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Sing of Arms and the Man...

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Contents of *Abyss* #46

Whom the Gods Destroy...	Dave Nalle	3
GenCon '90	Joseph Anthon	6
The World of Abaddon	Dave Nalle	7
Torg Reviewed	Tom Bagwell	11
Improve Your Spelling	Hans Dykstra	12
In the Speculum		14
Spells in Silence	Eric Olson	18
Fortune's Fools	Jan Mierik	19

CONJURINGS from the Abyss

Well, another decade, another issue, at least sometimes it seems that way. As has happened more than once, this issue is a good bit behind schedule. But at least it is here. And chock full of goodies as well, I might add.

Not only are there more articles and more text in this issue than in any recent issue of comparable size, but this issue also features the surprise return of Eric Olson to our pages. Don't get too excited and expect more Olson articles in the near future. From what we can tell Eric is probably somewhere in the Persian Gulf right now and his return rests in the hands of the powers struggling for dominance in that region. 'Spells in Silence' is an older Olson piece resurrected for your amusement. I also heartily recommend some of the features by new writers, including Joseph Anthony's review of GenCon '90 and Tom Bagwell's review of West End Games' new **Torg** role-playing system. All in all, a good issue, so read every word.

On the downside, you may note the departure of David Hargrave from our masthead. We ept him there in honor of his great contributions to *Abyss* in its early years and his seminal influence in role-playing. I'm afraid that David is no longer with us, with role-playing or with this mortal world, a great loss to role-playing and to Arduin fans everywhere. If you want to remember David, consider this a memorial issue in his honor.

Moving on. As we promise so often, look for another issue soon. We're serious this time. There's a very good chance that we can get another issue of *Abyss* out surprisingly quickly because we are developing a large backlog of articles, easily enough to fill another issue.

Dave Nalle



Whom the Gods Destroy...

The worlds of gaming tend to contain all manner of unusual situations which challenge and even threaten the minds of the characters involved. Some games, like **Call of Cthulhu** are specifically oriented towards mind-chilling horror, but others which are generally more innocent, like most fantasy games, have moments when characters encounter beings or situations which are hard for their weak minds to cope with. It is natural that some minds, when faced with the unknowable, will break or at least become bent and twisted, and in many campaigns insanity can become a major factor in an adventure or in the life of a character. Unfortunately, in too many games, most notably **Advanced Dungeons and Dragons** and **Call of Cthulhu**, insanity is handled cursorily and clumsily, with random charts and no guidelines for the logical application of the many different kinds of madness which exist.

Generally madness comes into a campaign from one of two sources. It is either introduced as part of a character's personality, by the choice of the player or GameMaster, or it is encountered and inflicted upon a character. Madness from the former source tends to be relatively mild, while the latter source can produce all levels of affliction. Some players feel that having some sort of mild phobia or other mental affliction gives their character personality, and while this is not the most sophisticated way to develop role-playing, some GMs encourage this sort of easy characterization. In some campaigns characters interact with gods and demons or use powerful, mind-bending magic, and in these situations, crossing the wrong god or missing a word in a spell can lead to madness.

These pragmatic and situational reasons for a character being insane are reasonable, but it is not very logical that the madness they are afflicted with be determined by a random roll on an arbitrary table. It is much more logical that their affliction be determined by its source or the situation which led to it, so that its nature and severity are in proportion to its cause. This requires a bit more thought for the GameMaster, but it is easily worth it. There are two general types of madness. These are Neurosis and Psychosis, though there are many different subdivisions within these.

The most interesting forms of Neurosis from the gaming perspective are phobias. These are neurotic fears of certain things, persons or situations. A phobia usually has its origin in some situation or event in a person's past, something which sets off the fear for a logical or tangentially logical reason. For example, if one is attacked by a dog one might fear dogs. However, it is also possible that if one were attacked by a dog near a lake one might fear lakes by tangential association. Descriptions of some of the most common phobias

follow.

Claustrophobia is fear of enclosed places, often caused by having spent time involuntarily in a closed place, like a closet or cave.

Acrophobia is fear of heights, and to a small degree it is present in most people as a protective instinct, though some persons develop an exaggerated fear of heights.

Agoraphobia is fear of open spaces, such as an open field or square.

Astrophobia is fear of the stars and sometimes extends to a general fear of the sky. This is the sort of thing which might be caused by contact with a star being or a sky god. Lunaphobia is another related affliction.

Hydrophobia is the fear of water and is very common from experiences with water or childhood warnings of the danger of water. It is extremely common in medieval societies where few knew how to swim.

Kenophobia is the fear of entering a vacant building.

Myophobia is fear of dirt, and is often a reaction to growing up in a dirty environment and then reacting against it.

Nyctophobia is fear of the night and darkness, and is common in childhood, but is usually at least partially outgrown by adulthood.

Pathophobia is the fear of disease, and is extremely common in societies where there have been plagues or epidemics.

Zoophobia is the fear of animals, and is generally restricted to particular types or groups, like insects or wolves, often having its source in a past experience.

There are as many possible phobias as there are things to fear, and some can be very sophisticated. Phobia also should not be confused with natural fears based on logic or experience, such as the fear of a dangerous animal, enemy or situation. Fear only becomes a phobia when it is beyond reason, obsessive, or illogical, when one fears things which are not necessarily dangerous or have shown no threat. Of course, the worst phobia, Panophobia, should be mentioned, for it is fear of everything or non specific fear, where a person is just continually afraid and every person or situation seems threatening to him. Manias should also be mentioned here. They are the opposite of phobias and not quite as common.

A mania is an unnatural obsession with some person, thing or activity, and they can be debilitating and embarrassing to the same degree as phobias. It should be noted that anxiety is a neurosis as well, and often accompanies some of these others, and that neurosis can effect organs which are under

...They First Make Mad!

voluntary control and even cause psychosomatic physiological reactions such as rashes, hives, a nervous tic or mannerism or even stigmata. Remember that not all people are afflicted by a phobia or a mania to the same degree and that some can control their reaction and that the manifestation of this sort of affliction can range from uneasiness to crippling paralytic fear.

In game terms neurosis of all sorts could result from dangerous situations or incomprehensible situations associated with common things leading to fear of those things, or in a fantasy campaign they might come as a curse from a god who was angered with a character and then might be related to whatever the character had done to offend that god.

While phobias can be quite serious, psychosis is generally considered to be more debilitating. Psychosis can be caused by outside stimuli, but they are also caused by chemical and hormonal imbalances or even genetic defects. Psychosis can be broken down into the Functional and Organic classifications. Functional Psychosis is a grab-bag classification which includes all mentally or situationally induced disorders, while Organic Psychosis comes from some sort of damage to the nervous system from disease, chemical imbalance, trauma or other damage. Regardless of the cause, there are a number of different psychoses which can afflict a person, some linked more often than others to particular causes. Some of the most significant forms and symptoms of psychosis are explained here.

Delirium, which can incapacitate and confuse a person, Disassociation which can alter perceptions and Hallucination can all be caused by fever and by drugs.

Amnesia, Unconsciousness, Incoherence, Convulsions and Hallucinations can be caused by physical trauma to the brain or by chemical and other imbalances, sometimes induced by disease.

Manic Depression is a state where a person fluctuates between states of extreme activity and periods of listlessness, feeling like a superman during his high cycle and becoming almost suicidally depressed at the low cycle.

Paranoia is a feeling of persecution or universal enmity, that people are plotting and acting against you and that everyone is your enemy. In severe form it can be debilitating, but it can be controlled.

Schizophrenia is accompanied by high levels of disassociation from reality and often additional symptoms, such as incoherence. Only in a small number of cases does it actually lead to split personalities, and even in these cases those personalities are rarely truly distinct.

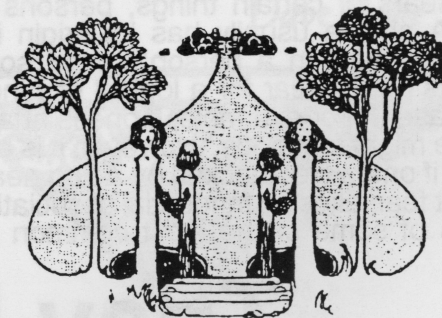
Psychosis can be very serious, even leading to catatonia, a state in which the victim ceases to speak, move or even make minimal actions to keep himself alive, becoming completely withdrawn.

Some sorts of mental disorders are harder to classify, such as depression and anxiety, which are more in the realm of emotional disorders, but can be severely debilitating if they are strong, and they should also be considered by GameMasters who are planning to afflict a player with some sort of derangement.

How you apply all of these possibilities in a game context requires some careful consideration. When skillfully applied madness can add much to a campaign, but it should not be exaggerated, nor should the dangers of insanity be underplayed. However, when characters meet the unknown and it is too much for their small minds to handle, let them develop a disorder in keeping with the significance of their experience, even if it is a small physiological manifestation like a tic or other mannerism. If the situation is greater let the effects be greater and let the effect vary for the strength of will and experience of the character. I imagine coming face to face with Azathoth might destroy the mind of a weak character and leave him catatonic, while a more jaded character who had chatted with Cthulhu might only develop selective amnesia to protect himself from the memory. On a smaller scale remember that any horrifying, painful or unpleasant experience can lead to some degree of mental disorder, so opportunities will always present themselves and not all mental disorders leave a character stark, raving, unplayably mad. The mind is an amazing instrument and its possibilities should not be overlooked in role-playing situations. However, when mental disorders are applied they should be applied wisely and with a logical knowledge of the character and the situation.

Euripides wrote, 'Whom the gods destroy they first make mad', and as a playwright he knew the dramatic, and for role-playing to work it must be good drama, part of the realm of gods and madness. And of course, in a fantasy campaign one of the great sources of madness will be the gods. Driving a person mad is a wonderful way to punish and humiliate them, because mad people do very strange things and if you leave a core of identity whole then that bit of consciousness can suffer and understand what has been done to the person. Gods are vicious and capricious and many mythologies have deities who are traditionally associated with madness and driving people to madness. Good examples are Dionysios, Ishtar, Set, Gwyn and Odin, though there are many others. The realm of the gods is beyond human comprehension and merely associated with gods for extended periods has been known to drive men from themselves.

Let madness take a realistic role in your campaign. It can add color and drama and give players some understanding of the mental impact of events and experiences which will help some players role-play better and become more a part of the campaign world.



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GenCon 23

Joseph J. Anthony

It happened again. Thousands made their yearly pilgrimage to MECCA, stood on the Infinite Lines, paid for the fifteen dollar hot dogs, and still managed to have a good time.

The event selection was sparse this year. The AD&D events, naturally, were the most numerous, but that wasn't saying much, this time. Events for *Toon*, *GURPS*, *Star Trek*, and *Champions*, to name a few popular ones from the past few years, went down roughly in proportion. I have the feeling that this year's crop of Judges was made up of the die-hards who have a game at each con, the neophytes, and those who simply seek the registration fee discount. A selection of events from these extremes would tend to miss the creative input and diversity of the larger mass of occasional Judges that lie in between. (The first type may be stuck in a rut, the second simply ignorant of what's been done before, and the third indifferent. All three groups are small.) One notices, as a concurring but not necessarily connected trend, that the con organizers are getting a tad more bureaucratic towards the Judges with each passing year. (This can be judged by the length and tone of the "Gipper sheet", the introductory pep talk letter that Judges get in their registration packet.) Several past Judges told me they just wanted to relax and have fun this time around; some of this group said they'd like to run a game at the next con, so it seems that there's some hope.

Someone wasn't proofreading, and the event listings in the on-site program were scrambled. Large chunks of roleplaying events were listed under the "Strategic Boardgame" and "Miniature Gaming" headings in timeslots 10 and 14, and some event listings had simply disappeared. True, this was minor compared with *some* con disasters, but it was easily avoidable — we expect, and are paying for, a higher level of professionalism than this. (I still don't know why they abandoned the nifty program setup they had in 1988, where all events were listed ONCE, under their respective game systems [saving tons of space] with a SEPARATE BOOKLET showing what timeslots they were in. Committee logic?)

With a token nod to accurate reporting, I'll list the Gen Con guests of honor: Mike Grell, artist; Frank Chadwick of GDW; and Robin Bailey, author. The guests of honor, I fear, are much like parsley sprigs that accompany your steak — very nice, but they get shoved aside for meatier concerns. At least we had no repeat of the '88 Fiasco, where the "opening ceremonies", with the Mayor of Milwaukee and the GOH's, were pumped full blast over the PA system, drowning out everyone, everywhere, without end. (Traces of it linger on today — a legitimate PA call could not be made this year without hundreds of gamers screaming "Shut UP!" in chorus.)

The pickings were relatively sparse in the Dealers Room. The Game Lizards managed to stomp everyone again. TSR continued to exploit their Buck Rogers license — several con demos highlighted their XXVc™: *The 25th Century Role-Playing Game*. Players that I talked to said that they had a campy old good time (much like watching the old Batman TV show), so TSR may be on to something. West End Games stood solidly behind *Torg*, their answer to SJ Games' *GURPS*. The plastic stone on a card that they handed out last con was worth 50% off any *Torg* product this year, so it was a good time to buy (Remember when boxed games normally cost fifteen dollars, instead of thirty and up?). Not content to entertain you, West End has drafted all those who bought the game (and

subscribed to the *Torg* newsletter, *Infiniverse*) to contribute the happenings of their own campaigns to a worldwide metacampaign — what happens next in your campaign could be influenced by a playing group on the other side of the world. It's a nifty concept, and probably deserves to succeed. (In their convention catalog update for *Torg*, WEG seems to have caught TM measles from TSR — that dreaded disease™ where little TMs™ appear after every character name™ or title™. I haven't seen it yet in their other publications — let's hope it doesn't spread.)

FASA brought out several new adventures for *Shadowrun*, and continued the traditional *Battletech* Open. Many expert Teachers feel that the Open still isn't measuring anyone's skill at *Battletech* — no attempt is made to match players of similar caliber, so it's possible for a mediocre player to engage only wimps, and gain more points than an expert who was evenly matched. You'd think FASA would notice (then again, considering the *Shadowrun* combatsystem...)

Skyrealms Publishing has handed over the publishing part to Chessex, a company previously devoted to battlemaps, dice, figure boxes, and similar items. Skyrealms (still alive and well) promises that Chessex will soon release more material for their *Jorune* RPG, including a one-book revision of the rule set and a re-release of the sold-out *Burdoth* supplement. The preview of the *Jorune* computer game (graphics by Miles Teves, illustrator of the RPG) stunned the eye — if the rest of the game is this good, they won't be able to keep it in stock. Release is set for sometime next year, for IBM and Atari (and Amiga, if demand is high).

Palladium's major release was *Rifts*, its version of West End's *Torg* (lots of Interdimensional Rifts hit Earth, most of humanity gets wiped, PCs are lone survivors in the wilderness, etc.) It's standard Palladium, but five dollars cheaper than *Torg*, so give it a chance.

R. Talsorian Games held demos (finally) of *Amber*, a diceless RPG based on Roger Zelazny's series of the same name. *Amber* fans have been waiting several cons for Eric Wujcik (the designer), or anyone else, to actually appear for the scheduled demo — from the one I attended, it was worth waiting for. Release is scheduled for spring of next year.

Steve Jackson Games was standing tall — you almost couldn't tell that they'd been hurt. The *Fantasy Folk* and *Fantasy Beasts* supplements for *GURPS* were out, along with more supplements for *GURPS Supers*. As *Horror* is popular among Gen Con *GURPS* events (judging by space devoted to it in event listings), I'd hoped to see *GURPS Horror* (Second Edition) released in time for the con — no such luck. (It'll be out in September.)

So, was it a good con? Well, I'll be going back next year — that should answer the question. The reason that cons exist at all is to give you a place with lots of other gamers around, so you can feel safe for a while. One measure of a con's success is its ability to reveal that quiet nationalism — and while many smaller cons achieve it through innocence and accessibility, Gen Con gets the same effect by providing a common enemy. The webs of commercialism and bureaucracy may lie about, but they ain't gonna stop a bunch of high-spirited gamers who want to have fun.

On the Completely Subjective scale, I rank it 7 out of 10. Here's to next year.

(Thanks to Matt Schurman and Blake Ellman, for providing two other points of view.)

Among the Myriad Planes

The World of Abaddon by Dave Nalle

The World of Abaddon

Abaddon is a campaign world designed for use with *Ysgarth, To Challenge Tomorrow* or just about any other game system. The original campaign was run as part of the *Ysgarth* playtest campaign as a little diversion from more traditional settings.

The creation of Abaddon was to a large extent inspired by William Blake's poem/hymn *Jerusalem*, especially by the verse:

Bring me my bow of burning gold,
Bring me my arrows of desire.
Bring me my spear, oh clouds unfold.
Bring me my chariot of fire.

Blake was obsessed with Hebrew, Christian and pseudo-Christian mythology, and Abaddon is a world which makes use of that tradition, drawing from Kabbalistic, Enochian and Apocryphal sources. The goal in creating the world was to use a mythology which was familiar yet surprisingly mysterious and to give a feeling for the glory and fear of the ecstatic religious vision which inspired Blake to madness and genius.

It is a harsh world, considered by some to be the Fifth Circle of Hell, though those who dwell there think of it as home. It is part of a system of separate planes or worlds which are being fought over by two powerful groups of beings, the Malekha and the Malekim who fight through their various powerful agents. This conflict is watched over and supervised by the Grigori or Watchers, a group of 17 beings who have the power of limited travel between worlds and seek to maintain balance and order.

The Lands of Abaddon

Abaddon is divided into seven main realms, each of them ruled by a Malekha. The Malekha are of great power, combining aspects of rulership, high-priesthood and even godlike supernatural powers in many cases. Not all of the Malekha are of equal power or importance. They are all ruled over by Apolion whose personal domain is the great city of Ehdom and the arid region of Shamayim which surrounds it. Lower in power than Apolion, but great in their own right are Zamael (King of Machronon), Sathariel (Queen of Araboth and the city of Zutha), Hazazel (King of Mathei) and Rahab (Queen of Sagun). Somewhat weaker, but still potent are Semyaza (King of Zebul) and Thaumiel (King of Raquia).

Shamayim is a land of high mountains and broad deserts. Ehdom is located in the foothills of the Emyrian Mountains. It is the largest city in the world and a major center for overland trade. The population is mostly Nefilim, but there is a large population of Zamzummin and Gibborium as well.

Raquia is a hilly land of many rivers and excellent agricultural productivity, populated mostly by Nefilim, but with a significant Enim population as well.

Araboth is a rocky coastal kingdom with its capital at the port of Zutha, the second largest city in Abaddon. The population is mostly Nefilim, but there is a disturbing presence of Rephaim who live beneath the rocky hills in ancient tunnel complexes.

Machronon is located at the delta of the River Ulthos, a land of fishermen and farmers. The population is almost entirely Nefilim.

Mathei is a small, mountainous realm located be-

tween Shamayim and the sea. The population is mostly Gibborium with a ruling caste of Zamzummin. The society is highly militaristic. The Malekha, Hazazel is known for his skills as a warrior and commander.

Zebul is a far northern realm, a land of glaciers and volcanoes inhabited by Nifilim, but also by the wild tribes of Izachim who are lead by Zephaniach. The Malekha, Semyaza, is reputed to be a great healer.

Sagun is an island realm, many miles off the coast of Araboth and Mathey. It is populated by some Nefilim and also by the Kukharim. The Malekha, Rahab, is mysterious, but reputed to have great sea powers.

In general, the major cities are large and dehumanizing, built entirely of stone, overpopulated and polluted by primitive industry, with a lot of ash and sulfur and soot. Think of them as huge factory complexes with population and you'll have the right idea.

The seas of Abaddon are like something out of Milton. They are deep and dark, teeming with indescribable creatures which are generally huge and hungry, but rarely seen as more than forms waiting just below the surface of the water. A lot of trade goes by sea, but almost no one knows how to swim, because it is generally assumed that if you go in the water you are dead no matter how well you swim.

The countryside is varied. There are farmlands, great forests, several deserts and the enormous peaks of the Emyrian mountains. Some areas are densely populated by small farms and villages, especially near Zutha, but others like the Emyrian mountains and the forests which surround it are virtually devoid of intelligent life.

The creatures of Abaddon are varied. Most earth species are represented, but often with small changes to make them more appropriate, such as carnivorous tree-rats instead of squirrels, giant owl-bats, oversized pack-hunting jackals and the like.

Abaddon Races and Skill Benefits

The major races of Abaddon are all more or less humanoid in appearance, though some are rather unusual in their abilities and characteristics. They are described here, with skill benefits and characteristic limitations.

The Nefilim

- 1 on 1 Craft or Nautical Skill
- 1 on 1 Craft or Rustic Skill
- 1 on 1 Craft or Smith Skill
- 1 on Short Sword or Merchant
- 1 on Round Shield or Sling

SC: 12, STR: 26, WIL: 28, ZEA: 20, SOC: 22, AGI: 22

The Nefilim are the most populous race of Abaddon. They are swarthy skinned and have curly dark hair. The men are given to broad shoulders and great upper body strength. The women tend to be plump, but very attractive. They are great craftsmen and decent soldiers. They have a great enthusiasm for business of all kinds.

The Enim

- 1 on 1 Rustic Skill or Hunting
- 1 on Spear or Short Sword
- 1 on Sling or Javelin
- 1 on Carving or Tracking
- 1 on Scent Tracking or Damage Strike

SC: 10, STR: 30, TAL: 18, CON: 30, WIL: 30, ZEA: 18, APP: 16, INT: 16, JUD: 16

The Erim are nasty, brutish and short. They are primitive humanoids, rather hairy, with the traditional sloping brow and crude habits. They have no written language and tend not to wash very often. They are violent, temperamental and rather stubborn.

The Rephaim

-1 on Silent Movement or Weaving
-1 on 1 Magical Skill or Claw Attack
-1 on Mana Sight or Excavation
-1 on Running or 1 Necromancer Spell
-1 on 1 Darkmage Spell or 1 Conjuror Spell
SC: 9, STR: 35, AGI: 30, CON: 15, WIL: 18, INT: 18, JUD: 20, APP: 20

The Rephaim are small, scrawny, hairless humanoids with pale skin and large, droopy ears. They live mostly underground and have considerable magical knowledge passed down through the generations from ancient times when they lived above the ground as men before being cursed to live beneath the earth and dine only on blood and raw meat. They are nasty, inbred, magically adept and feel oppressed. They like nothing better than to take revenge on a group of lone travellers, attacking in packs if the odds are massively in their favor. They usually only come out at night. They lose FP at double the normal rate in sunlight. They have natural claws with a MD of 4 and a bite which has a MD of 6.

The Gibborium

-1 on Legionaire Shield or Javelin
-1 on Great Axe or Cudgel
-1 Wrestling or Herding
-1 Mountaineering or Stonemasonry
-1 Intimidation or 1 Smith Skill
SCM: 20, INT: 18, JUD: 12, TAL: 12, APP: 14

The Gibborium are mountain-dwelling giants. They are given to long, curly brown hair and ruddy complexions. They tend to be tribally organized and are not terribly bright, though they make good soldiers. When left to themselves, the tribes have a tendency to turn bandit or engage in endless feuding.

The Zamzummin

-1 Tactics or Bureaucracy
-1 Strategy or Any 1 Weapon Skill
-1 Generalship or Any 1 Defense Skill
-1 Leadership or Any 1 Magical Skill
-1 on Any 1 Spell or Any 1 Missile Weapon
SCM: 14, DEX: 30, AGI: 30, TAL: 26, CHA: 15, ZEA: 12, CON: 16

The Zamzummin are reputed to have come here from another plane of existence. They are few in number, but they are extremely skilled in combat, very well organized and fairly good with magic. Virtually every Malekha has a personal guard of Zamzummin and places them at the top of his military forces. They tend to be cold, reserved and rather elitist, considering no one, perhaps not even the Malekha to be their equals.

The Izachim

-1 on 1 Magical Skill or Wilderness Survival
-1 on 2 Pyromancer, Hydromancer or Aeromancer Spells
-1 Hunting, Fishing or Skiing
-1 Spear or Hand Targetting
SCM: 16, TAL: 28, STR: 20, CON: 20

The Izachim dwell in the northern wastelands, a land of volcanoes and giant glaciers. They are tall humanoids, dark haired, usually wearing their hair in braids. They dress in furs and leather and are great hunters and fishermen. They are organized in small, migrant family groups and practice magic with spells handed down through the generations. They tend not to interact with other races and react violently when their territory is threatened.

The Kukharim

-2 on Any 1 Fishing or Craft Skill

-1 on a Hydromancer, Beastmaster or Aeromancer Spell
-1 on Spear or Trident
-1 on Round Shield or Piscean Affinity
SCM: 13

The Kukharim are amphibious humanoids. They appear very much like normal humans, but although they are air breathers, they can survive under water for several hours without breathing. They have pale blond hair, usually worn short and pale skin. They are almost exclusively resident in the island chain off the coast of the main continent of Abaddon and live in towns and villages on the coast, usually built out into the water.

Religion and Magic in Abaddon

None of the peoples of Abaddon acknowledge the existence of gods, or even conceive of gods as anything but a very abstract concept. The Malekha are so powerful that being their devotees is almost like religion, but it is widely understood that they are mortal and it is possible to rise to join their ranks. The closest thing to religion in Abaddon is membership in what are called Mysteries or Gnosés, cult-like organizations which have as their primary orientation the understanding of the universe through philosophy, science and magic. The Gnosés offer magical training to their members, and high level initiates in their complex hierarchies can be quite powerful.

Because of the highly entropic nature of the world magic in Abaddon works very differently from the way it might work in another world, like Ysgarth. Priestly magic is inhibited by the fact that there are no gods and the world itself is isolated from worlds where gods exist. A character coming from another world to Abaddon who practiced priestly magic would find that his Piety Points and ZEA were effectively halved as was his regeneration rate for PP. At the same time he would find that those spells which he did cast were wildly more powerful, often unpredictably so. A sleep spell cast with PP might send its target into a permanent coma, calling up a breeze might result in a hurricane, a binding spell might crush the target, etc. On the other hand, because there is so much Mana available, for normal mages TAL and Mana Points can be considered to be 50% higher in Abaddon. But, at the same time, spells cast by TAL using mages are generally weaker than expected. Most spells will function at one increment less in all their characteristics. Damage would go down by 2 points, duration to the next lower level, range to one increment less, etc. However, costs for casting those spells remain the same.

It should be noted that magical items, as such, are rare in Abaddon. Most individuals use magic and don't need artificial aids. What items do exist are enormously powerful and often destructive for the user as well as his enemies. Super weapons and magical power focusing devices are the most common. Generally such items are unique and jealously guarded by the powerful entity or group which made them.

The War of Powers

The war between the Malekha and the Malekim has gone on for centuries. With the intercession of the Grigori they no longer actually fight on each others worlds, but do their fighting through intermediaries and agents. The power of the Grigori has made it virtually impossible for the Malekim to exist on Abaddon for more than a moment or two without incredible pain. As a result they carry on their war through others of lesser power. This is a very good way to introduce established characters into the world, because the Malekim often recruit beings from other worlds to carry out missions on their behalf on Abaddon. Humans from other worlds who can pass for Nefilim are of particular value to them. They may give these beings powers and assistance, but it should be remembered that with so much magical ability and training floating around it is pretty easy for a lot of the locals to spot aliens and they may react badly.

There is a well established underground movement in most of the cities which are populated by Nefilim. Many Nefilim dislike the Malekha and their Zamzummin storm troopers and some have banded together to carry out terrorist actions against them and organize possible revolution. The

minds of the Nefilim are devious, so they are well suited to this sort of covert activity. In addition, there is a constant desire in all segments of the society for advancement, and if that means staging a coup or seizing power by violence, there are always little political and military factions forming to advance the interests of an individual or a group. It's a treacherous world and it pays to watch your back at all times.

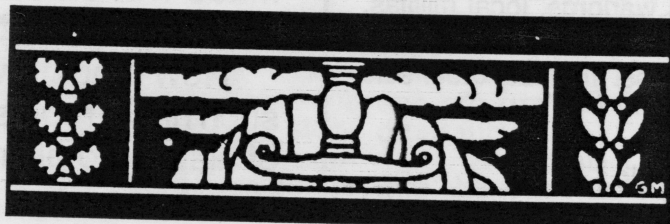
The Grigori may not interfere directly in the affairs of Abaddon, though they can and will manifest there. They can communicate information, transport people to and from the world, but they cannot use their powers to directly interfere with anyone unless Malekha and Malekim come into direct conflict with each other. The Grigori also use recruits and agents to make sure that balance and order are maintained and they have close ties to the resistance movements in some of the cities, though this is never an open involvement, as they are under great constraints to keep their presence hidden. The only exception to this rule is that since many of the Grigori come from the Malekha and the Malekim themselves, several of the Malekha are Grigori. No one knows which ones are, but clearly Apollyon is not one of them. There is also the problem that some of the Grigori may, effectively, be on the take, and some of the Malekha may actually be working for the Malekim. In a world where illusion is a child's first magic trick it is easy to establish deceptions of this sort and no one is ever really sure which side anyone else is on. The one constant is the lust for power and more power, and if that involves deception and treachery, that's all in a day's work.

Conclusion

Abaddon is an unusual kind of world to present to players who are used to something more mundane. If players are not used to being surrounded by bountiful magic and beings of power they may find themselves out of their depth. At the same time they may find the situation challenging and rewarding. There is much more detail about the world which could be explored, but it would take more than one magazine article.

Keep in mind that while Abaddon is based on Kabbalistic tradition, those myths have been warped to make it more viable as a game world. If you are interested in doing your own research and tracking down more useful information to expand on this base, or if you want to check into more of the background of some of the beings and races detailed here, good books to look into would be Gustav Davidson's *A Dictionary of Angels*, Willis Barnstone's *The Other Bible*, St. Augustine's *City of God* and S. L. Matheras' *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, as well as the works of William Blake and James Branch Cabell, who do a lot of this sort of disguising of demons, angels and hell as a source of background for fiction.

Too often the Judeo-Christian background is overlooked as a source for role-playing. There really is some wonderful mythology out there if you want to make use of it. With all the variants of Judaism and Christianity which have spun off over the ages the material to choose from is rich, varied and shouldn't be wasted because of religious squeamishness.



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"How could we have forgotten that Hitler was elected?"

*Janosz Skrivkin
Chancellor of Croatia
1999*

Torg

from West End Games

Reviewed by Tom Bagwell

Torg is the new multiversal role-playing game from West End Games. It seems to follow the tradition of **GURPS** by having a name which sounds more like a disease than a RPG and has other similarities in that it is a system which can be applied in many settings and for many purposes. Mechanically it incorporates many features featured in progressive games of the last few years, no character classes, a totally skill based system, an attempt to find new angles of gaming to explore, etc. It also capitalizes on the current fad for mixing genres and settings which is also found in games like **ShadowRun** and **Rifts**.

The actual mechanics of Torg are fairly similar to those of **Shadowrun**, but better thought out, more complete and more flexible. You can use precreated spells, or design your own. Annoyingly, the exact mechanics for making your own will be published in a forthcoming sourcebook. They provide over 50 'Templates' - as an alternative for those who like character classes. These are standardized characters precreated except for skill allocation. You can choose to play one of these (there are lots) or design your own character. Like **GURPS** or **Hero System**, how you do things in Torg is based almost entirely on skill use. The use of skills includes a target roll to succeed with the skill and defaults based on one of the character's base characteristics. 1D20 is rolled when using skills to generate a bonus (or penalty) used to modify your skill using a chart provided at the bottom of the character sheet. The system is easy to use and runs quickly. The combat system is very useable. It is simple but realistic; providing for shock damage, wounds, knockdown, and knockout all on one small chart. On the minus side, Torg has far fewer skills than its competitors (although they encourage you to add any you want) and is generally less flexible than **GURPS** or **Hero System** (so far, until I see more sourcebooks). This is balanced to some degree by the ease of play. Torg is definitely simpler than most similar systems.

The given setting is the 'Possibilities War', where modern-day Earth is being invaded by the 'Possibility Raiders' who seek to steal Earth's Possibility Energy, an esoteric concept relating to potential futures and the type of energy released by their creation. They invade with their own 'cosms', or alternate realities, each with its own set of axioms and natural laws (this is their fancy way of saying 'each with its own genre (horror, pulp, cyberpunk, fantasy, etc.)) Rules are given for the operation of axioms outside their home cosm. If this chaotic setting is not your desire, the rules will fit any genre you wish to run.

They introduce 'Drama Cards'. Instead of rolling initiative, the GM flips over the top drama card, which, among other things show which side gets initiative, as well as adding some colorful peripheral information. One side or the other will usually get either bonuses in the form of extra actions, bonuses to skills, etc. for that round only, or penalties. Thus varying the flow of the encounter. You can get extra cards for 'approved skills use' if you successfully use suggested skills (this seems aimed more at beginning players, I don't care for it myself). Each player also starts off with four cards, using the other side for other types of bonuses, sometimes aiding other players, sometimes introducing subplots, etc. More cards can also be acquired during play. These can provide extra Possibility Points (like karma in **ShadowRun** but more useful), which can give a bonus of up to +3 for a desired action. Additional cards can introduce subplots, and other changes in the campaign at the discretion of the GM. Players are limited in gaining cards, in how many they may have, how often they get them, and how often they keep them. When resolving a dramatic skill (one taking more than one round) it is broken up into stages, and each stage can only be attempted when its phase comes up on the initiative card (A B C D). Torg also provides means to accomplish things many other systems don't, but should; like the ability to exceed physical limitations temporarily (you'd be amazed how fast someone can run 100 meters when being chased by a dinosaur).

As Drama Cards are gathered and played into the character's pool, they can become very important in the game, and using the right ones at the right time can have crucial effects on play. Some GMs may not like Drama Cards because if they are not used carefully they take some control of the campaign and background out of his hands. They can be used as a supplement to the game and really don't have to be used at all, but used sparingly they simulate that unusual stroke of luck very well. My initial reaction was very negative, but after becoming more familiar with the concept, I can see potential.

West End Games also provides *Infiniverse*, a Torg newsletter, which if subscribed to, furnishes ongoing information on the Wars, which provides the GM with response forms to send in on the activities of his campaign to be included in reports in the magazine, as well as reports on various announced developments and a section of rumors, sort of an attempt to make all the campaigns part of a super-campaign.. Contradictions are no problem since there are infinite versions of every cosm, differing only slightly from each other. They tabulate the numeric results and figure how the War is affected.

There are many other things I like about Torg that would take up too much space if I listed them here. This is a rare kind of game. It has both an interesting background and playable mechanics. The game designers and publishers were clearly using their heads to produce a very marketable game which is still a high quality product.

Improve Your Spelling

Hans Dykstra and Dave Nalle

Moderating MegaSpells

In our ongoing playtest of *Ysgarth* while we develop the new 6th edition of the rules a lot of new ideas for modifying and improving magic have come up. Some of these are strange and radical and some are just practical and useful. Following Carl Jones' lead we want to offer some new ideas of ways to run certain aspects of *Ysgarth* magic, though these are by no means official rules or guaranteed as the best way to handle magic. Use them if they work for you.

One possible problem with the current spell system is that spells whose CST is over about 8 or so become prohibitively difficult to cast. Take for instance *Image of Things Past*, which is admittedly a good spell, with CST 13 and APC 800. Assume that we have a god-like spell caster with BMI of 500, and 100 AP per round, with 4 CL of the spell (this represents the expenditure of about two levels worth of LSP on one spell, which is a lot). This spell will take him about 6 rounds, and 11 FP, which is pretty good, though a lot of FP at one shot. For a more normal spell caster, with probably 2 SL, the expenditures will all be doubled, and the time longer still because no one but Ian actually has 100 AP. Still, this is relatively reasonable since it can be done on the spot in less than 10 min., though at a cost of 1/4 of a day's FP. The problem becomes more acute with more powerful spells. To take an even more extreme example, look at *Killing Darkness*. This is a fun, but nasty and powerful spell, and one which you will probably never see anyone cast at CST 31 and APC 4300. Take the same god-like spell caster, and assume he is even more interested in *Killing Death* than he was in *Image of Things Past*, and has spent the 120 some points to get 4 SL. Even with 4 SL casting the spell will take him 65 rounds, (six and a half minutes) if he goes at full tilt, blowing off a whopping 130 FP (more than most characters have) for a spell that lasts a minute and still has a will save, and can be evaded as well. More normal casters will be reading this from a book and take at least eight times as long. Most of an hour for a one minute spell; this makes this potentially useful against a besieging army but not much else (and if they see you on the parapets chanting for an hour they will fill you full of arrows before you finish anyway).

The problem here is that the spell design system was based almost entirely on the mechanical considerations of how many people can you kill in how much time, without consideration of the practical limitations on using these mega-spells. Yes, massive death spells should be difficult, but putting them so far above the level of lesser spells makes them essentially inaccessible. You can achieve better results for the cost with the creative use of lesser spells. The system is weighted in such a way that this kind of spell generally take too long to cast relative to its duration and effectiveness. The basic problem is that CST, MPC, and APC all increase together, and then increased CST tends to increase APC again in two ways: it makes it more difficult to get levels, and it makes the MI lower because it divides it. If you work it out, the effective APC (the amount of time it takes a caster with x number of LSP to cast the spell with 95% success) is proportional to MAG^3 (one power from actual APC, one from the reduced number of SL, one from the increased CST). This cube law means that as spells become more powerful they become astronomically more difficult. Not just very difficult, but impossibly so.

The question to hand is how to tame the explosion of difficulty for powerful spells, without making them too easy. If you look at the formulae in the spell design system, you will note that the reason this happens is that both CST and APC are proportional to MAG. This problem can be solved one of these factors be removed, and replaced by an arbitrary number, such as 10 which is an average of what might have been used before. In game terms it seems best to keep CST proportional to MAG, and remove this factor from the APC formula. The result is: $CST = (Medium RAT \times Effect RAT \times Target RAT \times$

$MAG)/100$), $APC = (Medium APV \times Effect APV \times Target APV \times 10)$. This makes effective APC proportional to MAG^2 . If you remove the MAG factor from the CST formula instead, it makes effective APC directly proportional to MAG. This might make the powerful spells a little too inviting, but it still might be a viable alternative. This seems to me to be a more logical improvement on the spell design system, one of the few systems in *Ysgarth* where you can afford to add complexity because it is such an advanced system and will only be used by a few GMs and players, though you can justify

Variable Fumble System

Some players have whined that an automatic 5% chance of fumbling any spell was too high, and that in the larger picture that would make magic way too dangerous and unattractive for most practitioners. A couple of alternate methods of figuring final Magic Index might resolve this problem.

One option might be just to set a minimum chance of fumbling equal to $(MPC)^2/100$. This makes small, simple spells almost foolproof, while more powerful spells are more likely to blow up in your face. This has the justification that large amounts of Mana are more difficult to control and shape without making an error.

An alternative would be to base the minimum chance of fumbling on the actual AP spent in casting a spell. That is, the longer you take, the more likely you will have a lapse of concentration and lose control. This would mean that you can only increase the AP spent (in order to increase the Magic Index) to a certain point, before you start to lose again. A possibility would be Minimum Fumble Chance = $AP/200$. This would encourage people to learn levels of their spells, rather than just count on spending as much time as it takes. It might be particularly effective if you employ lower spell CST as suggested earlier, making it easier to learn and cast spells, counteracted by the fact that you need more levels to keep your fumble chance under control.

In both of these cases, if you cast the spell at such speed that by the standard formula your fumble chance was higher than the minimum calculated with these two systems the higher amount would apply. These formulae are just to replace the 5% minimum with something a bit more flexible.

Where Did You Say You Put that Matrix?

Matrices of one kind or another, and the enchantment system, are traditionally one of the most exciting and most controversial aspects of *Ysgarth*. It is great to be able to use enchantment and matrices to enhance magical casting power and speed. But there are some hard to overcome practical problems. One is just how much time and Mana do mages have to put into Matrices and the other is where those Matrices are and what can effect or alter them.

It can be a real problem in a campaign if a character who is played only occasionally decides to spend all the rest of his time storing up Mana points and putting them into long-duration Matrices. This can make that character considerably more powerful when he gets into an adventuring situation than he really ought to be. There are some easy practical ways to limit how much Mana such a character has to play with. First, consider the time he has to work in and the MP he has to work with. Figure that in the course of a month a character with a TAL of 20 is able to regenerate around 100 MP. That would be the absolute maximum he would have to throw away on enchantments for the future. With Mana Gathering at a decent level he might have double that or a little bit more to work with. Then, consider his other obligations. At least half of those MP will almost certainly be called on profession-

ally. If he is an Apprentice or journeyman his master will want to use at least half of his MP in business. If he is a Master mage he will need to use those MP to keep his business going. So, he has 50 to 100 MP left to work with. That's enough to create a fair enchantment, but not a really impressive one, so that is one limitation. Another problem is that players often assume that if they have 2 months to work in, they have their full MP plus 2 months worth of regenerated MP to work with. That really is not the case. Chances are they came into that 2 month period in at least a somewhat depleted state. Also, those MP they are regenerating come in gradually throughout the month and they cannot store them up beyond their normal maximum MP. Thus, their maximum MP act as an absolute limit of what they can spend on a single enchantment, because they will not regenerate a significant number of MP during the actual casting of the spell. Then they face a delay while regenerating enough MP to cast a decent spell again. Thus, even with Mana Gathering, a mage with a TAL of 20 would at best be able to cast 2 enchantments of around 200 points, not considering the social limitations mentioned earlier. In addition to all of this there is the question of Fatigue Points. Remember that except with a very few spells FP are an absolute limitation and many enchantment type spells really eat up FP. Time is also a consideration. No mage is going to be able to concentrate on a single enchantment for more than about 4 hours per day, and those who are employed may have as little as 2 hours of free time. This becomes another limitation on the size of an enchantment to be cast, although it is not a problem with those types of spell which can be suspended. Basically, when he runs into a player who is making great use of enchantment, the GM should pay extra attention to when and how he cast his spells and point out to him some of these natural limitations. That may keep things in the range of reason.

Another question is how big matrices are, whether they have a physical existence or location, and just what they are. Matrices are heavy concentrations of mana, and yes, they need to be somewhere, and they do face physical limitations. Like other spells, matrices will interact with other spells which share the same space. How much space a matrix requires varies according to the material on which it is cast, specifically related to the density of the material. The denser the material and the larger the object, the more Mana it can hold. To represent density we use Specific Gravity, which can be found easily for most elements and the actual mass of the object. The higher the specific gravity and the higher the size the larger the amount of Mana which an object can hold. For our purposes some approximate Specific Gravities are: Human Flesh (2), Wood (2), Most Rock (3), Iron (4), Copper (5), Silver (7), Tin (8), Platinum (12), Gold (13), Lead (14) and the mythical metal Orichalcum would be about 15. The number of MP in a matrix which an object can hold is equal to $(\text{Mass (Oz)} \times (\text{SG}^3))/100$. Once an MP concentration goes above that limit MP will bleed off from the matrix at a rate equal to the number over the limit per day, continuing to drain off even after the number of MP has reached the limit. Using this system an average human body could hold about 154MP. A gold ring of 5 Ounces could hold about 110MP. A sword of 80 Ounces could hold about 52 MP. In addition, no more than one Matrix can occupy a single object at a time. The only exceptions to this are runes which take up only the physical surface area necessary to write them, which is usually an area equal to their CST squared in square inches.

New Mana Gathering Skill

As mentioned in Carl Jones' previous installment in this series, *Mana Gathering* as a spell has been eliminated to be replaced by a skill of the same name, similar to the *Prayer* skill for priests. This skill allows the gathering of Mana Points at a slightly accelerated rate. It still doesn't bring them back as fast as *Prayer* does for priests, but it can be a good use of Skill Points for some mages. The description follows:

Mana Gathering

CST: 6 FAC: 3 CHR: TAL

This spell increases the rate at which a mage gains Mana Points. The normal rate of Mana Point regeneration is $((3 \times \text{TAL}) / \text{AGE})$ per day. This skill augments that gain by an amount of the Square Root of SL additional MP per day, rounded up. In addition, the skill allows the mage to gather MP through concentration. He may gather MP at a rate of 1

MP each time he spends a certain number of AP. These MP are deflected against his daily regeneration and limited to that amount. The number of AP per MP gained is equal to $3000 / (10 + \text{SL})$. Thus, a character with a TAL of 20 and 20 years old with 16 SL of Mana Gathering would gain 7MP back per day and would be able to draw in instant Mana Points at a rate of 115 AP each, which would allow him to attract his full 7MP limit in a bit more than a minute..

Casting Skills and Magic Index

One easily recognized problem with spell casting is that the value of magical Casting Skills is seriously underemphasized in SpellCraft. This is easy to compensate for by stressing their values in the mechanics in appropriate ways which also make spell casting a bit more interesting.

The first step is to give each skill a different base characteristic with which it works and from which MI is determined when using that skill. These are: Meditation (WIL for mages, $(\text{WIL} + \text{ZEA}) / 2$ for priests), Ritual $((\text{DEX} + \text{AGI}) / 2$ for mages, $(\text{DEX} + \text{AGI} + \text{ZEA}) / 3$ for priests), Somatic (DEX), Symbolic $((\text{DEX} + \text{JUD}) / 2)$, Incantation (CHA for mages, $(\text{CHA} + \text{ZEA}) / 2$ for priests), Singing (CHA).

Next, change the formula for Magic Index. The new basic formula is $(\text{BR} \times (\text{SL} + 15)) / 2$, using the SL of the Casting Skill. If a character is casting a Charm instead of a regular spell, and therefore has no casting skill, or if he is casting the spell without using a casting skill, his MI is determined using $(\text{DEX} + \text{JUD}) / 2$ as the BR and a SL of 0. If a character is immobilized his DEX is considered to be 0.

These two changes make a significant difference in magic, encouraging the use of Casting Skills, which places important situational limitations on spell casting which add to the realism of magic.

What Kind of Mana is a Piety Point?

Just to clear up a little confusion. There is a difference between Mana Points and Piety Points, yet they are essentially the same thing. The real difference is in the source. Mana Points are generated or attracted by the spirit and power of the mage. Piety Points are given to the priest by his deity. This means that the acquisition of Mana Points is a purely mechanical thing, while the acquisition of Piety Points is highly variable, based on the actions of the priest and his standing with his god. How they operate, on the other hand, is exactly the same. Once the power has gone through the filter of the mage or priest it comes out as magic. Spell interaction, *Mana Shield*, learning spells, *Mana Sight* and all other effects and abilities which impact after MP/PP acquisition function exactly the same. In fact, PP really don't exist. It is merely a convenient way of identifying the source of certain MP. Once the points reach the caster and from that point forward they are all Mana Points.



In the Speculum...

Twilight Encounters

by Frank Chadwick and Loren Wiseman
from GDW Games

This is a supplement for use with **Twilight:2000**. It includes a number of improvements upon the basic system, as well as ten "encounter cards," miniature adventures which can be altered to fit a variety of campaigns and situations. It is well-thought-out and comprehensive, while retaining the essential emphasis of the original game. Unfortunately, some of the flaws of **Twilight:2000** are left in as well.

The expanded encounter tables are far superior to those in the original. They pull off the trick of being simultaneously detailed and flexible. There are many tables for all manner of terrain (roads, wooded areas, swamps, etc.), with each roll given a general heading (Group, Animal, Item, or None). These categories are each given a subtable, each one terrain-specific, in case the referee wants to determine the encounter randomly, but the book also encourages deciding the matter oneself without recourse to dice if the situation warrants. The author also discusses various ways in which the referee may expand upon randomly determined encounters, advice which will probably be second nature to experienced gamemasters but which will help the novice a good deal.

The combat system is revised even more extensively, and for the better in all cases. The old "hesitation actions" rules are replaced with a simpler and more realistic system of initiative, which is something like the "phases" of *Car Wars* fame and which is based upon the character's Coolness rating. There is also a provision for opportunity fire, to prevent individuals with excellent Coolnesses from being able to use cover faster than a slower opponent can fire, which would be ridiculous. The burn damage rules are more accurate than before, and the replacement of concussion for "knock-down" in the new explosives rules corrects an anomaly in the old rules which did not account for the fact that a human can be damaged by an explosion without being in contact with it.

The best aspect of the new combat system is the way in which small arms are handled. Three-shot bursts used to be mandatory; now it is possible to fire single shots or full-auto bursts, with the latter handled in a very satisfying and simple way: range, recoil, and number of bursts affect one's chance of hitting a target, but not skill. Most other games treat automatic fire as a succession of aimed shots, which it is not — it is an attempt to saturate an area, with no attempt at accuracy. (If you don't believe me, go to a machine gun shoot at a local range sometime and see what you think.) There is even a specified danger zone around the target of a burst, which is also very realistic, yet simple to implement. All you need to handle fully automatic firing is a copious supply of six-sided dice, and most experienced gamers have more than enough of those. All in all, Mr. Chadwick really outdid himself in this area.

The encounter cards are brief descriptions of situations which the characters might encounter in the course of a larger campaign: a surprise encounter with a slave caravan (Europe in 2000 A.D. just ain't what it used to be), a mission to steal or destroy some Soviet aerial photos of a British-American position, and one adventure which I will describe only by its title: "What's Polish For G'Day?" All are well-prepared, with plenty of maps and reasonable suggestions for ways in which to fit them into the campaign. They have a surprising amount of tactical detail considering their small size, and the designers do not overreach

themselves in trying to pack a complex adventure idea into a medium in which this would be inappropriate.

With so much going for them, what could possibly go wrong? Several things, all of which are flaws carried over from the parent game. One is the excessive lethality of the background (the characters are NATO soldiers who are stranded in Poland after a limited nuclear war). The high character mortality rate is quite true to life; James Dunnigan writes in "How To Make War" that about one-third of all combat infantrymen are killed within a tour of duty, and another one-third seriously wounded or maimed. However, it does not promote much attachment to one's character. The various expansions upon **Twilight:2000** (*RDF Sourcebook*, *Survival Guide to the United Kingdom*, etc.) provide settings which are less deadly to the characters. However, do not look to **Twilight Encounters** to correct this problem with the European campaign.

Another issue which goes unaddressed is the encouragement of and provision for roleplaying. The old motivation system for NPC's, which generates two aspects of a personality based upon drawing cards out of a deck, is left unchanged. Player character motivations are also ignored in the supplement; the original game gives this short shrift as well. While an old hand at gaming can fill in these gaps easily enough, a new player needs to have them emphasized somewhere to avoid the trap of turning an RPG into a paper exercise/treasure hunt. GDW in general has a problem with this aspect of their games, and would do well to correct it in an upcoming supplement.

Twilight Encounters does a number of things very well indeed, including the new combat system, the encounter charts, and the miniature adventures. Its sins are mainly ones of omission, but other supplements and a good GM can overcome them easily. This is definitely worth the money for a **Twilight** gamer. (Charles Hardin)

The Palladium Book of Contemporary Weapons

by Maryann Siembieda
from Palladium Books

This is one of a set of small books by Palladium, each of which provides a description of some mechanical aspect of roleplaying games or wargames (e.g., castles, assassins, archaic weapons, etc.). **Contemporary Weapons** gives a set of stats for modern smallarms which is sufficiently general that it could theoretically be used in any game which required them. It is badly laid out and horribly inaccurate, with practically no redeeming features whatsoever.

At first it looks good. It starts with an excellent description of the penetration and damage ratings it uses, which is detailed enough that the hopeful gamemaster could convert it immediately to whatever game he/she is using. But the problems start up right away. The rifle cartridges are assigned unrealistic ratings. For example, the 5.56x45mm NATO round is given as much penetration as the 7.62x51mm NATO and more tissue damage, which is very odd since the latter uses a larger bullet with more propellant behind it. The .30-06 cartridge does even worse than either, despite the fact that it is a larger and more powerful version of the 7.62mm NATO.

If that was the extent of the inaccuracy, then things would be all right; one would merely change the ratings and move on. However, the gun listings are the worst and most inaccurate part of the whole thing. The line drawings provided in

the text are horribly distorted at best, with the FN Compact pistol, the Lee-Enfield bolt-action, the AR-10 battle rifle, and the M-16 assault rifle illustrated approximately at best. I don't know where the artist got the photo on which he based the drawing of the Heckler & Koch P7 pistol (the famous "squeeze-cocker"), but it must have been the wrong one, because the two look nothing alike. But by far the most humorous error is the picture of the Chinese Type 67 light machine gun, with the bullets going in backwards! We are all prepared to make sacrifices in time of war, I suppose, but that is going a bit far...

Effective ranges have been assigned to firearms rather randomly, in some cases seemingly by witchcraft. The Austrian 5.56mm AUG supposedly has an awesome range of 800 meters, when in fact it has perhaps half that in real life. In contrast, the high-quality Enforcer sniper rifle is given a low 300 meter range, which is off by a factor of two again, although in the other direction this time. The MAC-10 submachine gun is assigned a 200 meter range, but I defy anyone to produce consistent hits with it at that range. 50 meters would be more like it.

In summary, the **Book of Contemporary Weapons** is an unsatisfactory attempt at producing a game-oriented description of modern firearms. There is a need for such a guide in some campaigns, but the blatant inaccuracies in this work make it useless for any purpose, for anyone. (Charles Hardin)

Ars Magica

by Jonathan Tweet & Mark Rein-Hagen
by Charles Hardin

David Nalle reviewed *Lion Rampant's Ars Magica* in the Spring 1989 issue of *Abyss*. He was largely unfavorable toward the game, calling it a "dismal failure." Unfortunately, many of the statements in the review were not adequately informed, and the evaluation may have been unfair because it was colored by an extreme reaction to some very small elements of the game. While I do not recommend **Ars Magica** for all roleplayers, I think that it does fill a niche in the RPG market.

Mr. Nalle's biggest complaint with the game is "the section on 'Personality,' where you pick a [character's] personality from a list of 32 possible traits, against which you have to make rolls in the course of play." This sentence alone contains two falsehoods. The 32 traits listed are not the only ones possible; the game encourages players to invent others to suit their character ideas. More importantly, trait rolls are not compulsory. They are an option to be used when the player cannot decide which of conflicting impulses his/her character would follow. I disapprove of this type of roleplaying crutch, which can too easily engender a dependence. Nevertheless, exaggerating the problem does the game a disservice.

Nalle also dislikes **Ars Magica's** character generation system, which he claims is class-based and therefore outmoded. It is true that Magi and Grogs (fighters) are classes, but each can be justified by the circumstances: Grogs are not central to the game and should therefore be uncomplicated to design, and magi receive specialized training which is best covered by giving them their own class. The third sort of character, a "companion," can be anything: a priest, a blind beggar, a thief, etc. This is a class-based system?

The game also recommends that each player run a Magus and a Companion, though never both at once. Nalle says that this prevents

proper character development. Has he never had players run multiple characters in his own campaigns? This is not an uncommon practice among gamers with other systems, and when kept within reason does not kill proper roleplaying. Furthermore, this sharing allows Magi to conduct research (a plausible pursuit, which might well consume much of a practicing magician's time) while the player can still have adventures.

Another startling allegation in the review is that *Ars Magica* encourages sharing characters among the players. Only Grogs are shared; Magi and their companions are the property of their players. Since the fighters play only a superficial role in a game which focuses on magic, this provision is understandable.

Of course, holding Grogs in common can create problems, especially if the players are not in near-perfect accord on the goals of the party. One can imagine the spectacle as dissenting players try to control the most powerful fighters ("Flavius kills you ALL!" "Does not!" "Does too...") After a time, I suppose that the Storyguide (referee) would have to determine who controlled which grogs, possibly at the beginning of each adventure ("OK, guys, time to roll for Flavius...").

Ars Magica has several other flaws as well. As David Nalle noted, the combat system is an abomination unto Goo (six rolls to resolve a single attack?). The attribute rules allow only limited control over the creation of one's character. The skill system is limited to adventure-oriented abilities only, and I can only shake my head sadly at the authors' suggestion to use "Whimsy Cards" for random inspiration. Clearly, *Ars Magica* is not well-suited to combat-heavy or individualistic play.

However, for a group of players who like magic, enjoy a European-style setting, and cooperate fully with one another, it could be just the thing for a successful campaign. (Charles Hardin)

Peterson's Field Guide to Cthulhu Monsters

by Sandy Peterson
from Chaosium Inc.

This 64 page supplement is the "Monster Manual" of Chaosium's popular *Call Of Cthulhu* role-playing game. What sets this particular effort apart from most of the other such supplements on the gaming market is the fact that it is produced with two features often missing in the other manuals of this type—it is obviously a quality effort and it has style. I have often noticed that Chaosium games on the whole seem to be endowed with these two very rare attributes, with time, care, and expense being easily seen in their production. *S. Peterson's Field Guide To Cthulhu Monsters* achieves this same level of excellence and would be a very valuable addition to a *Call Of Cthulhu* gamemaster's library.

To begin with, the first thing that struck my eye upon seeing this book was the high quality of the paper that was used in its production, which, although it was obviously of secondary importance, was the first indication of the care that its creators put into the product. It is the color paintings of the 27 various beasts by Tom Sullivan that next attracts the eye, but in most circumstances I would refrain from judging a game or supplement on the basis of its artwork. The quality of the art (or lack thereof) should be only a minor consideration when judging its value, but there are cases when the art and visual qualities of a product are so superior as to add considerably to its character and value or so horrible that it hinders or destroys its value. *S. Peterson's Field Guide To Cthulhu Monsters* is a wonderful example of a product whose value was greatly enhanced by the superb paintings and sketches that it contained (I especially liked the painting of the Ithaqua and the "survivors sketch" of a wendigo on pages 42 and 43), all of which gave the supplement a "feel" or atmosphere that greatly enhanced its overall impact.

The text of the supplement was also interesting as it was organized in the manner of an

actual field manual of wildlife, with sections on the habitat, distribution, and habits of each creature (complete with fictional citations and a bibliography of their sources), and it is also notable for the fact that the monsters' game statistics, such as hit points, were not included. I would say that this format was quite effective, especially when it was done in such a tongue-in-cheek manner as when a monster identification flowchart is presented at the beginning. I thought, however, that the information presented was often too sketchy or incomplete and though I realize that the supplement is intended to give a rough background, leaving the details to be created by the gamemaster's feverish imagination, I believe that a little more detail would have been desirable (...like just what are the special properties of an egg of a male Shantak?). The fact that the game statistics of the monsters described were not included did not bother me, as they can be found easily in the monster section of the *Call Of Cthulhu* basic game, which every game master should already have, and it does not interfere with the established field guide format—have you ever seen a bird watching book that lists the hit points of its subjects?

All things considered, *Peterson's Field Guide To Cthulhu Monsters* is a fine reference work on the terrors of the Cthulhu Mythos and would be a valuable addition to the library of both gamemasters of *Call Of Cthulhu* or to anyone who is interested in the works of H.P. Lovecraft and the horrors of the secret world that he created (in fact, the exclusion of game-oriented information makes this work very attractive to non-gamers who would not have to wade through what is to them pointless text). The supplement is priced at a fairly expensive \$15.95, but I would say that the wonderful art and the information that it presents is well worth it. (Scott McKinlay)

Mechanical Men

by Tori Bergquist
from Cliff Hanger Games

With the surge of the popularity of Japanese animation in the United States in recent years there has also been the development of a demand for game systems based on the science fiction theme of large robots and the like. Several games in this ever-expanding genre that are worthy of note are FASA's *Battletech*, its role-playing version *Mechwarrior*, and Palladium's *Robotech*. *Mechanical Men*, a role-playing game from Cliff Hanger Games, is yet another entry of this type into the gaming market, but, in my estimation, it fails to meet the standards set by its competitors in most respects.

The greatest problem that I saw with the game was its basic design principles (and that, most would agree, is a big problem...). *Mechanical Men* suffers from the assumption that humanity will develop artificial intelligence to the point that the robots (who are the player characters) are themselves endowed with human characteristics. The very title of this game points this out clearly, and the game's intent is to provide player's with humans who just happen to be made of metal (or fighters who can sleep in their plate mail, depending on how you look at it), which doesn't seem like an effort to promote this genre's interesting role-playing potential. The game's designer illustrates this "human bias" by defining a sentient robot as one which possesses "emotional capacity, thought capabilities, and will". I do not intend to pretend that I know a vast amount of information on this topic, nor do I wish to become entangled in an argument over the nature of artificial intelligence, but I can say that if such robots were intended to be used as slaves, as it is clearly stated in the game's background notes, then their human creators would very likely take steps to prevent the development of such things as emotion and will—no one likes a slave who has an annoying tendency to recite the Declaration of Independence complete with his own commentary. I realize that this bias is intended to provide a familiar base from which to play, but a far more challenging and interesting role-playing situation could be provided if the

game doesn't take the easy way out and instead gives the players a somewhat non-human viewpoint and culture to work from. As it stands in *Mechanical Men* the robot cultures of which the players are a part are in complete imitation of Man's, which, at least in my eyes, is just too limiting of the game's potential. Good role-playing would be encouraged to a far greater degree if, for instance, the characters were to be members of a robotic society whose members were still a bit "odd in the head" after the extinction of Man as a result of many years of having to hide what little emotion and willpower that they did develop from their human masters. Such a background would give the characters a much more fertile ground for creating genuinely unique and interesting characters, thus giving the players a better opportunity to expand their experiences through their characters, which, after all, is what role-playing games are supposed to be all about.

The rules booklet itself is about 40 pages in length, 7 pages of which are devoted to fairly detailed background information. As I said before the background has a very serious "human bias" problem, but there were other problems that I saw in it. For example, the entire campaign is based on the premise that in the 30th century sentient robots rule the galaxy after the instantaneous extinction of Man and all other sentient organic beings, and the robot inheritors of the galaxy have no idea how it happened. My first question when reading this was why didn't they know? Were they asleep when it happened? You would think that they would take notice of an event such as the galactic genocide of all sentient organic beings, and these robots, many of whom are intended for scientific purposes, would obviously have the capabilities to properly research the event. I admit that this is a relatively minor flaw but it annoyed me nevertheless.

The rules system itself is very simplistic, with the basic attributes being based on the classic D&D standard of 3D6. The list of the basic attributes includes all the usual ones, with movement and coordination being separate, and replaces the usual charisma attribute with a personality score, which reflects how "human" the robot is. I've always had a little problem with game systems that rate a character's charisma in any way other than his physical appearance, as I am a firm believer in giving the player the burden of the personal magnetism of his character; if the player wants to convince someone of something then the player, not the dice, should do the talking. I disliked the personality attribute of *Mechanical Men* for the same reason, as in my opinion all of aspects of a character's personality should be in the hands of the player and not subject to the whim of the dice. The game's skills system is also simple, and is somewhat reminiscent of that of the old *Traveller* RPG, but its mechanics are completely adequate for most gaming needs. Indeed, the relative simplicity of the basic rules are their greatest attraction to those gamers who want to avoid the cumbersome rule systems of games such as *Aftermath!*, which although they provide extreme realism, often makes maintaining an exciting pace and atmosphere very difficult. The robot's actual body is bought with 100 "structure points" to obtain the various modules available. This system is adequate, but the fact that size plays no factor in the amount of structure points that is available to a robot is a serious oversight in the purchasing of communications equipment and the like, as a radio broadcasting set takes up the same percentage of a 1' tall (SIZ 1) robot's space as the same piece of equipment in a robot that was 20' tall (SIZ 20). A robot's weaponry is purchased in a similar manner with each robot having 150 "credits" with which to purchase weaponry. Again the robot's size is ignored in determining the amount of equipment that it can carry, and it creates the interesting situation of a typical Geologybot having exactly the same amount of potential firepower as a "Death Commando of the Apocalypse", which should be an indication of a serious problem in game balance. I believe that a far more realistic and flexible system could have been achieved by keeping the set number of structure points, using them solely for the purchase of body modules, such as limbs,

and then giving the player a number of credits based on the size of his robot with which to install weaponry and equipment. Thus, a smaller robot would have less equipment than its goliath brother, and a player could more easily specialize his robot to fit his needs—you wouldn't see the everyday Janitorbot packing a missile launcher unless he was very large or the player sacrificed a mop or two in the process.

Mechanical Men's combat system seemed very sketchy, with very important details such as movement during combat, the effect of range in the accuracy of weaponry, and the effect of target size on the chance of hitting your opponent being left out altogether. I also had some serious problems concerning the weapons and their effectiveness in combat. Although I realize that this is a science fiction game and that I make no claim to have vast stores of scientific knowledge, I found a few of the weapons in **Mechanical Men** simply idiotic, such as the "black beam", a weapon that uses the "tangible force of blackness" to engulf an enemy, and the "light blast", which blinds the target for up to 36 seconds. As far as I know the force of blackness theorists aren't making much headway in the physics community and even simple starlight scopes used by the military today have a built-in light feedback function which shuts the device off when a damaging amount of light is encountered. I also found it quite humorous that the typical machine gun in the 30th century has a 100 yard effective range when those used by the armies of the present are often quite effective to ranges of 600-700 yards, which is a problem I have seen in many science fiction games. For some reason beyond my understanding many science fiction game designers seem to think that the bullet will somehow become less effective with the invention of the particle beam pistol and other energy weapons. Perhaps they want to play down such "primitive" emplacements, but I seriously doubt that they would become less effective with the march of technology, and these designers often overlook the fact that the simple machine gun would be vastly more reliable and economical than the more glamorous energy weapons.

In conclusion I would have to frankly admit that I was not impressed with **Mechanical Men** at all. To be fair, it is not the worst game I have ever seen and it does have some very good elements, but it simply cannot compare to its competitors. **Mechanical Men** is, however, priced at a very reasonable \$5, and, with a large investment of time and energy in order to seriously modify its multitude of inadequacies, it could be a very good choice for a "filler" game when your gaming group tires of the regular campaign and where a simple, action-oriented game would be preferable. If, however, you were not willing to invest that sort of effort into **Mechanical Men** to produce a decent "robot game", when there are so many others on the market, then I would not recommend that you buy this game. (Scott McKinlay)

Deadly Fusion from Mayfair Games

In **Deadly Fusion**, you get to play the character of Batman or Superman, using the DC Heroes system, from Mayfair Games.

I can think of no less onerous task in a role-playing game than being forced to play a character that has been around for over fifty years and has over 2000 different stories written with them as the main character. How can anyone be truly able to "role-play" the characters of Batman or Superman? Their character and personalities have already been defined by tens or hundreds of writers.

Deadly Fusion is somewhat unique, in that it is not a standard adventure, but a head-to-head adventure, with solitaire play (gm'ed by the other player) for most of the adventure and then a head-to-head meeting of the two characters at the end. How this works mechanically, I am unable to say, as I could not get another person to play the adventure with me. They did not seem to be thrilled about playing either Batman or Superman. From my reading through both sides though, I

would say that it works fairly well during the solitaire elements, but fails in the head-to-head section, where players switch booklets and give each other responses to circumstances. During the solitaire sections, I can see the non-active player getting somewhat bored.

Deadly Fusion is fairly well written, but no amount of good writing can cover up the chopiness of a solitaire module, and the inherent let down when you have to stop the reading and the action to make a decision from several predetermined courses of action. Also, at the cost of \$9.00, you are looking at a large price for what is essentially a team-up comic book, without the good art, and with choppy writing.

The information and background sections are very good, and detailed, and could be used for source material. I could also see a game master using some of the encounters and information to make this into a good team adventure.

Deadly Fusion is just that, a nasty concoction with the worst of solitaire adventures and head-to-head role-playing thrown into a neat glossy package. Buy the comic books and leave the roles of Superman and Batman to the writers. (Ian Hense)



The Otherwhere Quest from Mayfair Games

I have long held the belief that solitaire adventures for role-playing games are an abomination, mental masturbation if you will. Role-playing, by its very nature, is an interactive environment, so why should you hole up at home, by yourself, with what is essentially a mental Pop-Up book, when instead, you can get several people together and role-play? Don't try and answer that, we'll leave it as a rhetorical question.

So it was with some trepidation that I approached the review of **The Otherwhere Quest**, a solitaire adventure for Mayfair's DC Heroes system.

In the DC Heroes system, unlike other super hero games, you actually play the characters from the comic books. To me this is of dubious value, because it is much like donning the same coat that hundreds of others have worn. In **The Otherwhere Quest**, the reader plays one of the innumerable Green Lanterns that infest Earth, either Hal Jordan, Guy Gardner or John Stewart. Since each of these characters has a well known personality and history already, I am not sure how fun it is to role-play these characters. One of the most entertaining aspects of role-playing is the creation of a persona or character. This is not available to you in the DC Heroes system, or **The Otherwhere Quest**.

As in most solitaire adventures, you have a starting point and then are given various action

choices, which lead you to other parts of the book. This, in itself, is limiting, as the choices you have are not always the ones you want. Also, the "suspense" of a story is somewhat ruined when you have to stop and are given a list of choices. It causes very fractured reading.

As for the adventure itself, it is not badly done. The art and layout are good, though the attempt at high tech graphics fails at times, and the paper is very thin and annoying, hard to tell when you have skipped a page or two. The scenario is well written and progresses logically. I found myself ignoring much of the combat and just reading on, like in an interactive novel. The characters are supposed to be up against a rigid time frame, having a limit to the amount of time they can spend before they fail, but I did not really keep track of this, or the combat, as I would never play this character again in a campaign, so I was unsure of the necessity to bother with combat or time frames. I was also not concerned with my failing the quest due to a botched combat, since a die roll should not keep the hero from his appointed task!

Though the adventure was fairly well written, I fail to see the need to spend \$7.00 on it, as a solitaire adventure just isn't worth it. For that amount of money, you can buy two paperbacks, or even interactive novels, for that is essentially what this is, in the guise of a role-playing adventure. In reality, it is a short interactive comic book, with some dice rolls thrown in to see if Green Lantern will survive different encounters. But for \$7.00, I'd rather buy several issues of the Green Lantern comic book. (Ian Hense)

Witches

by Nigel D. Findley
from Mayfair Games

This is it! The product which answers that burning question: 'How many religious, social and ethnic minority groups is it possible to offend in a single volume?' You know, I really ought to stop reviewing Mayfair's 'Role-Aids' products. Their incessant pandering to the lowest-common-denominator in the world of role-playing is really making me sort of ill, and **Witches** achieves a new height in being just plain ignorant and offensive.

Witches is an attractively produced 100 page book with a glossy cover with a full color illustration of a traditional witch. The interior has a fair number of spot illustrations, a few dashes of color for highlights and clear, readable typesetting. So much for the strong points of this product.

The basic conceptual flaw in **Witches** is the egregious stereotyping of all ethnic and religious groups which are not white and Christian as inherently evil. When combined with careless research and plain ignorance the result is an offensive piece of trash. The book breaks down into ten sections, which include an introduction and examinations of nine different types of witches, which are essentially AD&D non-player character classes. In the introduction the author gives the disclaimer 'I have taken considerable liberty with fact to increase playability' for which I can only read that liberties were taken because the facts were not known, as presenting some truth would have had no effect on playability whatsoever.

The first group of witches examined are 'Classical Witches'. Right on the first page I started to gag. The assumption is made that the ancient Greeks were idiot pagans who practiced religion devoid of 'worthiness and moral and ethical behavior'. Classical witch/priests were apparently without faith and all they did was "butter up" their deities in order to get powers. This disdainful attitude goes on throughout the section, and I thought it was particularly amusing that they provide combat stats for the goddess Demeter. Their definition of classical is somewhat skewed. They never explain what region or period they are dealing with, and make no distinction between different regions, races and religions, lumping Ishtar (Babylonian) in with Demeter (Classical Greek), and completely ignoring Hekate, the one Greek goddess genuinely dedicated to the kind of evil, paganistic witchcraft they

are describing. Admittedly, long dead peoples can't complain, but if you've read any Greek mythology or history or are familiar with other ancient peoples you have to want to see them more fairly represented.

The next section covers the 'World of Faerie'. Well, what can I say? This is actually an attempt to discuss Celtic magic, a topic about which the author apparently knows nothing. Instead he just makes up some silly and not particularly well developed stuff ripped off from some really awful fantasy fiction and a few Disney movies. The section is so sketchy that he doesn't have time to figure out who he can offend.

The section on 'Medieval Witches' seems to have been the product of some research. Findley has read at least one book on witchcraft, most likely by Margaret Murray. Unfortunately no one pointed out to him that not only were Murray's theories completely wrong and thoroughly discredited, but they bear no relationship to historical fact whatsoever. It's nice to hear Findley blathering on about Dianic cults, but since such things never actually existed, the title of the section seems a bit inappropriate. Perhaps something like 'Delusionary Pseudo-Anthropological Hoax Witches' would have been more appropriate. This section perpetuates every bogus stereotype of the modern witch fantasy, which is sort of unfortunate since there is so much good genuine material he could have drawn on if he had bothered to do some high-school level research.

The 'Age of the Occult' section deals with the witches of the Golden Dawn movement and similar 19th century intellectual cults which can really only be peripherally classified as 'witch' cults. This section, while historically vague, is actually accurate, at least to the spirit of the Golden Dawn, because it is one of the few groups dealt with in this book which actually fits some of the author's preconceptions about witchcraft and its practice.

Findley seems to have gotten most of the basic facts straight in 'Witches in the Modern World'. Ostensibly this is an examination of the Wiccan and Neo-Pagan movements of the 20th century, and the basic facts and practices are given in a fairly straightforward manner. What becomes clear, however, is that the author doesn't like these movements, and there is a continuing negative tone in his presentation, implying that they are all evil and/or deluded, culminating in a sample character which typifies all of the negative characterizations of modern witches, an evil Wiccan, which may actually be a contradiction in terms. Oddly, there is no discussion at all of contemporary Satanism in any of its forms which seems like a strange omission given how much paranoia there is about it.

The section on Voodoo is farcical. Loa are referred to as 'Dark Powers' and Houngans are called 'Priests' which indicates how little trouble was taken to research any of this. Findley writes, 'Voodoo witchcraft is an innately Evil tradition', a conclusion which is either the result of prejudice or extreme ignorance. Again he refers to priests 'battering up' gods with sacrifices, and while there is lots of discussion of very traditional magic, there is no indication that he is aware that the primary sacrificial practice of Voodoo is spirit possession and there are no rules to cover this. The only 'Dark Power' mentioned by name is the relatively minor Baron Samedi, which Findley must know about because he saw him in a James Bond movie. There is no explanation of the fact that Baron Samedi is a Guede Loa or what that means, or of the signs of Guede possession or how significant those particular Loa are in Voodoo belief. Hardest to believe is that there is no reference whatever to Baba Legua, without whom most Voodoo practices would be impossible since he is the intercessory between the other Loa and human worshippers. What can I say except, 'Gren mi fret!'

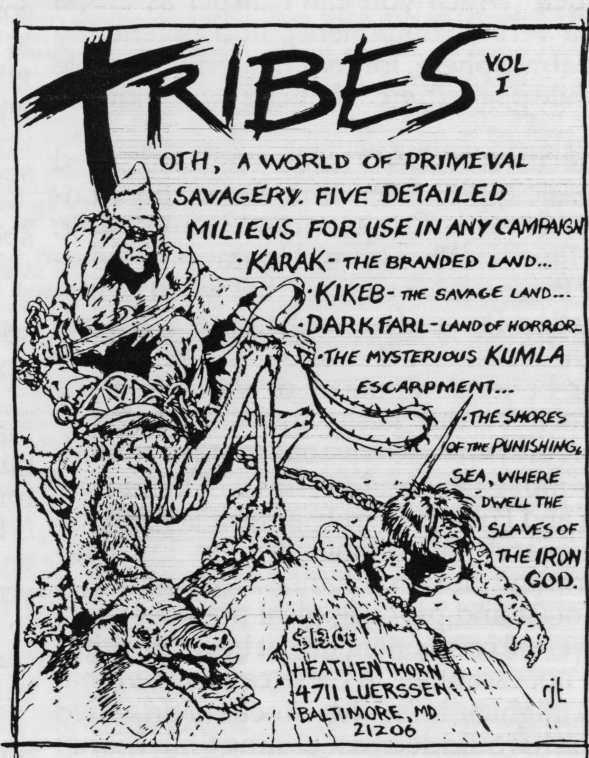
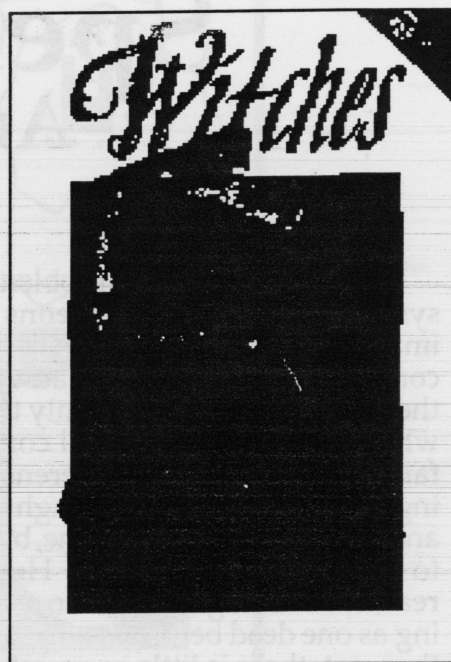
In covering 'Animistic Witches' Findley decides to save time by lumping together a number of different traditions from African animism to Native American religion to Druidism into a mishmash which is flavorless and makes very little sense, sort of generic animism, if such a thing can even be conceived of.

A completely fictionalized section follows, dealing with 'Elemental Witches', which is actually a pretty good idea for AD&D players, giving them something solid to focus on in designing NPC mages who are a bit different. Unfortunately, this is something which has already been done numerous times in *Dragon* magazine and even in official AD&D publications, so it is sort of a coals to Newcastle situation.

The final section deals with fictional witches, particularly those from the Deryni books by Katherine Kurtz which I believe are licensed to Mayfair. This presents what is essentially a class of psychic or mentalist witches, several versions of which are already in print in *Dragon*. It's redundant, but helps bring the chapters out to a nice even number.

Just what AD&D needs, more character classes. And since these ones come with the trappings of ignorance and bigotry, what could be better. The witches in the book are primarily presented as being servants of evil forces and there is little or no discussion of their beneficial function in society. Completely ridiculous assumptions are made and discredited theories are elevated, while far more appropriate historical realities are ignored. What's not to like in *Witches*?

I realize that we all make fun of AD&D players as the simple minded louts of role-playing, but even I find it offensive when Mayfair tries to palm off this sort of garbage on them. If this is the kind of aid AD&D players really want, they deserve our abuse, but so does Mayfair for pandering to their ignorance when they could have filled these 100 pages with something useful and enlightening instead. (Dave Nalle)



Spells in Silence

An AD&D Variant

Eric Olson

One of the major problems with the magic system of **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** is the impossibility of casting spells without a verbal component. In all the myriad versions of AD&D there are very few spells (only three by my count) which do not have a verbal component. In most fantasy worlds there are references to mages enacting the greatest magics through the use of gestures and great concentration alone, but there is no effort to simulate this in AD&D. How often have you read about a mage going into a trance and appearing as one dead before casting a spell. More often than not, there is little or no reference to a verbal component at all. It seems to me that the importance of the verbal element in spell casting is exaggerated in AD&D. There are many cases where the verbal casting of spells is difficult, dangerous or even impossible. Underwater (if you are denied airy water or the ability to breathe water), in the area of a *Silence* spell (which you can't dispel as *Dispel Magic* has a verbal component), in a potentially dangerous atmosphere, for fear of alerting hostile sources, while gagged, etc. I believe I've made my point.

In the current AD&D rules, magic is divided into nine basic types; Alteration, Divination, Enchantment/Charm, Conjunction/Summoning, Evocation, Illusion/Phantasm, Abjuration, Necromantic and Possession. I suggest that with Divination, Abjuration, Possession, Enchantment/Charm and Illusion/Phantasm, the verbal component be dropped or be made optional or variable. The reasoning for this is that these types of spells clearly depend more on mental activity, eye contact/hypnosis or body movement and gestures. Divination, Abjuration and Possession rely almost entirely on mental power and intense concentration. Enchantment/Charm and Illusion/Phantasm rely on things like eye contact and psychological manipulation, where the verbal component might be helpful, but is certainly not essential. In these cases the verbal component might be helpful as a focus or an added element which would decrease casting time, it is not central to the spell.

Some other game systems, like **Ysgarth**, already make use of this concept of non-verbal spell casting and there's no reason why AD&D can't be improved in this way as well. and concentration



aspects of spell casting. For AD&D players I have a few easy suggestions to let you incorporate this concept.

1: Allow the players to drop the verbal component of the spell types listed above.

2: Keep the verbal component in spells the players already possess, but allow them to research new spells of the above types without the verbal component.

3: Keep the verbal component in the spells which they already have, but allow them to cast it without the verbal component at an increased casting time, perhaps adding 4 segments to non-verbal spells.

4: Extend the casting time by 2 segments for spells which are specifically re-researched for non-verbal casting.

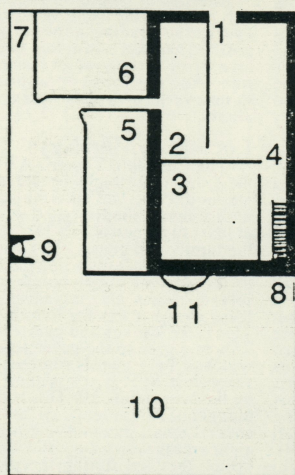
5: If you wish to further penalize non-verbal spell casting, you can increase research time for non-verbal spells by 10 to 40%.

I've had some experience with handicapped mages. Our august editor plays a character who is blind and researched special spells to compensate for that handicap. In my campaign there is a major NPC who cannot speak, but is still a potent spellcaster with non-verbal versions of standard spells. If you use liabilities (covered in an old *Abyss* article or in many game systems like **Hero** or **GURPS**) you can use lack of speech as a liability and gain valuable benefits.

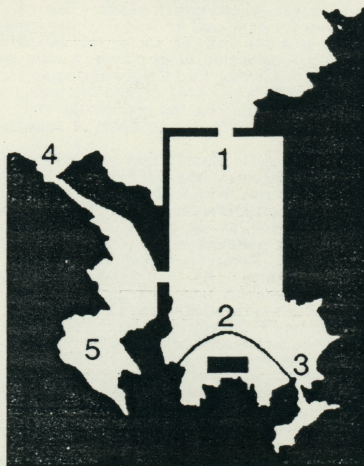
This is not to say that all spells should be cast non-verbally, but it is an option which should be available. I realize that this may take the idea of non-verbal spell casting to an extreme, but these are only suggestions. Most fantasy games rely far too heavily the verbal component and it may be time to put it in its place.

Fortune's Fools

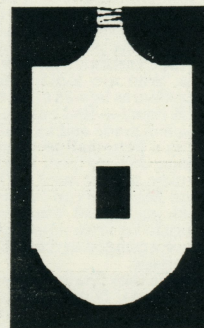
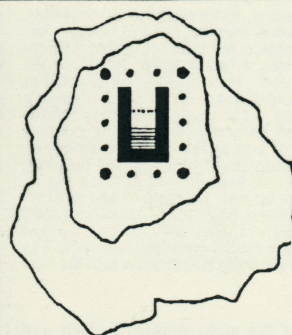
Verona, 1485



The Capuletti Tower



Fra Lorenzo's Chapel



The Tomb

Introduction

This adventure is designed for the setting of *Shakespearean Adventures Volume 1: Shakespeare's Italy*. It is provided here with text but without mechanics or character statistics for use with any game system. It can easily be adapted for a fantasy or swashbuckling campaign. The version which will be featured in *Shakespearean Adventures* will include full mechanics and statistics for *To Challenge Tomorrow*.

The adventure is based loosely on Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*, a lighthearted tragedy, if such is possible, and a good setting for an adventure of this period in which many of the characters should be familiar, though some names and situations have been altered to freshen up the material. The background plot of the action is that of the play, broken down by the days on which the various major actions take place. The position of the characters in this is somewhat variable. The best option is to make them men associated with either the Capuletti or Montago faction, travelling through a number of the notable scenes and events as they happen. Alternatively they could actually assume the roles of the major characters, though that might cause some players to suffer from limiting preconceptions. Because of the perspective of the action, it would probably be best if they were of the Montago faction travelling around with Romeo, or from the family of Prince Escalio, hanging out with Mercutio.

The general background and plot should also be familiar to both players and GM, but there are enough twists to make this version of the classic tale interesting. The events and encounters are written with the assumption that the player characters have taken up with Romeo, Benvolio and Mercutio. They should be given a general rundown of the personalities and capabilities of these three characters. What they do on their own initiative in the various situations is up to them.

Give the players a general outline of the situation in the city. Verona is ruled by a number of merchant noble families, all under the dominion of Prince Escalio. Two of the families, the Montago and Capuletti have a standing feud arising from an old argument between some of the oldest members of the families and kept alive by young hotheads. Some other families are allied one way or another, but the family of the prince tries to keep neutral and maintain the balance and the peace, although its two representatives among the active characters, Mercutio and Farisci are allied to the Montago and Capuletti respectively, however, as members of the Prince's family they are generally not drawn into the feud.

Note that a full set of maps are given above. These are for reference during the scenario. They are in order, the Capuletti tower, Fra Lorenzo's chapel and cell, and the Capuletti crypt in the necropolis just outside of Verona. Note that some action also takes place in Mantua. Which is another town not far from Verona. Also note that during this period both towns are under the general authority of the Doge of Venice, although he leaves administration to local rulers, like Prince Escalio.

Day #1

The adventure begins early in the morning as the

principle characters are gathering in the market. Several servants of the Montago and Capuletti are exchanging words when Benvolio and any of the party wander in. The two servants of the Montago are Romeo's servant Balthario and a kitchen worker named Abraham. They are arguings with two housemen of the Capuletti. Benvolio seeks to break them apart and calm them. Tybalt Capuletti, a renowned braggart and swordsman, shows up, throws a few insults and goes after Benvolio with his sword. Partisans of both sides show up and it turns into a general brawl. Lord Montago and Lord Capuletti show up with their wives and are about to enter the conflict, when prince Escalio rides in with a number of constables to stop the fight. All told, in the course of the conflict, there are 10 Capuletti plus Tybalt and 15 Montago plus Benvolio and the player characters. The partisans should be armed with clubs and knives, the constables with short swords and the more elite family leaders with rapiers. Tybalt is a brilliant swordsman. Benvolio is competent enough to hold Tybalt off for a while. The constables are well organized, but not exceptionally skilled.

Once the conflict is over, Prince Escalio abuses both house leaders, especially if there are any dead or wounded, and instructs them that there is a ban on duelling of any sort on public streets, with a penalty of death for any infringement. No one is taken into custody, because this was more like a riot, but the Prince is clearly displeased.

After things break up, Lord Montago will take Benvolio and his companions (the player characters) aside to inquire after his youngest son, Romeo. He asks them to find Romeo and do something to entertain him and cheer him up as he seems to be in a rather melancholy mood.

After Lord Montago leaves they run into Romeo. After some discussion Romeo reveals that he is depressed because he is in love with a woman named Rosalina, a somewhat older woman of a non-aligned family who doesn't even know he exists. As they head towards the outskirts of town, they run into a harried servant who they recognize as being from the Capuletti household. They stop him and begin to harass him, when they discover that he is carrying a list of people to invite to a masked ball in the garden of the Capuletti tower. The servant cannot read, and asks them for help in locating some of the people on the list. One of those listed is Rosalina. Someone in the party ought to hit on the idea that if they go to the masque in disguise, they can sneak in and get Romeo together with Rosalina and cheer him up while having some fun in the garden of their enemy at the same time.

The masque is scheduled for that night. They decide to go, but plan to proceed cautiously. They pass the day around the town, perhaps visiting a bawdy house and certainly drinking a good bit of wine. You might add an encounter with a group of 10 or so Capuletti partisans, at which Benvolio will go to great pains to avoid violence. Tybalt should not be in this group. Note that to get into the party they will need someone with an invitation. Mercutio, a friend of Romeo and cousin of the prince was on the servant's list. So they will want to seek him out. That evening they succeed in finding Mercutio,

who is bored and listless, and quite willing to have a little fun at the party, especially as there is some danger and intrigue involved. Although he is a member of the prince's family, Mercutio is young and adventurous and likes to stir up trouble behind the scenes.

Romeo, Mercutio, Benvolio and the characters of the players go to the party at night fall. It is being held in the garden of the Capuletti tower. They enter through main gates, where there are two guards who are not actually particularly concerned about who comes in. The garden is large, crowded, and there is a pavillion and dance floor set up with a large number of musicians and quite a few guests, many of them masked or wearing fantastical costumes, though some are not in costume.

Romeo approaches and attempts to romance Rosalina who rebuffs him as too young and too foolish. Others disport themselves gallantly with the ladies, and there are opportunities for romance for the player characters here as well. As the evening progresses, Romeo notices the very young Julietta on the arm of Count Paris, a cousin of the prince, to whom she is about to become betrothed, and an announcement which is made at the party. She seems somewhat distracted and indifferent and is the daughter of Lord Capuletti. Romeo takes one look at her and forgets all about Rosalina, becoming enamored of her at first sight. Young though he is, Romeo is resourceful. He gets Julietta to dance with him and then draws her aside in the garden, out of the pavillion where the dancing takes place into a private grove where his natural charms have a strong effect on the young and impressionable girl. He manages to arouse her emotions and she is quite attracted to the mysterious stranger. He steals a kiss and then she is called back to the dance by his Nurse. He follows at a discrete distance and when her father makes the surprise announcement of Julietta's engagement to Count Paris both Romeo and Julietta are shocked. She by the surprise engagement and he by the fact that she is a Capuletti.

While all this was going on, Tybalt Capuletti spotted Romeo and got a pretty good idea who he was. He has had his eye on Romeo as a promising younger swordsman who might be a challenge to his supremacy as a duellist. Rather than confront Romeo he approaches Lord Capuletti, who restrains him in order to prevent bloodshed. Tybalt storms out, swearing of his plans of vengeance on Romeo. Some of the player characters may overhear this exchange between the two Capulettis.

When the party ends and the group leaves, they get separated from Romeo and begin searching all over the neighborhood for him. Meanwhile he has sneaked back into the Capuletti garden and his having a dangerous secret meeting with Julietta. Eventually they will give up and leave him behind, not believing he would do something as stupid as returning to the Capuletti garden.

At this point some encounters for the other characters might be possible. At the dance they might overhear Tybalt's threats against Romeo. They may have assignments with ladies from the dance in the garden. In addition, when they are out in the streets drunkenly looking for Romeo it is quite possible that their shouting will attract Tybalt who may come out to shut them up

with some of his henchmen. Even so they will probably outnumber Tybalt and his men so he will restrict his attack to insults and threats, especially regarding Romeo.

After he leaves Julietta, around dawn, Romeo goes straight to visit his friend, mentor and confidant, Fra Lorenzo, who lives some distance away from town in a cave by a small chapel. The party may have heard Tybalt's threats against Romeo and they may eventually think of looking for him at Fra Lorenzo's chapel, where they will find him, find out about his meeting with Julietta, and be able to warn him of Tybalt's plans. Despite their warnings he will go back to see Julietta anyway the next day unless physically restrained, and he has a hot temper and is a good swordsman, so that might be difficult. They might also find him with Fra Lorenzo early the next morning if they miss him the first time.

Day #2

In their meeting of the night before, Romeo and Julietta agreed to get married in secret, and in his meeting with Fra Lorenzo Romeo made the arrangements. On the morning of this day, Romeo comes into town and meets with Benvolio, Mercutio and the player characters in the town square, where they encounter Julietta's Nurse and her servant Pietro, who are looking for Romeo. Who they will not recognize, as he was masked when she last saw him. She has come to find out what wedding arrangements Romeo has made and tell Julietta. She tells Romeo of Julietta's betrothal to Count Parisi, and he instructs her to have Julietta meet him at Fra Lorenzo's chapel where they will be wed. The player characters, Benvolio and Mercutio can accompany Romeo to the wedding as guests and witnesses. After the wedding they will return to the town separately from Julietta, and the lovers have arranged to meet that evening to consummate their marriage.

When they come back into town they finally run into Tybalt, who is eager to take on Romeo. Naturally, now that they are cousins, Romeo is reluctant to fight him. Any others may offer to fight on Tybalt (who has 10 men with him), and if none do, Mercutio will upbraid them as cowards and then challenge Tybalt himself. Regardless of who fights, Romeo will try to break it up. As Tybalt is probably a better swordsman than Mercutio or anyone else he faces, he will probably win, but whatever happens, both should be wounded. If Mercutio goes down and Tybalt is already dead, Romeo will pick up Mercutio's sword to help carry him away so that he won't get caught for illegal duelling. Tybalt's men will see him with the sword and accuse him (because he is a Montague) of being the actual killer of Tybalt. If Tybalt kills Mercutio or the player character he fights, Romeo will get mad, attack and probably kill Tybalt. No matter how it works out, Romeo should get accused of murdering Tybalt. Any other character can substitute for Mercutio's role here, so long as Tybalt dies and Romeo gets blamed. Prince Escalio will show up shortly and the characters should flee when they hear he is coming. They may have to hide out somewhere, perhaps at Fra Lorenzo's, and news will eventually reach them that the Prince has exiled Romeo from the city and would have declared his life forfeit, but was convinced not to by Romeo's family.

Meanwhile, Romeo, heedless of danger is going to attempt to consummate his marriage, so he will insist that his friends help him into town and to Julietta's chambers, probably getting them to keep watch outside the house as well. How they work this out is up to them, but there are guards on the city gates and four man watch patrols, all of whom will be on the lookout for Romeo.

In addition, the Capuletti house is in mourning for Tybalt and rather heavily guarded, with all the normal guards tripped. Romeo will spend the night with Julietta if all works as planned, and then they will have the same dangers to contend with in getting him out of town and to a safe haven in Mantua. They might also want to tell his family what is going on and get some cash from them for Romeo.

Day #3

In the morning Romeo awakes and flees the city. Soon afterwards, Lord Capuletti will come and inform Julietta that she will be marrying Count Parisi with all possible haste. Julietta will flee to Fra Lorenzo's chapel to ask him for help, and he will send her back with a potion which will make her seem to have died. He will then contact one or more of the player characters and tell them to go to Mantua, find Romeo and bring him to the Capuletti tomb, where Fra Lorenzo will meet them and they will revive Julietta and reunite the lovers. They must reach Romeo before he hears of Julietta's supposed death.

When they get to Mantua, they go to the hostel where they were told Romeo was staying. They find things in panic and disarray, with people running all about. When they finally get someone's attention, they are told to leave at once, as the hostel is being quarantined because of an outbreak of the plague. They are also informed that Romeo is staying at the house of the Count of Mantua. As they head for the door, 10 Mantuan Constables meet them and push them back in with the points of their halberds. They are informed that they must stay in the house for three days until they are sure the plague has died out. Then the place is boarded up and 6 men are left to guard it. The host apologizes for the bad taste of one of his other guests in dying there, and he offers them room and board for free. Despite this offer, they will have to find some suitable way to escape and get to Romeo in time. There should also be a small chance that they might catch plague while there. What is more, when they get to the Count's house, they will be questioned and scrutinized and delayed before they can see Romeo. The longer they take to get to Romeo, the greater the chance that his servant Balthario, who knows nothing of the plan and knows where to find Romeo, will arrive with news of Julietta's death. This will mean that they have to catch up with Romeo or at least try. This will have to be carefully judged by the GM to minimize the chance of their catching him before the tragic last moment.

When Romeo hears the bad news, he will immediately head to Julietta's tomb to join her in death. The journey to or from Mantua is about five hours by horse, so to add to the difficulties, the journey will have to begin late at night and end around dawn. So the actual locating of Romeo will have to happen on Day #4. The schedule is that they arrive at the hostel in Mantua at 3pm. Balthario will arrive at the Count's house at 6pm, during which time they will be attempting to escape quarantine. Romeo will ride back slowly and arrive around 12m. If they ride fast they could arrive about 15 minutes later.

Day #4

As described above, because no one will get any sleep, this day flows right out of Day #3. The player characters will get back from Mantua a few minutes after Romeo and go straight to the Tomb. Romeo will have arrived first with Balthario, and shortly after Count Parisi will have arrived and when he finds Romeo they will fight. The party should arrive slightly after Romeo

wins the fight, in time to come very close to stopping Romeo from killing himself, or more likely in time to stop Julietta from doing herself in on finding Romeo dead. Fra Lorenzo will arrive a bit later. If they waste little time and do everything efficiently they might actually be able to save the two lovers and get them away safely to Mantua. If the lovers die the two houses will be united in grief. If they live and flee, their union may eventually lead to the uniting of the two houses, and perhaps in a few years they will be permitted to return, especially if they can convince the Prince of Romeo's innocence in killing Tybalt.

The player characters could become big heroes if they can save the two lovers and somehow negotiate an end to the feuding between the two houses. Don't hesitate to throw additional obstacles in the path of true love or of the player characters and their supporting role. And if it seems appropriate, allow the tragic plot to be overthrown if the players come up with clever alternatives.

Locations/Map Keys

The Capuletti Tower - A little detail on the tower of the Capuletti might be useful. It is the first place mapped above. 1: This is the main entrance to the tower, with a heavy bonded oak door, and always guarded by at least two guards. 2: This is a dining hall for use by the family and guests. 3: This is a private entertaining chamber for meetings and the like. 4: These steps lead to the several upper levels of the tower, where the private rooms are, including Julietta's chamber. 5: These are quarters for live-in guards and servants. 6: This is the kitchen and quarters for the kitchen staff. 7: This is a gate to the garden and kitchen. It is always watched by 1 guard, sometimes more if the situation suggests it. 8: This gate is like #7. 9: This is the well used by the household. 10: This is the main garden, with all manner of adornments, including grottoes, a maze, and several small decorative buildings. There is a large clear area in which a pavilion and dance floor can be set up, as they are during the party. The next morning workmen are there taking them down. 11: This is the balcony of Julietta's chamber, which can be climbed to and is located on the second floor near the room of her nurse and farther from the rooms of her parents.

Chapel and Cell of Fra Lorenzo - This is the second area mapped. It is a small chapel and dwelling, built into a mountainside in a heavily wooded area north of Verona. It is where Fra Lorenzo lives a hermit-like existence, charged with taking care of a chapel built in the cave where St. Gaudridi hid from Roman soldiers and died in a cave in. Fra Lorenzo is the confessor and friend of Romeo. He is also an alchemist and dabbler in the magical arts. By the numbers, it features the following things: 1: the chapel, with benches, sacred to St. Gaudridi. 2: The altar with an image of the saint. 3: a sealed crypt with the remains of the Saint. 4: the semi-hidden entrance to Fra Lorenzo's cell. 5: Fra Lorenzo's cell, where he keeps a selection of books and odd herbs and artifacts, including alchemical apparatus.

Capuletti Tomb - This is the tomb where many generations of the Capuletti family are buried. Specifics are as follows. 1: This monument sits on an elevation above the underground tomb and has an entrance to it. The monument is inscribed with names and surrounded by columns. After a burial there will be one Capuletti guard on duty there to keep away robbers. 2: There is a fairly strong gate to the lower crypt. It is locked. 3: There are a number of dead bodies scattered about here, including Tybalt's remains if that becomes appropriate. 4: This is a raised platform on which Julietta will be laid out.

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