

#43

Abyss Magazine



ABYSS

Magazine

VO 11, NO 1

Issue #43

Spring '89

Editor/Publisher: David Nalle

Assistant Editors: Lew Bryson, Eric Olson

Contributing Editors: John Bashaw, John Davies, David Hargrave, Ian Hense, Carl Jones, Jan Mierik, Jon Schuller

Ragnarok Enterprises tries to publish *Abyss* at least quarterly and sometimes bi-monthly. Subscriptions are \$7 for 6 issues, \$13 for 12 issues and \$18 for 18 issues. Many back issues are available. Send an SASE for a complete list. The suggested retail price for this issue of *Abyss* is \$1.50. A sample copy is \$2 by mail.

Abyss and its staff take no responsibility for opinions expressed or statements made in *Abyss*. Send irate comments to the appropriate author c/o *Abyss*. We aren't here to mumble platitudes. We're here to keep gaming on track.

We welcome submissions of any fantasy or gaming material. Payment is made at a variable rate up to 2 cents per word in credit or cash. Artwork is also needed, paid at a parallel rate. Send an SASE for writer/artist guidelines. We assume no responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts, but if you are lucky we'll at least return rejected work. It might be a good idea to query us first with your ideas. Nothing is returned without an SASE.

All contents of *Abyss* #43 are copyright 1989 for the individual authors. All rights revert to the author or artist upon publication, but we reserve the right to reprint text or art paying at the same or a higher rate.

Editorial Offices

3716 Robinson Avenue, Austin, TX 78722

CONTENTS OF THIS ISSUE

Whisperings in the Abyss.....	3
Masters of the Game...A. Sadel	5
Spells by Design.....Dave Nalle	8
Echoes.....	9
In the Speculum.....	12
OriGencon.....Ian Hense	15
Travel Guides.....John Davies	18
Sigma Ballot/Awards.....	20

CONJURINGS

From the Abyss

I've had a devil of a time trying to figure out what volume and number this issue is supposed to be. I keep counting it over again and discovered that somewhere along the line the volume number got screwed up and so this issue actually has a lower volume number than the previous issue. I don't know why this is, but if you want to keep your issues in order, use the big sequential number on the cover and annoy whatever it says in the masthead.

As usual, this issue is delayed, but it is here, and I think it looks pretty good. There are some nice features and we had enough material left over that we are actually well on our way towards having issue #44 ready to go. Among the highlights of this issue are 'Spells By Design', which presents part of the spell design system from *WorldCraft*, the third book of the new edition of *Ysgarth*, a new Mazyrik tale by A. Sadel, a look at *Travel Guides* by John Davies, some great letters and reviews, plus a new feature, 'Whisperings from the Abyss', which is packed with unsubstantiated rumor and dangerous innuendo. Pay particular attention to the ballot for the SIGMA awards which is on the back cover. SIGMA needs your input to make the awards meaningful and all it costs you is a stamp.

Next issue we will have a new adventure, more of the same old features, plus new fiction and a special section of *Ysgarth* variants and rule modifications. Of course, your input is needed, and I'd like to make a small plea for articles, particularly articles on topics outside of our normal scope, on some of the stranger aspects of gaming, on less familiar games, or even on familiar games which we haven't given enough coverage. We want to expand our horizons and we're especially interested in games like *GURPS* and *Stormbringer*. Please help, because if you don't then I know who'll end up writing these articles.

Dave Nalle

Whisperings in the Abyss

Newsings and Musings

Wow, a new feature. If this column works, I'm going to be using it to look at what's going on in gaming, to gripe, to expound, to pass on rumor and news. Don't take it all too seriously. Little or no effort has been made to check the veracity of any of this, but each thing I pass on is believed by at least someone in gaming, and that makes it as significant as the truth, even if it is the result of industrial sabotage. Remember, much of what is said here will be rumor and conjecture and nothing is guaranteed to be any more true than the latest headlines in the *National Enquirer*.

Problems on the Hill

The latest pure rumor to splash down around here is that Avalon Hill is in bad shape and has been fighting off various take-over attempts from groups which include TSR. This is despite the fact that they seem to be producing better games than they have in quite a while. Speculation is that their ventures into computer games and other mass markets have been mismanaged and led to losses which their wargaming successes have not been able to offset. Despite these rumors, everything I've seen recently indicates that Avalon Hill is holding its own. Remember that every large game company has a person on their staff who is assigned the task of spreading spurious rumors about the competition.

Bowlerized AD&D

A recent issue of *Dragon* magazine gave us a virtually contentless preview of the new **Second Edition** of AD&D. From inside sources I can give you a better idea of what to expect. There are major improvements. The most notable being that the proficiency system has been expanded into a complete skill system with a fair bit of depth and variety. Supposedly combat is just as mucked up as ever, but a genuine effort has been made to keep things simple and logical. Hard to believe. Hard core AD&Ders should be alienated by the boatload. Here's the fun part. The game has been Bowlerized. All of the potentially offensive material has been removed. Every nasty spell, every pagan reference, every demonic or supernatural monster. From what I've heard the game now consists of throwing healing spells at threatening gophers, another change which will not sit well with the bloodthirsty munchkin hordes in their Ozzy Osborne tee-shirts. But then who ever accused TSR of having a spine.

Task Force Vanishes into Space

Supposedly Task Force Games, publishers of *Star Fleet Battles* has just folded up their operations and sold all their stock and copyrights to a computer company in California. The story is that they weren't doing all that badly, but not well enough to keep up the effort when the romance had died. The most interesting part is that the computer whizzes who have taken up the torch don't plan to release any more *Star Fleet Battles* material (it was one of the few sure money makers in the business), and plan to let it go out of print, disappointing a lot of slaving fans. Considering this I can't imagine why they took over TFG. Perhaps they are planning to make computer games of their other turkeys like *Heroes of Olympus*.

Marketing Madness

The most ironic thing I've heard recently is the tale of Milton Bradley and Toys 'R Us. You see, Milton Bradley produced this nice series of simple, flashy games for the wargaming market, like *Cesar's Legions*, *Axis & Allies*, *Fortress America* & *Shogun*. They had lots of nice plastic pieces, great art, and for the most part were pretty playable games. Sure the boxes were large, but they had to stuff lots of things into them. Well, you won't see any of these games anymore. They just weren't selling well enough. Seems that sales of each game were only around 20,000 copies



per month, and that's just too low for Milton Bradley to keep them in print. For most game companies selling 20,000 copies of something in a whole year would be respectable, but not for MB. Grossing over \$6 million per game per year just wasn't enough for them. But here's the really strange part. It seems that Toys 'R Us is the real culprit. The second reason for discontinuing the line was that the games were so big that they took up space on Toys 'R Us shelves which could be filled with more than twice as many smaller games at the same price. Apparently, when Toys 'R Us speaks Milton Bradley and many others are forced to listen. This chain has become such a dominant force in the mass market for games that some companies literally design their games specifically to fit their special packaging requirements. Toys 'R Us is so powerful that they can buy out entire print runs of games, can force local stores out of business by cutting their prices to where they make virtually no profit, and they even have been known to subsidize toy manufacturers whose products they think will be hits. All of this is nice for Toys 'R Us and for those companies willing to make their own integrity subservient to the whims of this vast market, but it is very bad for gamers, because it means that games like *Shogun* and *Fortress America*, which were damned good games have disappeared from the shelf and are unlikely to be seen again. Our loss probably means little to the MBAs who run Milton Bradley, but although they may not realize it, they lose out as well, because their ignorance of the gaming market has caused them to forfeit enough revenue to keep a small Central American nation operating for a year.

The Magazine Scene

Have you noticed that there aren't any good gaming magazines? *Dragon* has turned into a 100 page advertisement for TSR products. I remember a time when it at least attempted to cover a variety of topics. I remember when Gary Gygax actually wrote and published variants for games from other companies. Now it seems to be policy not to cover anything but TSR, and there are several feature sections which read more like promotional brochures than articles. I imagine that *Dragon* staffers take long, hot showers with wire scrub brushes when they go home at night.

How are things in England? Well, read the previous paragraph and substitute *White Dwarf* for *Dragon* and Games Workshop for TSR. Gaming journalism is dead. On both sides of the Atlantic it seems to be time to look out for number one.

What about the other magazines. Well, *Different Worlds* has vanished, owing me money to the grave. *SpaceGamer* claims it is still around. An issue in print would make that more convincing. Having gone through three different publishers in the last year and having produced one issue doesn't inspire one with confidence. The latest is that it is splitting into two magazines again and will be back shortly. I have nothing but respect for Anne Jaffe who has stuck with it through all of this, even enduring the slime-coating of being involved with Diverse Talents Incorporated. Best of all, *SpaceGamer* actually paid me for my last piece. The one magazine which seems to be doing well is *The Wargamer*, and although its audience is limited, it seems to be on schedule and well produced. *Adventurers Guild* has cut back to one issue a year. *Autoduel Quarterly* is down to two issues a year. General issues are few and far between.

What's filling the void? New magazines, that's what. The two main contenders in the new magazine category are the bold young efforts, *White Wolf* and *Gateways*. Contrary to popular opinion, it is possible to tell these two magazines apart. *Gateways* is the one with the nice typesetting and borrowed comic book covers. *White Wolf* is the one which tries to have as many as one meaningful article per issue. I have to ask. How many interviews with the creators of *ElfQuest* and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* can we stand? How much fawning and grovelling to the gaming establishment can these two magazines endure? Sure it is hard to start out a new magazine in the gaming marketplace, but does that mean that every review has to be a rave and that all of your features have to be gaming bigwigs expounding on why their games are so great? I also get a little tired of rabid excitement over licensed games. Yes, there are a lot of games based on movies and comic books. This doesn't mean they should be the primary focus of magazine coverage. *White Wolf* offers a little hope, with some earnest gaming variant material in some issues, but *Gateways* is more trendy and more cynical and has yet to present an issue with more in it than good looking fluff. I hold onto hope, but both magazines have been out for over a year and progress doesn't seem imminent.

So, the magazine scene is in bad shape. What can you do? If you're reading this I suspect you already know.

Reality Hits the Gaming Marketplace

The big news is out. Gaming companies have discovered what almost everyone else in gaming has known for about 10 years. There are a limited number of people who like role-playing and boardgames and nothing anyone can do is going to increase that number by more than a fraction. There isn't going to be another *Dungeons & Dragons* breakthrough, and those who are holding on for that kind of a market boom to come from one of their games are deluded. Small game companies seem to have known this for a long time and are content to produce good games for a limited market and get by with moderate sales in a field that interests them, but the larger companies are close enough to the big time to see what a company like Milton Bradley can bring in, so they keep yearning for that big breakthrough which will bring them into the mass market. The sad thing is that the breakthroughs have happened already. The fortunes have already been made, and the result is that these companies are now having to rethink where they are going, looking at level sales rather than booming success, and many are even deciding that it is not worth it and getting out of gaming altogether. I think that in the long run this will be a good thing, because it will leave only those companies who are dedicated to producing good games because they like what they are doing and want to do it well.

This is going to lead to a very different gaming world as companies reassess their futures and gaming continues beyond the boom phase. I think ultimately we'll have a lot more small to medium sized companies and much

better products available for the non mass-market gamer. This may also help gaming specialty stores once they also go through a realignment. Companies to look for in the future are those which have already based their plans on a limited marketplace, particularly Steve Jackson Games, which seems to be leading the way.

The Future

Not to be too negative, there is one breakthrough still to come, and someone is going to make a lot of money from it (I dream it might be me). In 1974 *Dungeons & Dragons* was the great innovator, more than tripling the size of gaming by introducing a totally new concept. Concepts that revolutionary are not likely, but some new twists on old ideas have done very well, particularly game-based books, though that market has now leveled off. The next big breakthrough is going to be interactive computer games, role-playing and strategy games run through computer networks which allow large numbers of players to participate simultaneously or in sequence. This revolution has already started. The problem is that no one can figure out how to make a real profit off of it. Selling the software doesn't bring in much because you only need a few hundred systems around the country to serve the demand for this sort of game. Charging fees to play as is done on Compuserve and Source works, but the games they are running are limited by the environment and the peripheral costs for accessing a network are just too high. I'd love to play games on Compuserve, but I stopped when I discovered my bills were over \$100 per month. The answer is good online games on local Bulletin Board Systems, but no real way has been found to make this pay. The company which will pull it off is the one which gets a multiple-user 800 number with a powerful computer set-up which allows the running of at least a half-dozen games of different types (RPG and Strategy), with a flat weekly or monthly fee per game, not coming to more than \$30 or so per month. The capital investment to make this work will be fairly high, but within the next couple of years someone will pull it off. If you have the money for a long distance call and want to get a taste of what can be done in this area on a shoestring, rev up your modem to as much as 2400bps and give Infinite Incarnations a call at 512/472-6905. It is the playtest node for some new online games which we are designing for bulletin board systems, including *Void Wars*, *Medieval Conquest* and *MageWars*.

On the Home Front

Ragnarok would like to be one of those companies which grow to meet the new gaming marketplace. If we had more money, more staff and more time this dream might come true, but right now our biggest hope is to try to catch up to the publication schedule which we've fallen rather far behind in the last year or so. Projects are backing up. Lots of items are completed and on the verge of release (maybe by the time you read this they are out), including *Cyberia*, *Dark Continents*, *Nightmare Realm* and others. Sales are up, and with the new format *Abyss* seems to be doing particularly well with sales in stores hitting new highs every month and increased advertising doing a lot to help out with the costs.

The one real annoyance we've hit in recent months is with *Dragon* magazine, where we've traditionally advertised. Under their current policies they won't let us advertise *Abyss* there, even though we've had ads there every year for the last 9 years, and they also won't let us advertise our potential best seller, the *Psychos & Slashers* series of games because of the same fears that have led to the 'cleaning-up' of the new edition of *AD&D*. Since there are no other magazines with anything like the circulation *Dragon* has we have had to fall back on our old standard of mass-mailing promotional material, which is less efficient and more expensive. Of course, in the last year or so response to ads in *Dragon* has been way down, perhaps the result of their increasingly self-promotional nature and resulting declines in sales and interest. Maybe stepping down our involvement with *Dragon* will ultimately be for the best. Nonetheless, look for our flashy new *To Challenge Tomorrow* ad in April. We're also exploring new advertising areas. Look for ads coming up in *Locus* and *Fantasy and Science Fiction*.

In the bizarre synchronicity department, take a look at George R. R. Martin's *Wild Cards* books. Then take a look at our game *Challengers*. Wow, great minds must think alike. Someone suggested suing, since *Challengers* was out first, but I like the *Wild Card* series and certainly don't believe you can copyright an idea. Besides, *Wild Cards* is so popular

Masters of the Game

A. Sadel

After three years Mazyrik had come to mistrust the road. Despite different language and scenery it provided a deceptive sense of continuity, a treacherous sameness. For many with whom he had travelled the road was the shortest route from birth to death, but for him people and places just seemed like milestones left behind to mark the miles of his flight.

Mazyrik travelled mostly by foot, but he had better time than usual from Vyonnes to Tours. A carter named Guibert took pity on Mazyrik near Ste. Etienne, carrying him sixty leagues in less than three days, though the fare of having to listen to Guibert's endless repertoire of Gascon notes was almost more than Mazyrik could bear to pay.

From Tours the walk north had been rough, with spring coming down hard from Normandy, bringing wind and storm. In Bauge there had been rumors of war. There was always talk of war in France. Resting on a bluff above the Loire and looking down at six English cogs poling and tacking their way towards Angers, Mazyrik began to believe the rumor.

Mazyrik didn't relish travelling through a land torn by war in the English style. Their campaign of raids and retreats left their victims harassed and frustrated, suspicious of strangers travelling in their midst. The best course was to travel by night, when the road would be cooler and more private.

Resolved, Mazyrik passed the rest of the day in caves above the river banks, trying to puzzle out the cryptic scratchings on their walls. By reflected light he made a number of sketches of the cave walls, copying down what might have been pictures or perhaps inscriptions. At nightfall he was ready to move on along the road which followed the course of the river towards Paris.

For the first hour of the night the road was quiet and empty, but before long Mazyrik found that he had unwelcome company. Ahead he could see the flash of lanterns in unsteady hands and not long after he heard the sound of voices. Mazyrik took to the safety of the woods. In their cover he could travel parallel to the road and avoid an unwelcome encounter.

From his sheltered trail a dozen paces from the road Mazyrik could see the encounter he had avoided. Six English soldiers had stopped a carter with a wagonload of wine, and while they 'inspected' the casks and indulged themselves liberally, they threw taunts, questions and blows at the young driver who was tied to one of the wheels of the cart.

Mazyrik hung his heavy road cloak over a tree limb and crept closer in the underbrush. When he reached the ditch by the side of the road he could see the scene more clearly. Six to one odds were hardly fair, and it seemed clear that the boy had no useful information to give them and was likely to pay for his ignorance with his life as the violence of the soldiers' play escalated.

Mazyrik cast around for ways he could help without exposing himself to the same dangerous odds. One good opportunity offered itself. Three lanterns had been placed on the ground around the cart and one of the Englishmen carried lanterns to provide light for two of his confederates who were searching the cart. Mazyrik had a way with fire.

A moment of thought, a word and a gesture. The flames in each of the lanterns shrank down to a pinpoint and then erupted as all the oil ignited at once. The glass in the lanterns shattered outward, flung wide on the force of expanding balls of flame. The soldier who held up a lantern fell to the ground, his arm and chest covered with flaming oil, his face sliced raw by shards of glass.

Oil from two of the lanterns had fallen on the ground and was burning slowly. Under Mazyrik's gaze the flames grew higher and spread to slowly encircle the cart. As the fire formed a semi-circle the soldiers backed away up the road before they could be surrounded, leaving their wounded companion behind.

Mazyrik searched quickly on the floor of the forest, found some twigs and dry grass and with a few deft motions of his hands he formed a small manlike stick-figure. Muttering an incantation and rubbing his forehead where a sharp pain was beginning, he threw the stick-man out into the flame. As the soldiers watched from a safe distance the flame drew in and transformed the stick figure, creating a large, manlike form of pure flame, which whistled like an ancient Djinn as it flew in pursuit of the soldiers, who wisely fled up the road.

Mazyrik was satisfied with the results of his efforts, but he was weak and the pain in his head was growing. He climbed up onto the road and cautiously made his way to where the wounded Englishman lay behind the cart. While he listened to the muffled cries of the young driver, he bent over the unconscious soldier. He rolled the charred and lacerated form over. In what seemed to be an act of mercy he drew a long knife

from his belt and smoothly slit the man's throat. Concealing his actions with his body, he bent down over the dying man and drank deeply of the blood which flowed from his wound, taking in sustenance and life energy in a way he found repugnant, but essential after such an exertion. Horrible though it was, and though he knew it damned him once again, there was an irresistible thrill in the invigorating efficiency of draining life from the living without having to consume dead flesh as others did.

In a few moments the soldier stopped breathing and the flow of blood slowed. Mazyrik cleaned his crimsoned lips and rose refreshed. He freed the pathetically thankful boy, who had been semi-conscious and had seen little of the sorceries which had saved him. He rode a short way with the boy, whose name was Gerard, parting company with him just before the village of Ste. Martin. He skirted the town and carried on towards Paris on foot.

A few hours before dawn low clouds had begun to gather, bringing rain and mist. By the time the sun had started to rise it was no use to look for its beacon in the east to show the direction to Paris. It was enough to hope to see the next bend in the road in the grey light and mist.

Paying more attention to his footing in the mud than to the road ahead, Mazyrik almost surprised and was surprised by another group of soldiers. Two knights walked ahead, squires led their horses and disgruntled men-at-arms trudged behind.

In the seconds he had before they looked up and spied him through the drizzle, Mazyrik dove off the road and made for an open spot between two large trees. One encounter with soldiers was enough for any journey. He found himself on a clean cut but little used path which seemed to parallel the road. The cover of tree branches kept off the worst of the rain and the surface of leaves and pine needles made surer footing than the slippery mud of the road.

Mazyrik had done a great deal of walking since the previous nightfall. He had covered much distance, but he was beginning to tire. He had not been sleeping well since Malecroix. Even with the rain he would have to rest or even attempt to sleep. Perhaps he could find a bower or some other shelter in the woods. He would certainly be safer resting in the woods than he would be if he camped nearer the road.

The forest gave good cover from the rain, with pine, laurel and thick scrub. Mazyrik came to a small stream which was running high and fast. He crossed nimbly on a path of rocks and rejoined the path on the far side, where the forest changed to tall oaks with clear ground between them. The oaks grew in surprisingly even rows, as if they had been planted and were tended by unseen gardeners.

Ahead among the oaks Mazyrik could barely see the outline of a building in the mists. As he got closer he could make out a wall and a tower. The wall seemed to have been breached long ago and the top of the tower must have fallen in, because it was jaggedly truncated where it disappeared into the mists above. Mazyrik climbed over the fallen rocks of the wall, and found the courtyard of the old chateau to be overgrown with bushes and nettles. The mists seemed to have gathered thicker within the fragmented walls and the rain was becoming heavier. The indistinct form of a keep loomed dark in the mists, presumably ruined like the rest of the chateau.

Ruined though it was, the nearest of the four towers was intact enough to offer some protection from the rain. Although the upper floors had fallen in and the center was filled with rubble, the stone stairs to the second level were intact and the space beneath them was dry and clear of fallen stones. Mazyrik laid his bedroll in this cramped shelter and lay down in the darkness created by stone and storm to get a few much needed hours of sleep.

For once, sleep came quickly and was deep and dreamless. Unfortunately, it ended much too soon. Mazyrik was awoken suddenly by the barking of a dog, and heard the sound of movement in the brush outside his shelter. As he peered out from under the stairs, Mazyrik was confronted by red-rimmed eyes belonging to a large boar, with long tusks and a bristly, buff-colored hide. The boar's companion, who had already voiced his presence appeared behind him. He was a huge dog of an unknown breed, clearly cousin to fighting mastiffs and tracking hounds. The two beasts regarded Mazyrik curiously, but apparently without hostility. A voice from outside the tower called them off.

"Gullin, Dormart, back off. That's no way to greet a guest."

A small man entered the ruined tower, clapping his hands to get attention. Dog and boar retreated slowly, and the man came forward to regard Mazyrik more closely, a scrutiny which Mazyrik returned with a bleary gaze.

The man who seemed to be taking these two strange animals for a

morning walk was dressed like a clown. Or he had been at one time. His clothes were an assemblage of patches of what must once have been rare, bright-hued cloth, whose color had long been worn to faded pastel tones. He stood with his hands on his hips. There was a broad smile on his lips, but something in his dark, sunken eyes made the smile more ironic than jovial. His welcome seemed genuine as he extended a hand to Mazyrik.

"Sorry to wake you. The pets can't spend too long cooped up in the keep. The hunt's in their blood."

Mazyrik remained silent and ignored the offered hand.

"Look, we thought there might some who needed shelter tonight. You don't have to stay out here. There's a bed and a fire inside, and you're welcome there. Lord knows you can't be what we were expecting. You look more like part of the road than a traveller on it, but the offer stands."

Mazyrik nodded in acceptance and took the man's hand to rise.

"If your bed is softer than these rocks, then I'm your guest. My name is Mazyrik."

"Welcome, then. I'm Tolier d'Agrimbois. This is the Chateau de la Fanda. First we'll introduce you to a bed and when you awaken perhaps you'll meet Sieur Guillon de la Fanda, the master of what's left of this pile of rocks. So come along."

Tolier whistled clear and loud to call his two charges, breaking into a light Gascon air as he led Mazyrik towards the keep.

The air had cleared somewhat to show that the keep was quite intact, ancient, but preserved from the collapse which afflicted the other walls and towers. Tolier ushered Mazyrik through the open doorway into a large, low-roofed hall, its roof blackened by smoke from generations of torches and candles. The walls were hung with the usual trophies. Two ash-hafted Frankish spears were crossed beneath a round Gaulish shield. A Saxon longsword hung between two Roman helmets. Faded tapestries softened the stone walls. Mazyrik could see that some concealed doorways or passages, presumably leading to kitchens and servants quarters.

The dog bounded across the hall through a large arch through an ante-chamber into a comfortable looking lounge. The boar shuffled along behind him. Despite the darkness within the keep, the light from a large hearth in the lounge showed Mazyrik that two well-stuffed chairs were drawn out before the fire, with a table and chess board between them over which two grey heads were bent in deep concentration.

A whistle drew Mazyrik's roving eyes to the broad staircase at the back of the hall where Tolier was gesturing upwards with a torch he had taken from the wall. Exhaustion won out over curiosity and Mazyrik followed.

The room was low-roofed, lit by an arrow slit and three candles. The bed was large, hard with oak and soft with down. Mazyrik hardly remembered bidding Tolier goodnight before the rare pleasure of dreamless sleep claimed him.

When Mazyrik awoke it was to the muffled echoes of music and the fractured light of dawn. He had slept through the rest of the day and night of storm and the new day had dawned clear and bright.

As he finished dressing, Mazyrik heard a scratching at the door of his room. He opened the door to find the dog, Dormart, waiting to lead him down to breakfast.

The dining hall was one of the secrets concealed behind the tapestries in the main hall. The walls were covered with dark velvet and silk. The floor was tiled in an intricate weave pattern. There was a long, low table with a dozen heavy chairs pulled up to it. Only one of these was occupied. Tolier sat near the head of the table, carving up a ham steak. A lute occupied the chair next to him. Another place was set near him and a silver serving tray was piled high with eggs, sausage and bread. No sign was to be seen of cook or servants. Dormart trotted down the dark passage to the kitchen.

Tolier gestured Mazyrik over with his knife.

"Sit. Eat. We're going to take a tour once you're fortified."

After the hearty breakfast and a sound night and day of sleep, Mazyrik felt stronger and more energetic than he had in weeks. Tolier slung his lute on his back and took Mazyrik on a tour of the keep. They saw long-disused dungeons and tunnels left by sappers years before. There was an armory with a neglected forge and every kind of weapon and armor. Room upon room contained treasures and curios collected over generations. They bypassed the lounge and its two strange occupants, and ended their tour on the roof of the keep.

In the clear morning the keep commanded an amazing view. Mazyrik could see for many miles, up and down the valley of the Loire. To the west he could see Ste. Martin where the white of English sails shone brightly through the smoke from the smoldering remains of the village which had been burnt during the night. In the east he saw glints off the helmets of French soldiers marching in to fortify Tours. He could see that the force of English at Ste. Martin was too small to face the French army. They must only be Chevauchiers, raiders sent up river to destroy and plunder.

"You see how the English burn everything they cannot steal and kill everyone they cannot ransom." Tolier gestured towards Ste. Martin.

"Yes, but is anyone better in war? In the south I saw French soldiers burn the homes of French farmers who lived at peace within the English domains."

"But the English make war without honor. Their infernal peasant levies pull knights from horseback with hooks. They burn fields of crops. They rob churches and extort money from landowners." Tolier laughed mirthlessly. "It is no wonder that the priests now say the litany, 'from battle and murder and from the English, Good Lord deliver us.'"

Mazyrik shrugged. "War is not a game. King John and his knights play at chivalry. They actually believe those fancies the trubadours dreamed up for the English a hundred years ago. Today the English make war a business. For them it is not a matter of the rulers grabbing land and glory. They take the pride and profits of their entire nation to war. They may be less noble, but they will win."

"They may win, but they remain wrong."

"Tolier, even a Jongleur should know that in war victory hardly ever goes to the virtuous. Virtue itself is a liability, and these are not the times of Roland and Oliver."

"Nor are these times for Trubadours and Jongleurs. I suppose that's why I hide in this rocky relic and write ballads for dead kings." Tolier took a last look west at the fires which were spreading through the fields around Ste. Martin. "Come, let's go below. It's time you met the Sieur."

Tolier led the way downstairs in distracted silence, picking out occasional chords on his lute.

In the lounge a low fire was already burning. Two large, comfortable chairs were pulled up before it. The table between them was inlaid with a field of squares of birch and cherry wood, a deep red and a pure white. They made a chessboard on which battled two armies, carved with exquisite detail from the same red and white woods. Beneath the table lay the boar and the dog, one at the foot of each chair. In the chairs sat two ancient men, richly dressed, their attention rapt on their game of chess.

The chessplayer on Mazyrik's right was short and broad chested, with a dark complexion, grey hair which might once have been black, broad shoulders and strong arms. His eyes when they finally looked up at Mazyrik, were so brown that they were almost black. As he played he scratched behind the ears of his hound, Dormart. He played with the red pieces.

The chessplayer on Mazyrik's left was taller and thinner. His hair was a pale mixture of blonde and grey. His eyes were a pale blue, almost grey or white. His hands were fine, like those of an artist, but scarred and calloused from hard labor. He rested one foot on the rump of his boar, Gullin, who seemed to be sleeping. He played with the white pieces.

Tolier pulled a straight-backed chair up to the table for Mazyrik. When a pause came in the game he bowed, gestured for Mazyrik to sit and made introductions. The red player was his master, Sieur Guillon de la Fanda. The white player was his guest and old friend, Sieur Lethiere.

Mazyrik took his seat while Tolier went to tend the fire. The two old men had nodded to acknowledge him, but it was clear they had no intention of speaking to him until they completed their current moves. While he waited, Mazyrik looked more closely at the unusual chess set, marvelling at the skill which had gone into making the small figures.

The detail of the pieces was incredible. Even the pawn which Guillon was about to take with his knight had such clear features that Mazyrik was sure he would know the model instantly should he meet him. Mazyrik said nothing as Guillon completed his move, though it was clear that it would place his knight in peril from Lethiere's queen.

The design of each piece was unique, and many of them did not follow traditional patterns. The white queen was presented as a mounted knight with a circlet crown, more a prince than a queen. The red queen appeared to be a cleric, an archbishop, or perhaps even the pope. Although the red castles were mighty fortresses, the white castles were ships with tall fighting towers. The white pawns bore longbows and spears. The red pawns carried crossbows and swords. Oddly, the two armies seemed to have been carved by different artists, both with great skill and detail, but clearly by different hands. The white pieces looked like the work of a trained artist, but the red pieces seemed more the product of untrained natural talent.

Apparently the rules they were playing by were as unusual as the pieces they played with. White had captured a large number of red pieces, including the red king, but the game seemed to go on unhindered. What's more, when Guillon took Lethiere's pawn he returned one of his own captured pawns to play. Clearly the rules by which they played were very special.

Guillon smiled when he removed Lethiere's pawn and replaced it with his own, but his mood changed when Lethiere laughed and took both pawns with his queen, commenting, "Sometimes you must sacrifice one piece to win two." His French had a harsh, unidentifiable accent.

Shaking his head in dismay, Guillon finally turned to regard Mazyrik. "You see, the game does not go so well. But, welcome to my home. I

hope you'll be able to stay with us for some time."

"Your hospitality is exceptional, the high point of my journey. After so long on the road, I'm impatient to get to Paris."

Guillon looked genuinely disappointed. "But what of the dangers of the road? There is a war out there."

"I'll continue to travel by night, and I'll soon be out of disputed territory. With care I should make it."

"By all means," broke in Lethiere, "Paris is a remarkable city. You should see its wonders soon. They may not be available much longer." He gave Guillon a glance.

"Then you are decided. Very well." Guillon turned to Tolier. "Have you shown our guest the armory yet?"

"No, Milord, though we have toured the rest of the keep."

"Well, it appears he will be with us until nightfall. The game has reached a critical point, so I leave it to you to amuse him. I hope that he will join us for supper before he departs."

As the two old men returned their attention to their game Tolier led Mazyrik into the main hall. Dormart and Gullin followed them, apparently aware that they were due for an outing.

Both men were already dressed for the forest. Mazyrik had only his one set of travelling clothes, and Tolier had anticipated the hunt and was dressed in breeches and jacket of soft leather, with sturdy Spanish boots.

They went out into a bright, hazy afternoon. Dormart and Gullin trotted ahead and waited for them by the door of the one intact tower. Tolier produced a large key and unlocked the door. By the light which spilled in Mazyrik could see that the bottom floor of the tower had been set aside as an armory. Weapons and armor gathered over generations were held in racks and chests around the room, enough to equip a small army. Tolier picked up a light fowling crossbow which was leaning on a bench near the door. He gestured expansively.

"Take your pick. There's no garrison here any longer and the master suggested that we offer you a gift."

Mazyrik looked around the room, at swords and shields and bows and bucklers. He ran one hand over a curved Saracen blade. He could barely make out the Arabic script on the hilt. He had learned to read the spidery letters from a tutor when he was a child. The name of the age-blackened Damascus blade appeared to be Mourglis. He remembered practicing with a similar blade in the courtyard of his father's castle, many years and many miles ago.

He shook his head. "I'm not sure I need a weapon. I'm a traveler, not a soldier."

Tolier looked disappointed, or perhaps annoyed.

Mazyrik's eyes landed on an old boar spear with a thick, ash haft. "But, I do need a staff, and who knows what we might find in the woods."

Tolier seemed relieved and threw the old spear to Mazyrik, who tested its strength and leaned on it, with the butt on firm on the ground.

Armed to their individual preferences, they followed Gullin and Dormart out of the ruined gate of the castle into the woods.

The hog and the hound seemed to know where they were going, scouting out ahead, noses to the ground. Mazyrik and Tolier followed behind at an easy pace. They splashed across the shallow, swift-running stream which ran between the castle and the highway.

Most of the hunt was downhill, leading to a forested valley which appeared to be familiar to Gullin and Dormart.

At the heart of the valley the trees cleared to reveal a brushy mound, the focus of dozens of small paths through the grass which terminated at the mouths of several deep burrows.

Gullin plodded around to the far side of the warren, bellowing and digging with his hooves and snout at one of the entrances. Dormart took up a position on the near side of the mound, crouching in the weeds, his great, black muzzle lowered in anticipation, his eyes fixed on the nearest entrances.

As Tolier and Mazyrik looked on at this expert rousting, a flood of small, grey rabbits erupted from the warren fleeing from Gullin's racket straight for Dormart's jaws.

The desperate rabbits tripped over each other and fell sprawling among the bushes in their haste, a scene which would have been comical had not the great jaws of Dormart been waiting to snatch them up and snap their necks with a single shake of his head. As soon as one grey furball was bloodied and broken he threw it aside and snapped up another. A few of the fleetest made for the trees, Tolier pinned them to the ground with well placed bolts from his crossbow.

Mazyrik looked on in horror. It wasn't his place to object, but this was far from the hunting he had known in his youth on his father's estate. As the Baron's son it was his responsibility to keep the village flocks safe from wolves, and a few times every winter from the time he was blooded at fourteen he had gone out with his father's huntsmen to hunt a wolf who had strayed too close to the village and estates in search of food.

That had been hunting, with a dangerous quarry and for the good of the community. This was just slaughter. After Gullin had joined in to root out the reluctant victims hiding in the brush more than a score of grey

and red corpses lay in the dirt, far more than Tolier and his masters could eat before they spoiled. It was slaughter for slaughter's sake and despite all the death he had seen in his life Mazyrik found it repulsive.

Gullin and Dormart were picking up the bodies in their mouths and piling them at Tolier's feet, while he string them together with a sailmaker's needle and strong thread through their ears.

One of the crossbow bolts had brought down its target almost at Mazyrik's feet. Before Dormart could carry it away Mazyrik snatched it up, pulling the quarrel through the small, warm body while Dormart looked on.

Mazyrik felt the warm blood of the rabbit running between his fingers. There was blood all around, on the ground, on the grass, on the jaws of Gullin and Dormart. It was dazzling, like a bright light in his eyes. He raised the rabbit up, blood streaming down his arm. He had tasted the blood of rabbits before and had never smelled this rich and strong, like the pure blood of a human youth. He thought of the pleasure of bringing that running wound to his lips, but as he looked up he saw Tolier give him a quick, conspiratorial smile, and he decided that he would be wiser to take more conventional nourishment during his stay at the Chateau de la Fanda. With a shudder at the hunger in his soul he let the rabbit drop. It was the blood of innocents, blood he would not savor. He looked around at the clouded brown eyes of the bodies all around him and turned away to towards the soothing darkness of the woods.

When they returned to the ruined Chateau Tolier vanished into the kitchen with his hunting companions and their grizzly prizes and Mazyrik went to his room to rest and relax before resuming his journey that night.

When he came down several hours later, Tolier had prepared a rich stew of rabbit and leeks and the two old sieurs were already seated when Mazyrik arrived in the dining hall. He took a seat at the place set for him, but he found it hard to approach his heaping plate of stew with the same relish displayed around the table.

Tolier seemed slightly offended. "What, is our simple fare not good enough for you?" Without giving Mazyrik a chance to respond, he went on. "It seems he doesn't like our hunting methods."

Guillon and Lethiere exchanged smiles while Mazyrik sat in silence and ate slowly and deliberately. Despite his concerns the stew was good and he found himself unusually refreshed and invigorated after the meal.

After they rose from dinner Tolier began to clear the plates, while, to his great surprise, each of the old men took one of Mazyrik's arms and guided him into the library across the hall where their habitual chess game waited.

Mazyrik noticed that the board had been cleared and set up for a new game. Once seated each of the players picked up a pawn, choosing them with an odd degree care and deliberateness. They cradled the pawns in their hands, bent over, seeming to whisper strange secrets to them with more behind their actions than just the idle whims of old age.

When this ritual was completed, Guillon took both of the pawns and handed them to Mazyrik, asking him to hold one in each hand so that they could choose who would move first.

Humoring his hosts, Mazyrik took one pawn in each hand, and switched them from hand to hand behind his back until even he was not sure which hand held what color. When he finally held out his closed fists for the selection, the wood seemed strangely warm against his palms and fingers.

"I offer you the honors, Lethiere," Guillon demurred.

Lethiere thought for a moment and picked the right hand. Mazyrik seemed to feel the pawn almost squirm in his hand, and as he opened his palm to show Lethiere his selection the pawn seemed to leap from it and fall on the floor, where Guillon snatched it up.

"Ah, pity, Lethiere, you see it is red, so I will have the first move."

Mazyrik returned the white pawn to Lethiere and Guillon placed his piece back in the front line of his forces. Mazyrik noticed that the red pawn seemed different from its comrades. It looked taller and thinner and somehow more finely detailed in its carving.

The two old Sieurs turned their eyes to the board, their minds on the first move of the game, apparently dismissing Mazyrik from their thoughts.

Before Mazyrik had a chance to consider what had happened too deeply he heard the sound of Tolier's feet coming up behind him.

Tolier was carrying Mazyrik's rucksack and bedroll and a new black cloak with gold stitching on the hem in a pattern of hounds and stags.

On the way to the door Tolier offered directions. "You'll find that the river route to Paris is likely to be in English hands for the next few days. You might be better off avoiding Orleans, cutting west through Nivernais and then up to Troyes or Etampes." Tolier handed Mazyrik his pack and the cloak and pushed open the great door of the keep.

"Thank you for the advice and the hospitality."

"Think nothing of it. Perhaps you'll find your way here again sometime."

"Until then..." Mazyrik turned to leave, the pleasantries sounding

Continued on Page 19

Spells by Design

Dave Nalle

All spells in Ysgarth are identified by a three letter classification. This is a logical system which represents the methods by which the spell operates and is part of the underlying system by which the spells were designed and by which new spells can be designed. This system was used to design over 500 spells for SpellCraft, but it was not included there for reasons of space and because there may be Ysgarth GameMasters who don't want this information and the potential power of spell design available to all of their players. Sometimes too much information can be a dangerous thing and we recommend that access to this system be limited judiciously as seems appropriate to your campaign.

Each letter in the spell classification represents a specific quality of the spell. The first letter signifies the Medium, the material or substance with which the spell works. The second letter represents the Effect, what the spell does and how it operates. The third letter is the Target or Object, where and how the spell's operation is directed. Each of these adds certain costs to the spell and contributes to determining its characteristics, in combination with a Magnitude system which determines the level of magical power of the spell.

The Classifications

Given here are tables for the three classifications with their classification letter (CLS), what it applies to, a Rating (RAT) used in determining Spell Cost (CST) and an AP Value used in determining APC Cost (APC) and Fatigue Point Cost (FPC).

Medium

CLS	Description	RAT	APV
A	Spirit/Magical/Soul	6	6
B	Mental/Mind/Senses	5	4
C	Life/Flesh/Energy/Animal/Living Matter	4	5
D	Matter/Earth/Non-Living Solids	3	5
E	Liquid/Water/Fluids	3	4
F	Gas/Air	5	3
G	Radiant Energy/Heat/Light/Electricity	6	2
H	Non-Radiant Energy/Force/Non-Physical Matter	7	4

Effect

CLS	Description	RAT	APV
A	Communication	3	5
B	Detection/Information	5	3
C	Analysis/Prediction/Prophecy	6	12
D	Locate/Guidance	3	15
E	Intensification/Expansion/Reduction	4	5
F	Protection/Barrier	5	4
G	Repulsion/Misdirection/Deflection	2	2
H	Attraction/Gathering	4	6
I	Subdual/Stop/Arrest/Immobilize/Hold	2	3
J	Command/Direct/Animate	4	2
K	Transportation/Movement	6	3
L	Summoning	3	6
M	Creation	3	6
N	Envelope/Bind/Link/Join	4	2
O	Assimilate/Separate/Remove	7	5
P	Alter/Transform/Deform/Reform	6	7
Q	Heal/Afflict/Cure/Infect	6	10
R	Restore/Return to Previous Status	8	15
S	Eliminate/Destroy/Kill	8	9

Target/Object

CLS	Description	RAT	APV
A	All in Area/Locus/Radius	4	4
B	Specific Target/Entity (Distance not Limited)	3	3
C	Object or Target (Within Limited Area or Range)	2	6
D	Specific Substance or Type of Thing (Distance not Limited)	4	6
E	Self/Caster/Internal	4	2
F	Formation/Shaped/Creation	5	5
G	Missile/Aimed Targeting	3	1

Magnitude

The Magnitude (MAG) of a spell is based entirely on the specific characteristics you want a spell to have, and in combination with the values of RAT and APV for the CLS of the spell it is used to determine the various costs for using a spell.

Magnitude is based on three factors, Range (RAN), Duration (DUR) and Damage (DAM). Also factored in under Duration is Delay (DEL) and

Damage includes various forms of damage and also Resistance (RES) factors. Note that the three part breakdown of damage is for damage to living things, non-living objects and AP damage, respectively.

MAG	Notes/Resistance Levels	RAN	DUR	DAM
0	0 RAN Effects Caster/0 DUR Happens Instantly	S	I	0/0/0
1	Vegetable Resistance Level/Touch Range	T	CR	2/4/6
2	Animal Resistance Level	1M	Mi	4/8/12
3	Human & Lesser Spirit Resistance Level	3M	10Mi	6/12/18
4		10M	Ho	8/16/24
5	Extra Planal Distance Resistance for Summoning	30M	12Ho	10/20/30
6	Prime Spirit Resistance	100M	Da	12/24/36
7		300M	3Da	14/28/42
8	Information Gained & Return to Nature Resistance/Duration	1K	We	16/32/48
9	Greater Spirit Resistance	3K	2We	18/36/54
10	Human Fatal Resistance/Non-Physical Distance Resistance	10K	Mo	20/40/60
11		30K	Se	22/44/66
12		100K	Ye	24/48/72
13		300K	De	26/52/78
14		1KK	Ce	28/56/84
15	Unlimited DUR or RAN or Total Destruction DAM	3KK	Mil	30/60/90

In this chart under RAN S is Self, T is Touch, M is Meters, K is Kilometers and KK is units of 1 Million Meters. Under DUR I is instantaneous, CR is Combat Round, Mi is Minutes, Ho is Hours, Da is Days, We is Weeks, Mo is Months, Se is Seasons, Ye is Years, De is Decades, Ce is Centuries and Mil is Millenia.

The Formulae

All it takes to create a spell is to know what it does and how it does it and then find its appropriate stats as given for its Classification and Magnitude and then plug them into a couple of simple formulae.

To a certain degree how you classify spells and interpret some aspects of magnitude is up to you, but a look at the spells in SpellCraft and some common sense should give you an idea of where things fit. In these formulae Total MAG means the magnitudes for RAN, DUR, DAM, Resistance and anything else factored in all added together.

To find the LSP Cost (CST) of a spell use the formula $CST = (\text{Medium RAT} + \text{Effect RAT} + \text{Target RAT} + \text{Total MAG}) / 100$.

To find the APC of a spell use the formula $APC = (\text{Medium APV} \times \text{Effect APV} \times \text{Target APV} \times \text{Total MAG})$. Round off to lower increment of 50 or 100 if APC is over 500 or to lower 100 if APC is over 1000. For FPC divide APC by 50.

Mana Point Cost (MPC) for a spell is equal to its MAG exactly.

There are also some strange factors to be taken into consideration in some spells. If a spell does multiple kinds of damage count the MAG for each kind. When resistance is required (a Saving Throw), you must take into account the RES MAG of the normal target of the spell. If the spell has a naturally reduced save the RES MAG is doubled if the save is reduced by a third. Most saves are assumed to start at three times a specific characteristic. If a spell is passive and only does damage if encountered, rather than sending its damage to the target the MAG is halved. If damage can be altered by Damage Class the MAG is doubled and the MD of the effect, which is then altered for DC is equal to the DAM value. If a spell does damage for multiple rounds the magnitude is slightly modified. True MAG for the damage of such spells is the MAG of the DUR times the MAG of the DAM. This is treated as the MAG of the DAM and the MAG of the DUR are still figured in separately in the normal places. Some spells may also have delays factored in before they take effect. These count as essentially negative DUR, with the negative MAG equal to half the MAG of that time period if it were DUR instead of DEL.

Example

With this system you can create virtually any spell you want if you use sound judgement. For example, Rain of Slime would be classified as EMA, because slime is a liquid which is created and falls in a specified area, effecting everyone there. Its MAG would be 21, because it effects a 3M Radius (MAG 3), Lasts for an 10 Minutes (MAG 3) and does 30 AP Damage to everyone in the area (MAG 15). This would make the CST 7,

Continued on Page 19

ECHOES...

Dear Dave,

Just thought I'd drop you a line and tell you that I look forward to each and every issue of *ABYSS*, no matter how long I have to wait. Issue #42 looked fantastic--you've finally realized that it is no sin to have the magazine look good (and be legible), as long as the actual writing remains at a high level. And it's working.

Kudos to you and your band of merry staffers for keeping this magazine alive and well for so long. It fills a gap in the genre that should never be left open. As some of your readers may know, I used to publish a small magazine called *PHANTASY*. So I know some of the things which are involved in an effort such as *ABYSS*, which makes it easier to forgive the perpetual lateness of your publishing schedule, and even easier to be astonished at the fact that you're still at it.

I've noticed a 'second coming' of the fanzine/semi-prozine scene; in fact, recently many of the former staffers of *PHANTASY* gathered to contemplate a reincarnation of our 7 year-old venture. We opted to wait until we, as investors, were more financially secure and could risk such a project with its potential loses. So beware--you may encounter a familiar competitor/companion on your turf in the future!

Since you left the door open so nicely for me, here are a few responses to Jack Patterson and his critique of my article on the 'Gaming Gender Gap'.

First, let me say that I wrote the article about 4 years ago, and I had not seen it since then until when it was published. So I can't really stand behind everything in the article 100%. However, I still feel that the spirit of the piece, and its message--that too few women play our games, and that we should try to change this--is true.

Now, to answer Patterson's charges specifically:

1) I didn't attribute sex roles in the 19th century to sexism; I didn't even attribute them. What I said was that while the seeds of modern fantasy were taking root, women's role in society was that of homemaker, mother, wife. Nothing else. Whether this was by necessity or not--and I would contend that it was not--is irrelevant. The fact is, women were not valued in society and had few rights and many responsibilities.

2) How do you feel about the importance of homemaking and child-rearing? And what place does this question have in a magazine of fantasy/science fiction gaming?

3) I obviously don't go to the same bookstores you do, because I don't live in Virginia. But here in New York and Connecticut, the contemporary fantasy fiction books still feature scantily-clad females with huge bazoombas on the covers. Maybe we're a bit behind the times here; I don't know.

4) I'm not thirteen. You're not thirteen. Dave and his staff member are not thirteen. Most people who read *ABYSS* are not thirteen. My article was addressing the older, more mature gamers. It is they who would have the real power to change the face of gaming.

5) I take exception to your hackneyed, all-encompassing male/female view of the world. 'Male concerns' and 'female



concerns'? Come on, give it a rest. It's people like you who buy Barbie for their daughters and G. I. Joe for their sons without a second thought. I mean, it's fine if you don't like thinking about alternatives to the way it is 'supposed' to be. As for 'realistic pre-industrial or early industrial society'--please!! These are games, fantasy games. Orcs. Spaceships. Dragons. Magic. Demonology. Pantheons. Why can you suspend your belief in these improbabilities, yet you still must cling tenaciously like moss on a log to traditional ideas about male and female roles? Just how realistic do you want your gaming? Yes, I agree, if you're running a strictly historical game, then women are relegated to playing 'full-time mothers, prostitutes or amazons.' But few games are purely historical.

The gaming gender gap is here to stay as long as we continue to find excuses to keep our gaming sexist. There are many ways to do this; one is to object that women on our Earth have rarely if ever been in power or participants in battle; therefore our gaming cannot put them there. But logic like this would have stifled the genre years ago. There would be no fantasy gaming, no science fiction gaming, no cyberpunk, no superhero games--just plain historical role-playing games. The fact that our imagination allows us to create altered versions of our own history and future, replete with monsters, magic science and gods, implies that we can also alter the role of women in these make-believe worlds as well. To do this is to invite people who are currently turned off by our games to join in the fun. And that was the point of my original article.

There remains one more group to be heard on this issue: the women! Come on, female ABYSS readers (yes, both of you)--let us know how you feel about what we males are saying about you. Why don't more women play role-playing games? As exceptions to the rule, surely you can give us some insight.

*Evan Skolnick
New York, NY*

[Yes, there are female ABYSS readers, and this whole discussion would be more meaningful if they took part, so I urge them to join in. For my part, I think that what women are looking for in a RPG is very different from what men think they are looking for or are prepared to offer them. Even if we don't provide historically based subservient roles, in most campaign the alternative seems to be the sort of butch he-woman character, female in gender, but indistinguishable from her male companions. A lot of gaming women play this way, but few of them seem satisfied with it. I think that to attract more women to gaming you have to provide a gaming environment which is feminine. I don't mean a world of pink lace and bows, but situations which appeal to them in the way that traditional role-playing adventures appeal to males. Unfortunately I have no answers. I'm a man, so by nature I can only guess at what women want in a role-playing campaign, though I know that standard approaches to incorporating women don't work well enough. Perhaps someone will enlighten us.--DN]

Dear Dave,

Received ABYSS #42 yesterday, and while I agree with some of the comments from you and the other authors, I must point out that some facts were left out of the following articles:

1) 'Licensed to Kill'- While many of the game systems were poorly designed, some have become big hits with the gamers. Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles has sold over 50,000 copies and Star Wars is West End Games biggest seller, and the same goes for Mayfair Games' DC Heroes. One thing that licensed games have done for the hobby is that they sell in comic-book stores, which has brought more people into the games stores, which gets them to see the other games they can learn, and then they attend conventions to meet other gamers and gamecompanies. So, licensed games haven't been that bad on the hobby. To be quite honest, they have helped the hobby. Dave, some would feel that your article is just another example of the 'sour grapes' attitude that you displayed in the past.

2) 'Just Awards'- One major note of importance was left out of the article -- the academy retired DRAGON magazine from the awards, since it had won the best magazine award since day one. By doing this, it has allowed the smaller print run magazines a chance to win. In regards to the voting, whoever has been in charge has always had to take a lot of unfair abuse from the losers. They finally open it up to the public, which should prevent any ballot stuffing, as we have seen in the past, and people still complain. The best advice I can give the small companies is to make sure that everyone who can be a member of the AAGAD become one, so that they are fairly represented in the academy. Final notes: neither Avalon Hill nor Victory Games have any members in the AAGAD -- they feel that the awards don't mean anything! Also, TSR, according to my sources, doesn't sponsor any of their employees memberships in the academy -- so the

charges that the big companies have rigged the awards are totally unfounded.

3) Your constant attacks on TSR continue to amaze me. Granted, D&D isn't perfect, but it was the first and had nothing to go by, unlike Ysgarth and all of the other FRPGs on the market. As a playtester for the 2nd Edition of AD&D, we have attempted to correct some of the problems. Also, calling the gamers who buy it 'junkies' is totally uncalled for. Just because they don't buy Ysgarth is no excuse to call them names ('sour grapes' again, Dave). I wish I had a game that was that popular. In fact, I bet most companies wish that they had a game that sold like that.

*Jeff Albanese
Diverse Talents Incorporated
Cambria, CA*

[Ah yes, my 'sour grapes' are airing once again in ABYSS, my personal gripezone. Well meaning though Jeff is, I'm afraid his conclusions and observations are colored by his preconceptions. Let's examine what he has to say point by point. Just because a game system is popular, that doesn't make it a good game system. Many gamers will buy junk on a popular topic. That doesn't make it right to give them junk instead of quality. The fact that TMNT has sold 50,000 copies seems to make it a good game in Jeff's worldview. The popularity of the comic book sold all those copies of the game. The game might well have alienated 50,000 gamers from the industry forever. Buying good games will draw people into the hobby. Buying bad games hacked out to fit a popular license will expose people to gaming and convince them not to bother with it. This isn't 'helping' the hobby. Good of Jeff to point out that Dragon is no longer eligible for awards. Of course, 'Just Awards' didn't discuss that award category. As for opening the Origins Awards up to the public, that would be nice. That isn't what they have done. The new voting system is exactly the opposite. Jeff seems to be progressing backwards through time. The old voting system was open to the public. The new system is much less so. And what a constructive suggestion, that we should all go out and sign up for the AAGAD so we can stuff the ballot boxes for our games. I think Jeff proves that Avalon Hill and Victory Games and a growing number of other companies are right. The awards are meaningless. Finally, let's look at my attacks on TSR. I suppose my wildly favorable review of the new Top Secret in Abyss #42 falls in that classification. As for the 'junky' appellation, I think it really does apply to people who buy compulsively, based on a name or trademark rather than on a qualitative assessment. Actually, quite a few AD&D players have bought Ysgarth and been converted. When we started out we had no hopes of displacing AD&D in the marketplace and still don't have that goal. Sure we'd like to have a best selling game, but since we are a company run by designers we don't have sour grapes if a game is as good as we can make it and finds an audience which appreciates it. Even though we've only sold about 4,000 copies of Ysgarth over the years we know we've enhanced the gaming experience of each of those customers. That doesn't lead to sour grapes.--DN]

Dear Mr. Schuller,

I read with considerable mirth your diatribe against the ORIGINS Awards. The relative merits of your arguments aside, I would like

to point out at least one falsehood you've helped to perpetuate to which I take great offense. To the best of my knowledge, no employee of TAHGC is a member of the AAGAD. I like to think that has more to do with our poor showing in the awards since they have become a hypocritical political football dominated by 'inside' voting than your professed opinion that '*Brittania* is the first decent boardgame they've produced in years'. Pardon me for stepping on your taste...I didn't know GOD had nominated you as the sole arbitrator of what is good. Forgive me if I take solace in the reassuring letters of thousands of game enthusiasts who still believe our products are among the best available anywhere. I would like to pass judgement on your games, but unfortunately I am not familiar with any of them.

Donald J. Greenwood
Vice President, R&D
The Avalon Hill Game Co.
Baltimore, MD

[I seldom get to horn in here in *Echoes*. Thanks for the chance to share in the excitement. First, I'm glad you agree that the Origins Awards are a farce. Second, my apologies for suggesting that Avalon Hill was part of the block voting phenomenon. I only

recently became aware of your laudable policy of non-participation. Third, at the time I wrote the article *Brittania* genuinely was the first good Avalon Hill game I had seen since *Civilization* and *1830* which aren't even original Avalon Hill productions. Traditionally Avalon Hill has bought far better games than they have designed in-house, which shows good judgement, if nothing else. To put praise where it is due, recently I've played *Kremlin* and it is also an excellent game. I've also read through *Advanced Squad Leader* and found it rather impressive, so don't let me leave anyone with the impression that Avalon Hill should be written off. They went through a slump for a few years, but now I'd say they are back with a vengeance. As for passing judgement, it was an editorial article and I expressed opinions. I imagine that if you wrote reviews of games or an overview of an aspect of gaming Dave would consider it for publication and then your opinions would have the same exposure. I'd send you a game of mine to review if I had any to speak of. I have contributed to some Ragnarok projects, particularly the *Jahannam* series of adventure modules (I wrote 4 adventures and am now the editor for the series), but I'm an editorialist and game player more than a game designer. I will stand behind the Ragnarok line of games, some of which you must be familiar with, and when you judge them you judge the design philosophy to which I subscribe.--Jon Schuller]



"In 2188,
you are the last best hope
for mankind..."

Share the Adventure!

HIGH COLONIES

*The Science-Fiction
Role-Playing Game*

\$15.00

Waterford Publishing House Ltd.
Box 3742, Main Post Office
Vancouver, B.C., Canada
V6B 3Z1
(604) 253-4293

IN THE SPECULUM



Cyclopedia Talislanta

from Bard Games

by Stephan Michael Sechi

Every so often I have the pleasure of getting to review a gaming product which is about as good as gaming can get, something I can recommend without hesitation or reservation. *Cyclopedia Talislanta* is one of the finest game aids I've seen in a long time. This is a magazine size, softbound book with 92 pages and a very nicely illustrated cover. The interior design and illustrations are also excellent. The only immediate drawback is the price. At \$14 you could get twice as much material with some other game systems which we won't mention by name (editorial policy). Even so, it is almost worth that price.

The *Cyclopedia Talislanta* is just data on the world of Talislanta, with no analysis or discussion, just lots of useful material which shows how much that world has evolved in the last few years, in many more ways than just having its name changed. The book starts out with a map. Ok, I do have one complaint. The nice, four-color map is broken down to fit on 8 standard book pages. I would have loved to see it as an insert instead. The cost wouldn't have been any greater and the overall visual impact would have been better. The map is detailed and is followed by more than 20 pages of small print descriptions of every location mentioned on the map in as much detail as seems necessary, all in alphabetical order. This is excellent. If characters are travelling overland you need only look up where they are going to get a good general idea of what they might encounter. The descriptions don't go into too many specifics of events or adventure possibilities, but they tell enough about local inhabitants and environment to bring a few ideas to the mind of any imaginative GameMaster.

Most of the rest of the book is taken up with creature descriptions. These are in good detail, with every single one illustrated. Most descriptions take up a full page, except for the descriptions of insects, small animals and the like. Some very interesting monsters are described, a nice merging of fantasy and horror elements which show that the world of Talislanta has some real character. You get a definite feeling that nature is redder in tooth, claw and fang in Talislanta than it is in many other worlds, but that's not necessarily something to complain about. What I liked most about the creatures is that there is a certain consistency of style which gives a feeling of a coherent environment. There are also some excellent illustrations which really grab the imagination.

The book is rounded out with a few other items. There are some nice new character types, the only thing in the volume specifically limited to the Talislanta game system (though easily adapted to AD&D). I particularly liked the section on 'Talislantan Conveyances', which looks at ships, barges, war wagons and airships, with descriptions and illustrations. There are also new weapons, new skills and equipment to supplement what can be found in other Talislanta volumes.

There is very little in the *Cyclopedia Talislanta* which depends entirely on the Talislanta role-playing game to be useful, and there is a lot of material, especially the creatures which could be valuable in any role-playing campaign. This book is a great source of ideas and an example of exactly what game supplements should be like. It presents a good chunk of original, interesting information, in a very practical format, and if the price is a little steep, remember that in the gaming marketplace you could easily pay a lot more and get a lot less. (David Nalle)

Ars Magica

by Jonathan Tweet and Mark Rein-Hagen
from Lion Rampant

Ars Magica is a role-playing system brought to us from a new company previously known only for their somewhat dubious Whimsy Cards. It is an attractively produced book, typeset with an Apple Macintosh, full-size, with a glossy two-color cover and 160 pages of fairly dense text. The production is a nice balance of economy and function, but it is an attractive package.

Having met and gamed with the authors of *Ars Magica*, I approached the system with the intention of praising and promoting what I assumed would be an interesting and progressive game system. After becoming more familiar with the system I faced the depressing realization that I had a much harder task on my hands, that of explaining why a game whose designers are intelligent and imaginative and which tries very hard to be innovative is a dismal failure. It is easy to design a bad game by following standard formulae and not being creative enough. It is a much greater achievement to design a bad game which fails because of misguided enthusiasm and an ideology which is fundamentally flawed.

Ars Magica characters start with eight fairly standard characteristics. Instead of being on a positive scale, these characteristics can be either positive or negative on a -5 to +5 scale, allowing them to be used directly as die roll modifiers. These characteristics are determined by rolling two dice and subtracting one from the other, to get a positive or negative number from -5 to +5. The only degree of control which you have over your characteristics is in choosing two characteristics which will be average and one which will be positive, based on character class. This is a rather restrictive system, giving the player little control of how his character turns out. The 10 point characteristic range is too small for good differentiation of ability, as has been demonstrated in other flawed systems like Traveller, and the positive/negative range, though inventive, is more confusing than beneficial.

There are three character classes in *Ars Magica*, Magi, Grog and Companions. Magi are the focus of the game. Grog are fighters and little more. Companions are sort of like supermen who assist mages in various areas of physical and technical prowess. *Ars Magica* introduces the interesting concept that players have one Magi character and one Companion character, alternating play between the two depending on the situation, implying that it is the player, rather than the character who is important in play. This idea pretty much guarantees that no character will get fully developed and that the distinction between player and role will be permanently muddled. The character classes also have a very strong role in shaping the game, and which class you choose determines what abilities and options your character will have to a great extent. In a time when most game systems have thrown out the artificial strictures of the character class it is a surprise to see this sort of throw-back system.

The problems with *Ars Magica* as a role-playing game are summed up in the section on 'Personality', where you pick a character's personality from a list of 32 possible personality traits, against which you have to make rolls in the course of play. This is no longer role playing, but roll playing instead. Every effort is made here to replace imagination and creativity with randomness and rigidity. Rather than creating a character you have one imposed on you by the system.

There are some good elements in *Ars Magica*. The skill system is well worked out and even includes a simple, primitive form of skill contribution. There is a good selection of skills, though there are almost no non-adventuring skills. Apparently *Ars Magica* character don't do anything for a living but fight, steal and do magic. Combat also features some good ideas, but it involves 6 rolls (First Strike, Attack, Defense, Damage, Soak and Fatigue) to do what other equally detailed systems manage to do in 2 or 3 rolls. Everything in combat is handled with die modifiers, which also becomes somewhat cumbersome.

The system which works the best is probably the magic system, as one might expect from the name of the game. Spell casting is simple and logical, with a lot of varied options and a well developed magic resistance system. There are rules for mage duels and differentiation between the different sources of magical power. The spell casting system actually reads a bit like some magical boardgames from a few years back, like *Duel Magical* or *Warlock*, but as I see it that is an asset. There is a nice large selection of interesting and unusual spells, and rules for creating magic items and specialized aspects of magic. One particularly nice thing is the section on 'Wizards in Society', which makes an effort to fit magic into the social system logically. It involves a lot of rationalization, but is a helpful aid for those starting a campaign.

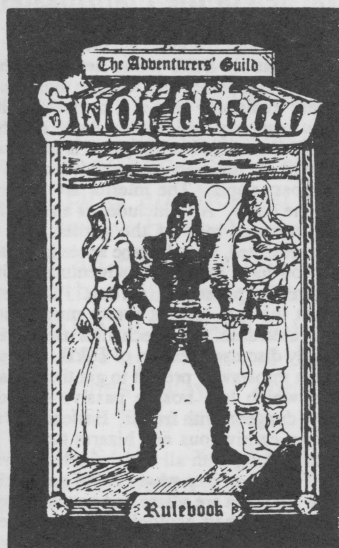
There is a 'Bestiary' of foes and creatures provided, and here the personality system seems to be an asset, as it gives an idea how those entities should be played. A fairly limited selection of demons, elementals and more common creatures is provided with guidelines for creating your own.

The final section of the rules covers 'Storytelling', and urges players to try 'troop-style' play, with characters shared and even with the world being shared. This may work for the designers of the system, but is a major step for most role-players to take and will not necessarily enhance their role-playing. There are suggestions for the 'Storyguide' (read GameMaster) in this section, including idiotic recommendations like that 'Whimsy Cards' be used to fill time with random events if you can't think of anything to do when running an adventure. Better just not to run it, really.

The most interesting aspect of *Ars Magica* is the character which the game seems to have. Through the techniques of rather odd social structuring and the use of Latin names for all sorts of game elements, the authors have given *Ars Magica* its own personality. Unfortunately, a lot of the time that personality seems like a contrived overlay designed to cover up the fact that the game really isn't all that original, is oriented heavily towards straight adventuring with no real world background, and this peculiar orientation away from individual role-playing towards group activities, a trend which runs very counter to the traditions of myth and literature. In *Ars Magica* you get glimpses of a campaign world which might be rather interesting, though apparently totally dominated by adventuring situations and characters, but you get little more than glimpses and it is likely that the campaign which produced the game is the only one which could make the game and the social design actually work.

Throughout *Ars Magica* the designers make a great point of emphasizing that all of their ideas and systems are intended to promote role-playing and character development. As they say in their conclusion, "we had one main concept lodged tightly in our minds--that was to make a role-playing game that helped us role play, that let players immerse themselves in other people's lives..." Unfortunately, this is exactly what *Ars Magica* fails to do. In fact, with these mechanics

and the basic concepts behind them, good role-playing would be virtually impossible. *Ars Magica* makes the individual secondary to the group and role-playing less significant than goal achievement. The mechanics inhibit role-playing and the situations towards which it is oriented are the old dungeon-delving chimera's of games like D&D. To give an off-the-cuff characterization of the game, *Ars Magica* is like playing an AD&D game in which two or more people fight an arena battle between parties of non-player characters from different modules. Sure, the mechanics are better than AD&D, but the ideas in the game seem to glorify all the errors and misconceptions most gamers have (hopefully) left behind and elevate deadly flaws in design as if they were laudable virtues. There are things in *Ars Magica* which are worth looking at, but don't put it on the top of your wish list. (David Nalle)



Swordtag

by Brett A. Dougherty
from The Adventurers' Guild

I suspect this is something new for these pages, a book of rules for live combat and role-playing using foam weapons. It is an inexpensively produced little book, digest sized, with 32 pages done on a typewriter and slightly reduced, from a company which clearly enjoys this kind of role-playing and produces a variety of paraphernalia to go with it. There are groups all around the country, in almost every community playing something like this with these or their own rules and they seem to have fun, and it is in the general role-playing family, so it deserves a review here.

Swordtag is a pretty simple variant on D&D, with the standard character classes and three characteristics, Strength, Intelligence and Knowledge, which can be chosen or determined based on real-world tests. Human, Dwarf, Elf and Gnome races are described. An alignment system is included with the warning that characters should never be of the evil alignment, which seems sort of restrictive. They explain that being evil is 'not a healthy thing to do for your mind', and suggest that it be left to the monsters (I suppose the people who play monsters have no minds left). The mechanics are pretty simple. You whack each other with well padded weapons. Each hit does a point of damage. There is a referee to set up scenarios and determine questionable outcomes. Armor provides protection from damage up to a point and there are rules for healing. One nice thing in this book in comparison to others I've seen is that the magic section is well detailed. Saving throws are determined by throwing a small ball. If you hit the target he fails his throw. There is a large selection of spells with details on costs, material components and how they should effect play. The limits on spell casting and availability are straight out of D&D. Also included is a selection of magic items.

Most of the mechanics of *Swordtag* are straight D&D. What is added is mostly material to interface with the real world, like suggestions for designing costumes and equipment, places to play and ways to set up scenarios and make all the mechanics work in the real world, plus a lot of common sense safety suggestions. As this sort of thing goes this is one of the more organized sets of mechanics which I have seen, but as role-playing goes they are extremely primitive. Certainly this sort of live-action role-playing isn't aimed at the

most sophisticated gamers, but it would be nice to see more progressive basic mechanics.

Having played in a live-action simulation group I know how fun this can be. You feel awfully silly running around in homemade armor and costumes, but if there aren't too many gawkers and you have a good imagination there is an interesting element of reality here which isn't found in other forms of role-playing. *Swordtag* and its more violent cousins like *Markland* or the *Society for Creative Anachronism*, are not for everyone, but they are worth looking into if you can find a group in your area. You might contact *Adventurers Guild* and see if they can guide you in the direction of a local group or ask your local parks department if they know of any groups using their facilities. (Carl Jones)

GURPS Space

from Steve Jackson Games
by Steve Jackson and Bill Barton

All the signs were bad when *GURPS Space* finally made it into my review box. It had been in production for years, was way past its deadline, and was already legendary in playtesting circles as a disaster of editorial conflicts. I saw Bill Barton's original manuscript two years ago, and heard many of his complaints about the hack job it had been given by Steve Jackson Games, and then when *Space* finally came out he wasn't even listed first in the credits. What could all of this mean? Was there any hope for *GURPS Space*? Well, despite all the editorial trimming, *GURPS Space* is still the longest *GURPS* supplement at 132 pages, and despite all the controversy, aside from a few predictable flaws, it is one of the better *GURPS* supplements to date. It's not at all clear who wrote what and where the praise and blame should fall, but all that time and work seems to have paid off.

You get an idea of the orientation of *GURPS Space* from the fact that it starts out by giving ideas on campaign design, including races, political systems, military and civilian organizations, with examples of the most popular types from the SF tradition. The rules become more technical in the next section which covers different types of space drives (broken down by technology level), including slower and faster than light types. General mechanics for drive costs and characteristics are also included, as well as for communication and detection equipment, all set-up to be customized to the campaign setting. Character creation is handled quickly in the next section. It includes suggested character types/occupations (an implied character class which is a recurring flaw in *GURPS*, though not fatal, just irksome), advantages and disadvantages, new skills and modifications to old skills. There are also special rules on jobs and wealth, plus excellent details on the effects of environment on human stock and on genetic manipulation. Finally, there is information on alien races. Race creation rules are unfortunately sketchy and the of the four examples only the 'Treefolk' aren't extremely anthropomorphic, but this does provide a place to start from. The section on 'Gadgets' provides information and all the hardware you would want in a *Space* campaign. The section of 'Weapons' is comprehensive and also includes some interesting variant weapons like the 'Tangler' and 'Screamer'. As an H. Beam Piper fan I was very disappointed to see that no rules for more traditional firearms in unusual environments were included and that they were brushed off as 'primitive'. Special rules for new weapon types are included. The 'Medicine' section is interesting, especially the unusual bits on cloning, 'Braintaping', bionics and new drugs. The section on 'Environments' is very good, but it seems odd to separate it from the rest of the campaign design material provided early in the book. There are lots of random tables (suspiciously reminiscent of the old Tyr game *Space Quest*), but you are also urged to design rather than roll-up your environment. What is particularly strange here is that inbetween the section on 'Environments' and 'Stars and Worlds' they have stuck in the starship design mechanics and combat rules. These starship mechanics are a bit limited, but will work. However, it would have made more sense to put them back where they were describing star drives so that they wouldn't have to reiterate a lot of that material and so that the universe design related material would not be broken up. In the same way they have the 'Planetary Civilizations' section stuck at the end of the book when it would have made more sense to combine it with the earlier section on interstellar society.

In short, there is lots of good material in *Space*, but some areas are covered a bit too briefly and the chapters are clearly organized in the wrong order, perhaps a symptom of hasty editing. One important

omission which should be mentioned is the lack of an adventure of the sort included in other *GURPS* books to give beginners something to work from. I suppose that *Space* was already too long, but a couple of short scenarios would have been nice to see.

GURPS Space tries to cover everything possible in space-going science fiction, and it is a pleasant surprise that it does a creditable job of it. What it lacks in character or originality it makes up for in breadth and variety. *GURPS Space* is sort of a primer for designing your own space campaign. It isn't a ready to play campaign like other *GURPS* supplements, but it does a good job of presenting the raw materials you need to design your own campaign with *GURPS* or with any basic role-playing mechanics. Give it a try. (David Nalle)

Star Traders

by David Ladyman
From Steve Jackson Games

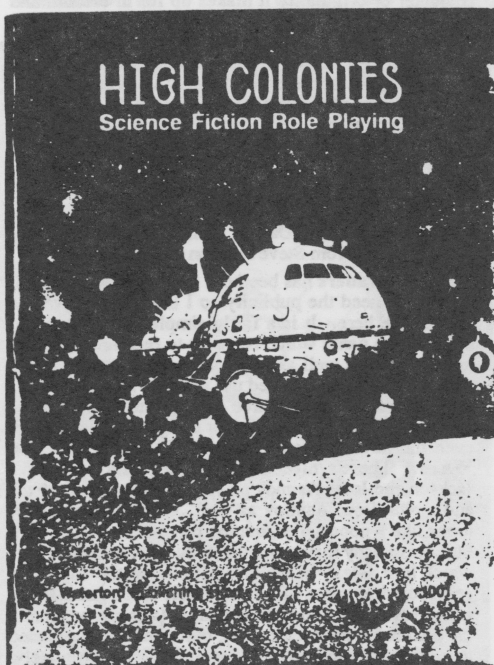
Star Traders has been out for a little while, but it seemed to need the publicity so I thought I'd give it a little space here. It is a fairly simple space trade and competition game which has a lot to recommend it and has not sold as well as it deserves. It is sort of ironic that even with the licensed use of Isaac Asimov's name *Star Traders* should have turned into such a white elephant for SJG. It comes in a big box, bigger than even the new editions of *Ogre*, *Illuminati* and *Car Wars*. There's nice cover art, a picture of Steve Jackson and Isaac Asimov playing the game on the back and a plug from Asimov as well. On the store shelf it looks like a good seller, but the production values are a little less flashy inside and that may be one of the things which hurt sales. In the original edition the 'full-color gameboard' is more of a flimsy, full-color game-sheet, which curls annoyingly on the edges (this can be seen in the picture on the back cover), but it has been upgraded to a nice, folding map in my copy. Unfortunately, full-color seems to mean several very basic colors and black, with no effort at graphics, just some geometric movement spaces. If they had changed the black back-drop of the board to a star-field like SPI did with some of their space games the overall appearance would have been much better and given a feel for the topic. As it is, the map looks singularly boring, sort of like chutes and ladders or something. The cards look cheesy, done in blue, looking rather like they were printed on a blueprint press. The counters are thin and unattractive and the rules are on flimsy paper and rather poorly printed. None of this stuff detracts from the quality of the game in any way, but it is puzzling. Without spending any more money SJG could have had someone with a decent sense of color and graphics design the board so that it was more eye-catching. When I look at the board for *Star Traders* I feel no desire to go any farther with the game. The mechanics are decent and deserve a better showcase. SJG's *Illuminati* board is a lot more effective and no more expensively produced. Basically, *Star Traders* was produced without any sense of visual style or appeal and that must be one of the things which hurt it in the marketplace.

As a game rather than a visual experience, *Star Traders* isn't bad. It is simple, plays in a couple of hours and provides some pretty good interaction between players as they build up trading stations and routes, compete for good cargoes and rack up money and prestige. There are some neat little features, like personality advantages for the traders and calamity cards. There is an advanced game which adds rules for imperial trading favoritism. I've had fun playing *Star Traders*. It is simple, fast and can be pretty competitive if you have a group of aggressive players. Its mechanical weakness is that it is too simple. More complexity and variety could have been added to the game to give it depth and maintain interest. After a few plays the game becomes familiar enough that it is less challenging and less interesting and ultimately after playing a few times you'll probably file it away with *Junto* and *Talisman*. The basic mechanics are sound, but it really needs to offer more. I'd like to see SJG come out with an expansion which makes the game more varied and challenging.

One thing which puzzles me is why they bothered with the Isaac Asimov license. Sure Asimov is popular, but he isn't known for the gameability of his books or for writing books on space trading topics. It would have been far more appropriate and appealing if the game were based on a license for Poul Anderson's *Polesotechnic League* stories. All Asimov seems to have given to this game is his name, and that is a pretty hollow form of licensing, really nothing more than an endorsement and a

way for him to make a nice fee, I assume.

Star Traders is the kind of game which I wouldn't recommend to every player, but if you play a lot of boardgames or have a club or group which likes to play beer and pretzels games it should definitely be part of your library. You won't want to play Star Traders endlessly, but it is certainly good for a few hours of fun now and then. (Jon Schuller)



HIGH COLONIES

Science Fiction Role Playing

High Colonies

by Eric Hotz and Edwin King
from Waterford Publishing

High Colonies is a space role-playing game from a new company and for a first effort it seems to be well produced, if beset by mechanical weaknesses. High Colonies is a full-size 104 page book with glossy covers and art which is liberally provided and appropriate, if not always of the highest quality. The typesetting is nice, the layout is clear and there isn't much wasted space.

Rather than going directly into mechanics as so many game systems do, High Colonies starts out with background and history, including a timeline from the present day to 2188 when the game is set. The time line is perhaps a bit longer than it needs to be, but it gives good background information. The background as it develops is fairly interesting, based around colonizing the solar system in closed-environment stations and the destruction of life on earth in a nuclear war. To add even more variety aliens have colonized parts of the solar system as well. There is also an alphabetical 'Gazette' of colonies/stations, which includes certain basic social and political facts, but not much in the way of more depth of description, except on some of the most important. Some of the groups owning or founding stations are sort of improbable, including the Ku Klux Klan, though that adds some nice variety. A section also details organizations, groups, alliances and political affiliations. All told, it is a pretty interesting background, easy to assimilate and explain to players.

The mechanics begin almost half way through the book. There are weaknesses from the very first, including the fact that characteristics are rolled with 3D6 rather than being done on a more contemporary system like point allocation. You also roll for birthplace and background. Skills are on a levelled system, bought with Skill Points which are found by totalling the characteristics and the character's age. Although skill levels are used as percentages in most applications, in combat they work as a plus or minus modifier, with the value of the skills rather decreased in those situations. Skill advancement seems rather rapid, based on doing things in combat, using skills and time and instruction. The system is comprehensive and features the RuneQuest-style success roll for training where one must roll higher than the skill level to gain more skill, leading to a self-limiting system of advancement. All skills essentially have the same cost, which means that differentiation for difficulty is not a feature of the game which detracts from realism considerably. There is a good selection of scientific, technical and combat skills,

but the social skills and other skills are rather limited. Overall the skill list is rather short and there are a number of areas where expansion would be valuable. While there are not character classes, there are several examples of character types given, presumably as a guideline for those who are more comfortable with character classes. There is a nice character sheet provided with a full listing of skills on it.

There are a number of weaknesses in combat. One of the most significant is that a primitive initiative system is used instead of an activity point type system, which makes random factors and characteristics rather too important, way over character choices and strategies. Surprise is a random factor as well, and each character is limited to two actions in combat, regardless of their nature or difficulty. Actually hitting in combat is fairly simple, with comparative rolls and modifiers, but six-sided dice are used, which makes it rather cumbersome. A hit location is then rolled, with no consideration of aimed blows. Hit location is very detailed, but totally random. Damage is modified for body armor. Melee combat follows the same model as missile combat, but the rules are clearly oriented towards firearms and no idea of hand to hand combat defenses or strategies is included. Aimed blows are added for melee combat as a separate roll which seems like an afterthought and doesn't mesh well with the rest of the system. There is differentiation for melee damage by weapon type, but no consideration of the different effects of different types of missile damage. Perhaps the most ridiculous element of this combat system is that healing is at a rate of one point per day, with no differentiation by type of damage or area, and you roll randomly to see which area of the body is healed. In my experience healing is not limited in this way in the real world, and I'd hate to have a nick on my finger and a broken leg and have the finger heal first while the leg healed not at all because of a random roll. Ship combat is also covered in this area and it seems to be pretty simple and playable, though relying a great deal on random rolls. On the whole the combat systems are simple, but at the same time rather inflexible and humorously limited in some areas, like healing.

After the combat system High Colonies moves on to other sub-systems, including an extensive random encounter section, random station design, information on the Chakon (resident aliens), Bio-Gens (Androids) and Bots (Robots) including some special combat rules. There is a glossary of weapons with illustrations, a glossary of equipment and costs, notes on adventure design and a short scenario.

High Colonies is a playable game with a good background. All the best material is put up front in the rule book and the rather less impressive mechanics are wisely kept towards the back. If you are attracted to the setting you can probably play with the mechanics which are provided, but you might be happier adapting something a little more believable and a little more flexible to replace them. I can't give High Colonies my highest recommendation, but it is certainly worth checking out if you are interested in an unusual SF campaign. (David Nalle)

Alone Against the Wendigo

by Glenn Rahman
from Chaosium

It seems that Call of Cthulhu is the ideal game for playing alone in the dark on the verge of insanity. Why else would Chaosium have produced all these excellent solo adventures for it? Alone Against the Wendigo is a detailed solo module in full-size format with a colorful if crude cover illustration and some 64 pages of text.

In this adventure which seems to be more or less based on some of the stories of August Derleth, you play Dr. L. C. Nadelman as you investigate some of the prehistoric myths of the great northwest, specifically the beliefs in the Wendigo. Naturally, this is a mistake if you value your sanity and bodily integrity, but naturally the quest for truth is worth the risks involved. The basic mechanical system of this solo adventure is nice and flexible, allowing you to customize the character to a certain degree, and the basic mechanics of Call of Cthulhu are simple enough that the adventure is easy to play with full use of the mechanics of the game, which gives it a lot more depth and variability than a lot of more rigid solos. In fact, if only a slight amount of additional mechanical explanation was included with the bare bones of the Basic Role Playing rules, even people completely unfamiliar with Call of Cthulhu could play this adventure and it could find a larger audience. The one big technical flaw in the adventure is a persistent

typo where all references to entry 324 are incorrect and have been replaced by hand with an ink stamp reading 364. Not a major flaw, but a bit disconcerting. If there is a weakness in the design of this adventure it is that it seems to rely more than other good solos on random rolls. There are many points at which a random die roll determines the sequence of events. This does add some interesting variety and a sense that everything is not pre-determined, but it also reduces the importance of skilled decision making in the play.

Alone Against the Wendigo is a pretty good solo adventure. It is not as overwhelming or as grim as Alone Against the Dark, but it can certainly provide a few hours of provocative solo adventuring. (John Davies)

Garden of the Plantmaster

by Robert J. Kuntz
from Creations Unlimited

It seems that old D&D hacks never die, they just form their own companies and work to preserve a great and mindless tradition. This is a campaign adventure from a new company which bills itself as 'The New Wave in FRP Games' (what irony). It is full-size, some 72 pages, with a uniquely unattractive cover in four colors on glossy paper. The interior art is somewhat better than the cover. Also included is a really horrible computer-generated map of the garden. The text is attractively presented, though some space is wasted.

What you have here is an adventure setting in a large, apparently possessed garden. The setting is unusual, but the rest of it is pretty much traditional D&D-type balderdash. The mechanics used here are yet another thinly disguised version of D&D. The scenario is basically a throwaway pretext to get the characters to the garden which is a hostile passive environment, essentially a dungeon with fronds. Basically, every type of poisonous, carnivorous and bizarre type of plant is covered here, along with all sorts of arboreal traps and surprises. You get an idea what kind of garden this is by the fact that the fauna are scarce and mutated, apparently having yielded up their ecological niche to the plants. There are some amazingly contrived elements here. Since there just has to be treasure in the garden, the Plantmaster left behind scrolls as decoration which contain spells, or else have a monetary value. Of course, those with spells self-destruct when used.

Nothing about this adventure is logical. In his introduction to running this mess the author recommends reading Clark Ashton Smith's "Garden of Adompha". If you want something worth role-playing take his hint and read Smith and ignore this adventure. What Garden of the Plantmaster has to recommend it is an large, illogical assortment of fairly wicked and inventive traps and trap situations. None of it makes any sense, but if you took a section or two out of here and moved it to a more believable setting you might have some fun with your players. Of course, a lot of space is just taken up with 'new' (rehashed) monsters and improbable random events. One nice surprise was that the encounter sections are not random, but give you several options to choose from instead. Somewhat annoying was the large section for rolling random effects from eating nasty things and random tables for generating flower and plant encounters. Somewhat more interesting is the brief section on herbal medicine presented at the end, which lists plants and their supposed curative properties.

There are some nice little bits here and there in Garden of the Plantmaster, but as an adventure it is a throwback and virtually unplayable unless you run a campaign with very little emphasis on reality. There is material here that could be useful in many campaigns, but it is up to your judgement whether those small rewards are worth picking up this module for anything more than the nostalgia value. (Jon Schuller)



ORIGENCON: STUDIES IN APPLIED MASS CRAMMING TECHNIQUES

It was with great expectations that I boarded the train in Chicago for Milwaukee and the great Origins/Gencon Gaming Conglomeration. I was expecting a convention of epic proportions, with record breaking numbers of gamers and fun. What I got was disgruntled and tired (with a few high points).

My first mistake was bad preparation. I had not planned on attending the Conglomeration. Then a business trip to Chicago with a side trip to California, with a small break between, afforded me the opportunity to attend. So I hopped aboard an Amtrak Luxury Liner and headed to Wisconsin. I arrived in Milwaukee with absolutely no plans for where to stay.

After an exasperating hour on the pay phone, I learned that Milwaukee had fewer hotels than Austin and there was no room at the inn. Finally, I was able to scrounge up a room at the Motel 6 near the airport (fifteen miles away). They could take me for **that** night only. They were booked for the rest of the four days of the con. So I was not looking forward to my stay on the surprisingly cold and chilly streets of Milwaukee.

I rented a car near the Motel 6 and journeyed forth into that wilderness they call Downtown Milwaukee and the huge convention center in which OriGencon was to be held. After paying the obligatory seven dollars to park, I ventured into the con itself. It was Wednesday and only the dealers were there. Using the many connections a writer for *Abyss* has, I was able to wangle a dealers badge from those gracious people at Texas Games (David Ladyman and Co.) Since I was also running GURPS for the Steve Jackson folk, I also wangled a GM's badge. (I got to run the official RPGA tourney. Boy was I thrilled.) So my collection of identification couldn't have been more complete.

The facility was truly huge. The building was more than adequate for the con, considering the halls were eventually filled with tables and overweight gamers (I'm not sure how many actually slept in the halls, but there were rumors of condos going up).

So my brief but informative tour of the actual facilities complete, I sauntered over to the Convention Annex, better known as the RPGA Hall of Hell. This was the basketball stadium that had been converted into a huge arena-like maze of thin aluminum tubing, sheets and tables. The corridors between these partitioned off gamer's havens had such cute epithets as "Dragon's Way" and "Goblin Alley". This was to be the place I would have the honor of running RPGA **GURPS** (and soon I would learn, to my horror, much more).

My next trip was to convention "HQ" so I could pick up the packet of information about my event. There,



thoroughly confused, I assaulted and annoyed event coordinators by mentioning my name, event and the fact that it was a Steve Jackson game I was running. Hearing the SJG name, they immediately breathed a sigh of relief and handed me a packet, assured that they had done their duty and I was out of their hair.

As I left with my packet and headed towards my car, thoroughly drenched in the ambience of the Con, I opened my packet and found I had been given the badge of the great Steve Jackson himself. According to the packet, I was in charge of the "Meet Steve Jackson Games" seminar. Much as the thought appealed to me, I didn't feel exactly qualified to run this seminar. Though I am sure most of the people attending would have been surprised to see that Steve Jackson was a portly tall guy instead of svelte and short with a beard.

Reluctantly (I still wanted to answer questions about *Necromancer*) I returned the packet. They assured me that if I returned tomorrow, I would receive the right packet.

I returned to my haven of luxury, Motel 6 and sat back and watched the *Magnificent Seven* with visions of gaming thousands in my head. Tomorrow would be a magical day.

In the morning, I awoke early, intent on arriving early enough to sign up for **Kingmaker**. I was surprised by a call from a friend who I wasn't sure would be attending (I had left a message with friends back home). He had extra space in his room. I would not be abandoned to the chilly summer evenings of Milwaukee.

I arrived and paid my seven dollars parking. I left the Hyatt parking garage and goggled at the hordes of people looped about about the convention hall. The convention opening was at least an hour away and

here were literally thousands of gamers standing about waiting to register or get tickets. I was, of course, appalled.

Using my quick wit (and my dealer and GM badges) I snuck in to the dealer room and awaited the opening of the ticket booths. Having made the decision to attend the con in some haste, I was not pre-registered. My *Tome of Wisdom* (con book) told me that all events were ticketed and that pre-registration had been limited to only three-quarters of the event. So I figured I had a good chance to get what I wanted, especially since, being the slime I am, I was already in the building and need only sidle up to the booths as they opened.

Having ten different choices written down for four days of gaming, I actually got into two of the events I wished. They opened the doors to the building first and I was crushed in a putrid heaping pile of gaming humanity. I was about twentieth in one of four lines. It was truly staggering.

But then I learned the true secret of the con. **GENERIC TICKETS!!!!** Yes, these were blank tickets that would get you into any unfilled event, if you just showed up with one. I bought ten immediately (the line for these babies stretched out of the building and down the block by the second day.) I just looked at what I wanted to play and showed up. I got in about 50% of the time.

The rest of the con I spent trying to find something interesting to play. I am a more discerning type of gamer (my gaming friends call it narrow minded), but only certain games interest me. I got into a great game of Kingmaker on a fantastic board. There were

miniatures for all of the nobles, ships and heirs with flags for the factions. I played in a fun new Avalon Hill game called **Kremlin**. I also witnessed the **Car Wars** championships on a three dimensional arena with miniatures cars.

The Auction was a huge conglomerated mess, but then when hasn't it been.

My RPGA event went rather well. Like all RPGA events, it was more like story time. The adventure had little to do with an actual rule system or independent thought. I read the adventure to the players and they were told how to respond and graded on how well they "role-played". At least that was how it was supposed to go. As it was we had a blast as I chopped the "Myth Adventures" rip-off to shreds. I also wound up running RPGA **AD&D** and **Paranoia** (which I have only a passing knowledge of.) Apparently many of the RPGA DM's forgot to attend. I'm surprised considering the wonderful \$2 TSR gift certificate that we got for running something.

I also got into a wonderful pick up game of **The Fantasy Trip** Arena Style (a personal favorite of mine).

All in all, the con was fun. It was poorly run, megalithic and far to much for the con organizers to handle, but then what con isn't. I don't think it was all that special being a combined Origins and Gen-Con. It seemed like a normal GenCon to me, with a few extra gamers thrown into the corners. There were the usual politics, GAMA tirades and other stuff, but very little of it trickled down to the normal gamers, who wound up unconscious in a damp corner of the carpeted hall, **Squad Leader** counters dangling from their foam flecked lips.

SORRY... NO DICE! - SWORDTAG

Complete Full Scale Fantasy
Game System for Outdoors
Comprehensive, yet Easy-To-
Learn Magic and Combat
Thrilling, Inexpensive, Safe

You won't need your dice bag... but you
will want your "longsword"!



Gamebook is only \$4.50 from:
THE ADVENTURERS' GUILD
Dept. R 401 New Castle Road
Marshalltown, Iowa 50158

Send for our free catalog of FRP and Swordtag

Two Thrilling Adventures in the Devastated World of **'TWILIGHT': 2000**™



Twilight: 2000 has taken you from the war-torn villages of Poland and Germany to the militarily active Persian Gulf, to the disruption and chaos which grips the United States itself. Become a member of the embattled 5th Division, cut off in Poland to fend for yourself with **Twilight: 2000**, the original boxed set of rules. Everything you need to play in a devastated, post-holocaust world. \$20.00. ISBN 0-943580-50-1

Satellite Down

Without sophisticated satellites, the weather has once again become an unknown variable. But a Soviet weather satellite has come down that contains records which can help predict the severity of the drought which is gripping North America. Your job is to retrieve it from its resting place—an island off the tip of Baja in Mexico, which is in the grips of a bloody civil war! \$7.00.

ISBN 1-55878-010-6

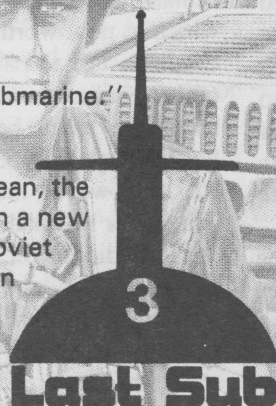
Boomer

"I thought we were the last submarine."

Last Sub Series 3

After a mission in the Mediterranean, the *City of Corpus Christi* is faced with a new problem. There is an operating Soviet sub (a "boomer") causing trouble in the area of the North Sea. The characters must make their way north to face the Soviets in a classic one-on-one submarine duel. 48 pages. \$7.00.

ISBN 1-55878-006-8



Last Sub

CHALLENGE

GDW's magazine of futuristic gaming is devoted to coverage of **Twilight: 2000**. Recent issues have contained new equipment, additional City Maker materials, and adventures set around the world. Available by subscription or from your local hobby store. \$3.25.

ISSN 0894-5535

GDW

PO Box 1646
Bloomington, IL 61702-1646

Available at your local hobby shop or direct from GDW. Add \$1 for handling.
For a free copy of our 1989 catalog write to: GDW, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646.



Travel Guides A Victorian Resource

John R. Davies

There are various books produced to help GameMasters prepare a role-playing campaign in the increasingly popular Victorian period. **Cthulhu by Gaslight** and **London by Night** are the two best and most familiar, but as a GameMaster you don't have to limit yourself to these second hand sources.

The Victorian period was one of the first historical eras in which leisure travel was feasible and people began to chronicle the interesting places to visit around the world, with great geographical, historical and sociological detail. The result of all this travelling was a the publication of a great number of excellent guidebooks between 1870 to 1940, a period which really extends well beyond the Victorian age and includes the standard period of **Call of Cthulhu**, **Daredevils** and other 'Indiana Jones' type games.

A good guidebook offers all the detail a GameMaster needs to design a campaign background and the Victorian period is the ideal nexus where good documentation and possibilities for adventure coexist. These guides provide maps, building plans and detailed descriptions of institutions and important buildings. Some of the best even provide historical outlines, language primers and details on regional folklore and mythology. Some of these guides are so good that people are still using them today, even though events of the last fifty years have significantly changed much of the terrain they cover. By any measure they are far superior to modern guides like the **Michelin** or **Fodor** guides.

Unquestionably the best guidebooks for this period are the **Baedeker Guides** published beginning in the 1870s by Karl Baedeker and Sons of Leipzig in German, English and French. The earlier guides cover Europe and North America in great detail, though after 1900 areas in the Middle East and Far East were added to the selection. **Baedeker guides** are still published today, still in their characteristic red covers, but their quality is not nearly as high as it once was, based only loosely on the original guides and presented in far less detail.

The great thing about **Baedeker** guides is the level of detail which they provide. A good **Baedeker** guide will include everything down to the names of the best restaurants, important public officials and where to go to buy a good cigar, including details on the costs of transportation, lodging and essential purchases. Many of the guides even have extensive sections by historians and other experts like E. A. Wallis Budge on Egypt and Henri Pirenne on Medieval France. The building plans many guides feature are ready-made settings for encounters and incidents and the rest of the background detail is the kind of substance which a good campaign needs. Not only are there guides for nations and specific regions, The Rhine and The Alps for example, but there are also guides to major cities, like Paris, London and Environs and Constantinople.

There are two problems with **Baedeker** guides. The first is that when publication of new **Baedekers** was suspended in the

1930s they had not yet covered many of the really exotic locales which make some of the best adventure settings. Secondly, in later years when they did begin to branch out their print runs were smaller and copies of later editions in English, or any language for that matter, are rather rare. The result of this is that while popular early guides are rather easy to find, the more interesting exotic guides are extremely difficult to find in English and often unbelievably expensive. I recently saw my first **Baedekers Russia** (1904 German Edition) priced at \$200 and it sold within the day, and the buyer got a real bargain at that price. I've been looking for years and some guides like **China**, **St. Petersburg**, **India**, **The Carribean** and **Constantinople** are virtually non-existent in any language and I can only imagine their price. My most exciting recent purchase was an excellent copy of **Baedekers United States** (1899) for only \$25 when it is listed at over \$300. The 1917 edition of **Russia** was so rare and in such demand that it was reprinted in a facsimile edition in the early 1970s which is now worth almost \$100 itself. It's unrealistic for most GameMasters to pay \$700 or \$800 for a 1917 **Russia** or a 1930s **China**, or almost \$2000 for a **St. Petersburg** or **India**, however useful they might be. Sometimes you can find bargains. My 1892 **Egypt** cost only \$38 a few years ago and is now worth almost \$200. However, most **Baedekers**, especially the various regional editions for England, France, Germany and Italy should be available in early editions for less than \$20. Prices have increased a good bit in recent years, so if you are going to buy **Baedekers**, do it now. Assuming you don't want to take on this kind of expense and can't find any bargains, think about libraries. Most university libraries should have a fair selection of **Baedekers** available, often including rare editions which you won't find elsewhere. Scarcity has increased in recent years as private collectors have been snapping up copies, but most university libraries probably picked up their share of **Baedekers** before they became so collectable.

Baedekers were so successful in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that they were virtually synonymous with the idea of the guide book. In most cases, if you were going somewhere there was no other guide to consider taking. Inevitably people began to imitate **Baedekers**. The first great imitator was Muirhead, one of Baedeker's researchers who got French backing to start his own line of guides which later became the moderately successful **Guides Bleu**, which cover about as many regions as **Baedekers**, but although their text is fairly good their maps and plans are far fewer and of inferior quality. By the early 1900s guides of all sorts had proliferated, many of them English, like **Terry's** or **Baedley's**. Most imitated **Baedekers** in style and format, the most popular alternative format being the 'Through-Route', the guide which traces a route of travel by train or land or sea, structuring what it covers around the stops on the route, rather than by country or region.

The idea of the 'Through-Route' is an element in many

Baedeker guides, which organize their descriptions of towns and cities along rail routes. The best publishers of purely 'Through-Route' type guides were English. The first great travel agency, Thomas Cook and Sons, published fairly good guides for exotic locales and routes to the Far East. They feature far less detail than **Baedekers**, except for good travel and lodging info and fair maps. Also good are **Bradshaws** guides which follow the common practice of the early 1900s, being the same size and color as a **Baedekers** guide and featuring a name beginning with 'B'. **Bradshaws** are pretty well detailed, but their maps, plans and background are not up to the level of **Baedekers** because they cover long routes too superficially, rather than going into detail on a specific region.

Probably the best of all the **Baedekers** imitations are the **Baedley** guides, visually cloning the **Baedeker** style, they actually succeeded in providing good maps and plans, excellent textual detail and even introductions and texts by contemporary historians and experts. The limitation of the **Baedley** guides is that they deal exclusively with the British Isles. Their detail for local regions like Fowey in Cornwall or the Scottish Highlands is astounding and if you really want to flesh out a particular British setting they are a great resource. Of course, another problem is that I've never seen a **Baedley** guide for sale in the United States, and in general it is harder to find good European guides, except **Baedekers**, here. In England they are considerably less expensive than **Baedekers** from the same period.

There are lots of other guide books from all different countries and in many different styles. Many guide books were produced as forms of advertising for transportation companies, hotels and other businesses in cities the guides cover. Sometimes this sort of guide is pretty sketchy on history and detail, but often the advertisements themselves are great sources of information on prices and facilities available. It is interesting to note that the best guides, **Baedekers**, **Muirheads** and **Baedleys** feature no advertisements at all.

Once you get hold of a good guide for a region you want to use as a setting, how do you make the best use of it? In general a campaign in a relatively recent historical period is strengthened by having firm underpinnings in fact. If you can give real names to places and people, if you can describe scenes accurately and show conviction that the background you present is the way it really was, your players will believe in the setting you have created. Good guide books like **Baedekers** were often bought as an alternative to taking a trip abroad, because they gave readers so much detailed information that they felt they were somewhere far off and fantastic without stepping outside of their parlor. Guide books were ideal for the English because they loved the idea of foreign travel but preferred it without the contamination of real, living wogs. This quality of making their subject real without having to go there is exactly what you need to make a role-playing setting work, and this is exactly what you can get out of a good guidebook. In addition, guidebooks contemporary with the period in which you are playing give this kind of realism for the period as well as the place. **Baedekers** are often salted with information and recommendations which could only come from a particular place and time, for example when the 1917 **Baedekers** guide to Russia suggests taking a gun when travelling in Central Asia for protection against bandits. That is the sort of information which really brings a far off time and place to life.

Good guidebooks from any period are the ultimate resource for role-playing. The purposes for which they are designed are

coincidentally almost identical to the applications to which GameMasters can put them. Even for earlier periods travelogues and memoirs (very popular in the 17th and 18th centuries) can provide excellent information of the same sort. Even going as far back as the Middle Ages there are resources like Chaucer's **Canterbury Tales** and Boccaccio's **Decameron** which provide a lot of the same kind of details, sort of like guidebooks to their era, if not as much to specific places. If you want to have a good campaign which your players believe is real you are making a mistake to limit yourself to the material provided in standard game systems. These resources are there, they are accessible, and they are excellent. Use them to your best advantage.

Continued from Page 4

that perhaps people will discover that **Challengers** features a virtually identical world-background and start buying copies by the boatload. We have plenty in stock, so think about it!

Despite delays and problems, **Ragnarok** carries on with the tenacity which has kept us going all these years and we still promise to bring you the best gaming material around, however late, bizarre or obscure it may be.

Continued from Page 7

hollow in his ears. The door closed behind him and he found a day which was warm and windy, stirring up dust between the ruined walls.

Mazyrik traced his steps back towards the road. The embroidered cloak felt heavy on his arm and as he passed out of the ruins of the castle walls into an overgrown orchard he decided that it was a burden he could well do without on his travels.

As Mazyrik hung the cloak over the branch of an apple tree something crunched under his foot. Partly buried in the grass and loam around the base of the tree were several dry and rotted boards which still showed the traces of fine carving in a Gascon style. Lying next to the boards was a carved knob, worn down by age, which might once have been a tuning key from a string instrument. A white pebble near it might once have been a finger bone.

Mazyrik took down the cloak again and wrapped up those shattered remnants of the past and lay them in the crook of a branch above his head.

Leaving the keep and its mysteries behind him, Mazyrik set out along the river road to Paris.

Continued from Page 8

because you round down. The APC would be 2000 (rounded down again) and the FPC would be 40.

Conclusion

This is a versatile, flexible, and potentially powerful system and GameMasters should take some care in how available it is to players and should reserve approval for spells which are created. The system is designed to be balanced so that nothing outrageous or inappropriate is created, but the mechanics of spell design involve a lot of interpretation and analysis and GMs should make sure players are not cutting corners and that the spells they create fit in with the campaign.



1989 SIGMA AWARDS

Any game or game-related product released or produced in the calendar year 1988 is eligible for the SIGMA Awards. Any interested gamer may vote in the SIGMA Awards using this ballot or any reasonable facsimile. Only one ballot per person. Ballots are not valid unless they are signed and include a verifiable name and address. You may vote for up to three products in each category. If a second round of voting is required, anyone who voted in the first ballot will receive a final ballot. A final selection of a winner and a 'Honorable Mention' will be made in each category. Please send all ballots to the address provided below by August 8th, 1989.

BEST ROLE-PLAYING GAME

BEST RPG AID/SUPPLEMENT

BEST STRATEGY GAME

BEST STRATEGY GAME AID

BEST MINIATURE FIGURE

BEST COMPUTER GAME

BEST PLAY-BY-MAIL GAME

BEST PERIODICAL

NAME: _____
 ADDRESS: _____
 CITY: _____ STATE: _____ ZIP CODE: _____

SIGMA

Society of Independent Game Manufacturers
 3716 Robinson Avenue, Austin, TX 78722

SIGMA AWARDS 1988

Society of Independent Game Manufacturers

Best Role-Playing Game

Winner: **Megatraveller** (GDW)
 Honorable Mention: **Star Wars** (West End)

Best RPG Aid/Supplement

Winner: **Star Wars Source Book** (West End)
 Honorable Mention: **SpellCraft** (Ragnarok)

Best Strategy Game

Winner: **Shogun** (Milton Bradley)
 Honorable Mention: **Kamp Killjoy** (Ragnarok)

Best Strategy Game Aid

Winner: **The Talisman Dungeon** (Games Workshop)
 Honorable Mention: **Ogre Reinforcement Pack** (Steve Jackson)

Best Miniature Figure

Winner: **Groo the Wanderer** (Dark Horse)
 Honorable Mention: **American Civil War** (Stone Mountain)

Best Computer Game

Winner: **Ultima IV** (Origin Systems)
 Honorable Mention: **Pirates** (MicroProse)

Best Play-by-Mail Game

Winner: **Nuclear Destruction** (Flying Buffalo)
 Honorable Mention: **It's a Crime** (Adventures by Mail)

Best Periodical

Winner: **Abyss Magazine**
 Honorable Mention: **Gateways**

RAGNAROK ENTERPRISES

3716 Robinson Avenue, Austin, TX 78722
 TEL: 512/472-6534 BBS: 512/472-6905

