's Explorer Corps beyond the Periphery completes the main background section. This final section includes interesting rumours of 'lostech', gypsy trader fleets and ex-Star League colonies.

Given the keen info-dumping in most of *The Periphery*, the actual gaming mechanics section is a real disappointment; the campaign notes are thin, with a dozen hooks and some basic pointers. Only two vehicle designs – one new mech and four player character archetypes – are provided, and the optional rules (system bypasses, patchwork armour and salvage) could be run up by any competent referee. The clear, crisp maps are the only saving grace. Perhaps FASA might have done better to omit these chapters and instead expand the others.

The Periphery is a sourcebook for the referee who wants to get on with it alone, and the rich setting is perfect for a Frontier, Mercenary or Pirate campaign. There's ample room for budding warlords to carve out their own republics through force of arms, engage in politics or just pound the lubricant out of each other's mechs. Definitely worth a look by any *BattleTech* gamers seeking fresh pastures.

James Swallow

Score 8/10

A boxed supplement for Necromunda

Outlanders

£18.00 Games Workshop 01773 713213 Out now

games workshop raise the stakes for gangs that've grown a little too big for their boots.

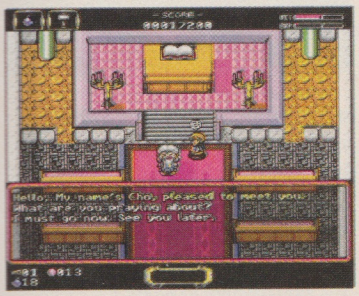

OUTLANDERS
OUTLANDERS
SUPPLEMENT
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OUTLANDERS

Speris Legacy

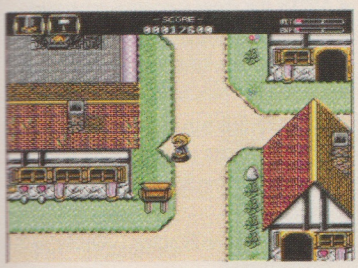
A roleplaying game for the Amiga
£25.99 Team17 01924 271637
Out now

You might think that imitation is some form of flattery, you might even think it a sincere form, but usually in the computer games industry when someone rips off an idea from an older game they at least have the decency to try and improve on it. *Speris Legacy* is so similar to the Nintendo *Zelda* series that you'd be forgiven for trying to plug a control pad into the front of your Amiga.

If you are unfamiliar with *Zelda*, it involves a small kid (in this case the



bizarrely monickered 'Cho') who accepts a mission from the king to take on an evil force that is threatening to destroy the kingdom. He must solve puzzles, collect various magic items, uncover information about said evil force, and finally confront it in a huge showdown. All the *Zelda*-like elements are there – the look, the plot, the weapons, the conversations with bystanders, the sounds, the architecture – everything is there but the fun, enjoyment



and sense of accomplishment typical of the better Nintendo offerings.

It isn't that the game is too difficult to play, it is just that you are constantly in a state of confusion about where you are supposed to be going and what goals you must achieve to get there. The tasks themselves are usually straightforward; it's knowing what they are that is the problem.

It's slick and polished, it looks great, it is a great technical achievement, but unless you enjoy this particular sort of masochistic puzzlery, it is also a spectacular under-achiever.

Nick Veitch Score 3/10 →

A storytelling card game

Once Upon A Time

Second Edition



£12.95 Atlas Games 001 612 638 0077 Out now

Is this the revival of ancient interactive skills, atrophied by media overload, or have we been at the pixie dust again?

What a startlingly bold concept. This isn't a roleplaying system or strategic battle game, nor some profiteering variation on an old parlour game. The *Once Upon A Time* set of cards is complete in itself and doesn't threaten to become 'collectable'. No, the premise here is that you sit around with friends and make up stories together. It really is as simple as that.

Each hand contains one 'Happy Ever After' card, stating the fairy tale conclusion towards which the player should work. These range from the specific ("So the king relented and the two were married") to the delightfully ambiguous ("It fit perfectly"). The other cards fall into categories of Characters, Items, Aspects, Places and Events, and you can play a card from your hand if you can weave its particular element into the plot. If the tale involves a wolf, for example, then the storyteller might lay the Aspect card This Animal Can Talk and say, "...But this was no ordinary wolf, for it looked quizzically at the boy and then inquired..." Later on, if the wolf's curious ability hasn't been explained, another player could use the Event card Transformation to reveal the wolf's secret human form.



And so the plot unfolds, until one player has dealt away their hand and brought events to a consistent and satisfactory close with their Happy Ever After card. Certain cards or common subjects allow other players to take over the narrative, or – more often than not – the storyteller will be forced to pass, giving the next player the chance to pick up the thread.

Now, I know what you're thinking. Being able to invent and deliver a cracking story off the cuff is not a talent we all possess in equal measure. Imagine a home version of *Whose Line Is It Anyway?*, with dear old Auntie Doreen filling in for Greg Proops. Quite.

The reason *Once Upon A Time* works is that it restricts itself to fairy tales. The iconography is simple but familiar, and some of the cards carry so much cultural baggage (Giant, Poisoned, This Can Fly, and so on) that you can often plunder half-remembered stories when inspiration deserts you.

Unfortunately, this is also its sticking point. The game is slightly too complicated for very young children, and I can't see many 14 year-old *Shadowrun* fanatics having anything to do with marriageable princesses and frogs. Anyone with an interest in European folklore will acknowledge that the original tales were actually dark and brutal, quite unlike the censored and diluted Victorian versions we tell today.

But I discovered that even mature players have to be quite unabashed to open a game with the words of the title. And if one player is trying to be 'authentic' and another is determined to have a laugh then you really are knackered. Perhaps it's not unusual that the most enjoyable game we playtested was at the end of an evening, with all players agreeing to come up with 'alternative' fairy tales. When it all comes together, it's marvellous.

Although I'm well aware that the first edition (now sold out) did receive some rave reviews, I'm going to award this a respectable but cautious score. If you've read this far without wincing or experiencing an attention-span crisis then you may be the adventurous, ambitious social gamer for whom it will work.

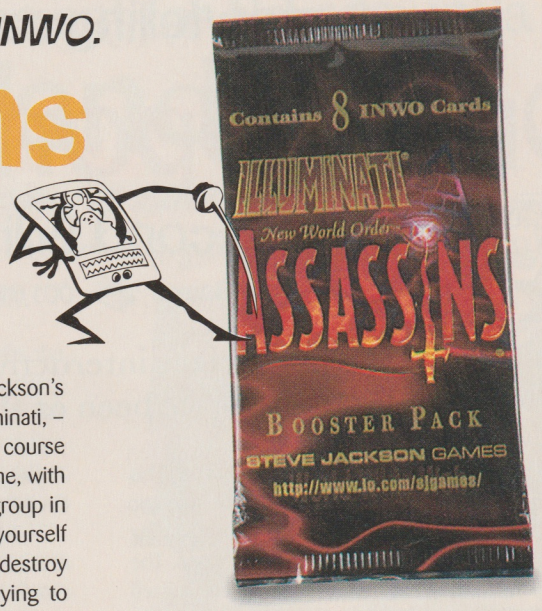
Zy Nicholson

Score 7/10

An expansion pack for *INWO*.

Assasins

8-card booster pack £1.25
Steve Jackson Games
001 512 4477866 Out now



Look out! Behind you!

Illuminati: New World Order is Steve Jackson's collectable card game based on the illuminati, – secret societies that subtly influence the course of human history. It's a multi-player game, with each player taking the part of one illuminati group in conflict with the others. You might well find yourself 'being' the Spawn of Cthulhu and trying to destroy everybody, or 'being' The Network and trying to control the world through the use of computers.

Assassins, the first expansion for *INWO*, introduces several new concepts to the game. Luckily, this is all done by using the text on the cards, so no extra rulebook is required. One slight downside to this is that some of the cards have huge amounts of text on them, and consequently the art looks somewhat cramped. I only mention this because the art is so good on these cards. The game is highly satirical, and the excellent artwork complements this superbly, adding greatly to the game's humour.



The major new game elements introduced are Plot Cards that allow you to Zap, Paralyze and Attribute Freeze other Illuminati and their puppets. For aficianados of the game, that means the following. Zap cards are Illuminati Actions that directly affect other Illuminati, preventing them from taking over certain types of groups or changing some of the basic mechanics of their turn. Zaps stay on an Illuminati until they are removed. This can be done with an Illuminati Action or by the use of other cards that come with the Assassins expansion. Attribute Freezes affect all groups with a certain attribute across the table and prevent them from taking actions for a turn; Paralyzes are similar but are more difficult to get rid of and only attack one group. Like Zaps, both Attribute Freezes and Paralyzes can be countered with new cards.

These cards have been introduced to enrich tournament play and to prevent some kinds of destructive deck-building. Unlike other CCGs, *INWO* encourages players to substantially change their decks between games; once you've worked out what your opponent is up to, you can introduce *Assassins* cards to nullify it. Fiendish, eh?

As well as the new types of cards, there is also a new Illuminati introduced with this set, called – aw you guessed it – *Assassins*. There are also several new Groups and some more traditional Plot Cards, making a grand total of 123 new cards in all.

INWO is a game that has always created memorable passages of play: California nationalising the International Cocaine Smugglers in order for Germany to take them over, for example. With the introduction of *Assassins*, it now appears to have the room for a few more of these, along with a little more game balance for tournament play. A good thing indeed.



Steve Faragher

Score 9/10

Alone in the Dark 2: Jack is Back

A game for the Sony PlayStation
£44.99 Infogrames 0171 738 8199
Out March '96

Listen to this – it's what happens in the intro to this game. The scene: a mansion atop a cliff. Weather: decidedly stormy – it's the law in these type of things. Ted Striker, private investigator,



(quality name) clambers through bramble and dashes toward mansion, hops over parapet and finds himself in a boudoir, hovering over a 40-winking young girl. In an instant, a clown doll springs forth and stabs him to death. Creepy.

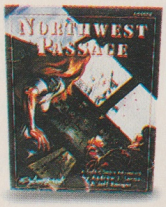
And the intro *looks* like the game plays, which is most unusual. *Alone In The Dark* is – pause for deep breath – an 'interactive-movie-style game' that *plays well*. You saunter between locations searching for a kidnapped child (the plot, as luck would have it), solve puzzles and kill foes. It works with beautiful simplicity because the visuals, sound effects and action meld perfectly.

The 3D graphics are superb, the use of camera angles dynamic, but the strength of *AITD* is the sheer suspense generated as you explore a haunted mansion and its environs – it's genuinely frightening. Sure, the control can be a bit iffy (a general rule of thumb in such fare as this) and the graphics are a mite patchy, but it's by far the best roleplaying adventure game for the PlayStation.

Steve Bradley Score 8/10

Northwest Passage

An adventure for *Cyberpunk 2020*
£9 Atlas Games
001 612 638 0077 Out now



Stealing valuable information from one corporation and selling it to another is a common business in any cyberpunk's career. What makes this adventure from Atlas Games slightly different is the location of the data – an oil rig in a remote part of Alaska. And it's winter. Still, the job seems simple enough,

and the team's employer seems to be organised and efficient. What could possibly go wrong?

Northwest Passage is what *Cyberpunk* is all about: nefarious plots, scheming corporations, double crosses, betrayals, life-threatening situations and desperate struggles to survive. Add to this the unique environment of the frozen Alaskan wastes, and you've got something truly special.

The adventure itself is clearly written, making light work of the potentially confusing plot, and well designed. Everything is laid out in a logical fashion, and the maps and diagrams are easy to follow. Likewise, the numerous player handouts are excellently presented, helping to add atmosphere to the story.

In addition to the adventure, the book also includes new rules to deal with the effects of sub-zero temperatures on characters and their precious cyberware, a selection of cold weather equipment and some background on the Alaska of 2020. Once again, this is logically presented and easy to use.

In fact, apart from a slightly linear structure (and there's more than enough inspiration here for a good referee to work around that), *Northwest Passage* is a great example of what a published adventure should be. This is good stuff, and should slot nicely into almost any *Cyberpunk* campaign. Highly recommended.

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

The Gothic Earth Gazetteer

A Masque of the Red Death accessory for *AD&D*

£5.99 TSR 01223 212517 Out now



What we have here is something very much like a history book, but with make-believe bits thrown in for good measure. The goal is to provide background and adventure ideas for *Masque of the Red Death* players. The method is to provide a timeline, along with information on important events, people and qabals, for the period 1890-1899.

The timeline makes for interesting reading and is, dare I say it, educational, despite its peculiar emphasis on American baseball achievements. Following it is a closer examination of the events of the Spanish-American war – no overt hints are given, but referees should find plenty here on which to hang espionage adventures.

A handful of happenings, →

A sourcebook for *Cyberpunk 2020*.

Eurosource Plus

£12.99 R Talsorian Games 001 510 549 1373 Out now

In the world of *cyberpunk*, Europe stands as the ultimate symbol of elegance and wealth. But just what lies below the surface?



After the huge success of the *Pacific Rim* sourcebook, R Talsorian return to the EEC with a completely rewritten supplement. *Eurosource Plus* replaces the original *Eurosource* book, and predates many of the events in the *Rough Guide to the UK* supplement.

The aim is to describe Europe in the same detail as the *Pacific Rim* sourcebook. Although it unavoidably covers some of the same ground as the original, it takes a deeper look at Euro culture, explaining not just how it works, but also why.

The book is split into several sections, beginning with a discussion of how to get to Europe and the forces that patrol the borders. Following this is a discussion of the European government. The next sections cover the individual countries that make up the EEC and surrounding areas, divided into The Major Powers, The South, New Central Europe and The Margins (which includes good old Blighty). Each country is described by one of its inhabitants, giving a feel for its atmosphere.

Next comes *Class And Eurostyle*, a chapter dealing with what makes Europe what it is in the world of *Cyberpunk*. Finally, *The Roles In Europe*, describes how the various types of cyberpunk fit into Euro society, offering special rules and roleplaying advice.

It's hard to fault *Eurosource Plus* for its attention to detail. Many previously unanswered questions about the world's third major power are finally settled, and there's a great deal of handy (and some inspiring) information included.

The problem is with the writing. *Eurosource Plus* is one of the worst written roleplaying supplements I've seen in a long time. Although for the most part mercifully free of spelling errors, it's full of awful grammar, poorly constructed sentences and plain bad writing. You get the feeling that half of the book is in the same form as when the writer first had the idea and jotted it down, while the other half is even worse. I've seen referees' hastily scrawled notes to themselves that read a lot better than this.

R Talsorian have gained a well-earned reputation for producing sharp, punchy and well written roleplaying games and supplements – the *Cyberpunk* rules themselves still stand as an example of how to create an atmosphere for a game simply by the way in which the rules are written. Which just goes to make this even more disappointing.



Eurosource Plus is packed with information and detail, but in a form that's a real effort to trawl through. If you can force yourself, you will find nearly all the stuff you need to effectively play adventures in Europe or characters that were brought up there. The Euros may represent the pinnacle of style in *Cyberpunk*, but this book represents a low point in the style of the game.

Andy Butcher

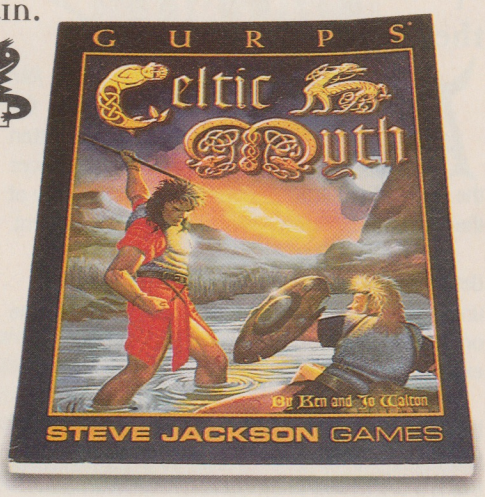
Score 5/10

A *GURPS* supplement.

GURPS Celtic Myth

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GURPS Celtic Myth is a sourcebook of Irish and Welsh culture up to around 400AD. Physically, it's a typical *GURPS* supplement – 128 pages, softback, easy-to-follow layout, good writing, fair to indifferent art. It's split into six chunks.

The Celtic World is background: this is what a Celtic hillfort looks like; here's an explanation of the importance of gesa; Celts saw the world like this, with magic playing a regular, but largely inexplicable role. It's the kind of information from which a referee using any system would benefit.

The Tales gives you summarised versions of Celtic myths. It's crucial. You have to know why Cu Chulain killed his own son, why Blodeuaedd was transformed into an owl, and you have to read about Cu Chulain's last stand (strapped upright to a rock, half-paralysed, half-dead, and facing an army) to get inside the Celtic mind set.

Characters gives you vocations from Druid through to Spearman ("Suggested disadvantages: 'I can survive battle'") There are some good period-feel skills, advantages and disadvantages, such as Odious Personal Habits: Arcane (!). An important element is the concept of gesa: 'Must not give name to strangers', 'Can only be killed by someone wearing red boots' and so on.

The *Sidhe* ('shee') chapter lays the ghosts of Tolkien's elves to rest. These are capricious Celtic Supers who meddle with the lives of men. Guidelines are given for running a Sidhe 'Supers' campaign, while the advantage of Sidhe Blood (ancestry) allows 100 or 150-pt human characters to have abilities like Cu Chulain's Battle Frenzy.



Magic gives you Tree Magic, a druidic front end for the *GURPS* magic system. It ties in nicely with the Ogham alphabet, and is a bit like the Runic system in *GURPS Magic*. Interesting. There are also teasing references to Wilful Weapons, such as Cu Chulain's friend-slaying spear Gae Bolga.

Campaigns details different settings: realistic, mythic, dark, a tie-in with *GURPS Camelot*, and so on. It also provides sound advice to help maintain the atmosphere: never explain, and fudge things. In a world where a Sidhe lord can only be killed by, say, a magic apple, this is crucial.

Omissions? I'd have liked a short scenario. *GURPS* sourcebooks need them (and some have them). It helps to see how the authors apply their own guidelines. The Wilful Weapons information should have been here in detail too. Buy *Pyramid* #14 for it? No thanks. Likewise, it's annoying to have to buy *GURPS Faerie* for more detail on Celtic monsters such as the Brollachan.

But what is here is cracking stuff. If you want to run a Celtic campaign – *GURPS* or otherwise – buy this book.

Dan Joyce

Score 8/10

← including the Dreyfus Affair and the murder of the Sioux at Wounded Knee, are dealt with in some detail, with the history being accompanied by proposed supernatural explanations. A similar approach is employed in the biographical section, where some of the notable people of the period (a few fictional characters, notably Sherlock Holmes, are included here) are given a fictional, other-world gloss. The artist Paul Czanne, for instance, is blessed with a 'spiritual parasite'.

The accessory finishes with lack-lustre accounts of the more significant qabals, and the whole lot is bound in a colour poster calender which you can use for things like checking 'when the next Friday the 13th will occur'. The *Gazetteer* is nicely presented and quite intriguing, but you're likely to unearth much more in the way of atmosphere and ideas by reading a few history books and period novels.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 5/10**

Underdark

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The main deck-building features of *Underdark* are the high-level clerics, the surplus of clerical spells, a heavy influence of powerful monsters and the underground Realms. Accounting for virtually half of the 100-card set, these go a long way towards redressing the balance upset by *Powers* (set six), which made Psionicists almost insurmountable. The *Underdark*'s Realms reach deep beneath existing Realms, granting access to otherwise unreachable Regions, and, for once, Holdings are introduced into the game as more than deck-building makeweights, ensuring that attached Realms have better than token immunities and powers.

None of the artists are named on the cards, but it is clear that each must have been given a specific block to work on – the contrasting styles complement each other in a way that no preceding set has managed. For the first time, there is new artwork for the majority of the cards, following complaints that previous cards had mainly featured artwork butchered from well-published paintings and magazine/scenario covers.

The *Underdark* is, in my opinion, second only to *Ravenloft* boosters as the most important addition to *Spellfire*.

Chris Baylis **Score 7/10**

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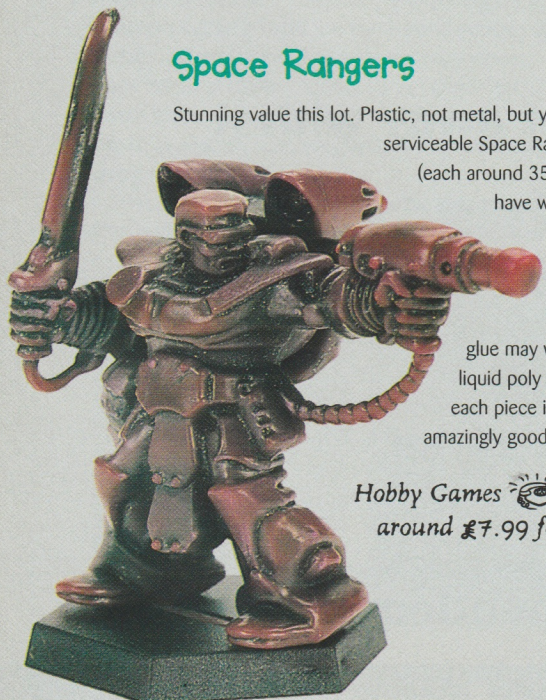
Karen Newis reviews 'em, Simon Chittenden paints 'em – they're figures



Nephandi (for Mage: The Ascension)

Nephandi (69-309, around 33mm high) is a two figure set for the White Wolf game *Mage*. As is to be expected, the female figure is tragically hip and not a little pretentious. The male is more traditional, to the point of tedium, despite fine sculpting of the hand details. Both suffer altogether too much from excess flash and indistinct faces, disgusting for such a new mould.

Ral Partha c/o Minifigs 01703 220855 Around £2.95



Space Rangers

Stunning value this lot. Plastic, not metal, but you do get 50 perfectly serviceable Space Rangers in this set. These guys (each around 35mm high) are chunky and have weapons to match. The detail is not brilliant, and sprue removal can prove taxing, but for that price don't complain. By the way, super glue may well melt 'em, so perhaps liquid poly would be better. The fit of each piece into its allotted hole is amazingly good.

Hobby Games 01903 730998 around £7.99 for 50



Heinrich Kemmler the Lichemaster

Old Heinrich (9185, around 48mm high) is just a little bit over the top for my taste, but then the Workshop crowd are hardly noted for their subtlety. The usual heavily undercut style and profusion of skulls can be yours. Painting this sucker will indeed be a challenge, as was cleaning off the moulding lines. If you like this sort of thing it should look quite funky when you're done, especially the top of his staff.

Games Workshop Mail Order 01773 713213 £3.99



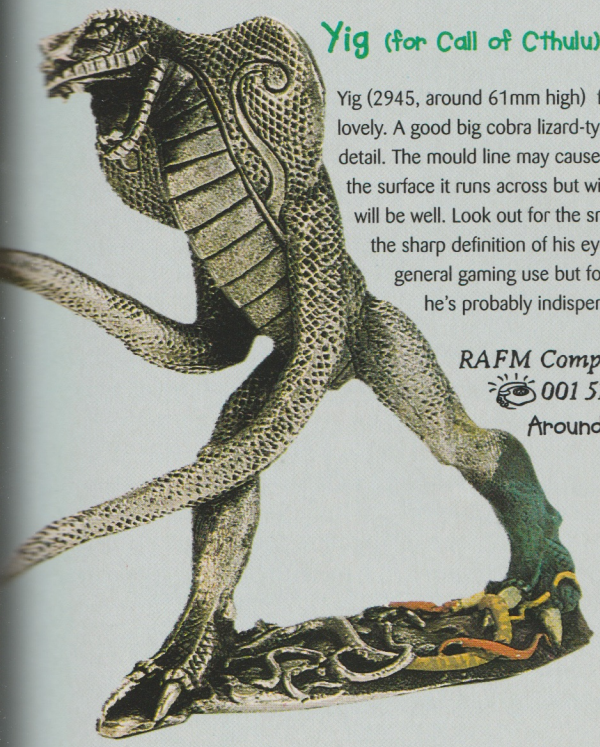
Wizards & Sorceresses

(for Castle Falkenstein)

This pack (155008, around 34mm high) comprises a male and a female figure for *Castle Falkenstein*, a wizard and a sorceress in, not surprisingly, pseudo-Victorian dress. Generally the detail is no more than competent, although the casting is fairly clean. The woman is depressingly dishabillé, but what else can we expect? The gentleman is hirsute to say the least, evidently the sculptor is more at home with hair than flesh.

Soldiers & Swords Games, 40 Jarvis Street Binghamton NY 13905 around £3.50

Yig (for Call of Cthulu)

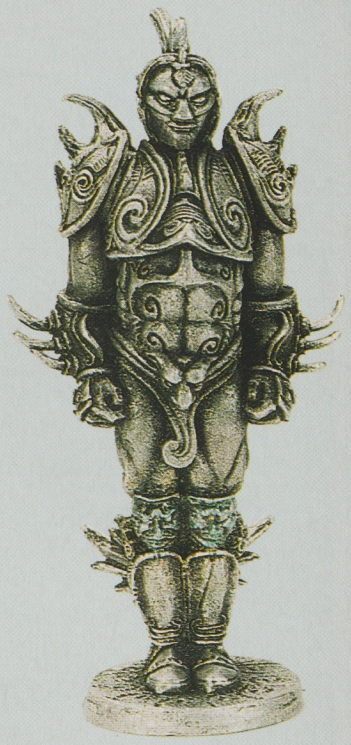


Yig (2945, around 61mm high) for *Call of Cthulu* is lovely. A good big cobra lizard-type entity with great detail. The mould line may cause significant trouble given the surface it runs across but with care and patience all will be well. Look out for the snakes around his feet and the sharp definition of his eyes. Somewhat limited in general gaming use but for you *Cthulu* people, he's probably indispensable.

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Marut (for 2nd Edition AD&D)

Woohoo, chaos spiky bits! This decidedly alien and not too far from fishlike creature is huge and ornate, and ugly to boot (11-646, around 60mm high). It's great – reminiscent of Tekumel if you know what I mean. Useful where your game calls for a statue that comes to life, or fishmen to take over. Intelligent mould-making means that removing the flash is not too difficult. Check out the gruesome masks and spiky curlicues on his knees.

Ral Partha Enterprises Inc *001 800 543 0272*
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Dragon

An old favourite of mine, this Dragon (01-068, around 100mm long) is just gorgeous. Note the scales actually overlap! Okay so it's an old mould and consequently there's a lot of flash, but it's worth it I tell you – look at the head to see what I mean. Just before affixing the wings which happily and easily sit where they are supposed to, it's worth shaping them a little to add movement and depth to the figure.

Ral Partha Enterprises Inc *001 800 543 0272* around £7



Death Knight

An official *AD&D* miniature, the Death Knight (11-502, around 35mm high) will serve very well in any game requiring undead warriors. Clean, believable detail particularly on the ornate shield make this little lead dude almost cute, despite his vaguely ridiculous skull face. The sword is detailed enough to be interesting, without extending into foppish frippery. No flash to speak of, so simplicity itself to prepare for painting – just open the pack.

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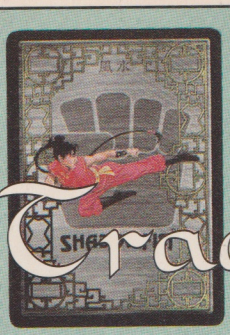
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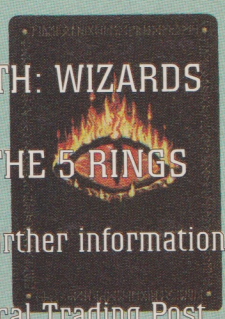
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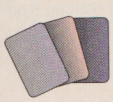
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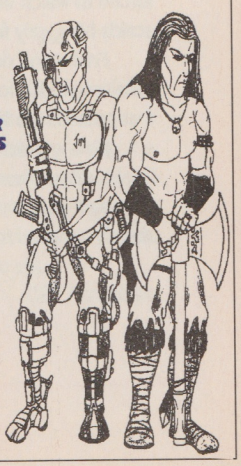
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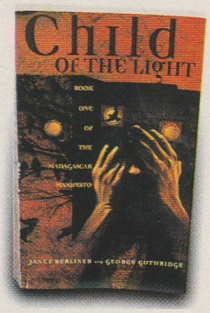
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Child of the Light

by Janet Berliner and George Guthridge
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Set in Berlin between the wars, this is the story of the love between three strange children: Sol, a shy, sensitive Jewish boy who suffers visions of the horrific future; Erich, his arrogant Aryan friend who can communicate with dogs but not with the people around him; and Miriam, the talented niece of a prominent Jew who must come to terms with her love for both of them.

The chaos, fear and moral bankruptcy of Nazi Germany is a disturbing backdrop, for though the strange powers the boys develop are never overstated, a mounting sense of foreboding and unreality takes hold as the world around them is revealed to be no less surreal than the voices and visions in their heads.

There is an episode, for instance, when Erich and a very uncomfortable Sol wait in a café for a glimpse of the Chancellor. We are

> "Is this your season of madness, Solomon Freund? Is this your season of sadness?"

forced to watch with them in fascinated horror as Hitler holds court and scalds his gypsy fortune-teller with boiling tea.

Erich can't deal with the truth, either, though he tries: "Hitler *means* well." It's for him to realise – in the face of madness and war – that perhaps the beloved Fuhrer is up to no good after all.

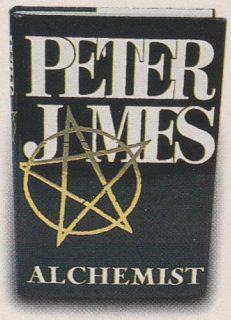
It's a wonder that Sol and Miriam love him at all. But that's the book's major theme, really: love knows no bounds. Its great strength is the way it uses an unusual story to explore a period of history that has already received much literary attention.

Gideon Kibblewhite

Score 8/10

Alchemist

by Peter James Published by Victor Gollancz
Hardback £15.99 Out now



The pharmaceutical industry is one of the most powerful and secretive in the world, with major companies pouring millions each year into the research and development of new drugs. It's also the cause of some of the most complex moral dilemmas facing modern science. Many question whether it's right to allow the patenting of medicines and other beneficial chemicals for profit, for example.

But what if one of these companies wasn't being run simply for profit, but for far more sinister purposes? This is the central premise of James' new novel.

> "Feeling a beat of excitement, she turned to the reports on the other two women. In each case the pathologist had made a similar remark."

The plot centres around a world-leading genetics professor's daughter. When her father's funding begins to run out, the pair accept a job offer from the Bendix Schere corporation. For a while everything seems to be going fine, but then a series of strange events arouses the daughter's suspicions about the motivations of the company, and a deadly game of cat and mouse ensues.

Although the evil scheme itself is not an original concept – the book reveals the historical events that inspired it – *Alchemist* is nevertheless packed with good ideas for any horror or conspiracy-based roleplaying campaign. What lets it down as a novel, though, is that it's ridiculously obvious that Bendix Schere is up to no good from the start. What's surprising is not that our heroine realises that something nasty is going on, but that the whole world hasn't twigged years ago.

As such, anyone looking for a simple read will probably end up having mixed feelings about *Alchemist*. Referees who want to introduce an unpleasant corporation into their games need look no further.

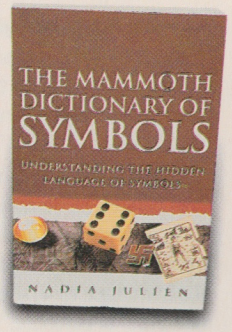
Andy Butcher Score 6/10

The Mammoth Dictionary of Symbols

by Nadia Julien Published by Robinson Paperback £5.99 Out now

Flawed thinking doesn't make a dictionary. Check these out... Premise one: 'symbols are outmoded'. So explain the popularity of semiology and the addiction of business to logos (the Coke bottle and Marlboro's cowboy are only two of the very powerful symbols omitted). *TMDOS* says symbols stopped

having any power in 1600, though the same introduction tells us symbols have survived into everyday life! What did the Nazis see in the swastika and how has this affected Hells Angels or Punks? What relevance do symbols have to us now? None at all, apparently.



Premise two: 'a symbol is a material object'. So explain the inclusion of 'Karma', 'Esotericism', 'Om or Aum', 'Mystery'(!) and even 'Love'. This kind of confused thinking and magpie (a symbol omitted from the book) research means that any trust in its knowledge has to be undermined.

"Lameness is an abnormality generally caused by debility."

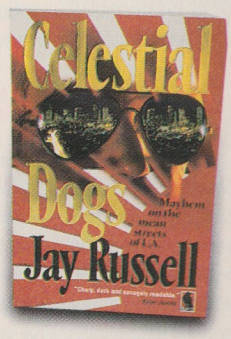
This mishmash of icons, symbols and pseudo-philosophy is 'supported' by a poor bibliography (Jung but no Freud, *The Baghavad Gita* but not the *Rig-Veda* or *Sama Veda*, and no Periodic Table, so no alchemy). This, and the lack of prices, ISBNs and, in some cases, even publishers ('*Soleil & Lune*, A. Barbault') means that much further reading is pole-axed.

Definitions such as: 'There is a tradition that says that swallows receive the souls of dead kings', or: 'Footwear is an indispensable item of dress in temperate regions', further undermine this as a reference work. That said, it could make a decent enough bog-read if only so you can fill in the gaps yourself.

Tim Smith Score 3/10

Celestial Dogs

by Jay Russell Published by Raven Paperback £5.99 Out now



When wise-cracking LA private eye Marty Burns is hired by a seedy pimp to find a missing hooker, he thinks it's just another unpleasant case. Unfortunately for him, what he doesn't know is that a Japanese sect is brutally sacrificing women in an attempt to summon an extremely nasty demon.

Jay Russell keeps his foot firmly on the gas with a thriller that has much that pleases. It boasts a fast-moving story, acutely observed and controlled with impressive ease, and enough bald guys, fat men and Asians in grey suits to keep B-movie merchants happy for a long time. Marty Burns is a likable hero, too, shooting suitably dry one-liners from the hip. Whether there are enough scares, though, is another matter.

"'Maybe you could give me a call if you should hear anything about Celestial Dog,' I said and slid a fifty along the counter along with a scrap of paper with my phone number. David Copperfield couldn't have made it disappear any quicker."

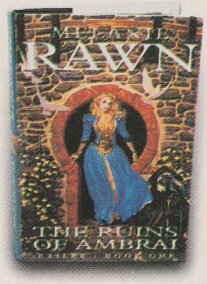
As a horror fantasy, it never really frightens enough. Early clues are given that suggest that the author may try to sick-out the reader with lots of slashing and rape, but as it turns out there is only sporadic gore and sickness and nothing in the way of a sense of menace to compensate. As a result, though the plot twists and turns agreeably and is often funny, the jolts are in short supply.

The trick the book tries to pull off is the marrying of pulp fiction with the supernatural. Unfortunately, however readable, it doesn't quite work. You are left at the finish with the feeling that it's just another detective story after all – no matter how many demons are involved.

Gideon Kibblewhite Score 6/10

The Ruins of Ambrai

by Melanie Rawn Published by MacMillan
Hardback £16.99 Out now



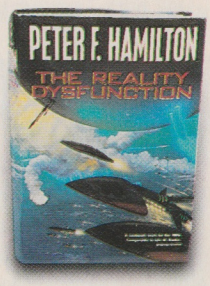
This isn't a light bedtime read. The first book in a proposed trilogy, it's a novel that demands devotion from the reader. The story revolves around the powerful 'Mageborn', a race of magicians who once fled persecution on their home planet and went on to colonise the world of Lenfell. After a Mage-inspired conflict, the land and people have recovered, but all enchanters are hated and abhorred. Even pulling a rabbit out of a hat at a children's party merits a village stoning.

"The Blanking Ward coalesced into a perfect cylinder seven feet high; a murmur of words and both she and the velvet ladder vanished."

Initially, it's a difficult read. The opening chapters are a heady info-burst, a confusing onslaught of names and places. But the style settles down. You become familiar with the Lenfell basics and the story then swirls along like a ➔

The Reality Dysfunction

by Peter F Hamilton Published by MacMillan
Hardback £16.99 Out now



It's over nine hundred pages long yet it's only the first part of a trilogy; many of the huge cast are made forgettable by poor characterisation; the point of view switches confusingly, often leaving characters stranded for hundreds of pages; the style is wooden, indulging in pointless detail – yet despite the literary dysfunctions this is a damn fine science fiction novel.

Peter Hamilton, you see, is an ideas man, and *The Reality Dysfunction* is saturated with them. Some are cosy, pipe-smoking, slipper-wearing old friends, some are the spiky-haired hep cats that everyone seems to know these days, and others are beautiful newborn idea babies, screaming their hearts out with vitality and originality. Taken as a whole, they create a wonderfully complex and compelling picture of humankind in the 26th century.

"The retinue of voidhawks watched solemnly from their safe orbit a thousand kilometers above, singing their silent hymn of mourning."

Hamilton's wide scope and weak characters mean that the initial stages of the novel flounder. It isn't until after page 200 or so that the plot begins to take shape; after page 300 things are motoring along at a more than acceptable rate. Towards the end the epic scale really pays off: the tension mounts and mounts as a wide array of human forces, hampered by ignorance and communication failures, attempts to halt an invasion on a colony world seemingly without strategic value.

Cliff Ramshaw

Score 8/10

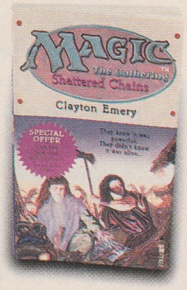
← lazy river, tracing the adventures of three Mageborn sisters and their struggle to make a braver, better world for the average sack-wearing peasant. Think *Dallas* with swords and you're not far off.

If you make it past the lengthy scene-setting, a sprawling tale of sibling rivalry unfolds, a political mud-bath that pits sister against sister against sister. It's neatly constructed and pacy, but lacks that certain something that would make it a fantasy 'must-have'. *Ruins* is a canned swords-and-sorcery tale and a fairly unremarkable one at that.

Dean Evans **Score 5/10**

M:TG – Shattered Chains

by Clayton Emery Published by Boxtree
Paperback £5.99 Out now



Any book that comes as a direct spin-off from the *Magic: the Gathering* game is up against a brick wall: everyone expects it to be appaling, a money-spinning exercise with little literary merit and as many clichés as paragraphs. Those of us with such expectations have yet to be proven wrong.

Take *Shattered Chains*, one of the latest *Magic*-based novels. It details the efforts of an untrained mage (Greensleeves) and her brother (Gull the Woodcutter) as they try to combat the evil manipulation of magic for wizards' personal gain…

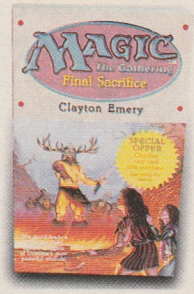
"Why couldn't wizards channel their powers for a good cause, improving fields for sowing, healing the sick, draining swamps, or collecting butterflies?"

Though bloody, to the extent of forcing you to read sections through one eye (there's a particularly gruesome torture sequence towards the end of the book, with 'strips of flesh' being peeled from a woman's breast), this novel would appear to be aimed at gullible children willing to spend their £6 on the promise of a free *Magic* card, should they be bothered to fill in the form and send off their proof of purchase. The writing style is poor, the plot mediocre and the only joy to be gleaned from it is that of relishing the profound lack of style which the author possesses.

Paul Pettengale **Score 3/10**

M:TG – Final Sacrifice

by Clayton Emery Published by Boxtree
Paperback £5.99 Out now



The fourth in a series of books based on *Magic: The Gathering* is, as you might have guessed, a tale of duelling wizards. The archdruid Greensleeves and her brother Gull are the good guys who mainly using green magic. Up against them is Towser, sporting a rainbow-coloured robe, an unpleasant personality and a good line in stolen artifacts.

It's the classic revenge plot. Greensleeves' family and village have been destroyed by evil wizards. Greensleeves takes on several wizards before the final showdown with Towser and his army. A twist in the tale gives the novel its name.

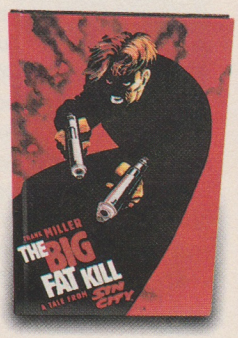
"Because an idea is bigger than your own, you grow to match it."

Written with good descriptive passages, it's reminiscent of a young Michael Moorcock in style, and packed with familiar spells that are often used unexpectedly. Craw Wurms, Force of Nature, Dragon Engine and many other cards are fleshed out nicely. Wizards slowly grow in power as they control more mana and cast ever more powerful spells; creatures attack, block and use special abilities; Goblin digging teams destroy walls and the like. This book adds a rich and detailed background to the *Magic* universe, and is an enjoyable and unpredictable read. An additional incentive is the bonus of a limited edition *Magic* card not generally available – a very tempting offer for any collector.

Anderson-Forsyth **Score 7/10**

The Big Fat Kill

by Frank Miller Published by Titan
Hardback graphic novel £16.99 Out 15th March



This is the third in Frank Miller's extraordinary Gothic Noir series *Sin City*. In a nameless city, in a nameless time, gangsters, prostitutes, ninja and cops collide in a frenzied assault on the senses.

Frank Miller is one of the true 'auteurs' of the comic world; his single vision as writer and illustrator of this book is electrifying as he weaves a story from patches of dark and light, all set in a city with no grey areas. It's bloody, it's violent, it's uncomfortably realistic – *The Big Fat Kill* is in your face.

"The fire baby. It'll burn us both. It'll kill us both. There's no place in this world for our kind of fire."

For me, though, Frank's skills are a little too unrestrained here. I prefer his *Batman* work, where his raging talent was made much sharper by the artificial constraints of the genre. In *Sin City* it's not just the characters that can get away with anything, it's Miller too. Maybe one of his editors should sit on him for a while and make him see sense.

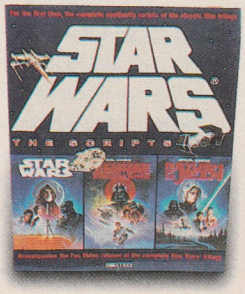
Nonetheless, this is a beautiful book studded with rusty nails, a glorious synergy of text and art and a must read for all his fans.

Steve Faragher

Score 8/10

Star Wars: the Scripts

by George Lucas, Leigh Brackett, Lawrence Kasdan
Published by Boxtree Large paperback £14.99 Out now



You can buy the 'shooting scripts' – what George Lucas et al actually wrote – elsewhere. Presented here, for the first time together, are the 'complete continuity scripts' of the wide-screen video versions of the *Star Wars* trilogy, complete with previously unseen footage, as re-launched by Fox last September. Someone at Boxtree obviously had the smart idea of making pots of loot out of a big, bright, shiny book to tie in with the build up for the new *Star Wars* film, expected next year. So they sat down in

front of a video with a word-processor, and copied out the words to the films as well as they could. And, apart from numerical notes at the bottom of each page that tell you how far you are into the films in minutes and seconds, that's really about it. I mean, if I wrote down all the words to the *Saturday Night Fever* soundtrack, would they publish that?

Vader: "Where are those transmissions you intercepted? What have you done with those plans?"

There is, to its credit, a well-produced glossy section in the middle with lots of good pictures of colour posters from the films, but does this make it worth fifteen quid? I don't think so.

Jonathan Palmer **Score 3/10**

The Uncanny X-Men: Executions, Books One & Two

by Chris Claremont & Jim Lee **Published by Boxtree**
Graphic novel £8.99 each **Out now**



Marvel's *X-Men* comics are shining examples of how to run a good superhero roleplaying campaign. You've got a dynamic group of heroes – all with vastly differing powers, personalities and motivations – plenty of recurring bad guys – many organised into groups of their own – subplots, personal tensions, internal strife, romance, moral ambiguity, defections, traitors, world-shattering plots and galaxy-spanning stories.

Never was this more the case than when the title was under the guiding hands of Chris Claremont, and as soon as Jim Lee took over responsibility for art the comics looked as good as they read. For many people this team produced the definitive *X-Men*, in both visual and narrative terms.

"They think me beaten, finished. A mistake many have made in the past."

One of Claremont and Lee's classic stories, *Executions* is a prelude to the new *X-Men* title's launch and the re-organisation of all the *X* comics. Collected here in two paperbacks, it's as much fun as ever, but there are problems.

The artwork hasn't been re-printed very well – on many pages the black is overdone, lending a smudged, blurry look to Lee's clean style. At nine quid a book, it's disappointing.



Also, the very qualities that make this period of the *X-Men* so great as a monthly comic mean that it doesn't translate very well to a graphic novel format. The story jumps from place to place, time to time and character to character, and there are at least a dozen subplots going on at once.

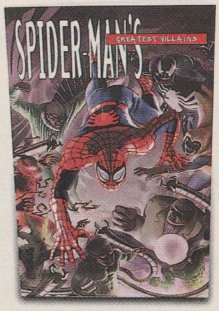
Internal references aren't explained, so much of this could be confusing. These are superb books, but to understand them fully you'll need to buy a lot of back issues. But that's not such a bad idea…

Andy Butcher **Score 8/10**

Spiderman's Greatest Villains

Edited by Sarra Mossoff **Published by Boxtree**
Graphic novel £9.99 **Out now**

Poor old Peter Parker, alias Spider-man, is one of Marvel's more fallible super heroes. Boxtree's compilation features eight stories that pit the angst-ridden arachnid against some of his most fearsome adversaries, including favourites such as Kingpin, Vulture, Hobgoblin and, of course, Dr Octopus. All this while holding down a job with the worst publisher in the history of journalism, struggling with a near-constant lack of funds, keeping his women happy and maintaining an ambivalent relationship with New York's finest. And, more often than not, he doesn't even manage to catch his man.



The stories span three decades, from 1964 to 1994. The progression is interesting. Spidey's early foes are little worse than lovable rogues by today's standards, not so much interested in murder as bags of swag and a good punch up, while 1994's *The Mortal Past* story features Carnage, a man-alien amalgam whose name says it all.

"What a getup! He's cornier-looking than Spider Man!"

Further evidence of society's declining standards.

On the whole, the artwork is functional rather than fancy, the plots are focused, the one-liners witty, and the fights frantic. *Greatest Villains* is not to be missed, if only for the preposterously piquant Peter Parker alliterations.

Cliff Ramshaw **Score 7/10**

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine – Dax's Comet

by Jerry Bingham, Tim Eldred, Bruce McCorkindale
Published by Boxtree Graphic novel £8.99 **Out now**



Two stories vie for the dubious honour of worst *Deep Space Nine* story in this new collection. *Lapse* is a one-parter featuring a 'paranoid and dangerous' Odo. *Dax's Comet* has a more dynamic and lengthy storyline: every 2,000 years a comet passes close by Bajor, devastating the planet. A myth has grown up about the 'Lost Tribe', a community of Bajorans who live underground awaiting the comet's return. This myth turns out to be a reality. The story swings between the crew's attempts to deal with the comet and the Lost Tribe's attempts to force Sisko and company to enforce the Prime Directive and leave well alone.

"I've worked out a solution, in theory. I'm not quite sure of its application, though. It is more the stuff of Buck Rogers than of real science."

Neither story is much cop. Both finish awkwardly and fail to carry any suspense, and there seems little point to either. Characterisation is poor, with none of the conflict so inherent to *DS9*, while the artwork is purely functional, especially when it comes to the major characters.

If these two stories reflect Malibu's *DS9* franchise, then it is a very poor relation to DC's *Next Generation* collection. Buy DC's *The Star Lost* or *Mondala Imperative* to see *Star Trek* work in the comic format.

Nick Peers

Score 2/10

free reader ads



games for sale

● *Ars Magica* 3rd edition: *Parma Fabula, Wizards Grimoire*, £25. *AD&D: Marco Volo Departure*, £2.50. Chris, Mon-Fri 5-8pm, 0181 4660573.

● *Planescape: Planes of Chaos, MC Eternal Boundary, Well of Worlds in the Abyss. Deva. Spark.* Worth £90, accept £40. Danny Kilpatrick 01501 733714.

● *Warhammer* boxed set and *Warhammer Battle Magic*, all for £25. Four *Warhammer* armies books for £15. 0197 8710483.

● *Warhammer* rules: *Enemy Within. Cthulhu* third edition: *Vanishing Sorcerer, Green and Pleasant Land.* Offers. Nik 0171 9232176, evenings.

cards for sale

● *M:TG, ME:TW* and *Spellfire* singles for sale or swap. Please contact Mark 01603-700168 after 6pm weekdays.

● *Rage? Illuminati NWO?* Wanna trade? To sell: *Spellfire.* Wanted: *Hyborean Gates.* Dustine, 16 Church Close, Antingham, Norfolk NR28 0NN.

wanted

● *Armoured Assault Space Master* supplement urgently required. Cash. Call Paul, evenings only, 01689 839765.

● *Cyberpunk* players and GM wanted, aged 13 to 16, in E Kilbride area. Contact Andrew at 01355 245120.

● *Marvel Super Heroes* RPG *Book of Ultimate Powers.* Sensible price please. Alistair Kennedy, 16 Underwood, Kilwinning, Ayrshire KA13 7HR.

● Novice roleplayers aged about 13 in Edinburgh/Midlothian area write to David Storey, 14 Inkerman Court, Penicuik, Scotland EH26 0LS.

● TSR's *The Art of the Dragonlance Saga* in good condition. Will pay reasonable price. Barry White 01295 712159.

● My first my last my everything and the answer to all my dreams You're my sun my moon my morning star my kind of Wonderful that's what you are.

● Looking for *Cthulhu by Gaslight* boxed set in good con. Ben Felten s4aae@csv.warwick.ac.uk 01203 230738.

● Wanted: second-hand copies of *CoC* (5th ed), *House of Strahd*, or any *GURPS* supplements. David 0181 5661819.

● Wanted: *Vampire: the Masquerades* Sourcebook, *The Book of Nod.* Call Jim on 0141 7631864.

● *Warhammer 40k Rogue Trader* 1st ed, *Chapter Approved* and *Warhammer Siege.* Peter Gurnett, 48 Denny Ave, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 1NT.

clubs

● Birmingham Central Roleplayers. Thursdays 7.30. Ladywood Community Centre. Bar. Over 16s. About £1 a night. Steve Jones 0121 5857263.

● Black Country RPS. Thu 7.30. Albright & Wilson Rec, Station Rd, Oldbury, W Mids. All ages and games. 70p a night. Steve Turner 01384 235244.

● Central London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Monday and Tuesday. Jason 0181 7158675.

● The Dark Door Club runs *Cthulhu*-esque LRP adventures. For information contact P. Hardy, 32 Park Hall Road, London SE21 8DW.

● East London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Thursday. Douglas 0181 5535332.

● *Elemental Lords* LRP based in Worcester; a fantasy game of magic, mayhem and monsters. Contact Paul 01905 425672.

● Exeter University Games Society meets Sundays 2pm in the Cornwall House Refectory, Exeter University Campus.

● *Fantasy/Vampire* LRP, Derby/Nottingham. Contact Martin Lee 08501 89892.

● *IOW, Masquerade, Vampire, LARP* meetings every other Sunday. Newport Youth Centre 7.15pm. Details Nigel 01983 528758. New members wanted.

● Leatherhead Games Club. Small group meet Mondays in Leatherhead. Currently running *Earthdawn* campaign. Interested? Jef 01372 375202.

● New club forming. Games TBA, nights TBA. Contact Simon 01625 574931. Bollington/Macclesfield area.

● Roleplayers of Chester ROC Wednesdays 7.30-late, The Railway Club, Lightfoot Road, Chester. Contact Ged 01244 322212 or Greg 01606 883698.

● RPGA Network Roleplaying Club. New members welcome Sunday afternoons, 1.45pm. 2nd Arnold Scout HQ, Calverton Road, Arnold, Nottingham.

● Shadow Warriors West London Branch of The Guild of Melee and Magic every Saturday. Gerald 0181 7239008

● Small club in Epsom, Surrey needs 1-2 serious roleplayers. Wide variety of games, *AD&D* mostly. Phone Simon 01372 811205.

● South London Branch of the Guild of Melee and Magic meets every Sunday. Jon 0181 699 9654.

● *Sword and Sorcery* LRP in Manchester area. For details contact Nemesis 0161 4911961 weekdays 6.30-8.30.



Got a rare *Magic* card you want to sell or trade? Having trouble finding fellow gamers in your area? Got a club or organisation you want to promote? Fill in the form, send it to us and we'll print it next month.

contacts

● 18 year old seeks others to game with (GM or player) in Oxford area. Call Liam 01608 810827.

● Established veteran RPG group seeks fresh input. Glasgow area. Own transport useful, not essential. Contact David 0141 6384170.

● *Hammaster* players in London please contact Edward on 0171 3597318 (evenings). Have campaign will travel.

● I am a novice *Magic* player looking for a club in the Halesowen or Birmingham area of Midlands. Neil Hickman 01384 836343.

● *Magic: The Gathering* players and card swaps, near Islington, London area. S Hong 0171 2789596. All welcome.

● *Nephelim* GM seeks players (French scenarios in English). Only over 17s. Central London location. Contact Jonathan 0171 3510470.

● Noble and Elf Ranger seek other *Warhammer Quest* roleplayers in the Huddersfield area, 13+. Contact Sir Albert Uttergeit 01484 511170.

● Novice gamer into PBM and *Magic* seeks penpals for tuition and brainstorm. Gael, 13 Hillside Ave, Silverstone, Northants. 01327 857488.

● Players wanted for fantasy and SF postal RPGs. Stewart Leary, 9 Oundle Road, Alwalton, Peterborough PE7 3UP

● Players/storytellers wanted for *Werewolf: the Apocalypse.* Also maybe other RPGs. Strood area. Neal 01634 719194.

● Roleplayers wanted. Doncaster area. Age 17+. *Vampire, Stormbringer, Darkside.* Jo Smith, 89 Hexthorpe, Doncaster, S Yorkshire DN4 0BE.

● Small roleplaying group seeks new players in Felixstowe area. 16+. Wide variety of games played. Paul 01394 276975.

● *Warhammer 40k/AD&D* player seeks to start a game club in Smethwick. Mark 0121 5558290.

● *Warhammer 40k* player seeks fellow gamers in West Yorkshire area (14+). Chris 01943 602852.

● *Warhammer 40k/Quest* player seeks players 16-19. Bridgwater area. Please contact Paul, 45 Friam Ave, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3RF.

other stuff

● Dudley Bug Ball, 27.4.96, presented by the Black Country RPS, a Midlands RPG convention in aid of charity. £1. Details: SteveTurner 01384 235244.

● Exeter University Games Society Convention. Sat 9/Sun 10 March. Details from Rik Stewart, 25 Victoria St, Exeter EX4 6JQ (please include SAE).

● Chaos trail interactive fiction. Epic, gothic, atmospheric. Superb narratives. Purity of vision. Flat 3 ,153 Lincoln Rd, Peterborough PE1 2PW.

● *Entity*, the skiffy fanzine. Fiction, PBM. Send 40p and SAE to Entity, Old Barn, Hundley Way, Charlbury OX7 3QE.

● *Role Call* – A4 fanzine for console RPGs (*FFIII* etc). Four issues available, £1.20 or £7 sub (six issues). Rachel Ryan 01925 490910.

● New fanzine. *RAGE!* It covers RPGs, PBMs, CCGs, sci-fi & lots of other stuff. Tel Peter 01291 421105.

● *White Dwarf* magazine from issue 1! Nos 1-46, 49-58. 4 extra copies. Total of 60 magazines. Offers? 01273 541929.

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March 1996

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arcane scribblings

If you've got anything to say about the magazine or roleplaying in general, pick up a pen and write to us at the address below

Dear arcane,
I am writing in response to M Reddick's (letters, **arcane** 2) and Alistair McBeath's (letters, **arcane** 3) comments. Both claim that computer roleplaying games already receive sufficient coverage in other magazines and therefore should not be included in **arcane**. I disagree. General computer games magazines seem uninterested in RPGs these days (they aren't as cool as *Doom*) and stereotype us lot as saddo, anorak-wearing recluses. Your mag is written and read by roleplaying fanatics, so it makes sense to dedicate space to our favourite genre of computer game. I hope you agree.

Rob Gurney

Um, yes. Of couse we do.

Dear arcane,
In **arcane** 2 I saw your Ten Bizarre Skills article and I was intrigued by the game *Plusch, Power und Plunder*. I mentioned this to my friend and he thought it sounded fun as well. Is it a good game? Is it available only in German or can you possibly get an English language version?

Neil Dangerfield

Plusch, Power und Plunder, *the RPG of being a cuddly toy, is sadly not available in English. Some companies have looked at translating it, but they don't think there's enough demand. If your German's up to scratch you could always try to buy it from one of the mail-order companies that advertise in* **arcane**.

Dear arcane,
CCGs are by no means a bad thing for the RPG hobby. About a year ago, my husband Steve bough *Jyhad* starter decks for his friends at Christmas, little realising what he was getting himself into. Soon we were all addicted. Steve gave up smoking shortly afterwards and spent his cigarette money on booster packs (yes, folks, CCGs are even good for your health!). The game was sufficiently intriguing that I dusted off an old copy of *Vampire: the Masquerade* Steve had bought in a sale, and began planning a Chronicle. We now play *Vampire* regularly, and I don't like to think how much I have spent on White Wolf's products…

As a final point in favour of CCGs, some of us aged roleplayers have lives aside from the hobby. It's not unusual for one of the players to phone at the last minute to say, "Sorry guys, I have to work late." If that player is the one whose character is pivotal to the night's scenario, it makes the storyteller's job very difficult. If, on the other hand, your players get into the habit of bringing along their *Jyhad* decks 'just in case', then the evening won't be a total disaster.

Ann Broomfield

Hi there arcane,
I thought this thing that recently happened might help me win a T-shirt. (its all true!)

We play *AD&D* on a twice monthly basis in the backroom of one of those cafes. The owner is a bit shady, and so are some of the clientele, but they are all nice people, and we get to use the space for free. One day we were gaming, and the referee took some players into the cafe to talk with them. I guess they were plotting to assasinate some NPC or PC. Anyway, a local drunk overheard and left the cafe in a hurry. Later, it turned out he had called the police, and told them that a terrorist group was planning a murder in the backroom.

The owner does not like police atention, and the drunk never came into the cafe again…

David Dylan

Hmm...

Dear arcane,
I do hope you will dedicate plenty of space to supplements, features and scenarios for *AD&D*, *Cthulu*, *Battletech*, *Star Wars*, *Gamma World*, *Middle Earth* etc. Although I realise you have to cater for a wide range of tastes, my club has no interest in card games, *Earthdawn*, *Bloodbowl* or Terry Pratchett.

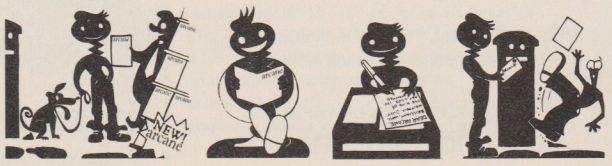
I would by interested in hearing about stupid quotes, strange situations or general naivety from other gamers. For example, once many years ago, while playing *AD&D*, we got on to the subject of creature reproduction and one clever roleplayer suggested the now oft-quoted line: "orcs lay eggs." Oh how we laughed on the way to the sanatorium. I daren't mention the vampire with clogs on.

As for Games Workshop and *White Dwarf*, they were excellent in the early to

The **arcane** forum on Futurenet can be accessed at http://www.futurenet.co.uk – come and join in the debate.

communication

If you'd like to get in touch with us there are several ways. The most traditional is to send us a letter addressed to **arcane**, 30 Monmouth St, Bath BA1 2BW. *The slightly more technically advanced can send us a* fax on (01225) 446019, *while all you fully fledged InfoCyberOtakuNauts out there can e-mail us at* arcane@futurenet.co.uk or visit our web site on http://www.futurenet.co.uk/entertainment/arcane.html. *We look forward to hearing from you.*



letters

arcane On-Line

Some more snippets from the ever popular arcane forum at Futurenet on the world wide web.

I can't really believe White Wolf will jeopardise their lucrative and popular RPG product lines for the sake of their thus-far unspectacular forays in CCGs. Nevertheless.

101325.3553@compuserve.com

GDW threw out almost 20 years worth of very popular *Traveller* resources and background by dropping *Traveller/Megatraveller* and using *TNE*. A lot of people were very disgusted with them (players and other companies in support of the game) and it showed by GDW's loss of sales. They got what they deserved. I'm just glad Marc Miller has control of it now.

pmthomp@ipa.net

The British roleplaying hobby would, I think, profit greatly from a few successful independently-run conventions. So I'm happy to know that there are actually two events this year - Contraptions and Convulsion 3D - as well as the regular StabCons.

phil@philm.demon.co.uk

I've played *Horror of the Orient Express*, and I loved it. Even though I had to retire Eddie 'Home-Run' Willson after the first few days of the game, as he gained a phobia about trains. Captain Lambert managed to get through the whole campaign, and is now in a mental hospital in Kent.

dave.maple@wmc.ac.uk

Just as the foreign gray squirrel forced out the native red squirrel because it was a more aggressive/more viable species, CCGs are forcing out RPGS.

cjmorr@essex.ac.uk

Realism is the ultimate goal - not boring 'where does the sword hit - jugular or carotid?' rules tables, but realism that lets the players imagine they're there.

cjmorr@essex.ac.uk

Have you ever got into any trouble with people misinterpreting what you're doing when you're playing an RPG? Write in and let us know.

mid '80s, but unfortunately both fell into narrow-minded bias, as alas did Citadel miniatures. Remember those plastic bases and shields?

Harry

Yes, we do.

Dear sir,

Thank you for taking the time and trouble to review *Throwing Stones*. I am flattered that you find the idea 'fantastic' and capable of changing the way one looks at roleplaying mechanics forever. I am disappointed, of course, that you were less impressed with the execution. I would like to address several of the questions your review brought up.

1. Expense. Our manufactured cost is well above half our wholesale price. Any manufacturer knows this is being generous with the price. *Throwing Stones* are more expensive than *Dragon Dice* because we use a different process and TSR benefit from economies of scale. Our common dice are more rare than their ultra-rares. Unfortunately we have to pass the cost on to the consumers.

2. Durability. The process we use to screen print the dice means they will wear out if unprotected. We needed to use this process to get the level of detail we want and be able to have different colors on different sides. Look at our name faces and compare them to *Dragon Dice*'s Face faces. You can read the name written on one face of each Throwing Stone. This level of detail is not possible with moulded dice. Unfortunately, the gold and silver paint tends to wear under continued use. I recommend clear-coating the dice or using nail polish. The current stones will not be reprinted. In the future, gold and silver will be replaced by less aesthetic but more durable yellow and white.

3. "Collectable means you can't play the character you want." We put a lot of thought into the commonality distribution. About a third of the stones are fighter types, another third magic users, and the rest are thief types and others. Having a large collection of stones isn't necessary to create a character, it just allows you to be more precise in your choices. The odds of getting the stone you want in a given tube aren't good, but the odds of getting a stone that will suffice are high.

4. Impenetrable rules. *Throwing Stones* is an entirely new approach to roleplaying mechanics. It is disorienting to →

try to understand anything this different. I don't blame you for getting muddled. There is an index and a table of contents as well as several pages of examples to help you. We also offer email and snail mail support for questions. Your specific question in the second to last paragraph – "...what about when you've got a 20th level character?" – is referenced in the index on page 95 and answered on page 78 under the heading 'Beyond Ten Stones'. Here is the complete text of that rule. Is it impenetrable? You decide. "A character can only throw ten stones in an action. When he attains more than ten stones, he may choose which ten of his stones to throw in a given action."

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views and flog my game.

Jeff Siadek
President
Gamesmiths, Inc.
Designer, Throwing Stones

Dear sirs,

When I first read of the controversy surrounding collectable card games I was reminded of the rise of the *Fighting Fantasy Gamebooks* and their ilk a decade or so ago. Back then they were decried as the death knell of true roleplaying.

With hindsight we can see that it didn't happen. They brought many youngsters into the hobby, many of whom form the bulk of today's generation.

I had always assumed that CCGs would do much the same. More fool me, it now appears. The *Magic: the Gathering* RPG would, I naively assumed, drag players into the larger hobby. But with Wizards of the Coast dropping their RPG line, that prospect disappears. And then I hear of friends playing CCGs because they don't have time to get an RPG game together. Funny – they always had time before.

Yours in distinct worry,

Dan Pergon

Hey arcane,

Thanks for the Retro piece on the *Judge Dredd* RPG, which made an old game designer very happy.

As regards the status of the game and the propect of a reissue, well, it's kind of complicated.

Judge Dredd was written by myself from a basic game system by Rick Priestley (fans of first edition *Warhammer Battle* will recognise the system instantly!). In 1987, just after I'd left GW to go freelance, myself and Carl Sargent were commissioned to produce a new edition. This included the long-awaited new chapter allowing players to run perp PCs. However, problems with the licence meant that the new edition was cancelled a month after we delivered it (hello, WotC's RPG department!). Instead, GW just stuck out the old edition in a single hardback format, which was available until the Dredd licence lapsed in early 1988.

Mid '94, with the long-rumoured film finally going into production, I hawked a brand-new third edition, with a hot new non-GW game system, around to various games companies. Trouble is, the word 'Stallone' on a license agreement adds greatly to the price and no one wanted in. Shame, but probably a sensible decision judging by the middling response to the movie (cf West End's *Tank Girl* game).

So currently the game is 'resting', but I've been considering making it available as shareware on the Internet. Would anyone be interested?

Thanks again to Paul for the piece. See you on the streets, creeps!

Marc Gascoigne

Oh go on, game publishers, can't somebody put out a new edition of **Judge Dredd**? *We'd all happily buy a copy in the* **arcane** *office, if it would help.*

Dear arcane,

Hurray! Issue 2 was even better than your impressive debut because it featured both *WFRP* ('Wuffrup' to us olde worlde veterans) and *Maelstrom*. Despite my general irritation at Games Workshop (due to their obsession with boxes of bits of card), I've always had a deep love of *WFRP* and *Realms of Chaos*. Never mind the 'blather' skill, what about 'consume alcohol' ('able to consume large quantities without much visible effect... they can drink most other characters under the table'), the 'produce small creature' spell (handy if you're peckish) or the Charlatan profession ('some specialise in selling bridges and other monuments')?

Anyway, it's been a good read so far. I even went straight out to buy *Shadowfist* (you're right, it's brill) and *Everway* (you're wrong, it's brill) after reading the reviews. And I suppose I'll have to scrape my pockets to get *Skills & Powers* now...

One last thing. A friend and I have invented an SF/fantasy RPG called *Xodiaxis*, which we are currently fiddling about with. If we ever get to a point, after playtesting,



Every month we feature an out-of-print game in our 'Retro' feature. Last month it was *Judge Dredd*. Are there any we haven't got around to yet that you think we should cover?

arcane shorts

Our monthly selection of little bits hacked out of otherwise tedious, overly-long or came-in-just-before-deadline letters.

...instead a small, fluffy and cute cat ran out and in its panic jumped at its 'attacker'. We all started laughing, but the ref and the player stopped quickly when the ref rolled the dice and informed the player that his head was rolling around on the floor.

Ian Revill

Has to be Rolemaster *you're playing, right?*

Every time I subscribe to a gaming magazine it goes bust. I'm sure there's a note passed around between editors saying something like 'if you get a subscription from Martin Norris, type up your CV and start looking for a job'. Tell Steve not to worry because when I subscribe I'll use a pseudonym and this will hopefully break the spell.

Martin Norris

We're not going anywhere.

...I mean *Dragon* is a good read, but seems to focus on the roleplaying side of things, while saying little about wargaming...

Andrew Armstrong

Oh dear.

As a tip for budding referees, I find that drawing a network showing the relationship between NPCs is always useful. Also, are there any C64, BBC or Atari emulators available which run on a 486 PC?

Baljit Singh Chima

Thanks for the advice. There are shareware emulators available for everything you mention. Try BBSs or PD libraries.

I'm 35, pushing 36, and can't help wondering if I'm too old for roleplaying?

Al Gosling

letters

where we think it's good enough to publish, what's our best bet? Should we send it off to big companies or small 'uns?

Liam Astley

Send it off to everybody you can (making sure that your copyright notice is clearly shown on each page) and wait for the offers to flood in, that's our advice.

Dear **arcane**,
CCGs – you can get them based on just about anything. *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, *Star Wars*, *Goldeneye*, *Wing Commander*, *Sim City* – what next, *Coronation Street: The Collectable Card Game*? And now *Dragon Dice* and *Throwing Stones* – collectable dice games!

I shudder to imagine what games companies will think up next. ("Hey, I've got a great idea for a game, and everyone will buy it, 'cos they're stupid and don't know what they're getting into, and they'll try to collect the whole set, 'cos they think they'll have a really powerful set of cards if they have the 'Sword of Ultimate Chaos' card, and they'll spend hundreds of pounds just to get that one card. What a great idea!")

Anway, good mag, guys, but why are all the computer RPGs for the PC only? Aren't there any RPGs for other computers and consoles? I own an Amiga, not a PC, but don't buy any mags and the nearest computer games shop is ten to twenty miles away. So it would be nice to know what RPGs you can get for other computers. That is my only gripe.

Live long and prosper.

Alan Jones

PS The 'TB' of 'TB Falsename' – it doesn't stand for 'Totally Blatant' by any chance?

At the Toy Fair recently there were two Premier League Football CCGs on display. There will be no end to this madness. As for your point about CRPGs, it's not that we're ignoring the Amiga, it's just that there aren't many games coming out for it at the moment, but we do have a **Speris legacy** *review this issue.*



Dear **arcane**,
Alright, while I understand and indeed sympathise with Paul Rose's feelings about the *AD&D* alignments, I think that they help new players get an angle on the idea of roleplaying a character. Although simplistic and, I admit, confining after a while, they can be dispensed with once novice players have found their feet. On the other hand, perhaps I'm wrong and merely placing unnecessary constraints on the minds of new players rather than letting them fly free from the start, thus perpetuating old practices and stifling progress. I dunno!

Mr Smith's Mysterious Emporium was first rate – plenty of juicy ideas for horribly confusing hapless PCs spring to mind. The pull-outs are a great feature, as good as and better presented than even the epics in *Last Province* (RIP). Thumbs aloft.

Hoorah for *The Dying of the Light. Warhammer* returns; Chaos never sleeps.

Ta ta,

John Clare

Dear **arcane**
I fail to see the point in the animosity towards CCGs. I am principally a roleplayer but I enjoy card games as well. (Why not encorage everyone to go for *Illuminati: New World Order*. Go *Assassins* go! I want the trademark card). Seriously though, they are a good laugh and a great backup option when a couple of players can't make it. It's different strokes for different folks. I'm not a wargamer, but that doesn't mean I'm going to slag them off.

And please God no! Not the *White Dwarf*/Games Workshop argument. Yes they were great for roleplaying but aren't anymore, that's their choice. I don't buy their products anymore because they don't interest me. If they do a game I like, I'll buy it. It's that simple.

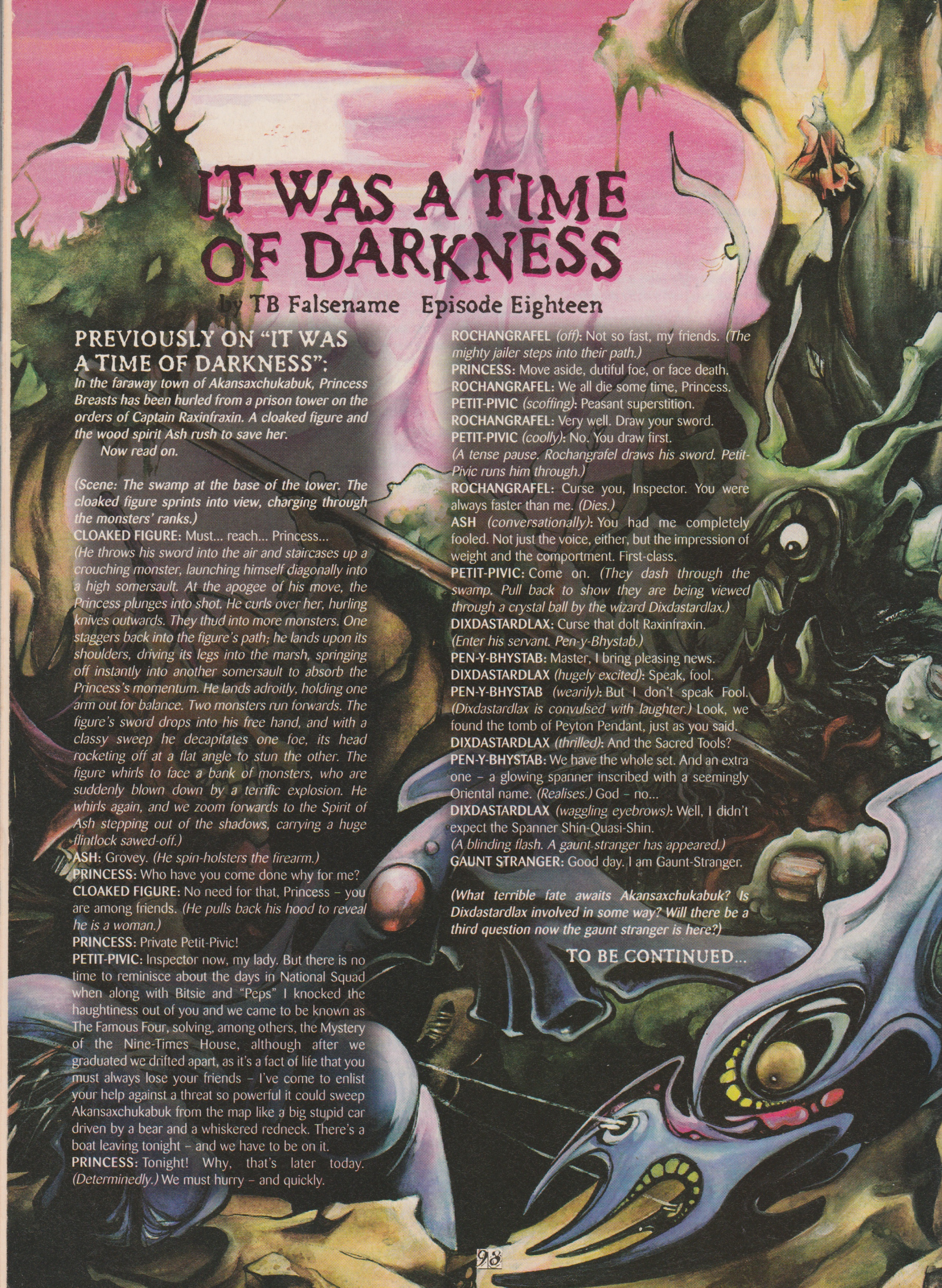
All in all the mag's groovy. Keep it going. Cheers.

Liam Kelly

So, it seems that this month we're getting a lot more support for CCGs than we have previously. We think we've said enough on the matter now, but we're still keen to hear your comments. And not just about CCGs, either. What about our feature on getting started in roleplaying this issue? What do you think are the best games for beginners to play? And we also enjoy reading the occasional humurous extracts from people's games that come in. Keep 'em coming.



Waddingtons are bringing out a CCG called *Squad*, loosely based on *Subbuteo* and featuring all the Premier League players. It was only a matter of time.



IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS

by TB Falsename Episode Eighteen

PREVIOUSLY ON "IT WAS A TIME OF DARKNESS":

In the faraway town of Akansaxchukabuk, Princess Breasts has been hurled from a prison tower on the orders of Captain Raxinfraxin. A cloaked figure and the wood spirit Ash rush to save her.

Now read on.

(Scene: The swamp at the base of the tower. The cloaked figure sprints into view, charging through the monsters' ranks.)

CLOAKED FIGURE: Must... reach... Princess...

(He throws his sword into the air and staircases up a crouching monster, launching himself diagonally into a high somersault. At the apogee of his move, the Princess plunges into shot. He curls over her, hurling knives outwards. They thud into more monsters. One staggers back into the figure's path; he lands upon its shoulders, driving its legs into the marsh, springing off instantly into another somersault to absorb the Princess's momentum. He lands adroitly, holding one arm out for balance. Two monsters run forwards. The figure's sword drops into his free hand, and with a classy sweep he decapitates one foe, its head rocketing off at a flat angle to stun the other. The figure whirls to face a bank of monsters, who are suddenly blown down by a terrific explosion. He whirls again, and we zoom forwards to the Spirit of Ash stepping out of the shadows, carrying a huge flintlock sawed-off.)

ASH: Grovey. *(He spin-holsters the firearm.)*

PRINCESS: Who have you come done why for me?

CLOAKED FIGURE: No need for that, Princess – you are among friends. *(He pulls back his hood to reveal he is a woman.)*

PRINCESS: Private Petit-Pivic!

PETIT-PIVIC: Inspector now, my lady. But there is no time to reminisce about the days in National Squad when along with Bitsie and "Peps" I knocked the haughtiness out of you and we came to be known as The Famous Four, solving, among others, the Mystery of the Nine-Times House, although after we graduated we drifted apart, as it's a fact of life that you must always lose your friends – I've come to enlist your help against a threat so powerful it could sweep Akansaxchukabuk from the map like a big stupid car driven by a bear and a whiskered redneck. There's a boat leaving tonight – and we have to be on it.

PRINCESS: Tonight! Why, that's later today. *(Determinedly.)* We must hurry – and quickly.

ROCHANGRAFEL *(off)*: Not so fast, my friends. *(The mighty jailer steps into their path.)*

PRINCESS: Move aside, dutiful foe, or face death.

ROCHANGRAFEL: We all die some time, Princess.

PETIT-PIVIC *(scoffing)*: Peasant superstition.

ROCHANGRAFEL: Very well. Draw your sword.

PETIT-PIVIC *(coolly)*: No. You draw first.

(A tense pause. Rochangrafel draws his sword. Petit-Pivic runs him through.)

ROCHANGRAFEL: Curse you, Inspector. You were always faster than me. *(Dies.)*

ASH *(conversationally)*: You had me completely fooled. Not just the voice, either, but the impression of weight and the comportment. First-class.

PETIT-PIVIC: Come on. *(They dash through the swamp. Pull back to show they are being viewed through a crystal ball by the wizard Dixdastardlax.)*

DIXDASTARDLAX: Curse that dolt Raxinfraxin.

(Enter his servant. Pen-y-Bhystab.)

PEN-Y-BHYSTAB: Master, I bring pleasing news.

DIXDASTARDLAX *(hugely excited)*: Speak, fool.

PEN-Y-BHYSTAB *(wearily)*: But I don't speak Fool. *(Dixdastardlax is convulsed with laughter.)* Look, we found the tomb of Peyton Pendant, just as you said.

DIXDASTARDLAX *(thrilled)*: And the Sacred Tools?

PEN-Y-BHYSTAB: We have the whole set. And an extra one – a glowing spanner inscribed with a seemingly Oriental name. *(Realises.)* God – no...

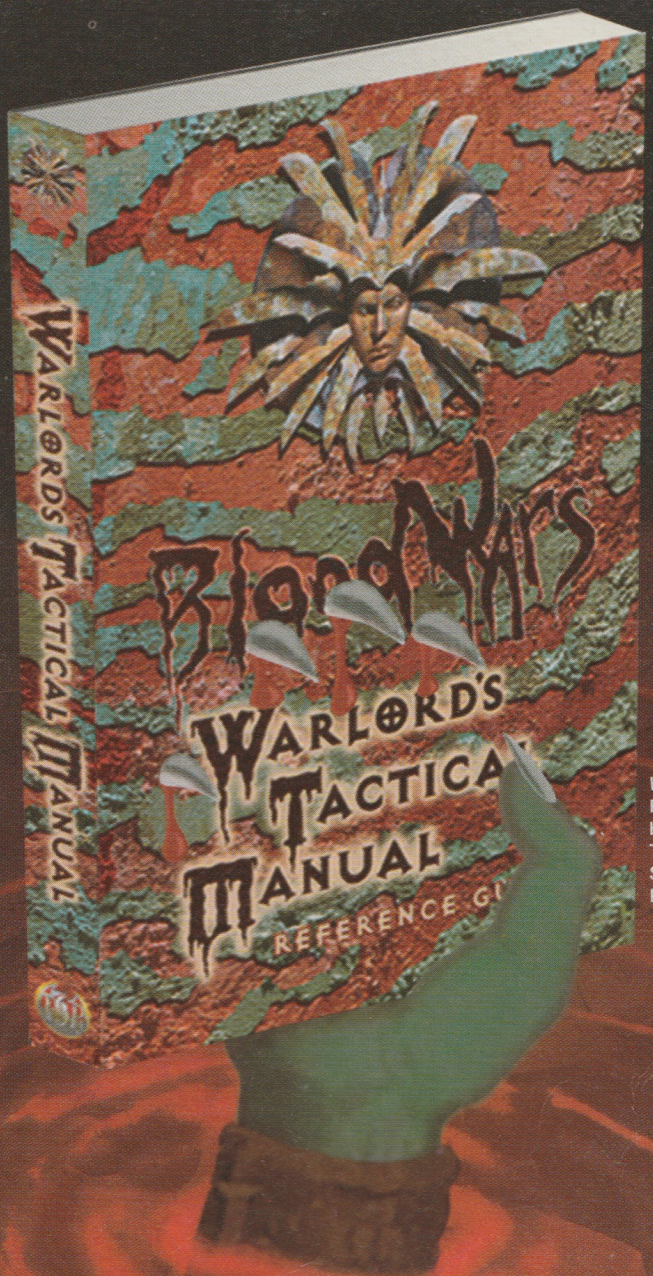
DIXDASTARDLAX *(waggling eyebrows)*: Well, I didn't expect the Spanner Shin-Quasi-Shin.

(A blinding flash. A gaunt stranger has appeared.)

GAUNT STRANGER: Good day. I am Gaunt-Stranger.

(What terrible fate awaits Akansaxchukabuk? Is Dixdastardlax involved in some way? Will there be a third question now the gaunt stranger is here?)

TO BE CONTINUED...



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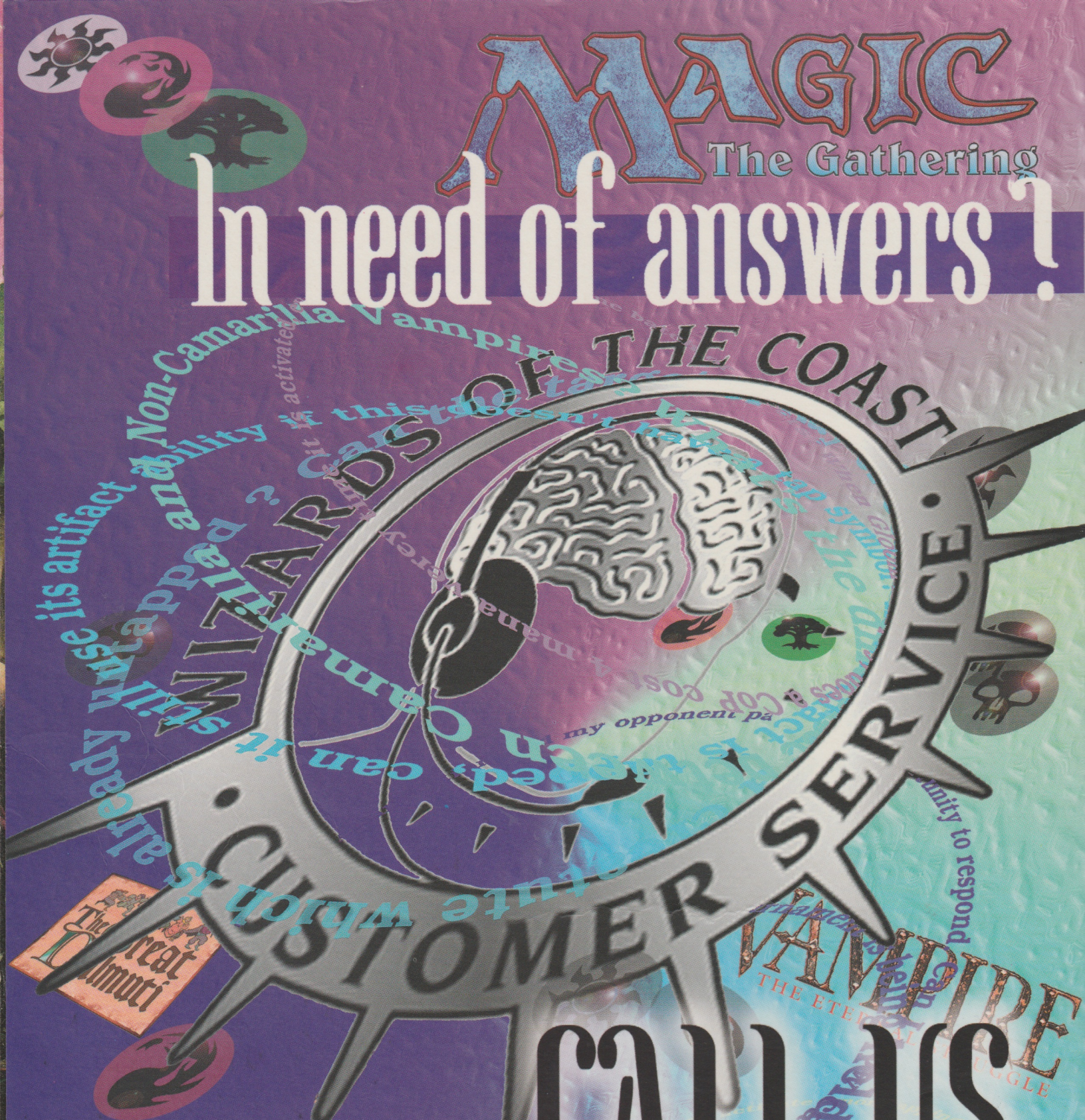
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