

ISSUE
21

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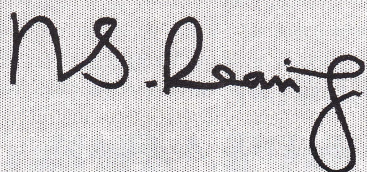
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Editorial Letters

After issue 20 some of the editorial team retreated with our families to the karri forests in South Western Australia for a well-deserved holiday. My three kids had a ball feeding kangaroos, emus, parrots, and kookaburras. Apart from the pesky flies and Karen locking the keys in the car outside the Balingup Cheese Factory we had a very good time. Heartfelt thanks go to the tourists from Ballarat who stopped to rescue us from the heat and flies by twiddling the lock mechanism with a coat hanger. Never again will I allow a thief character in my role-playing sessions to con me he can pick a lock in seconds flat. OK, so the thief is trained, experienced and has all the right tools - but then isn't every lock different, isn't it dark and aren't the other characters breathing down his neck, and if he doesn't get the door open soon won't the bad guys rock up to turn him into chopped liver. Nah, picking locks is no picnic.

We enjoyed a lot of bushwalking. The karri forest is magnificent. But one thing you quickly discover is that rough ground is not easily travelled and your sense of direction is confused by unfamiliar terrain even if you are following well-marked trails. Fact is, landmarks shown on maps are not obvious on the ground and strange things happen to your mind when you're stressed in this environment. I'll have no more rangers/scouts telling me that getting from one place to another is as simple as a dice check. If you're hot, thirsty, tired and confused travelling the wilderness is no picnic.

It was a great holiday. Like all life experiences what I learned can be used to enrich my role-playing activities. If only the reverse were true... but even when I rolled 01 on my d100 that blasted car door would not open!!



Nick Leaning.

Issue 20's News page items The Darkness Continues... And Gets Darker provoked impassioned responses from readers. Here are two letters from the mail bag showing polar opposite views of the current trend into Dark Roleplaying...

Geoff Adams
Belmont, WA

Dear Editor,

Whilst perusing my copy of issue 20, I came across your somewhat short-sighted tirade against the current drift in role-playing towards more character and less rules based games. Certainly role-playing has changed directions since you started all those years ago, but that's chiefly because the hobby has matured. It is no longer acceptable to give the players room after room of pointless limp encounters. The days of taking on the goblins in room 1 and moving onto the vampire lich in room 20 have happily been laid to rest along with the rest of that high fantasy crap, to be replaced by a carefully crafted environment in which players LIVE, not just move. We have progressed away from the GM mysteriously throwing die in order to permit players to do anything he couldn't make a decision over.

Gaming is now where those early pioneers were leading us to, but didn't have the courage to abandon the stereotyped formulae and go for it! How much more satisfying is a night of Vampire, where you walk away *knowing* and *being* your character as opposed to finishing off your gaming night having achieved nothing more than gaining an intimate knowledge of those stats sitting on your knee. Ask any dungeon basher what the most important element of any of his characters is and you can bet your next issue he'd say "hit points"! Ask any Vampire aficionado and he'd say "attitude"! I rest my case.

Geoff, roleplaying has grown since its pioneering days of "dungeon bashing". Whether it has matured is a point which I invite other readers to comment on.

Exactly what ATTITUDE do you walk away with after KNOWING and BEING a murderous, blood-sucking incarnation of evil? Perhaps we're all getting caught in the trap of taking the claims of these "dark" games too seriously. Maybe they're just catering to a currently popular trend for vampires and all things that go bump in the night? As with all supposed "art", the style you prefer rests on a personal value judgement. Play the way you like to play.

Alan Bierce
Glen Iris, VIC

Dear Nick,

Firstly I'd like to congratulate you on an excellent magazine. It continually impresses with its variety and quality.

Secondly I'd like to agree with some of the comments made recently about the direction that role-playing is taking. Certainly role-playing has always been perceived by the wider community as having a certain element of the "lunatic fringe" attached to it. We are continually accused of, on the one hand, engaging in childish behaviour, and on the other being some kind of demon worshipping occultists. The first charge is easily defended on the ground of doing merely what millions do vicariously every night in front of their TV sets. We're simply play-acting. Participating in what most only sit and vicariously watch. Getting a charge from our own imaginations.

The second charge is not so easily dismissed. I mean, let's face it, I've summoned the odd demon in my time and quite proudly so. Does this make me a demon worshipping fiend? I think not. This is all defended by my previous point about imaginative play-acting. Surely this is all happening far, far away in another time and place, and yes I can clearly separate that from the reality that surrounds me. But what happens when we start blurring these distinctions? It is quite obvious that I am not an elf, and I do not ride a white charger across an epic landscape filled with fantastical creatures. But is it so clear that I am not a vampire masquerading as a human living in downtown Melbourne, searching the night for helpless prey? Maybe not.

We are opening up our homes to games in which the idea is to haze the distinction between role-playing and reality. We are asked to become actors not in some far off land, but in our own backyards, and there practice acts which are clearly at best markedly antisocial! We are expected to plumb the depths of our own deeper and darker side to become the character, and act out these grim roles on our doorsteps. We are no longer the heroes, but the anti-heroes in a dark game with few clearly defined points to aim for. These games insist we become the very evils we were once proud to dispose of. Is it too much?

The community is full of people who wish to see us banned on the grounds which we as a hobby seem to be embracing with disturbing glee. In the run to place our hobby off the gaming shelves and into the world of real life experience are we going to far?

Alan, you are NOT a vampire. If you don't trust yourself to cut the crap from the truth - don't play these games! Sadly, the people

who oppose role-playing, generally do so on rigid moral grounds and their attitudes are very difficult to change. Whether they are to be offended by demons in D&D or immortal beings preying on humanity in Vampire and Nephilim is really more a matter of degree than kind. And do we really care what fundamentalists think? Well, yes we do if we are concerned about the future growth of role-playing because these people have a lot of lobbying power - especially in the USA. But then, with the current mass media mania for vampires it might just be that these games are more likely to receive mainstream acceptance than any other role-playing products that have gone before - ironic isn't it! Or clever marketing?

Daniel Farnan
Wollongong University, NSW

Dear Nick & Rest of the AR Team,

I was looking at your very first issue recently, courtesy of a friend of mine, and it was a pleasant shock to see how far Australian Realms (and the gaming industry) have come since those early days - a bigger magazine, more relevant articles and especially UNAE (I can't wait for each new

issue)! The A-Team, too, has remained consistently funny and reminds me of a bunch of guys I used to play (a popular TSR-trademarked game) with.

Not only has the quality of the magazine improved slowly but steadily, two of the articles I rarely bothered to read have led to the expansion of my hobby - *The Analytical Engine* increased my appreciation of the Cyberpunk and SF genre, and *Dice Are Dead* spurred me to follow a years-old urge to play PBM (and Remeses V is kicking serious butt in *Warriors and Wizards* - yeah!). And while I haven't seen *Mechwarrior Brewer* for a number of issues, somehow there's always something different and interesting in its place.

Thanks for creating a magazine that never disappoints, and keep publishing articles by the Ogdens - two of the best contributing authors I've read in any magazine.

Daniel, Mechwarrior Brewer was retired because of reader feedback that he was past his use-by date. We are continuing to move away from game-specific coverage; making Australian Realms an ideas and inspiration resource useful to all role-players.

The Editor Indulges Himself

There are a few things I wanted to say that don't rightly fit into the Editorial format so I've taken the liberty of intruding on your Letters page. Forgive me.

Apology To Cameron Turner

Issue 20's cover of the Unae sea dragon was incorrectly credited. The artist was Cameron Turner (not Thomas). Sorry about the mistake Cameron, but hopefully your next project - a portrait of an avatar of Mortigi, Unae's dark kult god of assassins - will soon grace our cover and we'll get your name right this time - I promise.

Thanks To The Team

1994 was a very good year for Australian Realms with a new format, our debut in the United States and growing recognition throughout the industry of the consistent and improving high quality we have achieved. I just want to say thanks to all the people who helped make this happen - readers, contributors, games companies, retailers, distributors, and advertisers. And especially I want to thank my long-suffering Editorial Team - Lee, Colin, Karen, Steve, Andrew and Paul. Thanks, Team. Now for 95!

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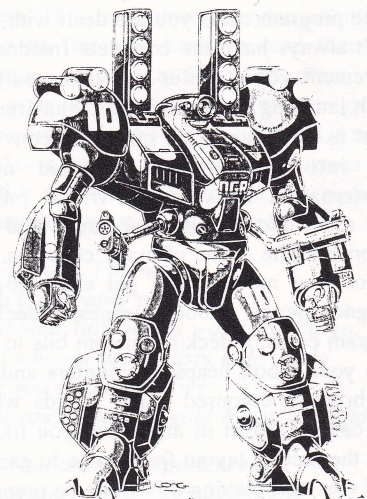
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RE VIEWS

ROBORALLY

Board Game by Wizards of the Coast
Reviewed by Wesley Brooks

RoboRally is the game that brought Richard Garfield and Wizards of the Coast together. Not being set up to handle a board game, however, WOTC asked Richard if he had anything else up his sleeve... and we all know what happened next.

Upon seeing the bright red box I lunged, knowing of the game's origins. I grabbed the three nearest people and began playing straight away. After we hurriedly read the rules we were off on our first RoboRally and we have hardly let up since then. Maybe if I had been a little quieter in my enthusiasm for the game Nick may have overlooked me for this review.

The game itself is sinfully easy; each turn you are dealt a hand of program cards - the number of cards depends upon your state of (dis)repair. You use these cards to program you're robot's moves across the game board - a factory floor - aiming to be the first robot to touch all the numbered flags in the specified order. Now that sounds easy.

Well, it would be easy if it was only you moving and the factory was empty. But you have to race against the other player's robots across a fiendishly designed factory full of conveyors, pits, pushers, lasers, cogs and crushers. Because you are restricted to the program cards you are dealt with, you don't always have the complete freedom of movement you'd prefer and this results in much laughing and pointing as your friend's robot is thrown off the end of a conveyor belt into a smelting pit, and much consternation as your girl-friend pushes your robot into a multi-laser tunnel and you vaporise to the sound of many chuckles.

For your money, you get eight Foglio-designed pewter robot figurines, a deck of program cards, a deck of custom bits to bolt onto your robot, heaps of counters and six big brightly coloured game boards which you can set down in any order you like to vary the factory layout from game to game.

If you start playing this game be prepared to be hooked. Damn, this game is hard to stop playing, which makes a pleasant break from endless rounds of Magic: The Gathering. Now who wants to play again?

"I wouldn't go down Cannery Row,
I learned a few things from Charlie Bot,
Don't you know."

MERCENARIES

Rifts Sourcebook by Palladium
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Mercenaries! Soldiers of fortune! The combat troops we all want to be 'cos they get paid heaps and don't have to parade up and down all day! Grand Old Duke of York - kiss my chrome-plated derriere.

Mercenaries are obviously the ideal player vehicle for exploring the megaviolence of the Rifts world. With all kinds of hell breaking loose there are too many hot spots for the opportunity to release **Mercenaries** be let go by. It was only a matter of time before Palladium brought out this guide to either becoming or buying the services of these bad-ass dudes.

So what do you get for your money? No great departure from the successful Palladium format. The title says it all - a new character class (O.C.C. in Rifts terminology), some campaign hooks, half a dozen ready to hit the ground merc companies, and a spiky arsenal of new and improved killing devices - guns, tanks, combat armour, and other assorted battleground tech. The book is feverishly illustrated by fun and exciting cartoony black and white line drawings of these shiny new toys and the grotesque creatures obligingly waiting to be blown away by them. Once again, everything in **Rifts Mercenaries** is BIG, tough and totally over the top.

Palladium products rarely disappoint, they have established a populist format that only the most uptight *role-playing* snob would denounce. This product is no exception. Required reading for those wishing to adventure in Rifts.

THE BRONZE GRIMOIRE

An Elric! Supplement by Chaosium
Reviewed by Adam Whitt

Subtitled "Magic and the Supernatural" this 80 page supplement for the Elric! roleplaying game expands on the magic system provided in the basic rulebook. Its chapters deal with Runes, Necromancy, Spells, Demons, Demonic Abilities, Enchantments and Tomes. The book is well written with the dark panache we've come to expect for this game of dark fantasy, and it is generously illustrated with images appropriate to the game's macabre mood.

Along with the themes of tragedy,

destruction, despair and the esoteric powers of chaos that are inspired by the Elric saga in novels, the Elric! game also offers a generous helping of black humour in the style of Michael Moorcock. **The Bronze Grimoire** certainly continues in this vein; see this extract from the Necromantic Mishaps Table (the things that can happen if your character fumbles his attempt to raise the dead into service);

"The gates of hell open in your laboratory. The wall breaks down, stones roll in every direction, and monstrous demons rush out. Nothing you do stops them. They tear you to pieces, and drag off your twitching remains to the nether hells."

Not since the hilarious Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play Critical Hit tables has a referee been furnished with such jolly imagery with which to scarify his players into instant law-abiding reformation.

My one complaint with this supplement is I thought there could have been more campaign background information included and advice for the referee on how best to use this new material in their existing games. It appears Chaosium have a policy of leaving referees pretty much to their own devices, which is fine for experienced gamers or those with plenty of time on their hands, but nowadays many referees expect and appreciate more help, hints and adventure hooks in their source material.

The compensator for this slight defect in the product, is the inspiring creativity of its authors. For me, adventure ideas loom like ravenous ghouls from most every section. Such highly imaginative material on magic is especially useful to me, as I like to cannibalise game systems and mix genres. I caught myself thinking how neat it would be to use **The Bronze Grimoire** as a sourcebook of ancient, dark and secret lore to decorate a threadbare patch of my hybrid AD&D campaign. This is a versatile, ideas rich, role-playing supplement. Well worth the asking price.

IMMORTAL

RPG by Precedence Publishing
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

"Immortal: The Invisible War is more than a roleplay game. It is an experience which transcends the limitations imposed by era, genre, culture and gender". Impressive or what? Just when I was thinking, 'oh no, not another, we all live forever and can't die roleplaying game' I'm told it's so much more! Let's take a look.

Latest in the new line of *storytelling* games (as opposed to the old-fashioned *role-playing* games - remember you're an actor now, not a gamer), in **Immortal** you have

the opportunity to take the part of a creature that's been alive for some sixty-five million years. How and why this is so is too long in the telling, but basically you've evolved from creatures who were made immortal by being touched by a being from the great beyond. The creature you once were is still bundled deep inside you, your *Hamsati*, which you must fight to keep under control. You are part of a sophisticated society of creatures which you mingle among with your less long-lived friends.

Immortals generally belong to a Pride, or tribe, based on their Hamsati, and within that Pride you have a particular Calling such as Keeper or Probe which further defines your role within the game. This is one of the game's strong points. Havin a place within a Pride and a well-defined role helps you set in-game objectives. Immortals also have homes, creches and cities to visit and explore. There is a large "world" structure of solid and interesting background, so you soon get the feeling you are playing *somewhere* and have a purpose, not just aimlessly prowling your home town looking for something to do.

All this is very nice, but let's get to the 'what you need to know stuff' like the rules. Aaaargh! The rules are scattered all over the place, intermingled with the background and there is NO INDEX. The only signposts to help you navigate the maze of in-game terminology is a "lexicon" which is strung along the bottom of each page of the book as a hastily thrown together afterthought. Not good enough. When you can find your way to the heart of the rules, they are fairly straight-forward and legible. Game play follows the current trend away from dependence on arbitrary dictates and random tables towards generous guidelines that encourage *storytelling*. Dice play is kept basic, consisting of several variously coloured ten-sided die with modifiers added to your level of ability and compared with a referee-set difficulty level. Magic is present in the form of Serenades, but the game doesn't make too big a deal of it.

The production quality of this book is phenomenal. Good use of photography and computer-enhanced graphics through a large number of colour plates give the game a certain "over the edge" atmosphere. The black and white art, however, is patchy - some excellent work interspersed with some less than average images (and I'd include the cover in this latter category). Layouts are interesting enough to compliment the text and help make the whole experience of reading this book very entertaining.

So what are its chances of success? With **Immortal** you are challenged to buy an idea. An extraordinary place to role-play in and an exotic character to explore. There's no complicated rules structure to trip the



unwary (once you get used to the unique language) and the expectation is you are willing to take the part and act it out. My only quibble is I couldn't help feeling the game might have missed its time. The market is flooded with this type of game, and there is a lot in here which echoes of other recent releases.

A couple of years ago this would have shaken your tree. Today, I think not. Will have to work hard to dislodge those other games from their unholy sepulchres.

ARMS LAW

Rolemaster Combat System by I.C.E.

Reviewed by Adam Whitt

This is dreadful, and for the blurb on the back cover to claim it is the "*latest in the evolution of role playing*" is laughable. Rolemaster was originally released as far back as 1980, and although it has undergone a number of revisions and is currently being released in a Third Edition, the game has hardly pushed the envelope of role-playing.

Before I come to my complaints about **Arms Law** let me tell you it does have some redeeming features. Having the book punched for filing in a three-ring binder will prove useful for those people prepared to use their precious purchases as the tool they were designed to be and not as an artifact for enshrinement (I hate people who won't let you look at their rulebooks because 'you

might soil them'). Also, the fact that **Arms Law** is framed as a combat system compatible with any RPG and comes complete with conversion notes for using it with AD&D might prove useful to people unhappy with their game's combat system.

So what is wrong with **Arms Law**, the combat system for the Rolemaster role-playing game? Well, rather than being all new and exciting, it really harks back to that earliest era of roleplaying when the hobby was evolving from of its original wargaming roots. It has the format and soul of a set of dry wargame rules. The book is 144 pages long with over 100 of them devoted to tables, some of which are repeated over twenty times, and all crammed with symbols, jargon and abbreviations.

The justification for all this mind-numbing eye-strain is that **Arms Law** is supposed to provide the role-player with "*flavour, realism and depth*". But this is simply not the case, the combat system is as random as any I've come across - not in itself a bad thing for a role-playing game but there are many more elegant systems that do the job better and make no such false claims.

For example, although each weapon has a unique attack table allowing for variable damage quotients, the various critical hit tables (these are the ones that are repeated so often) render the same random results without regard to the mechanics of the weapon or the style and training of it's

wielder. Thus, whether armed with a bodkin or a lance, whether a trained knight or rude peasant, there is still a chance that your character could yell - "I'll concentrate my attacks on the bandit's ugly face" and end up, through a dice roll, delivering a strike which "shatters foe's knee".

OK. So lets accept **Arms Law** for what it really is - another abstracted and random result driven fantasy role-playing combat system. How does it play? Awful. There are so many things to keep track of during every combat round that determine the combat effectiveness of your character (walking expends exhaustion points for pity's sake) that it all becomes a nightmare of bookkeeping where only rules lawyers will rejoice. This system reduces, rather than enhances the thrill of role-playing the cut and thrust of combat. It all becomes bogged down in lookup up tables and trying to decipher the results. The rules are simply too intrusive to be enjoyable.

Even if you do want to run a highly detailed and complex combat system this simply is not it. Some of the rules are absurd. For example, you may not move more than 50% of your movement allowance and melee in the same combat round. So much for the age old tactic of using momentum to gain a tactical advantage - no charging into melee allowed.

Dull text. Poor art. Flawed rules. It all adds up to a very poor bargain.

PARLAINTH: THE FORGOTTEN CITY Earthdawn Campaign Set by FASA Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This second Earthdawn boxed set contains a 144 page book covering the city, treasure cards, a large colour map and dozens of 'fragments', one of the best ingredients in this great boxed set. The fragments come in many forms, but they are best described as tidbits the players can buy in the town outside of Parlainth, Haven. Some are maps, others journal accounts from travellers of the ruined city and more. They are all very good, whether their content is true or not; each represents hours, and most often several sessions of gaming time.

The map and other components are well done, the book being an interesting read (it actually being two books bound together, my only gripe). These two books are the 'GM's Guide to Parlainth' and the more general 'Ruins of Parlainth'. The quality of production for the entire boxed set is very high. The box cover painting is fantastic.

The text is very good, many of the finer details that have never been covered in any other similar product have finally been explained and justified as common sense demands. No longer do ruined cities conveniently lay there awaiting pillaging.

Many of the sections are handled so well, in fact, that I would recommend that players of other campaign settings (such as Forgotten Realms) should consider buying the set and converting it to their game system.

In short, for a magic rich setting where fantasy is fantastic, such as Earthdawn, this is a market leader.

PARLAINTH ADVENTURES Earthdawn Adventure Pack by FASA Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This book is an 80 page compilation of four adventures set in Parlainth. While not needed to get the most out of the Parlainth boxed set it does give some very good ideas on how the campaign set was planned to be used. All four adventures are well done, and have suitable twists and personalities in them. Combined with the boxed set this would be a great series or adventures.

Art and text is great. The product being handy at the very least as an ideas source, but such a use would be sadly missing its full potential by far. If you are going to buy this, get the boxed set - your players may never leave Parlainth. It will be up to them to decide whether that is because they fall prey to the ruins many horrors, or that they are just too busy exploring and having fun.

MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH Ravenloft Campaign Set/Expansion by TSR Reviewed by Colin Taber

This alternative Ravenloft setting for AD&D is placed within the "real world" - 1890's *Gothic Earth*. This world is slowly succumbing to the hidden manipulation of the Red Death; a force of evil that is barely perceived, let alone understood.

The Red Death came to Earth around 2500BC, access gained due to powerful magics being cast by the servants of the pharaohs. Since this time it has been gaining in strength and spreading its influence, gradually claiming the world. It's servants and minions, the undead and the mad, are bringing it to a position of seemingly unassailable power.

Masque of the Red Death is packed with high quality bits and piece. First of all there's a 128 page book 'A Guide to Gothic Earth' covering topics as diverse as the history and atlas of Gothic Earth, to the rules and suggestions on how to role-play there. Next are three 32 page adventure modules, in themselves representing good value and a great starting point for a Red Death Ravenloft campaign. Also included are a referee screen, a poster of the cover art and a map of the 1890's alternate earth setting of Gothic Earth. The only complaint I have about any of this is the error on the Gothic Earth map, showing the Commonwealth of Australia, a nation which didn't yet exist.

All in all this has revived my interest in the Ravenloft setting, something which has been on the wane since the second edition of the core boxed set. While **Masque of the Red Death** is not placed within the Ravenloft demi-planes, it is nonetheless Ravenloft horror in feel, tone and atmosphere. For those interested in this genre, give it a good look over.

PACIFIC RIM SOURCEBOOK Cyberpunk Supplement by RTG Reviewed by Paul Mitting

Yet another well-written product for Cyberpunk 2020 from the R.Talsorian team. In summary, you get 160 pages of background data on the various nations lying in the Pacific area. The text is well thought out, and the illustrations are adequate. On a personal note, better artwork would have enhanced the product's appeal.

Particular emphasis is given to Japan (36 pages worth) and it's culture. As Nippon and it's people are major elements in every Cyberpunk gameworld, this is useful stuff. The info includes an extensive lifepath for Japanese characters, and some guidelines for what player roles are suitable. The section on Japanese gangs provides plenty of potential for gaming either within or against them (remember the bike riding gangs from Black Rain and Akira?).

If you plan on a heavy firepower game, avoid Japan. They've extensive laws about weapon ownership. Most of the guns that are used by gangs and criminals are blackmarket and very expensive. The average ganger prefers simple melee weapons and lots of martial arts. An interesting counterpoint is that body armour is quite acceptable. This means the guns you manage to get hold of could be redundant. To compensate the players for this lack of firepower available there's an extended and brilliant section (20 pages) on Martial Arts.

Australia gets pretty good coverage; the basics of the 2020 Australia are sport, beer and swearing. I must confess to being surprised at the language that was not edited out, although the use of asterisks partly covers it - sh*t and f**king. Despite this tendency to reinforce a poor stereotype, the background provided does make for an interesting game environment. Australia is now a Republic, with West Australia seceded and formed as a separate Republic (Yay!). Friction is rife between the states and the Aborigines have formed their own terrorist group, the Koorie National Front. Melbourne is a criminal haven, Sydney is plagued by a typhus epidemic and Queensland has the meanest cops ever hatched. Enjoy!

This supplement is "grouse" (in Aussie slang this means "very good" which was news to me). Buy it now, mate. ■



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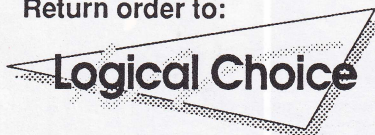
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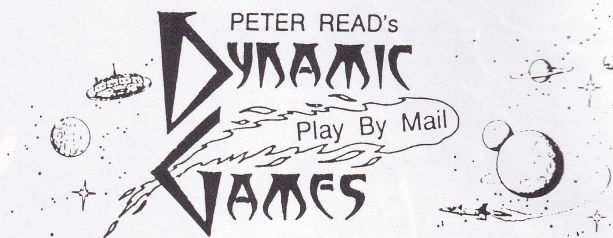
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SLANNESH'S SERVANTS OF CHAOS

THE DARK ELDAR

by Darrin Mison

THE DARK PAST

FIFTEEN thousand years ago, the Eldar were a peaceful, planet dwelling species. Many details of their homeworld are nearly totally unknown, however, even to the Eldar themselves for their entire civilisation was destroyed almost overnight by the catastrophic events that have now become known as "the Fall". The Eldar refuse to discuss the Fall and within the Imperium it has become the subject of the Inquisito Relinquo, the indefinite seal of heresy. To even know of its existence is considered heresy.

The Eldar psyche is very delicate and psychic sensitive. The emotions experienced by Eldar are virtually identical to those experienced by Humans but the Eldar tend to be more extreme in their feeling of these emotions. Equipped with this "hyper-sensitivity" the Eldar find it overwhelmingly tempting to rid themselves of all unpleasant, negative emotions and to only indulge in pleasant, positive feelings, a desire which often sees the Eldar engage in orgies of physical and intellectual self-gratification. This pleasure cult of the self, and the legendary psychic receptiveness of the Eldar led to their Fall and the birth of the fourth great Chaos Power, Slannesh.

While many Eldar at the time realised the danger of such abandonment into the cult of the self, great numbers of the race fell into this trap and the accumulative psychic energy released by this global orgy of pleasure is what awakened the dormant Slannesh into glowing consciousness. It was realised by many seers that a time of great doom was approaching. These seers managed to convince many Eldar of this truth, and a sizable proportion of the population fled their homeworld in huge interstellar trading ships. These became the wandering home of these Eldar and have since undergone such incredible modifications that today they are virtually artificial planets known as craftworlds.

Those foolhardy Eldar left gorging their insatiable appetites on the homeworld were now largely reduced to a mass of insane gibbering bodies, totally surrendered to self-gratification and a resulting worship of Slannesh. Slannesh emerged into this maelstrom of pleasure with a terrible psychic scream that caused the death of thousands of Eldar on the fleeing craftworlds, and the sudden awful demise of hundreds of other races within the vicinity. The corrupted Eldar homeworld had become a conduit for pure Chaos to spew into the region, collapsing that part of the galaxy into what is now referred to as the Eye of Terror.

THE DARK ELDAR ARE SPAWNED

It was because of the fall and the psychic vulnerability of the Eldar to Slannesh that the surviving Eldar developed the concept of the Eldar Path in a bid to ensure the emotional well-being and survival of the race. As to those left on the homeworld, they are considered by most Eldar to have been destroyed. The Farseers of each craftworld, however, know different. Slannesh could not afford to slay outright his most devout followers, the source of his awakening power, and so they were subjected to the warping influence of Chaos which in their advanced state of wanton abandon they embraced with glad hearts. Immediately they were reborn into what the Farseers call the Slanneshi - the Children of Slannesh, the Dark Eldar. The Farseers keep this knowledge secret from all but a few, they see ignorance as the best defence against

that which could once again destroy their sundered civilisation. If the Eldar don't know the truth then hopefully they will not be tempted to a grab for power and a repeat of the fall. Despite these efforts, some Eldar have fallen from grace and embraced Chaos; these 'out-casts' are ostracised from the craftworlds and Eldar society and are never again spoken of.

The Dark Eldar are the bare remnants of the proud race that they once were. They have retained the superficial trappings of grace of their previous existence but this has been deeply corrupted to a level that is both deadly and perversely attractive. The distinction between male and female has become all but non-existent as is highly pleasing to Slannesh. Mutations run riot through their bodies and they gain their sustenance direct from pure Chaos. Already a highly psychic race, the Dark Eldar revel in the power that Chaos grants them. They remain largely within the Eye of Terror due to their dependence on Chaos, but occasional raiding parties leave to attack passing fleets and nearby systems.

Dark Eldar armies are lead by hugely powerful psykers called Wytches and the bulk of their forces are made up of bands of mutated Warriors and Cultists as well as soulless Slave Warriors and Daemons. They are often accompanied by a Keeper of Secrets as the ultimate notifier of their loyalties. Among their numbers can also be found Outcasts who have returned from the craftworlds seeking refuge, these serve as Cultists, Warriors or Possesseees.

THE DARK FORCES OF CHAOS

Dark Eldar Chaos Cultists

These cultist covens, devoted to Slannesh of course, make up the bulk of Dark Eldar attack forces, as well as the bulk of their homeworld populations. Less deadly than the fearsome Warrior Bands, they are no less committed to their evil cause. The Cultists are commonly armed with laser or shuriken weapons. As a general rule they're considered to be the Guardian forces of the Dark Eldar. **HATRED:** Dark Eldar Cultists are subject to hatred of all Eldar.

Dark Eldar Warriors

Unlike the Eldar, the Dark Eldar have no Aspect Warriors as such because the concept of the Eldar Path was developed after the Fall. Besides, the restraining of indulgences is alien to the Dark Eldar and highly displeasing to Slannesh. Dark Eldar Warrior Bands are usually equipped with shuriken weapons as well as a variety of special and heavy weapons.

HATRED: Dark Eldar Warriors are subject to hatred of all Eldar.

Dark Eldar Wytch Lords

As the Eldar are a highly psychic race they are vulnerable to daemonic possession. The Dark Eldar actually welcome daemonic possession as both the greatest sign of favour from their god and as a pathway to novel and exquisite experiences beyond the understanding of ordinary mortals. Psykers are particularly favoured by Slannesh due to their close ties with the Warp. The most powerful of psykers are usually possessed by a Keeper of Secrets. These foul individuals are grateful receptacles of power beyond imagining, and are all but worshipped as gods by the Dark Eldar whom they rule over. It is these Wytch Lords who lead Dark Eldar armies in battle.

BREAK TESTS: Wytch Lords never need to take break tests, they are assumed to have passed any test automatically. Death holds no fear for them, it is welcomed as the ultimate experience.

PSYCHOLOGY: Immune to all psychological effects except hatred

as described below.

HATRED: Dark Eldar Wytch Lords are subject to hatred of all Eldar. **DAEMONIC POSSESSION:** Dark Eldar Wytch Lords are possessed by a Keeper of the Secrets (Codex Imperialis p82) and so can take one of the following Daemonic Abilities:

Aura of Slannesh: as per a Keeper of Secrets (Rule Book p66).

Demonic Aura: Unmodified 4+ saving throw that offers no protection against force weapons etc.

Terror: cause Terror as described for a Keeper of Secrets.

Dark Eldar Possesseees

Some Dark Eldar are especially favoured by Slannesh. This is usually due to the warrior's fighting technique causing maximum self-gratification and their victims to die in the throes of ecstasy. Slannesh rewards such prowess with daemonic possession. Not psykers, they are only possessed by Lesser Daemons.

PSYCHOLOGY: Immune to all psychological effects except hatred as described below.

HATRED: Dark Eldar Possesseees are subject to hatred of all Eldar.

BREAK TESTS: Dark Eldar Possesseees are assumed to pass all break tests. If they are leading a unit, the unit may flee even though they are using the Possesseees Leadership. In this case the Possessee immediately leaves the unit.

DAEMONIC POSSESSION: Dark Eldar Possesseees are possessed by lesser daemons of Slannesh. Thus they can take one of the following daemonic abilities:

Fear: The possessee causes fear as described in the Warhammer 40,000 rule book (Psychology p65).

Soporific Musk: The Possessee exudes a Soporific Musk which is exactly the same as that produced by Fiend of Slannesh (Codex Imperialis p83).

Tongue Attack: The Possessee gains the tongue attack of a Steed of Slannesh (Codex Imperialis p83).

Dark Eldar Wytches

The Dark Eldar are truly powerful and corrupt psykers. Their natural psionic sensitivity when combined with the corrupting influence of Slannesh produces psionics totally unlike anything the galaxy has before witnessed.

HATRED: Dark Eldar Wytches are subject to hatred of all Eldar.

PSIONICS: Dark Eldar Wytches have the following mastery levels: Wytch - 1; Wytch Champion - 2; Wytch Master - 3. They drawn their psychic powers in the same manner and from the same decks as Chaos Magi.

Slanneshi Daemons

Refer to the Codex Imperialis for information on these daemons.

Soul Slaves

When the Dark Eldar capture Eldar prisoners they often inflict on them horrifying perverse rituals devised to corrupt their Way Stones and take their souls. This process leaves the Eldar captive as soulless automatons in the service of Slannesh. When in this state they are completely unable to use psionics. An Avatar cannot be made into a Soul Slave as it is impossible to take them prisoner. Dark Eldar regard Soul Slaves as expendable mass troops which are often deployed forward to absorb missile fire.

PSYCHOLOGY: Immune to all psychological effects.

BREAK TESTS: Soul Slaves are not deemed to have any free will and thus any concept of peril. They are assumed to pass all Break Tests automatically. It is possible, however, that Soul Slaves retain a tiny vestige of sanity which watches with dread at what their body is forced to do, and perhaps that is why they refuse to run from danger as death may bring release from their living hell.



CHAOS MUTATIONS

The path of Chaos leads swiftly to power but there is a heavy price to be paid; the exactions of the Dark Powers are taken from the individual's body and mind. Their frame is twisted and contorted to echo Chaos and the Warp. Only the most favoured or the most fortunate can survive these terrible gifts without degenerating into mindless Spawn. Slannesh, however, particularly favours the Dark Eldar and their mutations do not affect them adversely, only enhancing their already considerable abilities. Dark Eldar characters and squads may have mutations. The points costs of mutations can be found in the Mutations section of the War Gear rule book. Each mutation is fully described below:

Agility: This mutation makes the mutant incredibly agile. Initiative is increased by 2.

Aura of Terror: Due to a multitude of minor cosmetic mutations - extra eyes, eyes on stalks, re-arranged facial features, living hair, strong odour, hideous shriek etc. - the mutant takes on an horrific appearance which causes Terror (see WH40K Rule Book). In some cases, the outer appearance of the mutant is in no way distorted and yet the sheer menace of its presence creates the Aura of Terror.

Beaked: The mutant has a beaked face not unlike a parrot or other such bird. Other facial features remain unchanged. The mutant may bite with the beak and its Attack value is increased by 1.

Bestial Head: The mutant's head has become that of a beast. This may be the head of a rat, dog, insect or other vicious animal. A mutant blessed with a Bestial Head causes Fear.

Blood Rage: The mutant is subject to Frenzy as described in the Warhammer 40,000 Rule Book. The point cost for this mutation is unusual as it is not just 'plus' on the current point cost. Calculate the normal point cost first, applying all upgrades and any other mutations. Then add half of this cost (rounding any fraction up) to the total cost of the unit. eg. A Chaos Cultist (10) with a Shuriken Catapult (5), a Plasma Pistol (4) will cost 19 points before the mutation of Blood Rage is costed in as +10 (ie. 19 divided by 2, fractions rounded up) for a total cost of 29.

Extra Joints: The arms and legs of the mutant have additional joints which enable the mutant to move and react faster in tight situations. Movement and Initiative are increased by +1.

Immense Strength: The muscle structure of the mutant bulks up to an incredible density. This gives the model a +1 to Strength which applies to all weapons being used in hand-to-hand combat.

Long Legs: The mutant's legs are abnormally elongated increasing the model's movement by half, rounding up.

Poisonous Bite: The mutant may make a bite attack instead of striking with weapons and inflict wounds using their Strength +2.

Poison Spines: The mutant's body is covered by long poisonous spikes. When the mutant is hit in hand-to-hand combat, the attacker takes a Strength 4 hit. This is worked out before damage is calculated for the mutant; this way the attacker may die before he actually strikes the mutant and the mutant survives unscathed.

Psychic Resistant: The mutant has a strong resistance to psionics. They can resist the effects of any psychic ability which affects them on a roll of 4+ on d6. This does not dispel the ability and it may remain in play and affect other models. If the mutant remains in the area of effect of the psychic ability they have to make another resistance roll at the start of each of their turns.

Regeneration: The mutant has the uncanny ability to recover from wounds which would easily slay another mortal. When "killed" place the figure on its side, and at the start of its turn roll a d6 - if a 4+ is scored the model gets back up with 1 wound. The point cost for this ability is two thirds of the model's total point cost (before counting the mutation) round fractions up.

Scorpion Tail: The mutant has sprouted a segmented tail like that of a scorpion. It can be used to make an additional attack in hand-to-hand combat. Attacks is increased by one and the Strength of the extra Attack is equal to the mutant's Strength +2.

Scaly Skin: The mutant has grown excessively scaly skin similar to that of the Dragons ridden by the Exodite Dragon Knights. This increases the mutant's Toughness by +1.

Scythe Arms: The mutant's arms are now formed into huge blades. No other weapons can be carried or used, but the mutant does gain an extra attack, +2 to Strength and can Parry twice.

Tentacles: Often seen by most as the classic Chaos Mutation, the mutant grows several tentacles out of his or her body. These tentacles may replace limbs or be in addition to them. In either case this mutation increases the model's Attacks by +1.

DARK ELДАР ARMY LIST

CHARACTERS	Up to half the points value of the army.
SQUADS	At least a quarter of the points value of army.
DAEMONS	Up to half the points value of the army.
SOUL SLAVES	Up to a quarter of the points value of the army.
SUPPORT	Up to half the points value of the army.
ALLIES	Dark Eldar may ally with Chaos or Orks

Characters

1 Dark Eldar Wytch Lord.....190 points

A Dark Eldar must be commanded by a Wytch Lord, one of the possessed psykers who rule the Dark Eldar. The Wytch Lord has a strategy rating of 4 and is a level 4 Psyker who draws his abilities either from the Chaos Slannesh or Adeptus Telepathica decks as per a Chaos Magus of Slannesh. He is armed with a Las Pistol and Carapace Armour (save 4+). May have up to 3 Wargear cards and any combination of additional Wargear allowed by the Dark Eldar Wargear list (see list for points values). The Wytch Lord may take up to 3 Chaos Mutations selected from the Mutations section.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Wytch Lord	5	6	6	4	4	4	7	3	9

0-1 Dark Eldar Possessee..... 190 points

A Dark Eldar may include up to one Possessee for each Warrior Band or Cultist Coven in the army. Armed with a Shuriken Pistol and Carapace Armour (save 4+), the Possessee may take up to 2 Wargear cards and any combination of additional Wargear allowed by the Dark Eldar Wargear list (see list for points values). The Possessee may take up to 2 Chaos Mutations.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Possessee	5	6	6	4	4	2	6	2	9

Dark Eldar Wytches

Wytch	30 points
Wytch Champion	65 points
Wytch Master	110 points

A Dark Eldar army may include any number of Wytches. Armed with Las Pistol and Carapace, Dark Eldar Wytches may take up to 2 Wargear cards and any additional equipment as per the Wargear list. Wytches are powerful psykers with the following mastery levels: Wytch - 1; Wytch Champion - 2; Wytch Master - 3. They draw their abilities from the same decks and in the same manner as a Chaos Magus of Slannesh. Dark Eldar Wytches may have up to 1 mutation selected from the Mutations section of the Wargear list.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Wytch	5	3	3	3	4	1	5	1	8
Champion	5	4	4	4	4	2	5	1	8
Master	5	5	5	4	4	3	6	2	8

Squads

Dark Eldar Chaos Cultist Covens10 points per model

A Dark Eldar army may have any number of Chaos Covens. A Coven consists of 5 - 20 Cultists armed with Lasgun and Las

Pistol, or Las Pistol and a Sword, or 2 Las Pistols. Any number of models can be equipped with additional assault or basic weapons from the Wargear list. Up to one model can be equipped with a special or heavy weapon from the Wargear list. All models have Mesh Armour (5+ save). The entire Coven may have up to 1 mutation selected from the Mutations section of the Wargear list, the point cost is per model.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Cultist	5	3	3	3	3	1	4	1	8

Dark Eldar Warrior Bands 15 points per model

A Dark Eldar army may have any number of Warrior Bands. A Band consists of 5 to 20 Warriors armed with a Las Pistol. Any number of models can be equipped with additional assault or basic weapons from the Wargear list and one model can take a special or heavy weapon. All models have Carapace Armour (4+ save). The entire Coven may have up to 1 mutation selected from the Mutations section of the Wargear list, the point cost is per model.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Warrior	5	4	4	3	3	1	6	1	8

Daemons

Slanneshi Daemon Hosts

Keeper of Secrets	200 points per model
Daemonettes	27 points per model
Fiends	19 points per model
Steeds of Slannesh.....	19 points per model

A Dark Eldar army may have any number of Daemon Hosts. Daemon Hosts consists of 5 to 10 models except in the case of Keepers of Secrets which may only be fielded as individuals. Daemonettes are psykers - refer to Dark Millennium Rulebook page 26 for details. Steeds of Slannesh may be purchased as Mounts for characters and this in effect creates a Host made up of two different Daemons which can be made up of 10 to 20 models although there must be equal numbers of Daemonettes and Steeds.

Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Keeper	6	9	10	7	7	8	7	6	10
Daemonette	4	6	5	4	3	1	6	3	10
Fiend	6	3	0	3	3	1	6	3	8
Steed	12	3	0	4	5	1	6	1	10

Soul Slaves

Soul SlavesVariable points value

Soul Slaves can be made up of any of the following Eldar units: all Guardian Squads, all Aspect Warriors, Eldar Scouts, Exodite Dragon Knights, Eldar Pirates (including a Pirate Captain), Support Weapons on Anti-Grav Platforms, and Harlequin Squads.

Support

VehiclesSpecial

A Dark Eldar army may include any of the vehicles in the Vehicle section of the Wargear list (see the Wargear list for point values and the relevant Datafax for details of the vehicle). With the exception of JetBikes, the point value includes the Cultist crew

armed with Las Pistols and Mesh Armour. JetBikes can be bought as upgrades for characters, Cutlist Covens and Warrior Bands but only if the entire squad is mounted on Jetbikes.

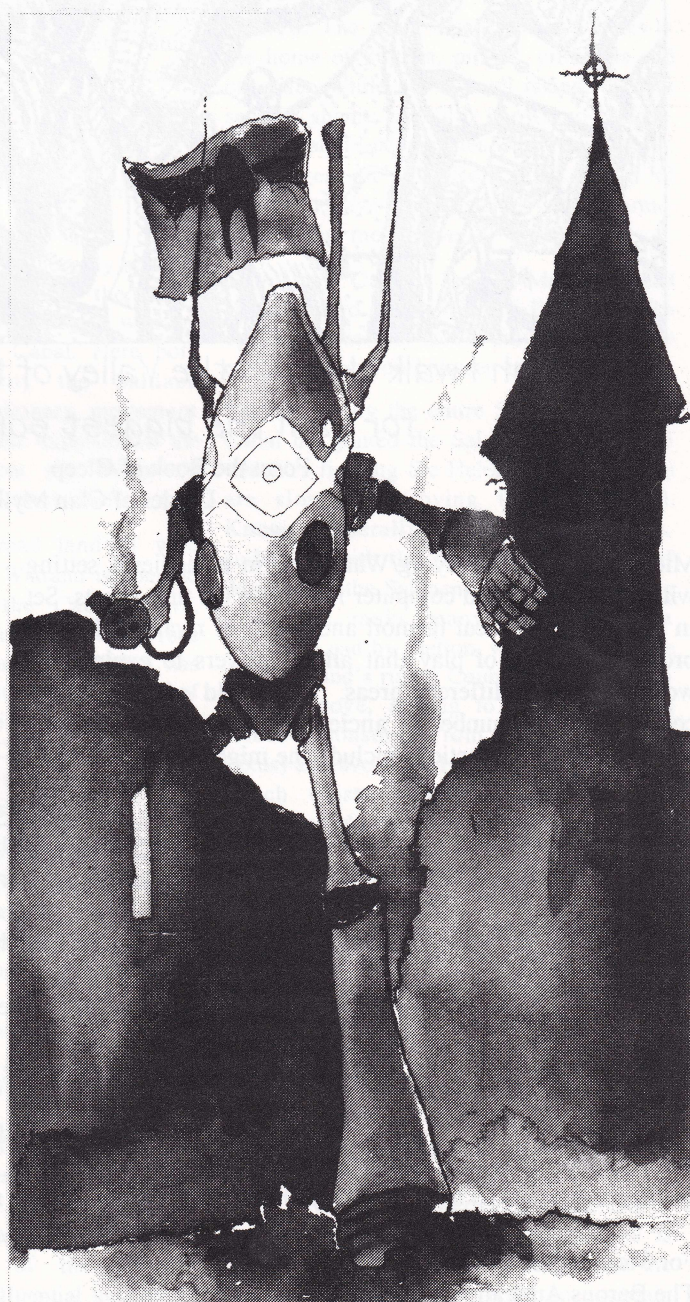
Troop Type	M	WS	BS	S	T	W	I	A	Ld
Cultist Crew	5	3	3	3	3	1	4	1	8

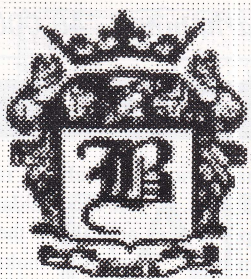
DARK ELDAR WARGEAR

WARGEAR	COST
ARMOUR. One item per model. For characters only	
Refractor Field	6
Conversion Field	14
Displacer Field	24
ASSAULT WEAPONS. Any number per model.	
Chain Sword	2
Power Axe	7
Power Glove	10
Power Sword	6
Hand Flamer	7
Las Pistol	1
Needle Pistol	10
Plasma Pistol	4
Shuriken Pistol	3
Sword or Axe	1
BASIC WEAPONS. One per model.	
Shuriken Catapult	5
Las Gun	2
Cross Bow	1
HEAVY WEAPONS. One per model (not characters) Incl targeters.	
Shuriken Cannon	40
Auto Cannon	25
Needle Pistol	10
Las Cannon	45
Missile Launcher	45
Multi-Melta	65
Heavy Plasma Gun	40
VEHICLES	
War Walker	See Datafax
Vyper JetBike	See Datafax
Jet Bike	See Datafax
Falcon Grav-Tank	See Below
MUTATIONS	
Agility	5
Aura of Terror	15
Beaked	5
Bestial Face	5
Blood Rage	Special
Extra Joints	5
Immense Strength	5
Long Legs	10
Poison Spines	10
Poisonous Bite	5
Psychic Resistance	20
Regeneration	Special
Scorpion Tail	10
Scaly Skin	10
Scythe Arms	15
Tentacles	5

ELDAR FALCON GRAV-TANK

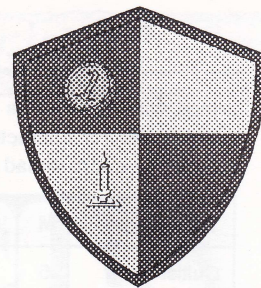
The Eldar Falcon Grav-Tank is the main transport vehicle in common usage by Eldar and Dark Eldar forces. It, like most Eldar vehicles, uses anti-gravity motors to propel it over and above the ground surface, skimming over all terrain types. It can also make pop-up attacks like other skimmers. It is armed with a single Las Cannon and four Shuriken Catapults for anti-infantry purposes. The Falcon Grav-Tank can carry 10 normal figures, eg. 10 infantry or characters, or it can carry 1 Dreadnought, or it may carry 1 Support Weapon and 5 figures, or 2 Support Weapons. They cannot be used to transport an Avatar due to the Avatar's white-hot metabolism and the problems you usually have when trying to transport living incarnations of bloodthirsty and murderous gods. Falcon Grav-Tanks are available from Epic Cast (USA) as a resin kit. ■





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THE ART OF COMBAT

Add Some Flavour To Your Next Session of Roleplaying Combat

by Alan Ogden.

As Virgil and Shana went about their work, the heap of orcish dead and wounded was increasing logarithmically.

"Yo!" burbled Virgil happily as another orc head bounced across the floor. "Brill! Low-life, two hits per round! Don't you just love first-level greeblies."

Shana's blade flickered; first one, then a second orc fell cleanly sliced and diced. "Yup, all seems a bit too easy really...." with a nervous glance upwards.

- Adventures of the A-Team, Andrew Daniels

Combat. It's the stuff of legend. Mighty heroes battling terrific odds and triumphing over all. Combat is the source of gaming stories told over and over - how such and such a character dealt with such and such a foe. As a role-play referee one of your primary goals is to always keep things interesting and, ideally, make each and every combat the stuff of legend - well gaming legend anyway. This means having to repeatedly come up with new and exciting combat scenarios, generating drama and maintaining the pace by keeping things moving. In the high-action books and movies which inspire us role-players, combat is the fastest flowing, most action-packed part of the story. Yet in most role-playing games combat can be slow and tedious. The exciting battle envisaged by players and referee degenerates into a time consuming mechanical routine.

There are numerous reasons for this, the rules system used - "You can't do that, the rules say..."; the sheer frequency of combat - "Ho hum, another swag of orcs to kill"; the fatigue of referee and players - "Lets just polish one more obsidian before we go home"; or the lack of preparation by the referee - "Emmm, I think the elf decker can do that, let me just check the rulebook".

In this article I will address these problems and explain some of the techniques I use to overcome them. I'll also try to give you some ideas you can take away to use in your games. Remember, even if your players are not combat junkies, conflict frequently reduces to violence in role-playing games and combat should be as well-prepared as any other part of your storyline.

The Trouble With Rules

Many of the problems with role-playing combat can be traced back to the highly random outcomes and result tables most combat systems rely on. The necessity of rolling dice and then consulting one (or more) tables, combined with the numerous bonuses and penalties involved will slow even the most experienced game masters down. Once this starts to happen then the conflict loses its pace, the excitement begins to ebb. Plus, it is very difficult for a rules system to cope with the many, many possible actions that a character can take in a combat round. On top of this, there are the age old arguments of how effective is this weapon against that armour, this or that manoeuvre, and so forth. Quantifying human action is very difficult. We just have to accept that the rules will always have holes, will always be open to interpretation and get on with the game.

Some games with "abstract" systems aim to minimise dice rolling by keeping things as simple as possible, other games strive for "realism" by doing the exact opposite. Most games use a combination of both styles and offer optional rules for those who want more detail and realism. Either way things tend to bog down when it comes to the punch because we all become fixated on game mechanics and you lose the flow and rhythm of combat. This problem seems to get worse as the player characters advance in ability and their opponents become more numerous and/or more powerful. This is because, whilst players generally only need to consider their own character's actions the referee may need to consider the actions of all his combatants as well as the possible ramifications of the characters' actions. The more powerful the combat the bigger the headache.

En Garde!

Preparing for role-playing combat is a little like preparing for an exam at school or university - you need to be totally familiar with the game rules that apply to the combat you intend to run. Treat each encounter that is likely to result in combat with as much care as you would a major NPC - think about the rules, the terrain, the actions of the combatants, and the special effects that you can generate. Consider tone and atmosphere, and explore every avenue to enhance the drama and excitement.

While most referees are very conversant with their game's combat system there will always be areas that you are less familiar with, simply because they don't arise on a regular basis. Often these are the areas you'll find yourself using to spice up your campaign combat, or more likely trying to interpret when a player pulls some unexpected stunt. If, for instance, you are planning an ambush then you should read up on the rules that apply to surprise, attacking/defending from concealment and the use of any ranged (missile) weapons that the attackers are using. If you have an adventure going in which an underwater or perhaps aerial combat is likely to occur then you should prepare for that eventuality. If your players acquire new skills or weapons then you must learn the rules applicable to them. This preparation means that when the time comes to run the combat you won't have to go diving into your rule books to find the relevant passage. If you don't feel confident of your ability to remember great quantities of text then at least mark the pages/rules you require with bookmarks and highlighter pens so they are easier to find. Another thing you can do is to do a dry run before the gaming session. This not only familiarises you with the relevant rules, but also will point out any problem areas, weaknesses or opportunities to improve the whole combat.

Be Familiar With Your Weapons

All protagonists in your games deserve respect, treat them as more than just a set of numbers on a sheet of paper, more than cannon fodder for murderous players. Your NPCs should be thinking, active creatures, people who will do their best to succeed. If you're fighting for your life then you aren't likely to "forget" to

use an ability that may ensure your survival, and careful combat preparation will ensure that you, the referee, don't overlook a combatant's specialised abilities in the middle of a fight. Something that helps me is to write out a summary of the combatant's statistics and special abilities using a standardised format and inserting it into my adventure notes. This serves two purposes, the first is that it helps me learn the creature's stats and the second is that it presents the information I need in an easy to read format that I can quickly refer to when running the combat.

When preparing the use of specialised abilities try and avoid the blinking effect the description of the ability can have and think in terms of what else can be done, how the combat zone lends itself to an unusual application of the ability. The ability to create small fires will be more impressive if the area is full of combustibles. A spell which creates clouds of smoke can be quite lethal in a sealed air tight room if the effect lasts more than a few minutes - remember that most people who die in fires actually do so because of smoke inhalation. The ability to telekinetic small objects will be more dangerous if the objects concerned are trigger mechanisms for traps or small bottles of acid, poison etc. An area of darkness, or blinding effect will work best in an precarious environment like a rope bridge over a chasm or beside a cliff top. Try to think laterally and in terms of what an ability means, rather than the more straight-forward applications. Monsters (and other opponents) fighting on their home ground should have a distinct advantage over attacking players. Traps and ambushes can be prepared and characters lured into them.

Fight Smart

Included in my summary notes is an outline of the combat objectives for my protagonists. A combat objective is essentially what the protagonists are trying to achieve in the combat. A war party may be out to kill every thing they meet as long as they aren't losing, a scouting party is going to try and break off a combat as quickly as possible, a group engaged on an espionage mission are not going to want to be involved in a combat at all but cannot allow any witnesses to escape. Low intelligence monsters or animals also have instincts which drive their behaviours in combat; a hungry predator will seek out isolated or obviously wounded prey and will usually run at the sight of determined resistance, a monster defending its young may fight to the death.

Objectives can change as the combat develops but should always be consistent with the combatants' mentalities and the situation. An example of this in play is a band of rebels who encounter and ambush a smaller troop of royal troops - their sworn enemies. The rebels are not going to break off a combat with the soldiers as long as they are winning and are unwilling to offer quarter. When player characters arrived as reinforcements over the horizon, the rebels will fight on as long as possible, seeking to inflict as much damage as possible. Only as the characters get closer will the rebels make a decision to break off the combat although a few of their number may hang back to sacrifice themselves and allow their comrades to escape. The progression of the combat and the modification of the objectives is not controlled (except for the actual melee) by random dice rolls but by the protagonists and the dynamics of the situation they are in.

Although you need to fight smart, do remember it is a game. True life strategies go out the window in worlds where magic, future science and super powers can take effect. Strive for a logical attack and defence routine for your protagonists, but be prepared to be surprised with the response of your players, and when it happens - go with the flow if it enhances everyone's enjoyment of the game.

Snicker Snack Go The Dice

Even with all this preparation it is still going to come down to rolling the dice eventually, but you can even prepare for this by making some combat rolls in advance. This works best in a mass combat situation where you need to make a lot of rolls in a short time. If possible reduce the roll to a hit/miss indicator. Although it can take some of the spontaneity out of things it will certainly make things progress more quickly. This method also allows you to get an idea of how the combat is likely to turn out. If all of your rolls turn out to be misses (or hits) then you can "adjust" the rolls (some might call this cheating) or re-work the encounter with more suitable opponents.

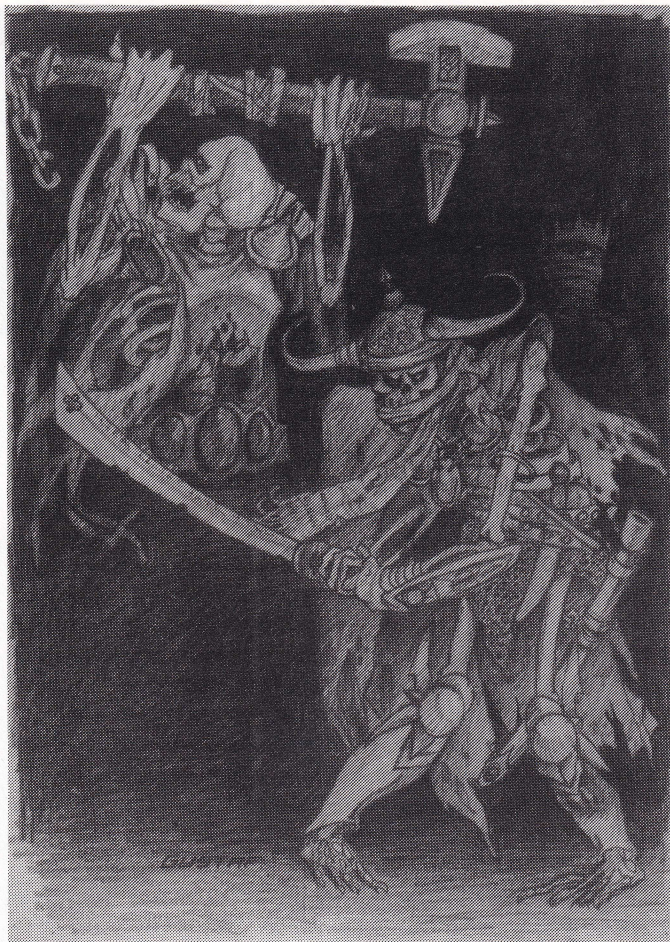
When running the combat be prepared to trust your players. Let them make their own rolls for success and damage. Although it is true that dice rolling can intrude on your carefully crafted atmosphere, there is some justification for using dice in combat because the uncertainty of the result followed by the thrill of making a successful roll is great fun for most players. If you think you can't trust a player either kick them out of the game or out-cheat them. If you have a player who is not involved in a combat, brief them on the situation and get them to help you out. It will keep them occupied and prevent them from distracting you and the other players during the combat.

Balance of Power

To my mind the ultimate object of any campaign is the success of the players, and it is the referee's job to provide challenges and obstacles to make that success more meaningful. Finding the balance between the level of challenge you want to create and the player's abilities to deal with it is a problem for every referee. No-one wants to play if their characters always die, and playing in a game where everything comes to the players too easily (or no-one ever dies) soon palls. A balance needs to be found. Combat shouldn't be too hard, nor should it be too easy.

A "good" combat is one that the player's can win - or at least have a reasonable chance of surviving. As a referee you have a vast arsenal at your disposal and should be able to slaughter your players without too much effort, however this is likely to make them feel manipulated and very hard done by, especially if it happens too often. On the other hand if the players never lose then there's no point in engaging in combat, never any need to run in fear and soon your players are ruining your storylines by attacking everything they feel the want to. The real excitement of combat is always the uncertainty of the outcome.

One of the hardest things to do is figure out what the players can handle with some difficulty. Given the vast number of games out there, and the different means of calculating abilities it is difficult to come up with a general rule for setting a balance but the one I usually work with is to sum the abilities of the players' characters (levels, skill points, whatever), then create opponents to 110 per cent of this value. The reason for the extra 10 per cent is to allow for my shortcomings (I'm not perfect and make mistakes when running combat) and to make it a little bit harder for the players. If the group I'm running are particularly good then I make it 120 per cent, if they're particularly bad then I make it 90 per cent. Whether this total represents one opponent or 100 doesn't matter, though my preference is to go for a few high quality opponents. The trick is to come up with your own rule of thumb that works for your game and your players. Once you've figured it out be prepared to ignore it.



can't see a player character shrugging off being scalded that easily. Even within conventional terrain, it is possible to surprise the players or add interest by using your imagination, or borrowing from something you've seen or read. Too many published scenarios ignore the possibilities of special effects in combat using terrain and furnishings. For example, in modern and post-modern games there are many great settings for hunter-killer scenarios. See how many movies use cluttered warehouses and factories, or multi-level complexes like car parks and shopping malls to heighten the action. This is because the terrain is varied with many hiding places, and convenient plot devices can be readily introduced. Such environments reward players who are prepared to use stealth and concealment skills, acrobatic abilities and improvisation. Thus a dangling block and tackle with chain can be swung as a weapon, or used as a spectacular escape route; a pile of boxes can be used as cover or toppled over as a noisy decoy; an escalator can be used to deliver a grenade; a parked car can be exploded; a supermarket has many items that can be used as impromptu weapons; the list goes on. And the same applies to fantasy settings - dungeon dressing should be placed with an eye to the dramatic effects it can be used for by inventive players. At first you'll have to lead the way, but players will quickly pick up on this if you show them you are prepared to accept their ideas. If the rules don't cover it, make one up, or make a quick judgement and allow it anyway - the entertainment value of watching a character demolish skeletal undead with a handily placed frying pan will be well worth it.

You can also vary combats from walk up hack and slash fests with exotic weapons and attacks. Some that come readily to mind are nets, bolas and lassos which work very well against highly armoured opponents as they don't need to penetrate the armour to be effective. Weapons which allow you to disarm the players are also useful. It doesn't really matter how good the Blademaster is with a sword if the sword is ten feet away. Poisons or drugs can be used to immobilise powerful heroes with a single blow and can frequently be manufactured from the local herbiage by those in the know (eg the medicine man, wise woman etc.).

Simple tactics include dividing the players into smaller groups and then attacking these, concentrating on a single character, abduction and/or immobilisation of more powerful looking opponents. Use the same techniques against your players that they use against you. Player characters can usually survive well past the point of unconsciousness so this strategy isn't too harsh - as long as someone survives to nurse them back to health.

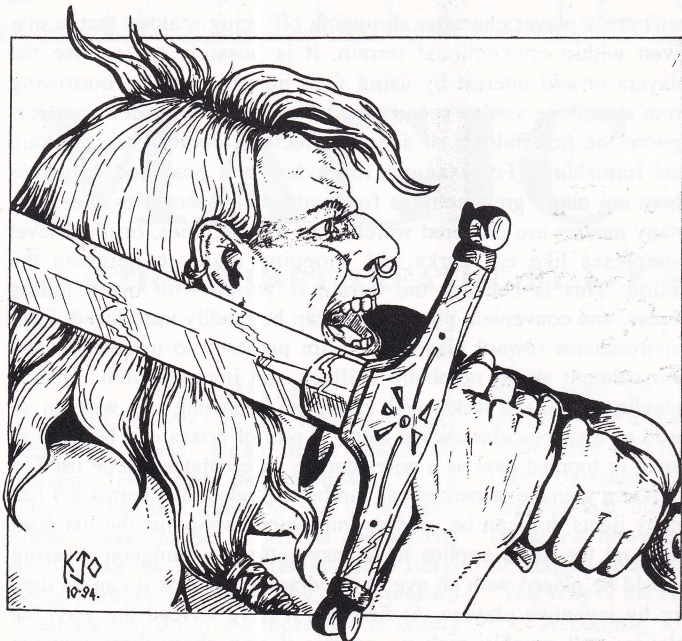
In my own campaigns I've used these techniques to trip up some overly confident players on several occasions. Take the group (of mid-level characters) who were nearly decimated and captured by a group of (low level) orcs as an example. The players had complained that they were tired of fighting orcs, that it was too easy (which was true) so I decided to spice things up. I didn't use any magic to do it, just some unusual weaponry (inter-locking tower shields) and a creative application of the rules regarding cover. The group's mage was neutralised by the orcish scout (who had concealed himself as they passed), the two fighters were pinned to the walls of the corridor and then butchered with short swords before they could do any damage. The thief and priest were captured. The priest was later sacrificed but the thief escaped. The players weren't terribly proud of the fact that they had their asses whipped but they still reminisced about the combat and agreed it was one of the toughest they'd ever been involved in. The point is that I took a relatively simple encounter and turned it into one of the campaign highlights by using a little bit of imagination and creativity. The players knew they were in serious trouble from the start and this charged them up. They enjoyed the encounter because it was tough and provided them with a challenge.

Flexibility & Creativity

When running combat you've got to be flexible. Just because you've generated the statistics for 1000 screaming goblins doesn't mean that the player characters have to wade through the lot, hacking and chopping until they drop from exhaustion. Be prepared to drop a plan of attack that isn't working (from the point of view of pace and entertainment). If you see players becoming bored with a combat then resolve it as quickly as possible, or do something unexpected - instead of goblin 346 running up screaming a war cry (as goblins 1 through 345 did) have it throw away its sword, cower and gibber for mercy or maybe do a standing somersault over the defending character's head and attack from behind. It doesn't matter what you do as long as it breaks the monotony.

Also, try and be as innovative as you can be when running combat. This doesn't mean throwing new monsters at the players every session, but being creative with the ones you've got. Once you've selected your combatants take a careful look at them. Evaluate their mentality, the weaponry they possess, their armour and the encounter area and how these can be combined to create a challenging whole. Challenge the players by creating combat situations they haven't encountered before - either through the use of terrain, specialised attacks/weapons or through the use of preplanned strategies and tactics.

Terrain based twists can include lairs designed for defence, aerial or underwater combat, astral encounters etc. Try not to go overboard and create scenarios that are hard to justify - if the goblins are too poor to afford cauldrons of boiling oil to pour on opponents substitute water instead. Water is cheap (ie free) and I



Pace and Pressure

Keeping up a fast pace and the pressure on is another trick to running good combats. If you can get your players off balance and keep them that way then you're half way there. Time is a critical factor in combat and if you can reduce the amount of time your players have to think then they will feel more pressured. Make real time reflect game time - if their characters only have a few seconds to think only allow the players a few seconds before you step up the pressure. And when they call an action for their character, have them stick to it unless their character could be expected to react in time to change. The more pressure the players feel, the more real the combat will seem.

If you've already prepared the combat then you shouldn't have to spend as much time running your end of things. As your reactions and plans quickly counter theirs the pace will begin to pick up naturally. As things progress you'll find yourself making mistakes but don't let them throw you - never let your players know when they've got you off balance personally. If their game strategies are succeeding then let them know (in game terms) but still try and come up with some improvisation that will turn things around - a wounded combatant playing dead and then attacking from behind, even the sudden escape of a major opponent can shift the balance back in your favour as you force your players to change their plans on the spur of the moment. If it helps prepare a list of "emergency" tactics to jog your memory.

Once you've got the pressure on, don't let up for an instant. If you find yourself in the middle of a great combat but need to stop and look for rules, don't. Make it up as you go along, improvise, whatever it takes. Once you've got the pace of a combat going don't let it falter. You can always look up the official rule later and play it from then on, or you can let your judgement stand as a house rule.

Don't let players con you into "reversing time" to re-run a combat according to the rules either. This is especially true if you're in the middle of the combat. If you've made a mistake then admit it, even apologise but make it clear that the result stands firm. This should be the case regardless of whose favour the mistake was in, although I've found that players generally won't mention a mistake that they find favourable. Umpires in major sporting events don't reverse their decisions (even when re-plays show them to be wrong) and you shouldn't either.

Reality vs. Fantasy.

Once you've mastered the "skills" of running combat it's time to work on the artistry, on developing a style and flair of your own. This is the key to running great combats.

As I've mentioned there are two main styles of running combat, the realistic and the abstract or fantastic. Realism's prime tenet is that if you couldn't do it in the real world then you're not going to be able to do it in a science fiction or fantasy world either. Hit locations, dodging, parrying, piece-meal armour are just some of the factors catered for in the more realistic games. I've got to admit that this isn't my favourite style of combat and that I avoid it when I can. My major reason for this stand is that if you can suspend your disbelief to the point that you can handle magicians, super-heroes and space ships then why not stretch it that little bit further and allow stunning feats of martial prowess?

My other major objection to this style is that the unpleasant realities are frequently overlooked. The effects of shock, infection, and permanent disablement are largely ignored in "realistic" combats but shouldn't be (if you want to be consistent). Wounds are healed by magic or by science or by a convenient passage of game time without having to suffer any of the mundane after effects from injuries. Sure you can lose a limb but what about the time it takes to learn to cope without it. Wounds tend to heal without infection or other complications. Broken bones knit and there is no loss of movement or strength in the affected limb.

What about the long term and mental effects? Even something as simple as a broken wrist can (in the real world) lead to a significant loss of movement and the eventual onset of arthritis. It's hard to describe the feelings of frustration involved in spending time confined to bed, or months in a cast as a result of an injury and I don't know of any game system that details these unpleasant results of combat (or coming off a motorcycle) to any degree. As far as I'm concerned the reality of combat is particularly unpleasant and better off ignored. I'd much rather stick to fantasy.

Having had my rant, there are still a number of options you have when running realistic combats. The first is in your selection of a game system. As previously noted there are a number of game systems out there and the combat systems vary from the simplistic to the insanely complicated. If you have the resources then you can go through them and select the combat (game) system that meets your needs the best. Given the expense of most game systems, an unending supply of money is one way to achieve this. Another way is to join a role-playing club. These clubs will sometimes have a library of games that you can use and play or at the very least will allow you to meet with people who may have already played a game you are interested in. This has the added advantage of providing you with someone who may be able to give you a hand interpreting some of the more obscure and ambiguous rules. Another alternative is to see what you can pick up second hand. The major thing to watch out for in this case is that you get the complete package - ie make sure nothing is missing.

If these options aren't for you but you still want to run more realistic combats then you can go for either the "story-teller" option or the "house-rule" system. The story-telling system basically entails taking the combat roll and making it mean whatever you (or the players) want it to. A successful hit doing massive damage can be interpreted as a disabling rather than killing blow. A blow that does little damage may leave a duelling scar as a permanent reminder. You can take an unsuccessful roll and interpret

it realistically. Instead of saying "the assassin attempts to hit aaaaaaanddd ... (rattle of dice, consult table) ... misses", you can embellish it a little by saying "the assassin lunges, his blade dripping foul poison. (roll dice, consult table) His foot slips on a patch of ice, the blow goes wide. He barely recovers in time to protect himself". One roll but a "realistic" interpretation.

The house-rule option means making up the rules you need and then playing them. If the game system you are using doesn't allow for parrying or hit locations make up a rule (or borrow one from another game). For example, the Palladium Fantasy RPG has a fairly effective (and simple) parrying rule and the RuneQuest game has an easily adapted hit location system. If you (or your players) want to use skills not covered in your game, such as fighting with two weapons, then develop your own system. If it doesn't work at first don't be afraid to refine it or abandon it for something better. A word of caution when doing this - it is important to be fair and discuss things with your players before hand, don't just hit them with an arbitrary decision that they'll find hard to take. With some careful thought and planning you will eventually end up with a set of rules that work effectively and allow you to enjoy the "real" combat you and your players want.

Now for the fantasy flip-side. When it comes to role-playing I'm in it for the glory. I want my characters to perform heroic deeds that outshine anything I can find in the movies or books. I've had characters who have leaped moats and kicked in the drawbridge to get into combat, or who have taken swan dives off precipices to escape it - some of the characters survived, some didn't but the point is I had fun doing it. In the games I run I try and give my players the opportunity to do the same heroic stuff. Again sometimes they die, but most of the time they don't and they nearly always enjoy themselves.

When running combat of this sort you should let your imagination run wild, let rip with all of your best prose when describing the combat and the results of play. If something interesting happens, run with it, work it into the combat and use it to entertain. You can't really avoid throwing in technical terms (such as damage taken etc.) but what you can do is describe the effect of an attack and then slip the technical stuff in at the end. If you get the chance to read some of the Rolemaster critical hit tables you'll get an idea of what I mean.

I'm also very much in favour of characters who attempt the amazing and will often allow them to survive a bungled attempt at heroism where the rules say they shouldn't - perhaps not entirely intact but at least they'll live to fight another day! I try to reward heroic and entertaining play in combat with success where possible, and once the players realise that their heroic efforts won't necessarily result in a characters death they'll become a lot more adventuresome. The end result is worth bending a few rules for.

Coup De Grâce

The major point about combat I'm trying to make is this. For me role-playing is about live action story-telling, and when combat occurs, it is a key part of the story. Plan your combat encounters to fit the tone and atmosphere of the rest of your plotlines, prepare for the scene beforehand, and be willing to run it with the same passion and verve that you put in the rest of the game. Don't let the rules get in the way of a good story. ■

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The Lonely Halls of Hra Kurban

By Sheppard, Taber and Whitt

Tripping, Mathan fell, rolling onto his trusty pack. He let its tough leather soften the blow against the hard rock. Beside him stones fell over the cliffs edge, tumbling to the depths below. They had been running for days, ever since they had achieved their goal, only to find that others also had a claim. The pursuit had been a slow, haphazard thing, but for the past two days the orcs had followed close and hard, gaining on them every hour. The only chance the party had was an old abandoned dwarven trade route, Hra Kurban. A road that lead straight under the mountains. As Mathan again got to his feet his attention went to Kajer who was at a cave opening ahead, hopefully this was the western gate, hopefully the road was still open. As orcan arrows started to fly from below, Mathan rushed to join his fellows as they finally entered the darkness...



AND SO IT BEGINS

This scenario is in three parts, each in a different style and with their own unique ingredients. This is not just a scenario, it is also a 'How To...'. From the same basic plot line our three writers (each in their own section) present how their style of refereeing guides their detailing of the adventure. By allowing each to claim a separate stretch of the underground complex we hope to show how the three methods of refereeing influence the flavour of the adventure.

THE BEGINNING

The player's last goal was achieved, but to their horror they've discovered that they were not the only group seeking the prize. They are pursued by a superior force of orcs, including several war-masters, for the past three days. The pursuit is closing in after the orcs joined with another group of their kind last night and redoubled their efforts. The players only hope is to head deeper into the steep mountain valley they have been chased into, hoping that at its end they would be able to find the

long-abandoned entrance to the fabled dwarven trading road of Hra Kurban. Finally, as the pursuit narrows, the party discover the old entrance. Taking it, they head under the mountain.

HRA KURBAN

This old dwarven trade road hasn't been used for decades. Founded five hundred years ago, originally as an extension and practical shipping road for the small but high quality dwarven silver mines of Mount Kurban, the road slowly died with the failing supply of silver. Eventually the trade road was superseded by the Hra Quarrar route, a hundred miles to the north, a new mining community that sucked in trade and commerce. It has been two centuries since regular traffic used the road, and as long since anyone has claimed residence in the route's road-town. So with the mines exhausted, the competition of Hra Quarrar to the north, and the sudden desertion of the township by a beleaguered population, the Hra Kurban road was closed, sealed to the world.

Such seals are easily broken, and this happened within months of their placement. The lazy hoping to be able to loot the abandoned road-town of Kurban and look over the old mine works. For a short period a new population was resident, thieves and cut-throats, scum and rascals. These vultures picked over all parts of Hra Kurban, some digging at the low quality deposits of silver that the dwarves before them had ignored. *Some dug too deep...*

A few survivors of this second generation of inhabitants were found wandering the valley, claiming many ludicrous things. Eventually they were slain or institutionalised, little of their story was ever listened to or recorded. They were but raving fools telling of a foul demon, disturbed from its deep rest.

COLIN: *My style of refereeing is a 'story strong' technique. The emphasis is not on rules or cold facts, it is one of layering storylines and mixing in sub plots. Aside from preparing the main storylines and having on hand half a dozen sub plots I do little preparation. Whether these sub-plots are simply an*

NPC, some act of god or something that the players cannot avoid is irrelevant, it is their existence (whether the players pursue them or not) that adds to the depth of the game, enriching the background. The players feel that a lot is happening, because continually you are adding to the major storyline, but also distracting them with the sub-plots, there is always so much to do.

THE ENTRANCE

Climbing the old road to the gates is the easy part. While the road is in a terrible state, the orcs provide the encouragement for you to hurry inside. Within seconds you are within the gate, and on the Hra Kurban road, it is dim inside and fortunately the old lock for the gate seems to be in working order, unlike the crumbling road outside. It takes but a moment to slide the lock into place, it will take the orcs a few hours to get through the solid doors.

THE ROAD

The road is twenty feet wide with a roof line that is twelve feet high. Above, at fifty feet intervals, old dwarven glow lamps hang from the roof, still shedding their magical faint green light.

The road itself is a monotonous, boring thing, but along the road can be found many things...

The Broken Cart: Along the road the players find an abandoned cart with a broken wheel. An observant player will also notice fresh horse manure. The cart was heading in the same direction the players are travelling in and as the players search its canvas-covered load they will find one of its owners. The man has a terrible wound on his arm and leg, while bandaged it is obvious that he has lost a great deal of blood. Surprisingly he is still (but barely) alive. The players won't be able to get anything out of him as he is near death (healing magic will help, but still put him to sleep for eight hours, after which he will regain consciousness). He has been abandoned by his two comrades, all three are bandits who stole the cart from the merchant who once owned it. The thieves were attacked along the road by some large creatures, and his two fellows have fled, leaving him to his fate.

The goods on the cart are a mixture of materials, trinkets and cheap jewellery. While it all has value (500 gold), to take all of it will dramatically slow down the party.

The Place of the Dead: The players come across a water station that is full of skeletons. The bones of over fifty people are here - dwarves, elves, humans and orcs. Scattered amongst them are weapons, armour and other possessions. Most of the equipment is either broken, rusted or in bad shape, but there are some worthwhile pieces.

It looks as though the group died fighting, but not each other. This is the site of the scavengers' last stand, it was here that most of the town's second group of inhabitants met their end.

COLIN: An obvious idea here for a combat-oriented game is to re-animate some of the dead. Otherwise this is just more detail of the sorry tale of the Hra Kurban's doom.

The Bag of Coins: Sitting in a water trough is a leather pouch. At a touch it falls to pieces, revealing a handful of shiny coins within its ruin.

The coins are of gold, and while seemingly worth no more than any other gold coin, they are blessed. The coins are very shiny, and dated to show that they are over five hundred years old. The holder of the coins will (when they are touching his flesh, eg. worn around the neck or clutched) give the owner an advantage as per a 'blessing' or extra 'luck'. Conversely, any player who gives away, or spends these coins as normal cash will be plagued by bad luck for a month.

COLIN: Do not tell the players of the blessing. Those that question the good condition may be allowed a check against a magic skill to note it.

The Journal of Miger Nystar: This book is found under a skeleton, poking out from under its buckled plate armour. It is a personal journal, and tells many tales of hidden treasures, legends, prophecies and factual accounts of famous places. Even if only one in ten stories within it are true, the book is worth a fortune.

Miger Nystar was an elven bandit living in the road-town after its first desertion. He was well travelled and many of the accounts in his journal are first-hand and true. But, that was almost two centuries ago, much has changed since then. What is most discomfiting for the player who reads it is that a fellow party member is clearly described in a 'prophecy' that Miger Nystar has written as the last entry, claiming that the listed player will avenge Miger Nystar's demise on a night of a full moon and in an atmosphere of absolute terror. But, hey! It's only some old prophecy.

The Dreaded Random Encounter (or Two):

Although Hra Kurban has been abandoned for centuries, there are many creatures and people of the world who might seek refuge in the Lonely Halls. Prospectors seeking new seams of ore, bandits seeking refuge from the law, rats and other underground dwelling creatures, predators that hunt the other denizens... there are any number of possibilities that a creative referee could introduce to the ruins.

COLIN: In this kind of a complex those of you who have the need for combat don't need any excuses for why a 'wandering' monster is about. Resources in Hra Kurban are in short supply and extremely precious - PC intruders will be targeted as potential prey or possible rivals. Ideal locales for such encounters are the water stations which the locals frequent and the ruined road-town of Kurban.

THE WATER STATION

The water station is a square chamber forty feet across (including the twenty feet width of the road which passes through it on one side). The area has stone benches, a water trough (and hand pump) and several stone bins that long ago would have held feed for horses. Here can also be found a *sun-lens* (this ingenious dwarvish device feeds natural sunlight through a fissure in the mountain from a dizzying height above) and a ventilation shaft.

The water stations are regular features of the road, one being found at every two mile interval.

ROAD TOWN OF KURBAN

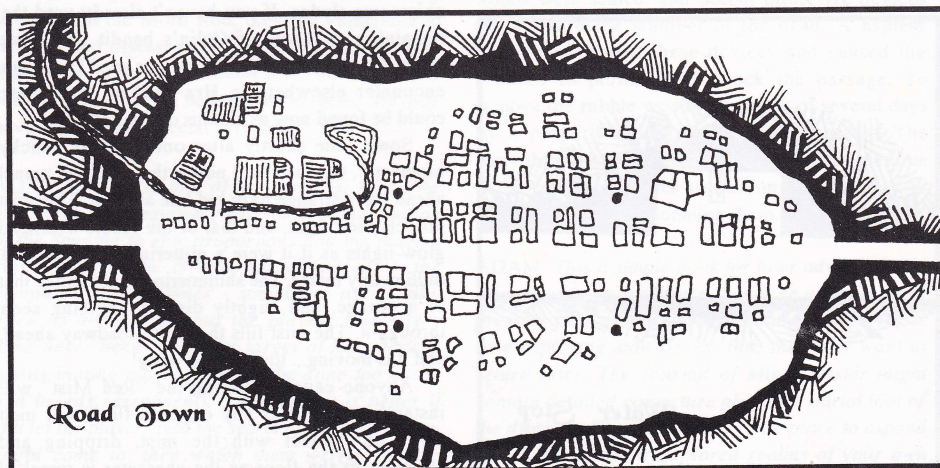
Eight miles in from the gate the road opens into a huge chamber. The area is 300 by 600 feet across, with the roof rising to a height of fifty feet. The roof is supported by four massive stone pillars, the road running straight through the middle of the chamber (lengthwise) and between the pillars. The roof is dotted with sunlight beaming down from dozens of sun-lenses. Some of the lenses now seem blocked, the sunlight filtering through only dimly, some of the tunnels seem filled with webs.

The township takes up the majority of the space of the chamber. The road, a small stream, a pool and the now overgrown gardens are the only exception. The clusters of buildings are all two floors high (at least) and most are built for dwarven occupants (doors five and a half foot high, ceiling six). The town holds over a hundred buildings, mostly gathered along the road side (the buildings facing the road are taverns, inns, smithies, etc.). While the town has been looted many times it has also been taken by time. Several buildings now have collapsed roofs, while others have even been burned down in past accidents or vandalism.

While the town has been looted it may be worth searching again...

COLIN: Fill this area with whatever you like. If you wanted to you could hold the players here for several days, searching through the ruins or planning an ambush for their orc pursuit. Maybe there was a note in Miger Nystar's Journal telling of where his savings were hidden away or some such thing. The many side tunnels of the town chamber lead off to mine workings, and secondary roadways. There may even be a route connecting to Hra Quarrar, or delving into deeper levels.

Kurban is a place of dim light, ruins and many threats, some imagined, some real. React to the players reactions, perhaps they feel that they're being watched. Perhaps they are!



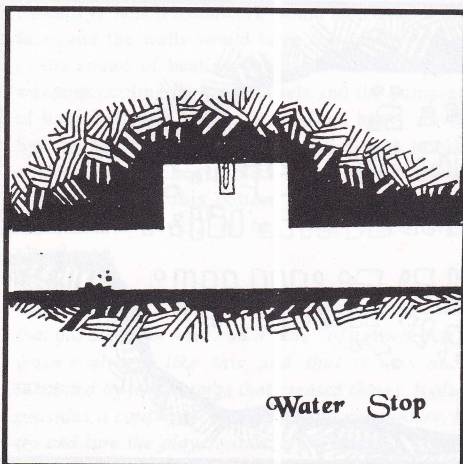
ADAM: When Nick invited me to write this section of the adventure I couldn't fail to think on Moria from J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings". That got me to thinking how much my own adventures have always relied on inspiration from novels I've read and movies I've watched. And I love using special effects too - atmosphere-setting music, dimmed lights, 3-D props, odd voices, prerecorded sounds, squeals, whistles, wails and howls often punctuate a night of Dungeon Bashing at my house.

When writing an adventure for my players I tend to consider an idea for a character, creature or situation first, then build the setting around it. Thus the episodes for my story come first and then I find a convenient theme, or storyline to link them all together. If something doesn't quite fit, there is always enough imagination/paranoia in the player's minds for them to invent the connections for me on the fly!

THYSVYN - MAD DWARF

Thysvyn is a half-crazed dwarvish prospector who has thoroughly explored Hra Kurban over the past twenty years or so. In his wanderings he has witnessed many things which have prematurely turned his scraggly beard shock-white and addled his mind. Now, he has forgotten his original reason for entering the Lonely Halls, and subsists on cockroaches, rats and wild fantasies about how he is mayor of the Kurban road-town and how he wants to rebuild the prosperity of the town. Thysvyn wanders the road from end to end, although he has not been over the chasm near the east entrance for many months. He is most likely to be encountered surveying the ruins of the road-town and will exhort the players to settle here, speaking expansively about the "municipal council's" grand plan to re-open the silver mines, and resettle the town. Most of the time, Thysvyn is a feverishly friendly NPC who provides nothing more than a nuisance to players. Thysvyn can only face his terrible memories of what he saw within the tunnels when drunk. If given alcohol, Thysvyn becomes increasingly sombre, and will tell hair-raising tales of the Curse of Hra Kurban.

ADAM: Attach Thysvyn to the group like a barnacle. Thysvyn must be played in character at all times. Invent a voice you are comfortable with then add a manic touch to it for when he's crazed (most of the time!). If he does become inebriated revert to his "normal" voice, using hushed and sombre tones as he starts telling terrible tales of grim foreboding. Inspiration for this character originated with Fraser, the Scottish undertaker in the British TV comedy, "Dad's Army".



"DOOM, DOOM, DOOM!"

If and when one of the players disturbs anything within the Lonely Halls of Hra Kurban - like dropping a pebble into one of the wells, tearing out the webs from one of the side tunnels, or overturning a piece of rubble to reveal an opening they will suddenly hear a far off noise as of a deep heartbeat: "Doom, doom, doom!". The noise repeats a few times before fading away.

This sound will come and go during the remainder of the adventure, but each time it is heard the sound will be so much closer.

Then, without warning shout, at the top of your lungs in your deepest voice, "Doom, doom, doom!" as an apparition from hell, a great slaving hound (over eight feet tall at the shoulder), the doomdog, lopes through the passage, ethereally appearing from the left wall, swallowing one of the party members whole in one swift gulp, then passing ethereally through the right wall before anyone else in the party has chance to react.

It may be that the doomdog is the "curse" of Hra Kurban that has plagued the place for the past two centuries, making it unsafe for mortal inhabitation. Whatever, defeating the doomdog is going to be extremely difficult as it can pass through stone at will, and will always attack from ambush, rarely pausing more than a moment to devour its prey whole.

ADAM: The purpose of this encounter is to terrify the players... not this time, they'll just be confused up to the moment the doomdog appears... but next time. Just watch the raw panic on their faces next time you whisper "Doom, doom, doom!". If you cannot bring yourself to take a player character (WIMP!), take a henchman, NPC or pack animal.

Inspired by the 'Journey in the Dark' chapter of Tolkien's "Fellowship of the Ring", and by a beast from the pulp heroic-fantasy novel, "Brak the Barbarian" (author forgotten, sorry!).

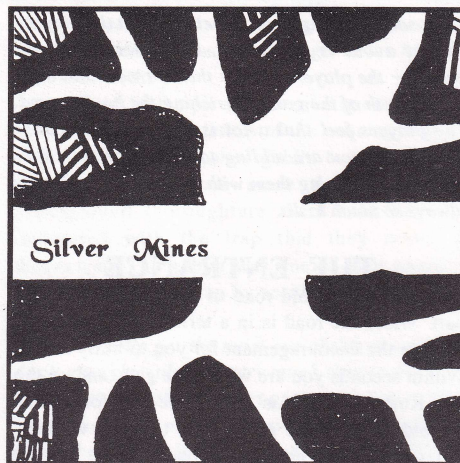
THE RED CURSE OF HRA KURBAN

The first indication of this encounter is when a party member puts his foot through the crust of a puddle, releasing an awful stench of slow decay. The puddle is but a couple of feet wide and an inch or two deep. It is gooey, red- and puss-coloured and foul to the nose. It is not poisonous, although it may carry disease.

Repeat this episode a couple of times to build tension, subsequently introducing several small items of equipment to point to the awful truth of the noisome sludge. If you haven't already used the remaining members of Colin's bandit party (see "The Broken Cart" subplot, page 21) as an encounter elsewhere in Hra Kurban, then these could be found now as victims of the Red Mist.

Some time shortly after one of these "sticky moments", the party will notice the air of the tunnel ahead has a strange hazy red hue about it. This mist reflects their light, and that of the feeble overhead glow-lights as if it were a glittering waterfall of a million tiny motes. The shimmering is not unlike that of a mirage, and slightly distorts anything seen through it. The mist fills the entire roadway ahead, and it is moving... towards the party!

Anyone caught entering the "Red Mist" will instantly regret it as any exposed flesh will melt away on contact with the mist, dripping and slopping to the floor as the character is wracked



with incredible pain. The Red Mist is in fact a colony of microscopic organisms, an airborne virus of sorts which attacks the DNA of any living organic matter. This attack reduces the victim's DNA to its constituent parts, separating core genetic material from other non-essential minerals and water. Ingested DNA is quickly absorbed into the colony, adding to it. That material which cannot be absorbed is reduced to a foul-stenching soup. The origins of the mist are unknown, although the wild stories of the secondary inhabitants of Hra Kurban say the Demon of Red Death escaped, like some wicked hell-born effluvia, from a fissure that was opened up in one of the deeper mine shafts not far from the road-town.

Now the Red Mist floats quietly down the passages and roadway of Hra Kurban, hungrily seeking more DNA to absorb.

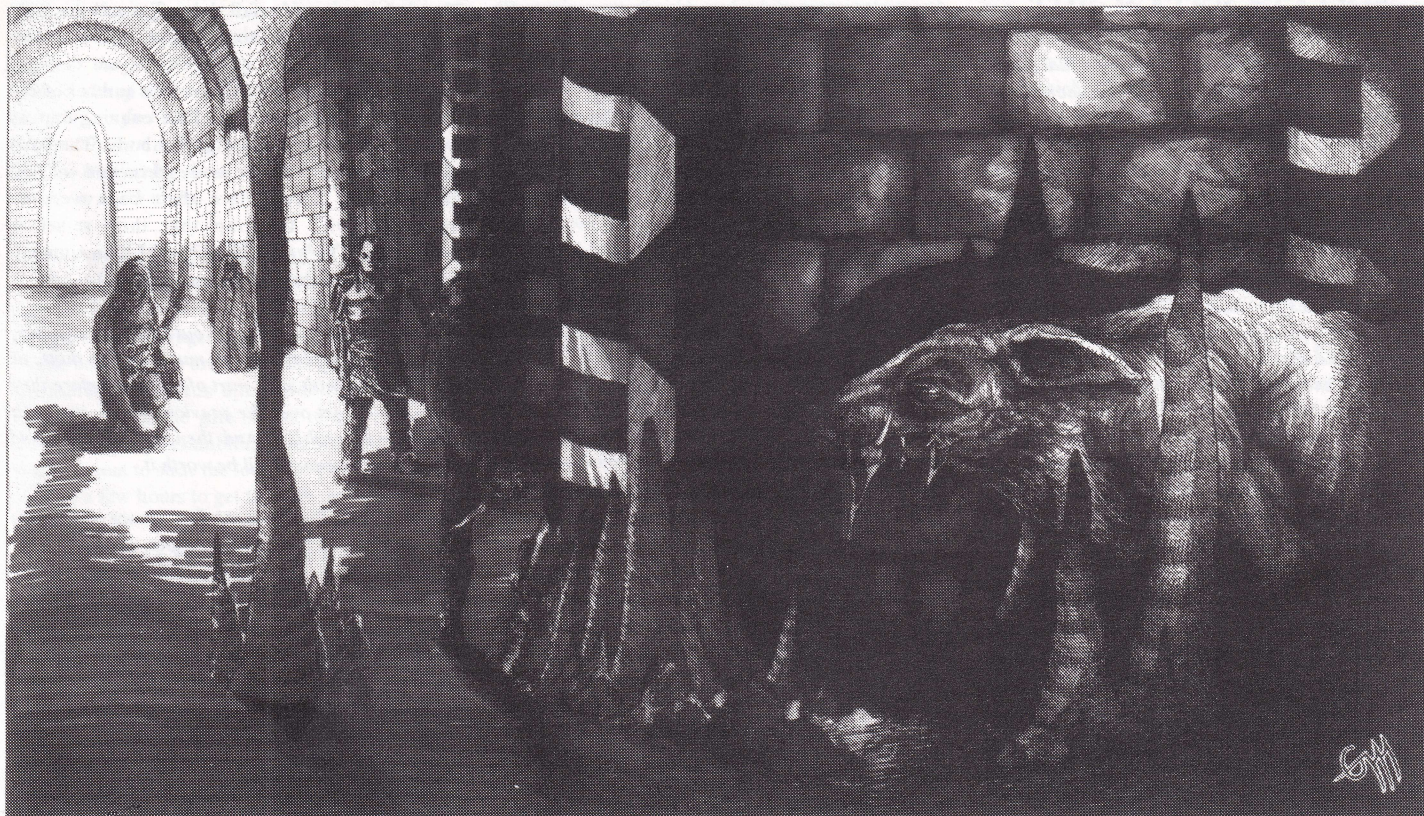
If you want to, you could make this colony creature intelligent, or else the demon of local superstition. Either way, it may be able to absorb and use some of the knowledge, skills or even spells of its previous victims. If you do this, try to consider the personality of the victims and add that to the creature's behaviour. As it is has mainly absorbed dwarvish DNA, there may be a vestige of awareness of its past lives and a twisted sympathy for characters of that race. Perhaps that is why Thysvyn has survived here for so long.

ADAM: This is a straight-up monster encounter - pump it for all it is worth. Players should react to the Red Mist with horror if you make your description of its attack graphic (but be aware of your audience - sometimes gruesomely graphic narrative is inappropriate... NAH! Go for it!).

Smart players will quickly link this creature to the odious puddles, and be revolted by the muck stuck to their boots! The Red Mist moves quite slowly so it can be outrun, but it is tireless, and can pass through any non-airtight seal, so you could use it as an inexorable party-stalker. Truly devious players might use the Red Mist as a way to deal with the pursuing orcs, leading them into its clutches.

How to defeat the creature - quite often I don't even bother to work out a creature's game mechanics or statistics. It is the idea, tone and dramatic effect of the monster that is of importance to me. Let it live on as long as it is doing its job - terrifying the players. Usually I like to listen to the player's ideas during play and react to their suggestions - let them come up with a suitably entertaining nemesis for my critters.

Inspired by the novels "Blood Music" by xxx, and "The Black Cloud" by Fred Hoyle.



NYLETH SCORN

Stepping undetected and unannounced from the shadows comes an athletic woman in travelling robes, a sword of superior craftsmanship strapped over her back. Her equipment seems well-stowed in a bedroll a-dangling from her side. The other item of note is a sealed leather tube about two feet in length which she holds in her left hand. Nyleth's well-tanned, scarred face illuminated by the party's lanterns shows as open, friendly and smiling. She quickly introduces herself as a traveller, heading in the same direction as the players, and wanting to join them for their mutual protection: "These Lonely Halls are too dangerous pto wander alone, may I walk with you?"

Nyleth Scorn is not all that she seems (surprise, surprise). Nyleth is a Scuntha, a minority human race which dwells on an island where Morti, the Tree of Death is (it can't be said to grow for it has no life in it). The Scuntha are unique amongst mortal creatures in that the touch of the Tree of Death, instantly fatal to all others, has no adverse effect on them. Chosen and initiated Scuntha cut a small stave from the Tree and carry it with them always. With this "Morti Rod" they will kill only those who they are paid to kill; under no other circumstances may the rod be drawn. They also train to an exquisite level of skill with one weapon - usually a long sword.

Terror is the Scuntha assassin's companion - for it is said that death by Morti's touch obliterates the soul. Whilst they carry their rod a Scuntha can't be killed. Once hired for a kill, the Scuntha has only one aim, to complete the contract. Not even the original hirer can divert the Scuntha from completing the mission for their reputation relies on it's success. Authorities leave them unmolested, hoping they will pass through their lands without causing trouble. The Scuntha do not kill without being paid to do so, except to defend themselves so that they may finish their appointed task.

A person who is known to be the target of a Scuntha is considered now dead but still walking amongst the living. Most people cease to associate with the target for fear of their own life. To pay the exorbitant fee that the Scuntha's ask is a cruel and desperate act, for although there are many cheaper and quite efficient alternatives, only the horror of knowing you are marked for death by a Scuntha can satisfy the foul cravings of some enemies.

Nyleth Scorn is on a mission. There are several ways you could use this dangerous NPC. Her target could be known to the player characters - their patron, perhaps, or else a friend or relation. Another option is to let her travel with the party for a while. She will not deny being Scuntha, but nor will she volunteer the information (Nyleth knows from experience it causes to many complications). Some players are just too inquisitive to allow the strange leather tube that she carries at all times pass without closer investigation. Any character who opens the seal and touches the rod will die instantly. Another option is to have Nyleth injured or ill (although Scuntha cannot die without being parted from the Morti Rod, they are vulnerable to wounds and disease) and in need of assistance to make it to the nearest settlement for healing. If the party do this, she will be indebted to them... do they have need of her special services?

ADAM: *Nyleth is one of my personal favourite NPC's. In my campaign I have built the reputation of the Scuntha to epic proportions and the players rightly fear them. Nyleth has appeared in the campaign several times - sometimes as an ally, often as an enemy... but the players themselves have never been the direct target of her services (assassinating players tends to be done too easily and breeds resentment). Sometimes it is better if you let the players into the secret of what harm they could come to, then watch them wriggle as the threat of that harm comes ever closer - but never*

actually touches them. To add depth to this long-running plot device, drop hints that there might be a defence against the power of the Morti Rod. With the nagging concern that one day a Scuntha will be hired to kill one of the party, the players will spend precious time and resources trying to discover a protection against the dreaded Morti Rod.

THE BURIAL CHAMBERS

Beyond Kurban's road-town, about a mile down the road toward the further exit of the dwarven roadway, is a side-corridor blocked by fallen rubble. The arch of the doorway is largely collapsed, but some facing stones still remain and show elaborate dwarvish carvings. Anyone with knowledge of things dwarvish, or a background knowledge of religions will be able to decipher that these stone carvings are consistent with motifs of death and the passage to dwarvish heaven.

This tunnel did once lead to the burial chambers of the original inhabitants of Hra Kurban. When the roadway was abandoned, the doors to these tombs were sealed, and potent protective devices left to ward the slumber of the dead. A hapless looter has tripped these devices and caused the rockfall to permanently block the passage. To remove the rubble would be a work of several days by a properly equipped team of labourers. The party do not have this gear with them, nor the time to dally. Either the orcs are still on their hammer, or else the Red Mist is pursuing them.

ADAM: *This is a simple hook for later adventures. In this scenario your players should be under a lot of pressure from the orc pursuit and unwilling to waste time exploring side issues. But, they may want to return later. The Journal of Miger Nystar might contain detailed conjecture about the burial loot of the dwarves. This side-tunnel is the place to expand Hra Kurban into unexplored realms of your own design. OK, Lee, over to you...*

LEE: Unlike Adam, I always place the rooms first when designing a dungeon. I have always felt that dungeons should appear logical, so my initial design question is always "What is the dungeon doing there, and why is it in its present state?". Dungeons shouldn't just appear out of nowhere, they should evolve over a period of time. Was the dungeon an old dwarven fortress, now abandoned, a city sewer system added to by strange, illegal cults, or the original city buildings, built over by subsequent generations after natural disasters? The answer to this initial question does much to determine the number and type of encounters that will fit the final dungeon blueprint.

Once I know the dungeons original purpose, I can then begin filling it with appropriate residents, ensuring that each creature encountered logically fits the situation. For example, in a city-based dungeon, thieves guilds, cultists, illegal pit-fights, wizards conducting secret experiments and hordes of rats make much more sense to me than scores of undead creatures, great munching beasts and dark-elf cities. As a consequence, I never use random monster tables. However, I do like using traps, but once again, only as long as there is a valid reason for the trap to exist in the first place.

Given the parameters set by our ever demanding Editor, and having no idea what the other two would be placing in their side of the dungeon, I decided to keep my part fully self-contained. My section represents part of an abandoned complex that has been re-occupied. I've kept my bit very simple, leaving the special effects to Adam.

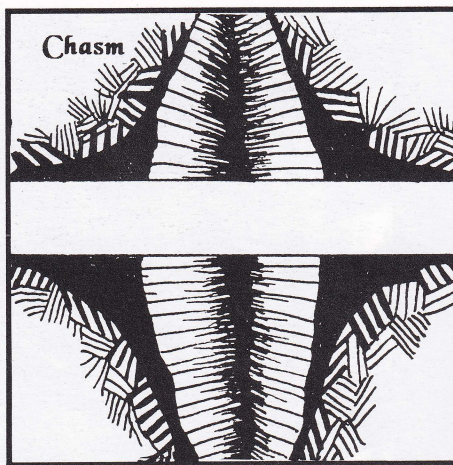
THE BANDIT HIDEAWAY

This, the further end of the dwarf roadway, Hra Kurban, once housed a secondary settlement built around a small, but profitable manufacturing industry. The dwarves made items for sale to the travellers along the road - silver artifacts, ironwear and some leather goods. Long abandoned, the empty chambers have recently been taken over by a force of bandits.

Smelter: This large chamber was once used as a smelter, breaking down ore for use in the metal foundry. Large ovens fill one half of the chamber, but are now cold and neglected. A series of pipes that would have carried molten lava and holes and troughs for collecting the molten ore are now filled with soil and other refuse. A huge iron bucket sits where it fell to the ground, it's carrying chains worn through.

Foundry: Much metalwork would have been done here, and the walls would have constantly echoed to the sound of beating hammers, the sizzling of weapons cooling in water barrels and the pumping of huge bellows. Large fire pits and heavy anvils line the floor, and the walls are filled with hooks, chains and other heavy black-smithing equipment. Like the rest of this portion of the underground complex however, it has long since been abandoned.

LEE: These first two rooms are provided to show that this dungeon once had a "life" of its own, that it wasn't always like this and that it was once inhabited by real beings that created things. It also provides a couple of rooms without encounters, to try and lure the players into taking things a bit too casually so that you can catch them out later.



Chasm Bridge: A well constructed stone bridge spans a 40 foot chasm. The distance to the bottom of the chasm cannot be estimated, even if an object is dropped into it. Simply put, any character who fell into the chasm would never be seen again (don't even bother rolling damage). Warm, sulphurous wind rushes up from below, suggesting some distant volcanic activity.

Unknown to the characters, a giant and deadly spider lurks under the eastern edge of the bridge. Tired of a staple diet of large cave bats, the spider has recently discovered the taste of humanoid flesh, having killed a wandering goblin from the small force of bandits that wait to the east (the bandits now avoid coming this far). The spider is not poisonous, it's fangs alone more than capable of killing most prey.

LEE: The spider will attack the party immediately someone moves onto the centre of the bridge, trying to drag a victim under the bridge to it's web, only retreating when half of it's hit points/wounds have been lost. Although the spider's victim might take damage in the initial attack, he/she should be allowed to remain alive, but wrapped up under the bridge by the spider (to eat later). This encounter then provides a real challenge for the party, as the mournful cries of their companion force them to find a way to neutralise the spider while they rescue their friend. And any who use a rope to get under the bridge will be in peril of having the rope cut by the spider's razor-like forelegs, then "Aaaaaahh!"

Trapped Passageway. The original inhabitants of this underground complex left a number of clever traps to catch any unwelcome visitors that made it past the outer defences. Once the players are about half way down this passage, a hidden pressure point (thief and similar characters get their normal chance to discover the trap) releases a large boulder, which crashes through the ceiling near the entrance point to the northern end of the passage, and rolls towards the southern wall. The initial purpose of this boulder is to cause those trapped to run for the turn in the passage to the south, which then exposes the second part of the trap. Five feet into the next passage, a 15 foot deep pit waits those fleeing the boulder. All those who fail an agility roll will fall into the pit, suffering appropriate falling damage. Those who make an agility roll must still enter the pit to avoid the approaching boulder, but may jump into the pit, avoiding the falling damage.

The final element of the trap now comes into play as the boulder bounces off the suitably shaped southern wall of the passage and falls into the pit.

Those characters who fail the agility roll this time will suffer serious crushing damage, as the boulder joins them in the pit.

A search of the pit will reveal a number of old skeletons, previous victims of the cunning trap, as well as a recently crushed goblin body. The band of outlaws who have made this end of the underground thoroughfare their base were so impressed with the trap that they re-set it themselves. The goblin was one of their number, who discovered the trap by accident.

LEE: To really get the most out of this encounter, don't give your players very much time to think. At best, hit them with each part of the trap before they have time to get over the previous stage, just as it would be in real life. And then, just sit back and enjoy their reactions, it'll be worth it.

Secret Firing Position: At first glance, this looks like a simple 15 ft x 15 ft chamber, probably used as a storeroom. Its real purpose however, is to conceal a hidden firing position. The ceiling of the chamber rises to 20 feet, and the northern and western walls are solid to this point. The eastern wall only rises to 15 feet however, for a dugout position has been carved into the wall. This originally used to contain up to three crossbowmen who, from relative safety, could fire on any intruders passing the open passageway. The dugout is deep enough to allow a human sized individual to crouch down (to reload a crossbow perhaps).

The dugout is currently occupied by a goblin guard, positioned here to warn his compatriots of anyone approaching from the west. He is armed with a short bow and a sword. He carries a small horn which he blows when intruders are detected. There is a flat 25% chance that the goblin will be asleep at any one time, although setting off the trap in the previous passage or making any other similarly loud noise will certainly wake him.

LEE: This encounter is designed to teach the players the importance of stealth, something the A-Team have never heard of.

Great Hall: Six steps lead 10 feet upward to a 40 ft x 40 ft chamber, with entrances to the west and east. A statue of a long-dead dwarvish hero stands in each corner of the chamber, their faces long since defaced by unknown intruders. One statue has also had it's arms removed.

This room is now occupied by a mixture of human, orkish and goblin bandits, all fighters. Referees should determine exact numbers to match the abilities of the party, but no more than 9 bandits should be found here. Only the humans wear armour, being simple leather cuirasses, but all the bandits carry wooden shields. They are armed with swords, spears, and daggers. The goblins (2 or 4) all have short bows and will have them loaded and prepared if advance warning is received (ie the horn is sounded). They will continue to fight until faced with superior numbers.

Should the players manage to defeat all of their foes, a search of the bedrolls, backpacks and other miscellaneous items left by the bandits will yield 23 gold florins, 65 silver crowns and a jewel-pommeled dagger.

LEE: This is a standard combat encounter, nothing more, nothing less. Read this issue's article on staging combats to add your own unique elements.

staging combats to add your own unique elements. Remember, these guys are bandits, but they're not stupid.

Doorways: Two wooden doors face each other across the passageway. The southern doorway leads to a collapsed section of ceiling (*the rest of this passage is up to you, go ahead and add whatever you wish*). The northern passage leads to a 25 ft x 25 ft room, its original purpose no longer determinable. The room is now occupied by the bandit groups' two leaders, a human thief called Vash and a half-orc fighter called Klegg.

If surprised, the two men will be sharing a goblet of wine or two and arguing over splitting the contents of a small money box, probably taken from a coach. Greedy players should certainly be allowed to catch a glint of gold. If the bandit leaders have somehow been alerted to the presence of the player characters, then they will both be waiting at either side of the door, preparing to strike whoever first sticks their head in.

The thief wears leather armour and carries a broadsword and a parrying dagger. The half-orc uses a battleaxe and a shield, and wears a scale tunic, plate greaves and a "pot" helm. Neither of the leaders has a magical weapon, but both should probably fight as well as the second-best fighter in the PC's party, to at least make the fight a reasonable challenge.

The money box contains 50 gold florins and a small leather bag containing six gems worth a total of 125 gold crowns. GMs can also use this opportunity to seed further adventures, perhaps by leaving a treasure map, some important documents or deeds or a diary that someone would be anxious to pay to have returned. The PCs might also be able to claim a bounty on the bandits, perhaps leading to their temporary employment as bounty hunters.

LEE: *This encounter provides three elements - combat, monetary reward and further adventure hooks. Adventure hooks should be designed to turn what might have been a single session game, or a simple, common encounter into the beginnings of a long-term campaign, where the role-playing fun really begins.*

Temporary Stable: These two entrance rooms have been converted to act as temporary stables for the bandits' dozen horses. Six of the horses are used as mounts when making raids, the remaining six used as pack horses to carry off booty. The six saddles and other riding paraphernalia are stored in the south-west corner of the first chamber. A single bale of hay and some bags of oats are also stored in this room, the horses taken out daily to feed on mountain grasses. All twelve horses are stabled in the northern room, and buckets of water and some straw provide rudimentary comforts.

LEE: *Simple logic again. These bandits have horses, and horses need to be fed and watered (or they die!). And don't forget - when you come to design your own dungeons, remember that people also have to eat, sleep, wash and go to the toilet.*

Cave Entrance: Two large stone doors (still perfectly hinged and balanced for easy opening despite their obvious age) open to reveal a small cave, approximately 30 ft in diameter. If the PCs look around after leaving the underground complex, they will see that the doors are marked

with dwarvish runes. Rushing water can be heard as soon as these doors are opened, and a solid sheet of water can be seen filling the cave opening, directly opposite the stone doors. PCs should be able to quickly deduce that a small waterfall obscures the entrance to the cave from any casual observers. The actual sheet of water from the waterfall is only an inch thick and can easily be stepped through.

Observation Post: If the PCs move immediately to the right after coming through the waterfall, they will find a rocky shelf capable of supporting their weight. The water from the waterfall flows away to the left and down the side of the mountain to a fertile valley below. The players will be able to see a town in the distance. A single human stands at the end of the shelf, watching for any signs of bounty hunters and possible targets for thieving. He is armed with a short sword and a light crossbow. If obviously outnumbered, he will jump off the ledge and run away down the hill to make his escape. The climb down the mountainside is a relatively simple one, and the PCs should be able to reach the

distant town within a days march, should they wish to make that their next destination.

LEE: *I decided to end the dungeon by providing a new adventure location just on the horizon, which immediately gives the players a direction in which to travel. If nothing else, this at least provides a simple way to get your players into your next city-based adventure. Good luck!*

EDITOR'S NOTE

This is Australian Realms' first attempt at a traditional dungeon-style scenario for a long while (since issue 3's *The White Rose*). Colin, Adam and Lee wrote this adventure under duress - they were given a strict brief - and although they were all initially reluctant to do it (except, perhaps Adam) they ended up having a lot of fun putting it together.

What we'd like is to hear your reaction to *The Lonely Halls of Hra Kurban*. Did you like it? Will you use it? Which of the three styles did you prefer? Would you like us to expand the setting? ■



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Steve Jackson's new bi-monthly role playing magazine. It is 72 pages in length, and features reports on overseas cons, reviews hot selling games, such as Earthdawn, contains scenarios and designer's notes on things such as GURPS, Car Wars, Toon, etc. It also has many regular features such as Steve Jackson's games news and release schedule, industry news, AADA news, etc. It also contains some rather tongue in cheek rip offs of other games. For example, they are running a series of Toon supplements, such as: Hampshire: The Masked Ace Raid, and coming is Werewolf: Ah, Pork Lips, Gee, which games are they ripping off?

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MAGIC IN UNAE

A THREE PART TREATISE BY LEE SHEPPARD, COLIN TABER, ADAM WHITT

INTRODUCTION

Many devotees of the Realms fantasy campaign world, Unae, have asked the question "How does the magic work?". To fully answer this question and to properly cover Unae magic in all its complexity would take us into the realms of a fully-fledged source book (one day, we promise). What we can do in the meantime is briefly explain the fundamentals of Unae magic so that you will be able to make judgments on how best to fit the rules of your preferred game system to Unae. Specifically we will look at:

- Magic in Unae
- The Dormetian Cabal
- Faiths of Dormetia

MAGIC IN UNAE

If you had not yet guessed it, the dark and gritty realism of Unae fantasy requires a "magic poor" style. That is, although magic most certainly does exist in Unae, it is not commonly used to solve mundane problems. In Unae magic is a rare, potent and carefully conserved resource. The prevalence of magic, however, does vary from region to region depending on the popular attitude to its use. In Evora, for instance, Cabalist magic is widely accepted and magically illuminated meeting chambers may pass without undue comment (except by inexperienced visiting Heletian merchants who might gawk open-mouthed at such "trivial" displays of the *Art*). In Greater Baimiopia, on the other hand, where the Cabal has been all but hunted out of existence, only the most confident of practitioners will reveal their secrets to the uninitiated. In Unae magic rests in the hands of a very few. Magic requires knowledge, skill, courage and an iron will to handle it safely. To most common folk it is a feared and mistrusted wild force of darkness.

THE ROOT OF ALL MAGIC

Whether magic is a gift (some would say curse) from the gods, the remnant aura of a long lost civilisation, or just some bizarre, latent phenomenon leaking from Unae's bedrock remains one of the biggest mysteries facing those who either wield or condemn the *Art*. Many centuries of research

have gone into trying to answer this question, but a distinct answer continues to elude those who seek it. The recent events in Ossard (issues 18, 19 & 20) do much to suggest that magic is affected by *divine influence*, however the most popular theory on magic is centred on the self and known as "The Way of the Heart, Soul and Mind".

According to this theory, magic has one root and three main trunks from which grow many branches. The root of magic is mortal sentience and our *sensing* of the universe. The theory states that which we can see, touch, taste, hear and emote we intelligently interpret as being the world. In this way, all citizens of Unae play their part in defining reality. Amongst these masses live a rare few with the *passion* (the Heart), the *faith* (the Soul), or the *intuition* (the Mind) to creatively reconstruct their sense of reality. And what these potent individuals recreate can fundamentally change what the uninitiated experience. Such *artificers* can and do manipulate reality. This is magic. Nor is this some elaborate illusion, for it appears Unae responds to those who practise the art. Unae will change if a mage so wills it. Magic works.

PASSION, FAITH AND INTUITION

The three main trunks that draw sustenance from this deep and mysterious taproot of power are aligned to the magic wielder through either the Heart as Arcane Magic, the Soul as Faith Magic, or the Mind manifested as Mystic Magic. Growing from each of these great boles are many, many branches - some broad, straight and powerful limbs such as the Elemental branches of the Arcane, and some precarious, twisted and feeble twigs such as the myriad Lesser Kults of the Horned God all sprouting from Faith.

THE HEART

Wizards gain their Arcane magic through The Heart. Having studied the ways of the ancients (secrets collectively known as *des Arcana*) a mage is able to tap into the sap of Unae's power which courses through his veins. By utilising arcane devices, rituals, mendicants and incantations a mage controls that power, drawing upon his own life force and the world around him to make a

magical effect external to the self - a spell. Because mages have no reservoir of "faith" as such to draw upon, they must augment their power for their spells through physical means. Elementalists naturally draw their power from the very elements, using and manipulating earth, air, fire and water for their own uses. The Sango Drajo use blood to cast their spells, often their own blood, but just as often the blood of creatures and other innocent victims. Because wizards use their own life energy (*essence*) to cast their spells, much of their apprenticeship is therefore spent learning how to store, draw from and then replenish these energies. The most powerful mages are those who learn, over the years, how to increase this personal store of energy so that more impressive spells may be cast.

An experienced mage's *essence* becomes a very potent force which if correctly stored can keep him alive when ordinary mortals would be slain. A certain species of leech are so used to draw off this essence which can then be stored in a specially prepared receptacle - usually a talisman. This store of energy is kept by for casting greater magicks and as a safeguard against death. As long as some small part of this essence remains in Unae a wizard's life cannot be taken. Mages who take such precautions are very difficult to kill outright. The exception to this rule is if the wizard is attacked with a Heart Knife - a magical artifact whose creation includes the inscription of the mage's *true name* on the blood-tempered blade. Cutting with such a knife severs the link between the mage's essence or life force and Unae. True names are closely guarded, though sometimes traded, secrets.

THE SOUL

Faith or Divine Magic is seated in the soul, and derives from a shared experience and understanding of the way the world is ordered, and typically this follows a pattern or *creed* which is taught by the priests of that particular faith. The vast power that is generated by the masses believing in a deity can only be tapped by rare individuals with deep understanding of the *creed* and a strong will to follow that code to its furthest extent. Only the most devout and disciplined

of priests, shamans and holy warriors (paladins) are able to work "miracles or blessings" (a churchman would never refer to them as "spells").

Priests with the training, discipline and devout faith to work miracles draw on the collective faith of the religion's worshippers through a focus for that faith, thus they use icons and carry symbols of the religion. It seems the furthest limit of that magical focus is affected by the ability of the priest, his own personal faith and, to a much lesser degree the distance between him and the source (fellow worshippers). Most priests seem to be able to cast petty magicks in the sanctity of their churches (such as blessing an individual), but only a few devout individuals appear able to carry this magical power to areas that could be classed as heathen to that faith. This is why only missionaries, inquisitors and fanatics are able to cast spells when seemingly a world away from their nearest beloved church. And this is why so many churches (like the politically aggressive Church of Baimiopia) strive to win converts in regions beyond their immediate control - to increase their power.

THE MIND

The wielders of Mystic Magic do so through the Mind. Psions are trained to attune their intuitive vision of the world to such a fine pitch that they can magically alter reality. As a result of mystic contemplation and the collective thoughts of sister minds (all psions are female, probably due to the intuitive nature of the sex) strange mind forces come into play. Psions are the most secretive of magic users, rarely straying from their 'normal' lot in life, but always working towards their sister's goals. Wielders of this form of magic have their own organisation; the Sisterhood (which will be detailed in future issues of Realms).

THE POLITICS OF MAGIC

As has been shown by previous background articles, religions and priests abound, but even so, magic wielding priests are a small minority of the total priesthood.

Divine magic is largely controlled by the dominant church of each state, or culture - sanctioned, safe magic that the masses have been taught to accept. Unsanctioned divine magic is that of the kults, as strong and diverse, but generally declared illegal due to the state's inability to administer and control these groups. Magic is political.

Arcane magic as practised by mages and Mystic magic wielded by psions is also generally beyond the control by religion or by the state, and so is also unsanctioned. In such places, notably Greater Baimiopia and

Unae is an old world; down the ages miraculous and arcane devices have been created. Anyone who does manage to find a magical weapon or item is more likely to treasure it as a gift from the gods, not offer it to the nearest wealthy adventurer. Magical weapons are passed on from father to son, through generation after generation, and magical potions and similar items are usually kept as part of a long-term contingency plan. To the average Unae, it is far more important to save healing salves and have the ability to cure an ill town of the plague, than to heal wounded adventurers.

TYPES OF MAGIC

Technically (from a rules point of view) in Unae there are no separate spell lists for character types. All spells are accessible to all... *in theory*. The restrictions come into play in the following ways; if a priest follows a healing god or saint, then he will only have access to healing 'blessings' because that is all that he believes (through his faith) that he can call upon. An elementalalist will specialise in elemental magic, and thus not be able to use healing magic, to do so would make him a 'general mage' or a wizard, not the elementalalist he aspires to be. Many spell casters can achieve a varied mix of spells, blessings or psionics at a very low or petty level of ability, but they can't progress in that generic track without betraying their faith or specialisation.

The breakdown of magic types (and who can cast what) follows this; large churches have saints who

cover many fields such as healing, battle and the like, priests of these saints follow those 'specialities'.

Kults tend to be aligned to a specific branch of Divine Magic - Kavists use Battle Magic, followers of Tergaia wield Earth (Druidic) Magic. The Cabal covers mages who can specialise in many branches of magic, the most common forms being Wizardry, Elementalism, Illusion, Alchemy and Necromancy. The illusive Sisterhood will be covered in future issues of Australian Realms.



Lixus the dominant faith (the Church of Baimiopia) has taught a deep mistrust of such magicks, consequently practitioners are despised and hounded by the masses.

MAGIC ARTIFACTS

While casters of magic are rare in Unae, magical artifacts - enchanted items, potions, enscribed spells and the like are rarer still. There are no magic shops in Unae. Magic items are not manufactured for sale. Mages respect their art too much to reduce it to the level of tawdry commerce. Nevertheless

THE DORMETIAN CABAL

KEEPERS OF ARCANES MAGIC BY LEE SHEPPARD, COLIN TABER, ADAM WHITT

Let me speak of a group so exclusive, so powerful and knowing. Then let me also speak, but in whispered tones, of a conspiracy, far reaching and dangerous. A plot that already circles the globe, and is but generations away from its ultimate goal.

I speak of course of the Cabal. Why they haven't yet silenced me fills me with greater dread than knowing that one day they will. Am I somehow but a tool, part of their poisonous plan? It would make me like so many other personalities of Dormetia.

-Forwao, Elven Charlatan.

THE DORMETIAN CABAL

Our exploration of the Unae campaign setting over the past two years has often mentioned the existence of the *Cabal*, a global organisation of mages. The following article provides background information on the composition, location and goals of the Dormetian Cabal.

In many ways, the Cabal operates like a large guild. While it has a guiding philosophy of propagating knowledge, research and the use of arcane magic, there are many sub-groups within the Cabal that push their own agendas. These sub-groups are formed on racial, political, economic and magical grounds (this being the most common, such as elementalists, etc.). These localised divisions generally stay beneath the surface, often consisting of nothing more sinister than stacking the vote at a meeting to decide which apprentices will be advanced to mage status. Each branch is headed by its most powerful practitioner, such a post is gained by challenges and duels. A Cabal Master can be from any of the schools of magic, regardless of whether they be Sango Drajo, elementalists or necromancers. The only exception to this is the Flet Cabal, which openly condemns Blood Mages.

BRANCHES OF THE CABAL

Every country in Dormetia has its own branch of the Cabal. Where each of these various Cabals differ is in the size of the membership, the overall abilities of the resident mages, and the level of publicity that each affords itself. Following is a quick reference list of Cabal branches, memberships and each branches' head and their home, listed in order of strength.

Branch	Members	Head/Home
Evoran	2,510	Vulture/Belmez
Wair-Rae	3,000	LaeCoster/Yamere
Saldae	5,000	Stelton/Unknown
Burvois	3,000	Jeunet Karo/Tyon
Fletlander	1,560	Kistoff/Bering/Migell
Ogre	2,000	Mugour/Bar Mor
Kaid-Onor	1150	Soe Unae/Unknown
Dwarven Cities	850	Zhar/Ghon Moar
Grtr Baim*	240	Motus/Poto Baimio
Kramer*	230	Kamora/Vangre
Lucera*	200	The Bleeder/The Rocks
Teramo*	110	The Captain/Bari
Heln. Saldae*	55	Hunter/Savilla
Kano*	39	The Hermit/Unk
Lixus*	16	Dark One/Unknown

* The seven surviving (Ossard was the 8th) Heletian League states hold the weakest Cabal branches due to the risks involved in casting arcane magic in those nations.

PURPOSES OF THE CABAL

The Cabal serves as a perfect means for advancing the study of magic, with mages using the many contacts made through the network to test their theories, pass on their discoveries and to learn new techniques. Over the millennia, a vast store of magical knowledge has been built up and this is the Cabal's greatest treasure. A treasure housed in safe-houses across the anti-magic nations, and held in the Cabal's public buildings in other, more open-minded lands. Most branches have access to copies of parts of the various magical texts that have resulted from the combined knowledge of thousands of mages, but no one Cabal has access to them all. Each Cabal has a number of mages whose sole task is to ensure that these texts do not fall into the wrong hands (as one Baimiopian Inquisitor found out to his cost when the cornered scribe-mage centred a massive fire storm upon himself after gathering up the magic tomes).

In many of the less enlightened nations of Dormetia, practising magic is a crime punishable by torture and death. In these countries, the Cabal provides a safe house, where mages may meet in secret or seek help if personally threatened. Certainly in some parts of the Kramer Confederation and all parts of Greater Baimiopia and Lixus, this is the prime function of the Cabal.

As with all such oppressed groups, some within the Heletian Cabals have now taken the extremist view that "attack is the best form of defence" and have openly begun a campaign against the Church of Baimiopia, identified as the greatest threat to Arcane Magic. At this stage it appears that all such actions have so far been merely disruptive, but the recent events in Ossard have given new impetus to the movement. That mages would openly declare their presence in the Holy City of Baimiopia (see *Ossard II*, Issue 18), is an audacious act and it remains to be seen whether this boldness has the overall support of the Cabal.

Apart from the odd, very rare, case of spontaneous magical awareness, in which a previously ignorant (of magic, that is) individual suddenly displays the ability to use arcane powers to some degree of competence, most who choose to become mages do so because of some inner feeling, a calling, but not of a spiritual nature. Only by allying themselves with an experienced mage can they take their unique talents and become a mage in their own right.

The final "goal" of the weakened Heletian Cabals therefore is the preservation of the Art, through the selection and training of apprentices. If the study of magic is to survive, new blood must constantly be introduced to replace those lost through natural attrition and more dramatic events such as the Expulsion (see Issue 13 - *Greater Baimiopia*) which decimated the Heletian mage population some one hundred years ago. Within the Heletian League Cabals, all mages who have reached a mid-level of ability must take on two apprentices, such measures are enforced unerringly by the local branches. The mages in Evora, Fletland and Burvoy are less concerned with the apprentices, as their numbers are unthreatened. In these nations, mages who take on apprentices do so as they see fit.

THE PRESENT

Although only a few dozen human mages remember the heights of power that once belonged to those who practised magic in the Heletian League (prior to the *Expulsion*), their memory is strong, and their words inspirational. Many long to return to the days when their words were taken and acted upon by Kings, and those young bloods flushed with the thrill of the *sense* of magic are more than keen to see it happen sooner rather than later. The "destruction" of Ossard has shown what powerful magic can do, and although many foolish young mages were literally consumed by the magical forces that were gathered there, many more secretly covet what the next display will bring. Benefice Verrocchio is right to be concerned. Never in recent years has the Cabal been so brazen. It bodes ill for the future indeed.

CABALS OF DORMETIA

To bring you up to date with current events and personalities to look out for in your travels here are the Dormetian Cabals.

Burvoy: The Burvois mages go about their business as they have always done, quietly, efficiently and with the apparent support of the country's ruler, Reynald II. Jeunet Karo, a Sango Drajo, has been applauded by other Burvois Cabalists for his involvement in the fall of Ossard, an event that the entire Cabal has been much pleased with.

The Citadels: The dwarven Citadels of northern Wairanir are very insular, most news of the city-states comes via the Dwarven Cabal, which is lead by Zhar of the city of Ghon Moar. While little is known for certain of the dwarven society and its ways, such knowledge is bound to increase as several city-states open themselves for trade. Coming years should bring many surprises, profits and possibly conflicts.

Evora: The Prabesk Cabal continues to support the Heletian branches with both coin and information. All forms of magic are practised in Evora, some more openly than others, but with Elementalism dominant (also being the state religion, see issue 14).

Fletland: The practice of magic continues to receive strong support from the Flets. Although Blood Mages are not welcome within the Flet Cabal, elemental and battle magic are strong here. One would assume that with the high number of practising mages present in Fletland, the events in Ossard would have had a far more serious effect on the local Cabals, especially given the close proximity of the Gargoyle Spirit Queen. This was not the case, however, with fewer than a dozen mages drawn to the magical lure of the doomed city. Living so

close to the Gargoyle Spirit Queen for so long has possibly given the Flet Cabalists a "magical immunity" to the warping effects that befell Ossard. A number of Fletlander mages have achieved arch-mage status. Under their expert guidance, the first human magical university is being built in the city of Bayner.

Greater Baimiopia: The loss of so many Inquisitors in Ossard has seriously weakened the amount of control Cardinal Vincenzo has over limiting the activities of the Cabal within the capital. While he waits for reinforcements of Inquisitors to arrive from Lixus, a few foolish Cabalists have openly practised magic in the streets. A number of quick and bloody public executions by the Des Sankta Glavos have put a stop to this, but the loss of face endured by the Grand Inquisitor will certainly not go unpunished.

Rumours abound that a new young leader has emerged to take the place of Alvasto Gutari, a Necromancer, former Master of the Greater Baimiopian branch of the Cabal, and killed in the streets of Ossard. His elevation to the senior position is said to have been very bloody indeed.

Heletian Saldae: This is the only state of the Heletian League that sees the magic weavers of the Church of Baimiopia working alongside those of the Cabal. Here both sides work to destroy the Saldaen Underground, a revolutionary movement that is working towards the expulsion of the Heletian colonists from the Saldaen's (halfings) homeland (see next issue).

Kaid-Onor: This broad land of wild nomadic elves in central Wairanir is home to it's own branch of the Cabal. Here, following the lifestyle of the elven tribes that claim their deep valleys, a Cabal has evolved that shows little in the way of regulation and organisation. The only fixed part of the Kaid-Onor Cabal is it's leader, Soe Unae. In his hidden valley he lives with his research, tribe and many surprises.

Kano: Mages are a rare breed on lightly populated and conservative Kano. The small Heletian island state is a slave to its larger brother, Lixus, and follows it in most rulings. The leader of the Cabal on Kano is known as the Hermit, and lives in the barren, rocky countryside.

Kramer Confederation: Despite increasing involvement of the Church of Baimiopia in the lives of the people of this region an increasing interest in the practise of magic prevails. The constant threat to shipping lanes by pirates threatens the livelihood of many of the Kramer Confederation's more influential mercantile families, and as the presence of a skilled

Cabalist on board ship lessens the losses from such attacks, magic is not outlawed in most cities. The quill might be mightier than the sword, but the purse is mightier yet. Until the Church of Baimiopia backs up its strong sermons with strength of arms, magic still has a relatively free (but not completely trusted) reign. Wizards are most frequently found in the Kramer Confederation, with a large number of Elven and Evoran mages in the coastal cities.

Lixus: Here in the third most powerful (and most conservative) Heletian League state is the Dark One, a necromancer, and head of the small but feared Lixus Cabal. None can claim to have seen the Dark One, but all can feel his cold presence. Lixus is a place of Kreinta fearing people, and good, but the shadows seem overly dark and cold.

Lucera: The scum of all Heletian states is the home of kultists, pirates, criminals and cabalists. While but a small island, its dark secrets, shame and filth knows no bounds. The Cabal of Lucera is headed by the Bleeder, who lives on 'the Rocks', a group of limestone, cave-ridden islands. He is Dormetia's second most powerful Sango Drajo.

The Ogre Cabal: Lead by Mugour, famed battle wizard of the city of Bar Mor. The ogre Cabal is that race's only link and line of communication between its clans.

Saldae: Fully the entire Saldaen (halfling) Cabal has joined the Saldaen Underground which is fighting the Heletian colonists that are slowly destroying their homeland. Known generally as a placid people, suddenly, with the rise of great need and desperation the Saldaen Cabal is discovering within its ranks many powerful battle wizards. Lead by Stelton, who lives with the Underground's ruling Council, she is always on the move, aiming to attack Heletian forces (sponsored from nearby crowded Lixus) and avoid the Heletian Saldaen Cabal which exists largely to oversee the Underground's destruction.

Teramo: Controlled by 'The Captain', a pirate mage discretely based in Teramo's principle port, Bari, he has ruled over his branch for fifty years. Well known for his affinity for the magical ways of the sea and water in general, the Captain is an elemental of rare talent.

Wair-Rae: Lae Corster (the Master) has headed the Wair-Rae Cabal for over four hundred years. Many say that he is too old for the new challenges the world brings, others say that his tower in the Pillar-city of Yamere, is but his tomb, and that he is already as good as dead. It seems that the Wair-Rae Cabal is destined for an uncertain future of trials and challenges.

FAITHS OF DORMETIA

THE WAYS OF DIVINE MAGIC BY ADAM SPARGO, COLIN TABER, ADAM WHITT

Dormetia is a wide, sprawling place - from the rain soaked valleys of Wair-Rae and its arch-enemy Kaid-Onor, to the ogre infested peaks of the Heletian Spine and the fertile Sidian Valley. In all these places are the strong faiths, the state faiths. These sanctioned religions bring to Dormetia wonders, miracles, blessings and death. They have laid order across Dormetia, but have also delivered war. These faiths are a double-edged blessing, for with their love they bring hate, and with their promises of eternal salvation they bring threats of foul damnation.

And, with all these religions, and all these gods, we are yet to find Utopia. Worse still, we are but one small corner of Unae. Who knows what the rest of our world offers?

Forwao, Elven Charlatan

THE STRUCTURE OF FAITH

Every nation of Dormetia (that part of Unae which we have been detailing since issue 8) has one legal, state-sanctioned religion. Whether it be the lumbering Church of Baimiopia, the all-powerful five churches of Wairanir, or the meek 'Ways of the Wood' followed by the placid folk of Saldae, in all nations one faith (or closely linked pantheon) reigns supreme over the hearts and minds of the masses. Each of these faiths have largely developed in isolation, but with the increasing contact between nations in this era of change, these 'religious organisations' are now looking to each other's lands, preparing to harvest converts for their own glorious gods.

In all of the major religions (due to the numbers of men and women required to serve) the 'quality' or magical ability of such faiths average priests is lower than that for the fringe faiths. Put simply, this means that while an ordained priest in his church can bless someone, a wedding, a new babe

or the recently departed, he cannot call fire storms and the like at will. The average church priest of the largest non-pantheon faiths (eg. the Churches of Baimiopia, Rosemaigne and the Messengers) cannot call anything beyond a blessing. Such is the limit of their magical skills (and also the will of their gods). The powerful miracle workers of these faiths are the travelling missionaries, the inquisitors and often the higher ranking Benefices, and so forth.

For example, the Messengers (the faith of the Prabesk - see issue 14) is actually a branch of the Cabal, and controlled by Elementalists. The everyday priest of a Messenger Shrine is not able to perform anything other than a basic blessing of good luck and fortune. Such an individual who shows no flare for magic is one that will not advance in the Messengers, and one that will never understand his religion's true goals, philosophy and foundation.

Another example; a more common one, of a priest of the Church of Baimiopia (or Rosemaigne), he can bless his flock, and guide and counsel them, but he cannot part the seas. Why? If he was that adept at Divine Magic, he would be a wasted asset sitting in some backwater telling peasants that they better be good before they die. The Church of Baimiopia has thousands of priests and initiates, all able to only dimly feel and wield the wonder that is Divine Magic. It is but a few hundred of the Church who can truly understand, control and manipulate such divine gifts and are given the opportunities to use them.

While the priests of the larger faiths seem disadvantaged by this magical shortfall, their religion's huge size recovers the apparent fault. The larger faiths may have only one tenth of its number who can wield powerful magic, but it also has ten times the number of priests as the smaller churches. The smaller faiths, those that are often divided into pantheons following many different gods (such as the faiths practised in Fletland, and in dwarven and elven society) are not bound by limits of 'magic-weak' priests, as the gods of such faiths treasure and look after more carefully their smaller number of priests. Ensuring that a well behaved and devoted servant is always able to do their master's bidding.

ORDERS OF DIVINE MAGIC

Divine Magic wielded by a favoured servant of a faith follows the tenements of the faith. A priest in the service of, for example a god or saint of healing, will only receive blessings of divine magic that can heal. If it is a god of battle, then the magic will be that of battle. The 'single-god' faiths generally provide priests healing magic, with the particularly cherished being able to call upon battle and defensive miracles. Thus a Benefice who follows St Silva, (Saint of Warriors of the Church of Baimiopia) is also likely to have access to the blessing of aggressive Battle Magic (maybe even selected elemental spells) as well as being able to bless and heal.

One of the biggest limits a priest will have placed on them in regards to what miracles they can behold will be caused by themselves, and their belief in what they are capable of. In theory a priest can cast any spell, but their faith, their *creed*, limits them to certain spheres or branches of magic.

THE MAJOR FAITHS

While Dormetia holds eight of these large faiths, it also holds hundreds, perhaps thousands of lesser beliefs, the most well known being the Kults of the Horned God. The following is a quick reference summary of the major faiths of Dormetia.

CHURCH OF BAIMIOPIA

Holy City: Baimiopia, the capital of Greater Baimiopia.

Mortal Head: His Holiness, Benefice Verrocchio.

Majority Areas: The eight (now seven) states of the Heletian League, North Burvoy.

Other Areas: Fletland, Evora, Burvoy, Heletian Saldae.

No. Followers: 5,000,000+

Martial Arm: Des Sankta Glavos

Magic Types: Diverse (Healing, Defensive, Battle).

Holy Day: Venitago, 1st day of spring.

Notes: See issues 11, 12 and 13. Venitago celebrates the rising of the mortal incarnation of Kreinta upon Unae, from the dead man-boy's body later known as St Baimio. This miraculous event occurred 515 years ago, on the dawn of the first day of spring.

The Five Faiths of Wairanir

Holy City: Lae Bareth, Lu Komensae Island, Wair-Rae.

Mortal Head: High King Caemarou.

Majority Areas: Ungria (non-Dormetia), Wair-Rae, Kaid-Onor, The Colonies.

Other Areas: Serhaem & Lae Ossard.

No. Followers: 4,000,000 in Dormetia

Martial Arm: Lu Andrastra's Sargo (common name; the Silvan guard)

Magic Types: Diverse

Most Holy Day: 5th day, of the 5th month of each 5th year.

Notes: Five faiths are followed by the elves of Unae, all united together into one pantheon which is the state religion of Ungria, Wair-Rae, her colonies (including Lae Ossard and Serhaem) and the sanctioned faith of the tribes of Kaid-Onor. The five churches each follow a different god, and are individually governed. The head of each of these churches also sits on a council known as; Lu Konsenardae, it is this council that 'regulates' the actions of the united faiths.

The five individual churches are dedicated to the following gods; Culann - father of craftsmen, Dylann - lord of healers and scholars, Teteri - keeper of nature, Andrastra - lady of war, and Pennardun - goddess of honour, love and duty. These faiths, their often bitter relations with each other, and their current unification will be further detailed in issue 26.

The Church of Rosemaigne

Holy City: Tyon, the capital of Burvoy.

Mortal Head: King Reynald II.

Majority Areas: Burvoy.

Other Areas: Teramo.

No. Followers: 400,000+

Martial Arm: Rosemaigne's Paladins.

Magic Types: Heal, Defensive and Battle.

Most Holy Day: Rosemaigne's Loss, first day of winter.

Notes: Largely a martial church which befits a young nation which has had to struggle to establish itself in Dormetia after an exodus from far off lands. See issues 8 and 18 for full details.

The Messengers

Holy City: Kuthra, Prabeq

Mortal Head: His Eternal Eminence, Caliph Dullah.

Majority Areas: Prabeq and Evora.

Other Areas: Many large trading ports

No. Followers: 150,000 in Dormetia (over 4,000,000 including Prabeq)

Martial Arm: None

Magic Types: Elemental

Most Holy Day: Summer solstice

Notes: Prabesk religion and the Cabal are closely linked, and Evora is one of the few nations in Dormetia where the two happily co-exist. See issue 14 for more information.

The Faiths of Fletland

Holy City: Many. Five major faiths in the pantheon are Woden, god of the wild; Meervaten, goddess of the sea; Kave, god of battle and honour; Geilan, goddess of mercy and healing; and Schoperde, goddess of life.

Mortal Head: Many (see issue 16)

Majority Areas: Fletland

Other Areas: Evora, Kaid-Onor

No. Followers: 400,000+

Martial Arm: Followers of Kave (battle).

Magic Types: Diverse

Most Holy Day: Diverse

Notes: See issue 16.

The Way of the Wood

Holy City: The City of Ledene

Mortal Head: His Most Holy, High Priest Malbadan

Majority Areas: Heletian Saldae

Other Areas: None

No. Followers: 100,000+

Martial Arm: The Templars of the Lake

Magic Types: Healing

Holy Day: The Birthday (according to lore the 1st day of spring)

Notes: This gentle faith of a placid people is one of nature worship and few demands. Many aspects of the Saldaen's culture (including this faith) reflect a complacency that has settled on them due to a simple and comfortable life. Unfortunately, this idyllic lifestyle has been shattered by Heletian colonisation, and now the once sedate Saldaens have launched a guerrilla war against their masters (see next issue).

The Dwarven Pantheon

Holy City: Many

Mortal Head: Many

Majority Areas: The Korbhan Republic (non-Dormetia) and the Citadels

Other Areas: None

No. Followers: 2,500,000+ (600,000 in Dormetia)

Martial Arm: Many

Magic Types: Diverse

Holy Day: Diverse

Notes: The Dwarven pantheon spans all aspects of life, love and hate, life and death, craft and art, war and peace. With the insular nature of the Dwarven nations coming to an end as they prepare to open up for trade, it would seem that the little known will increase greatly. See the upcoming Dwarven Citadels and Korbhan source articles.

The Ogre Clans

The Ogres worship their ancestors, immortalising them and their great deeds. So no specific details can be given, as religious practice varies from clan to clan. The only constant among the ogre faith is that the clan shaman is master of clan lore, and judge of things spiritual and supernatural.

Recently a taint has darkened the proud ancestor worship of the clans; the emergence of the Clans of the Night, lead by the Blood Tribe. These clans have forsaken the old ways, and embraced new gods, the most powerful is known as Horc Dhark, yet another aspect of the dreaded Horned God.

The Kults

Many kults - dark and light, innocent and evil - exist in Dormetia, the most well known being those of the Horned God. Generally these kults are covens of followers who revere the "old gods" and are driven underground by the sanctioned faiths. The most widespread faiths have been covered previously (see issue 15) and a future sequel article is planned which will give detail of others.

HIDDEN AGENDAS

Many faiths in Dormetia, and indeed across Unae have their own righteous goals and aims. Some of these will be expanded on in the future. The most sinister is the collection of a magical substance known as *Esenco*. This powder is a form of raw magic, and much sought after by those of the Cabal, Sisterhood and all the churches, faiths and kults. This blue powder is a priceless commodity, mined from a terrible source.



It is 515EK, it is Spring ☼

Shuffling The Deck

Unofficial Game Variants for Magic: The Gathering

by Darrin Mison and Wes Brooks

Magic: The Gathering (MTG) by Wizards of the Coast will without doubt go down as one of the great gaming classics. Apart from generating a whole new gaming genre - the collectible trading card game - it is simply hugely addictive. One of the things that make it so addictive is its versatility; it is very easy to adapt the method of play to create new game variations which then leads to the necessity of developing new tactics to win. This keeps the challenge of the game alive. We present below some of the game variations that our group has come up with.

Solitaire

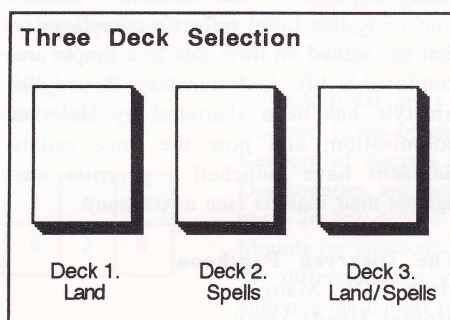
This is a variation of the Wipe-Out rules on page 136 of the *Pocket Player's Guide*. First select your deck, about 40 cards is recommended. The objective is to reduce yourself to less than 20 life points within seven turns. Life point 'throw away' cards like *Lich* and *Channel* are not permitted and mana burn is not counted. You may attack yourself with creatures and cast offensive spells such as *Fireball* and *Lightning* at yourself. Before beginning play you must ante one card. If you fail to kill yourself then you lose the card from your deck and must play again. The overall objective is to kill yourself in as few attempts as possible.

For a greater challenge play with another person or even several and see who can kill themselves in as few attempts as possible. The cards you lose could also be handed over to the person who comes closest to death in each duel. Losing ante cards permanently is optional.

Three Deck Selection

This is a variation of the Two Deck Selection option provided on page 132 of the *Pocket Players Guide*. Instead, you divide your deck into thirds. Again this option is especially good for players who like to keep large decks (100 card plus) but

do not like the randomness of the game which tends to result from having so many cards to draw from. In this variation your deck is divided in approximately equal thirds, with one sub-deck made up entirely of Land cards, a second made entirely of Spell cards, and the final third made up of a roughly equal mix of Land and Spells. Each time you come to draw a card you get to choose which deck you draw from. If you wish to play for ante then a card is randomly selected before the deck is divided.



Against The Clock

The introduction of a time limit on a player's turn can quite significantly speed up game play as well as create some anxiety as players are forced to make quick judgments under the stress of a ticking clock. Generally thirty seconds per 20 cards is sufficient to make the game challenging as all players are forced to think faster, particularly when your opponent is using new tactics or cards which you are not familiar with. The clock is stopped whenever one player interrupts another's turn to play a card or asks for a judge's decision. It is not recommended to use time limits when playing for ante, unless you are really confident of your abilities.

Another variation on this theme is to set a time or turn limit (5 minutes or 10 turns for example) and the winner is declared at the end of this limit as person with the greatest number of life points remaining.

Tag Team Magic

In this variation, two teams play against each other. Each side shares a common Land deck which they can both draw from, but each player within the team has their own Spell deck from which only they can draw. At the start of the game each team may nominate their "leader" - usually this will be the person who made the best initial draw of seven cards. That player continues to play as per normal, drawing one card per turn either from the common Land deck or from their own Spell deck and playing their hand as if it were a normal game. At the start of each turn however, the leader can choose to "tag" one of their team mates who then takes over the position of leader and continues the game either drawing from the common Land deck or using their personal Spell deck.

Each team shares a common life points total (we suggest 30 points) and the player who is the leader assumes control of all cards in play that his or her team has laid down; that is, creatures, enchantments, artifacts and other effects that have been played by previous leaders of their team are usable by the current leader. The winning team is that which reduces the other team's life points to zero. Alternatively each player has their own life points total. Any cards that refer to the owner or controller can only refer to the current players and not other members of the team. As players are eliminated, their unused spell pack is out of the game. The winner in this version is the side that either kills all the members of the other team, or the side which inflicts the most damage within a set time limit (see above).

Suicide Magic

This variation sees the game played backwards. The game plays pretty much the same as standard MTG except each player is trying to reduce their own life points to zero whilst the opponent is trying to keep them

alive! Creatures and spells can be used to attack yourself and any healing effects of cards can be transferred to your opponent. Use your creatures to block your opponent's attacks on themselves. Life point "throw away" cards like *Lich* and *Channel* are not permitted and mana burn damage is taken away from your opponent's life points. Any cards that damage you if you neglect them such as *Erg Raiders* actually heal you instead of causing damage. One interesting tactic in Suicide Magic is to prevent your opponent from laying cards via use of a card such as *Stasis* which taps his cards, and then cast lots of healing spells on him.

Take Prisoners!

A cutthroat alternative to playing for ante is to play a set of three games playing that any of your creatures under the control of your opponent at the end of each game are captured by him. This also includes any enchantments that are on them at the time. Any captured creature that has such enchantments must be recorded somewhere and the enchantments kept separate, so that when the creature is drawn in future games, those enchantments are taken up to remain matched with the creature. If you find this unbalances your games then the next time that a captured creature is summoned both the cost of the creature and the enchantments which are on him must be paid. Alternatively the creature can be summoned without the enchantments but those enchantments are immediately returned to the original owner's hand.

This variation means that cards such as *Control Magic*, *Spell Blast*, *Counter Spell* and any other spells that either give you control of creatures or prevent these spells become very powerful. It also weakens decks which have been pumped up with heaps of enchantments. An interesting add-on to this play is that you can "ransom" the captured cards or conduct prisoner exchanges by offering to trade for other cards in the opponent's deck.

Flying High

Under the revised rules creatures with special abilities which do not include tapping as an activation cost can use these abilities as many times as they like provided that the mana cost can be paid. For example, *Frozen Shade* (1 Black, +1/+1); if you have five black mana spare you could pump the *Frozen Shade* to +5/+5. Some abilities, however, work differently; the *Goblin Balloon Brigade* gains the ability to fly until the end of the turn by expending one point of red mana. In the Flying High variant you are able to add additional red mana points to this special ability so that

you can gain altitude. Now, creatures with natural flying ability fly above non-flying creatures to avoid blocks but creatures such as the *Goblin Balloon Brigade* have the option to fly higher, above other flying creatures, by paying the mana cost more than once. By paying two red mana the *Goblin Balloon Brigade* becomes unblockable by other flying creatures, except you can allow that a flying creature with a *Flight* spell (or similar) cast upon it also gains High Flying. This variant does make the *Goblin Balloon Brigade* more dangerous, but it is a common card and countermeasures are available.

Hack, Slash and Burn

The Magic: The Gathering world of Dominia is brilliantly realised in the art and background text of the cards. No doubt a fully-fledged role-playing campaign world will soon be available. In the meantime, try this variant as a play aid for your fantasy role-playing games. Think of your next scenario in terms of a wizard-led group going in search of a specific artifact or spell. One player takes the role of the referee or Cardmaster (CM). As is consistent with the essentially non-competitive nature of role-playing the CM's role is to make the game challenging for the players, not to defeat them. The CM can summon creatures at no mana cost, although their abilities and all other enchantments require mana as normal. These cards then become obstacles in the path of the adventurers, and the players have to overcome these obstacles using the standard MTG rules by summoning their own spells and creatures to combat them. The players have standard life points but the CM has unlimited life and cannot be killed.

This variant works best if the referee preselects his deck and has the creatures arranged in a set sequence of prepared encounters. He draws all creatures from this specially prepared deck, using a loose narrative to link the episodes similar to any other RPG. When the encounter enters the "combat phase" (no other option is available) the CM draws the creatures from his prepared deck and all other cards from a mixed deck. The players respond to the creatures by playing cards normally, with each player alternating turns with the CM. The encounter continues until the prepared creatures are vanquished. Players then have the opportunity to heal damage, and keep laid down cards in play until the next encounter. The referee can replenish his hand to a full compliment of seven cards (excluding the defeated creature cards) before the next encounter.

If the players survive to the end of the series of set encounters, they have

completed their quest and are rewarded with the spell or artifact card(s) which was the object of the quest. These can then be used to augment their decks for future scenarios.

Limited War

This variant is designed to pull the rug from under the power player who comes to play with a case full of cards. This is done by limiting the available card pool. Each player purchases a Starter Deck each - no more cards are initially allowed. Obviously this makes for diffuse and relatively ineffective decks, so each player is then given the chance to conduct limited trading, but only with other members of the group, and then only by using a trading point system. In this system Rares count for 9 points, Uncommons for 3 points and Commons are worth 1 point each. Trades are restricted to 9 points per player per game.

The games are always best of three and always played for ante. That way, along with the trading, cards are kept circulating within the pool. Also, the same opponent cannot be played in two consecutive matches, ie. a third opponent from the group must be played before a rematch between initial opponents is allowed. After everyone has played each other at least once, an influx of cards is allowed into the pool - one Booster pack per player. The only other time a player is allowed to bring in a Booster into his pool is when his deck drops below 40 cards due to the attrition of war (cards eg. land cannot be discarded). This keeps trading happening and allows new cards to come into play to spice things up, but without the wholesale arms proliferation that commonly occurs in a MTG war.

Using this variant has revitalised our MTG group, and the decks are developing well. As always there are dreaded opponents and easy pickings, but you're never sure what trading and new cards will throw up; yesterday's easy meat is tomorrow's hunter.

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MAGIC

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collectible trading card
games. Issue #1 out
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THE TWOCLUB

Adventure Hooks for Cyberpunk & Shadowrun in Australia

By Andrew Boswell

This is the first of what we hope will become a regular series. The results of the Reader's Polls, your letters to the Editor, and our own brainstorming sessions have told us that what many of you out there want is fresh ideas for your roleplaying sessions, not boring charts, endless character kits and dry as dust rules variations.

To address that need for colour and excitement, we have come up with this, the "Adventure Hooks" series. The purpose of these articles is to provide you, the referee and/or player with a sort of expanded NPC/Trading Gallery. Each of these Hooks articles will describe either a unique setting, non-player character, useful item or dangerous creature, complete with generic background information, that may be easily slotted into a variety of roleplaying game systems.

The main purpose of each of these articles though will be to provide referees with a number of generic adventure hooks, so that, even if the specific place, person or thing described in the article is not suitable for your particular campaign, you might still be able to make use of some of the many plot ideas detailed within (after a suitable bit of tweaking on the your part) to put your own group of players to the test.

This first article provides an interesting Australian adventure location. Specifically for the Cyberpunk™ game, it could be adapted to any near future "punk" style of game.

Adelaide's TWOclub (The Wheels Of Commerce Lubricated) is a restaurant/nightclub complex standing atop Mount Lofty in the Adelaide Hills. Built over the remains of an earlier structure the TWOclub is serviced by the existent roads and also by a cable car system completed in 2003. The cable car traverses nine and a half kilometres before connecting with rail and road services in the valley below. It runs between the hours of 7 at night through to 8 in the morning and has a one way trip time of 20 minutes. Controls for the cable car are located at the top, within the TWOclub's main system.

Sleeting ultra violet radiation which is slowly sterilising the Southern hemisphere (in comparison to the overcast Northern) has turned the once stunning stone building into the same uniform colour as the (now mostly barren) Adelaide hills. The light/bell tower which was built around as a feature for the clientele holds a sophisticated antenna array. Capable of acquiring and interacting with orbital platforms it is this array which has moved the TWOclub to the fore of partially legal business.

This array has been the focus of much of NetWatch's activity in Pacifica. They have invested large amounts of time and capital in attempting to locate it in realspace.

Hook: Solo characters can be employed by the TWOclub management to defend the array acting on the suspicion that an assault is imminent. Equipment provided will stop short of heavy weapons which would only confirm the existence of the array. Characters accepting such a contract would pick up the trail of the assault team in Hong Kong or Tokyo, possibly infiltrating it, but certainly attempting to neutralise it well before it makes an actual attack on the club. Preferably this counter measure should occur over the sea or the Australian desert to cover the move.

Hook: Solo characters can be employed by NetWatch to assault an illegal antenna array located somewhere in Pacifica, probably either Adelaide or Melbourne. Mission specs would involve a team of about 8 mercenaries, equipped as deemed necessary, commencing in Tokyo and homing in for the destruction. Spice for the mission is two 'traitors' employed by the illegal array management who attempt to either quietly assassinate team members, or at the least attempt to sabotage the flight while over the sea or desert.

Hook: A Cop character hears that an armed intervention of some sort is going to go down around the TWOclub in the next few days. The club has 'helped' the character with certain financial obligations and over the years have proved honest in their dealings with him/her. While the character has no idea or interest in what such an attack would be about, nothing like that is going to go on in this beat to such good friends. Stumbling around the Adelaide hills in lethal sunlight or struggling on the roof of a swaying cable car with a jacked up lunatic would make a good finale to this adventure.

The TWOclub array operates on a schedule which is constantly changing to prevent being tracked and put off net by NetWatch, EEC or Eurocorps. The timetable of online times is the most valuable item in the club. Access to it is only at the highest, most trusted levels. The only copies of the timetable are in physical form and are located in the management office safe. No electronic trace of this document exists, the original randomising program was employed on a laptop which was not net connected, which was then destroyed. Control of the cable car and internal security of the club is also located in this office. Guarded by TWOclub Solos at all times, the office is on the first floor below ground and will be actively manned seventy-five percent of the time by techies and club management conducting meetings.

Hook: If stolen, the timetable would command at least a million Euros to the right parties. In Arasaka's hands it would mean complete control of the array (though they would probably sell it back to the club). In NetWatch's hands it would simplify their task of snuffing out another expression of freedom. Solos have no chance of taking the timetable by force. This mission is for Techies, Netrunners, and possibly a Rockerboy to gain entrance to admin areas by getting a gig.

At the highest levels of power however it is never possible to keep secrets of course. But the major players are prepared to allow the continued functioning of the rebel net insertion (for the meantime, as long as profits continue to find their way back). Arasaka for example regularly launders vast sums of money through the Melbourne LDL to TWOclub, the piggybacking mining interest signals to Delhi and from there to whatever accounts they need clean cash in. Black Budget capital often moves through this route into the coffers of needy mercenaries.

Arasaka has a contract reaching completion in the Mediterranean in a few days time. 60 million Euros will pass through TWOclub in the route described above.

Hook: This is a mission for an extremely brave Netrunner and Fixer team. Laundering routes for the stolen money and new identities are essential if the characters intend to survive. This is a good way for the GM to generate recurring foes for the characters. The characters will require the timetable book or access to the coding of the Bogus Icon program (see below). Otherwise they may infiltrate the club as staff to gain access to the data stream.

The co-owners of the club have created a communication program for net use which generates a bogus icon for the TWOclub transmitter. When the array comes online this bogus icon (or icons as there is no theoretical limit to the number possible) sets itself up in a distant part of the net. Information is shunted in modulated bursts into this bogus icon which then performs transmission to other remote services. Much like the money laundering that Arasaka does on a huge scale the Bogus Icon program can shuttle information around the net from fake location to location thus

thwarting any trace or destruction attempts. This ruse coupled with the irregular transmission times have foiled NetWatch attempts to locate the antenna both in the net and realspace (though they know it is in Pacifica).

Hook: An extensive adventure within the Net is to locate the real TWOclub data fortress, gain entrance and copy the Bogus Icon program. This program is worth at least 2 million Euros to any software company, and more to NetWatch, the EEC or Eurocorps. Again, theft of the program will generate recurring foes as the owners of TWOclub will be really unimpressed by being laid open.

Occupying two above ground and two below ground levels the club boasts 37 private rooms for business discussions. These rooms, in addition to the five casino rooms, three bars, four cabaret rooms and a restaurant, are all guaranteed surveillance free. Unlikely combinations can often be seen meeting here. The Adelaide MFP (Multi Function Polis; Australia's Arcology) staff regularly meet with mining, Nomad, Agricultural concerns and the staff of the recently reopened Woomera launch site.

The leader of the Chundering Chapells (Nomad) discusses with local security chief of CSR (largest Australasian agricultural corporation) limited sabotage of harvesting equipment. This will help justify larger military budgets which can be skimmed by both parties.

Hook: An adventure for a Cop or Media character is to record this conversation and blow open the scam both with the CSR management and with the Chundering Chapells rank and file, most of whom used to have farms on the land now fenced off by the corporation.

Hook: A group of Chundering Chapells suspect that their leader is up to some sort of deal with the hated CSR bosses. They hire the party to either find the truth or to assist in the next assault on an installation. This time though the aim is to do real damage and thus expose the corruption of the security staff. (This is a short-sighted strategy of course but Nomads are Road Warriors, not thinkers).



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DICE ARE DEAD

Play-By-Mail Column

FEATURE REVIEW

Legends PBM

PBM Enterprises

Reviewed by Brad Smart

Legends PBM from PBM Enterprises offers players the chance to participate in the ongoing history of a huge fantasy world. Players have four starting options when the game begins. These range from being the ruler of a fledgling kingdom, being responsible for managing it's economy and expanding it's borders, through to taking the role of one of those hero's, you know the type, has sidekick, sword and an attitude. I chose a role in between, as the leader of a band of adventurers roaming the country, looking for treasure, trouble & fun.

Upon registering, players receive 3 manuals for the *Legends* game, (around 200 pages worth) explaining everything from the game system, to races, magic, geography and economics. This is also accompanied by a 30 page book detailing information specific to the particular game module or world that the player is about to enter. As well, players receive a full colour map of the world. (very impressive!)

The game module I chose was "Realm of the Immortals". This is set in the world of Vrenna, where up to 200 other players, many NPC's and the armies of the Overlord stand between you and world domination. There are no set victory objectives in Realm of the Immortals, and even destruction of the Overlord and his armies does not guarantee political stability and happiness in the world.

Each turn I received a printout listing the status of my characters, and the results of their actions. With a spy, this included reports of troops and characters in the surrounding area. Sometimes mysterious figures would approach my camp late at night, and leave objects which I later discovered to be magical Items. (I am sure that this only happened to my Ranger character though. Hmm...). Combat proved more deadly than expected, and the early loss of one group member taught me to respect most monsters, and give some a very wide berth.

I found travelling about as a small group was often intimidating, especially with all those mercenary groups & Kingdom soldiers prowling about. They are very aggressive and life in the wild is dangerous. But hey, isn't that what adventuring is all about?

A newsletter accompanies each turn report, and covers information from PBM Enterprises, as well announcements from players in all their games. Some of these were interesting, some humorous, some just plain confusing.

The game system itself is definitely not for beginners, and I would be recommended having a look at some simpler PBM games first before playing in the *Legends* game series. This complexity is due to one of the game's main strengths in that almost anything is possible. You can stick to



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wandering the world being a hero, gaining fame fortune and fans, or you can start the same, scrape together some cash and forge an empire, then having to deal with the micro-economics of feeding your loyal subjects and warring with your neighbour. Of course the reverse is entirely possible. The manuals provide a wealth of information, but can be a little confusing to those not familiar with large scale Play By Mail games.

I did enjoy this game though found it a bit overwhelming at times. The turn fees are pretty high too. Legends is really a game for the PBM aficionado who likes to study the rules in minute detail, pour over his turn sheet, and slowly build a position of power. There is so much to do and explore in the game that I can see people getting really hooked on it. No complaints about the service either, Shane is a very good moderator with time to answer most questions. A very good game of adventure, exploration, empire building and conquest for the experienced player. A big step up from Quest.

PBM Enterprises can be contacted at PO Box 278 Emerald, VIC, 3782 (059)68 5652.

PBM NEWS

There is very little to report this issue as the PBM world pretty much goes into recess over the Christmas break.

I did receive a package from what I assume is a new PBM company - **Obsidian Games** announcing the launch of their fantasy strategy game set underground, *UnderEarth*. From what I can gather this is fully computer moderated and coded by Obsidian Games. One of the persons credited, Troy Baker, ran a hand-moderated fantasy role-playing PBM called *Avenger* which I played in for a while a few years back before it went into recess for an extensive rewrite never to resurface. I don't think *UnderEarth* is the result as this game is an explore, build and conquer game.

Actually, the A5 photocopy 34 page rulebook depicts a fairly simple game with limited options which reads a lot like *Trollquest II*. We will appoint an independent reviewer to investigate *UnderEarth* further. Obsidian Games are offering the rulebook, set up in a game and 5 free turns for \$5.00.

Obsidian Games 47 Chester Rd, Annerley QLD 4103.

Andrew Daniels, currently playing in *Middle-Earth PBM*, reports that he is having a very good time, although the learning curve for this game is pretty steep. We expect Andrew to be filing a full report in next issue. See ya'll then. ■

The Analytical Engine

by Peter Crank

<PLINK>....Bartender, my Gin & Tonic seems to be empty. If you wouldn't mind? Thanks. Now where was I? Oh yes, that Terry Pratchett fellow. Very strange meeting him, don't ya know. Not what you'd expect... well maybe he is. That Bellamy voice, the myopic squint, all that talk of money. Well I'd given up on him, really had, but this latest book of his has changed my mind. **Men at Arms** (Corgi, \$11.95) is a bit of a surprise. Pratchett has turned into a real novelist! There were disturbing signs of this over the last few books, and with **Men at Arms** he's finally got it worked out. All those lovable characters from **Guards! Guards!** make a comeback, as does Gaspode from **Moving Pictures** (not, I'll admit, one of my favourite Pratchett creations - a bit cute).

The problem for writers like Pratchett is that what made him successful was naivete; the off-the-wall concept and the idiosyncratic delivery. Not great writing but hugely entertaining, and totally different. New. The problem comes about as time goes by and new ideas have to be wedged into the straitjacket of the original concept by a writer who has outgrown that "wacky" beginning. For example, the story overcame the humour in **Small Gods**, quite ruining the book for me and others I spoke to - might as well have been reading David Eddings (Whoa! Watch that dirty talk there, fella!). What's left for the writer is to plod on in a formula fashion; or try to grow the original concept. The latter is what Terry has been endeavouring to do, not always successfully. He'd talked of winding up the Discworld for a while but so far it doesn't seem to be happening. I think he's got the bug again. I could be wrong. At any rate you'll find a lot of socially directed asides in the footnotes of **Men**, stuff about rainforests and police brutality, its right out there in the open and it doesn't get in the way at all. It is a more relaxed, mature and confident Pratchett we're seeing here. And bloody good fun. Hope you got one in your stocking at Xmas.

Watchers of the marketplace will have noticed a tidal wave of Pratchett material hitting the shelves "just in time for the

festive season". Discworld companions, a mapbook of Ankh-Morpork, the novels mentioned above. It must be giving Pratchett's accountants a real workout. If you're a Pratchett fan you're gonna be broke this summer. Be a good chap and pass the peanuts, would you? Thanks.

Another British "humorist" with more than a few forests demolished in his honour is Robert Rankin. Two of his works have slid out of the redback nest I call a mail box this last couple of weeks. I've only managed to read one of them. The other will have to wait for next month. **The Raiders of the Lost Carpark** (Corgi, \$11.95) is not in the Pratchett league, I'm afraid, but it is a pleasant diversion. If you've read **The Book Of Ultimate Truths**, then you know the major characters (Cornelius Murphy, Tuppe - an irritating little twerp, and Hugo Rune - an engaging egomaniac) and the basic premise - the world is actually much bigger than it seems, all the missing bits are the "Forbidden Zones" where the Earth's real rulers dwell, manipulating us and shaping our destinies. Great idea, pity he couldn't come up with a story to go with it. Still, there's enough pointless action and really terrible jokes to keep you going for a couple of days. It might be just the antidote you need if you read any of the following books. [Warning: Those of you with little knowledge of things Pommie may find some of Rankin baffling, as will those with atrophy of the giggle gland - and we know who you are, don't we. Keep the cards and letters coming folk.]

Horror is BIG (bigger even than mega-epic fantasies that go on for six enormous bookshelf bending, brainnumbing, credulity straining volumes). Vampires, ghouls, creatures you just can't seem to kill until just before the credits (when for some reason they become strangely vulnerable) fill the bookshelves of your local retailer. (Ah, but is it really dead, or just playing possum until the inevitable sequel, "The Thing that Ate My Y-Fronts II - The Hamper Re-opened"?).

The distributors and publishers are always very generous this time of year and my cup of horror drippeth over. First up is **In The Dark**, Richard Laymon (Headline Feature, \$14.95). An interesting premise, I'll give you that Richard. Jane the Librarian (not to be confused with Conan the Cimmerian) is living her dull little librarian life in Donnerville when one night an envelope appears at her desk, "Look homeward, angel" it says and encloses \$50. Jane being a good librarian knows this is a book title and heads off to get it. Lo! Within its pages \$100 and an invitation from MOG (Master of Games) to join the game for fun and profit. To cut it short, Jane joins the game, meets a nice guy (her ex was a philandering

creep) and finds herself in deeper and deeper poop with every envelope from MOG. At first the challenges are simple, but soon become bizarre, dangerous and kinky. Thing is though, the money in the envelope doubles each time and it doesn't take Einstein to realise we're soon talking thousands, then tens of thousands of clams. Jane is hooked. Naturally Jane soon finds she is in too deep, MOG won't let her quit.

Okay, good idea. The writing is basic, standard American bestseller, so its an easy read. But wait a minute, there is a strong erotic current here that grows stronger by the page, so does the level of violence. There is a scene in a house that Jane must break into that is a stomach churner (give us a hand, dearie); and MOG likes to pay nocturnal visits on Jane to inscribe his instructions on her bare flesh (sometimes with a marker, at one point with a knife). Probably not a good idea to let Mom read this one. The really dumb part is at the end; what looks like a good sting-in-the-tail ending winds up with the usual inexplicably vulnerable monster who up 'til now has been invincible. The good part is a female protagonist who won't let her man get between her and some really decent blood-soaked vengeance. (Ahhh... you, know you're a cute little heart breaker! Foxy!).

Do you like to wet yourself in terror? Well that won't happen with this anthology. **Stalkers** (ROC, \$11.95) does represent value for money and there are some good stories here, but alas no classics, nothing to set your world afire. Richard Laymon turns up here too, with a story called "The Hunt" - the intro says Laymon displays a human heart to his fiction which sets him apart from his splatterpunk contemporaries. Well I'd sure hate to meet his friends. Vicious little story with a nice ending, surprised me. Dean R. Koontz is here, but "Trapped" is not his best, in fact it reads like a study for **Green Moon** (which I also have here in my hot little hands, it is a good read and will suit you if you don't like your horror too graphic. Koontz can write well - the opening line of **Green Moon**: "*Death drove a green Lexus..*" LOVE IT! **Green Moon** is heartily recommended as summertime reading to chill you on those hot summer nights).

Strangely, there are two stories about truckers and vengeance: "Pilots" by Joe R. Lansdale & Dan Lowry which is amusingly macabre and different; and "Mother Tucker" by James Kisner which isn't. Robert R. McCammon is a familiar name to fans of horror but again another disappointing story from a Big Name; "Lizardman" has great atmosphere but in the end is just "E.T." with attitude. "What Chelsea Said" by Michael Seidman stands out for me as the pick of the bunch.

Doorway To Eternity (MirrorDanse Books) is a collection of three novelettes by local writer Sean Williams. "New Flames for an Old Love" leads the pack and its an OK story. Certainly as good as the average story to be found in the marketplace these days. That's called damning with faint praise, folks, but I see so few REALLY GOOD short stories any more. "New Flames" just doesn't explore any new territory. Which is not saying Williams is a bad writer, he just doesn't shake my tree. "Reluctant Misty and the House on Burden Street" is a ghost story and I'll leave it at that. The final story, "Doorway to Eternity" irritated me with its clumsy narrative so I left it unfinished. So there you have it: I would not buy this book, spend your precious cash elsewhere.

The same editor (Bill Congreve) brings us **Intimate Armageddons** (Five Islands Press) a local horror anthology. All the usual people are here: Sean McMullen, Terry Dowling, Bill Congreve, Peter Corris (better known for his crime fiction) and yes, Sean Williams. It is better value than **Doorway to Eternity**. The really weird thing here is that for me the stand-out story is the one by Sean Williams, "Going Nowhere". I read this one in a doctors waiting room, a place I usually find it impossible to relax in, let alone read, so Williams passed a difficult test with flying colours. I'd recommend this one, definitely worth the asking price.

There are times when I dread the postman's bike. The Horror! when I reach in and gingerly retrieve from the bowels of the mailbox (where the mutant killer snails leave their phosphorescent trails and feast on the latest from Social Security and Time-Life) the newest and (unfortunately best) from McCaffrey or Jordan. "...There ain't no life, nowhere" (Jimi's playing and he's a bad influence). So I have, but have not read, **Powers That Be**, Anne McCaffrey & Elizabeth Ann Scarborough (Corgi, \$11.95) but it sits here whinging at me. "You read Rankin, why not me?", it whines. I'd like to, I say, I really would; but Scarborough mentions cats in her dedication and that much stereotype right up front is scaring me off. Why do these writers always have to have cats? Cats with stupid names, and probably a lot of get-up-your-nose-and-make-you-sneeze fur. Cats are New-Age pets, they're a bigger con than Aromatherapy. "Sure, I'll be a pet", says the cat, "but I won't come when you call, I won't fetch that bloody ball and I won't acknowledge your presence in any way actually. In fact if you don't feed me on time I'll climb your flyscreens making a hideous row, and I reserve the right to wake up the whole neighbourhood if I'm feeling a bit, you know, frisky". Yeah, right (roadkill has more personality). Why can't these writers have rottweilers like proper people?

Anyway, the book failed the first page test - that is, if it makes you laugh on page one and its *not* a comedy then it is probably a good time to clean those gutters. [Note to Transworld: Please send McCaffrey stuff to people that don't gag at the mere mention of her name. Apologies to all you dracophiles but there are some things a sane person will not subject themselves to (dolphins and dragons - I ask you!). The usenet is full of folk that read McCaffrey; no wonder people question the value of the Infobahn].

"Last call!", Huh? OK, then make mine a double. Summer wouldn't be summer without some sweaty afternoons lying on the trampoline reading Patricia Comwell's latest Dr. Kay Scarpetta mystery. This summer we have **The Body Farm** (Penguin \$19.95). The Body Farm of the title is a research establishment where the bodies of those considerate souls who will their bodies to science are subject to all manner of interesting experiments to determine variations in decomposition. How do we determine time and manner of death if we've never established some baselines? Well, at the Body Farm corpses are hung in trees, put under logs, weighted at the bottom of bathtubs, sealed in cement, you name it; and the effects of weather, wildlife and general wear & tear carefully monitored. Fun place to spend summer; send the kids.

Anyway, the farm is only important as a metaphor and as the place where Dr. Kay goes to research the cause of death of what appears to be the latest victim of Temple Gault, a loony we met in Dr. Kay's previous outing, **Cruel and Unusual** (Penguin, \$12.95). This is intelligent crime fiction at its best, the details of forensic pathology are endlessly fascinating to sickos like you and me. This book deserves your attention, but to be fair you have to read them in sequence, so start at **Post Mortem** and work your way through. You won't regret it (If you are fan of **Silence of the Lambs** then this is for you - you can really gross out sensitive friends with graphic descriptions of autopsies and stuff - way cool!).

*Oh I know, I know
You'll probably scream & cry
that your little world won't let you go.
But who, in you measly little world
are you trying to prove
that you're made of gold & can't be sold?*

*Oh...but are you experienced?
Have you ever been experienced?
Not necessarily stoned...but beautiful.
- (Jimi Hendrix: Are You Experienced)*

So until we meet again, "Bottoms Up!" (This one's for you, Bud).

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THE ADVENTURES OF THE

MEEN

BY EDGAR + DANIELS

THE RAINING STOPPED. THE LORD OF THE POLYGONS LOOKED DOWN ON WHAT THE GODS OF RANDOMNESS HAD DECREED. HIS STERN FACE CRACKED INTO A GRIN. THE GRIN GREW TO A SMILE. THE SMILE BROKE INTO A FULLY-FLEDGED LAUGH. THE GODS HAD SPOKEN. NAUGHT COULD BE CHANGED. THIS WOULD MAKE THE BEGGARS' EYES WATER!

I'M FINISHED! I'LL NEVER MOVE AGAIN!

TOLD YOU TO LEAVE YOUR ARMOR BEHIND.

AND BE MISTAKEN FOR A SNEAK-THIEF?

WOT YOU SAY?

NOTHING. WE'VE BIGGER FISH TO FRY. NOW WHERE ARE THE OTHERS?

HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR FISH?

DO YOU MIND?

HEY, I'VE BEEN A FOOT FOR SIX MONTHS. WHAT DO YOU EXPECT, LETTERMAN?

LET'S ASK THEM.

SOB

SOB

CAREFUL. COULD BE A TRAP.

I KNOW A PAMSEL IN DISTRESS WHEN I SEE ONE.

BESIDES, WHAT SORT OF A TRAP IS THREE WEEPING WENCHES?

AAAGH!

AAH!

VAMPIRES!

COME NOW.

THREE VAMPIRES AT ONE TIME - THAT'S AGAINST ALL LAWS OF PROBABILITY.

AGH!

SEE? YOUR GOOD AURA REPELS THEM!

SHANA. I'M ASHAMED OF YOU.

SURELY I DON'T DETECT A NOTE OF JEALOUSY?

THESE ARE POOR VILLAGE MAIDENS ENSLAVED BY THE EVIL MASTER OF THIS CASTLE.

AREN'T YOU?

SUCK MY KISS, WHITE BOY!



WELL MET!
UGH...
SORRY ABOUT THAT. SEEM TO HAVE GOT OFF ON THE WRONG FOOT.
WILSON, MANGO AND ZEEK AT YOUR SERVICE.



KOFF MY MASTER REQUESTS THAT YOU WAIT IN THE CONSERVATORY.
MORE REFRESHMENTS, YUMMY!
ACTUALLY, IF YOU COULD JUST DIRECT US TO THE CRYPT, WE'LL...



I'M AFRAID THAT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE. MY INSTRUCTIONS ARE...



WHAT YOU SAY?
URK...
PUT HIM DOWN! YOU KNOW WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO THAT SORT OF STUFF!
WHY NOT?
THE LORDS OF BALANCE PERMIT FREE WILL ONLY TO THOSE WHO BEHAVE ACCORDING TO THEIR ETHOS!



AH! IF I SEE WHAT YOU'RE SAYING, MANGO CANNOT DO THIS BECAUSE HE IS BASICALLY A GOOD PERSON.

CORRECT!



BUT MANGO IS ALSO A KNIGHT OF NOBLE EXTRACTION. IT IS IN HIS IDIOM TO TREAT MENIALS AS DISPOSABLE CHATTELS.

HE CAN DO WHAT HE WANTS TO THOSE HE CONSIDERS MERE SERVANTS WITHOUT AFFECTING THE BALANCE WHAT-SOEVER.

ERR... POSSIBLY.



GOOR. THAT'S SETTLED THEN.

NOW WHAT WAS I DOING?

G'Day to the US of A

To our new readers in the United States we wish you "welcome". This issue now marks the third that has been made directly available to those who live in the traditional home of role-playing so we thought it was about time that we formally said "Hello". Although many of the US gaming companies have long since recognised the abilities of those writers and artists who live "downunder", now you US gamers have the chance, every two months, to share our unique point of view.

And please don't be shy when it comes to submitting your own work to us, we're happy to see proposals and letters from any of our overseas readers. See the Contents page for details on how to obtain our submission guidelines. Now that we're available in the US, and with plans to distribute to the UK and beyond in 1995, we have some big projects in the works. Why not join us for the ride?

CanCon 1995

We at Australian Realms would like to wish Wes Nicholson, and all those involved with Australia's biggest roleplaying and wargaming convention, the best of luck for CanCon 1995. CanCon will be held at Bruce TAFE, Canberra, from January 26-29. Sadly, we won't be able to make it ourselves this year, as events at home are keeping us fully occupied at the moment.

If you'd like to buy back issues of *Realms*, the *A-Team Annual* or the all new *A-Team Miniatures* see Tony or Pat at the Logical Choice trade stand. Hope to see you all in 1996 - maybe next to the White Wolf booth! Hey, Keith, you said you'd like to be there - perhaps Stewart will let you come over if we suck (groan) up to him.

Unae Play By E-Mail

Always keen to bring our loyal readers more, we at Australian Realms are exploring the feasibility of setting up our own electronic play-by-mail game, based in the highly successful Unae fantasy campaign setting. Perhaps the best news of all for potential players, however, is that the game will be *completely hand moderated*. The scenario will have set objectives but will be heavily atmospheric and story driven. You'll match wits with the creators of the Unae setting - Colin Taber, Lee Sheppard and Adam Whitt.

At this early planning stage, we are looking at a 14-day turn around time, a set number of turns (about 20 turn) and a strictly limited number of players. Initially the game will only be available to electronic mail users,

but anything could happen in the long term. Turns will cost approximately \$15.

If you would like to know more, please write to us here at *Australian Realms*, or you can contact us at our E-Mail address: nicklean@perth.dialix.oz.au

A-Team Miniatures

The *A-Team Miniatures* designed by Scott Edgar and made by Inquisition Miniatures are now available. Without trying to be too biased (and how can we not, we love the gang of misfits!), we think that they look absolutely brilliant. For fans of the *A-Team* comic strip they are a must, and for collectors of excellently sculpted fantasy figures they'll make a great acquisition. The *A-Team Miniatures* are available on a strictly limited basis only, so see the ad in this issue for details on where you can get your own set. Do it now, before they disappear!!

Unae Campaign Notice

Issue 23 of *Australian Realms* will contain the first of a two-part scenario that will have major repercussions for the Unae campaign setting. We're saying nothing more at the moment, but for those of you basing your own fantasy campaigns in Unae, we suggest that you start moving your players towards Vangre. Trust us, they'll either thank or curse you for it in the long run, but they'll certainly enjoy themselves while they're visiting.

New Australian Magazine

Cashing in on the recent spate of hugely successful collectible trading card games is the new publication, **Card Magic**. Apparently this will be a magazine for collectors and players of Magic: The Gathering, Jyhad, Star Trek: The Next Generation, On The Edge, Illuminati: New World Order and other card games. Issue #1 is due out late January 1995 via those hobby specialists that stock these games.

Talking About...

Wizards of the Coast advises they expect to have sold a billion cards by the end of 1994. In the past twelve months they have employed over 100 people (great Christmas party!), and have now announced a change of corporate logo to go along with the change of direction as they move well beyond the founders' concept of producing and publishing fantasy role-playing products into the land of mainstream games and mega-

bucks. Hearty congratulations to the founders of this once-upon-a-time small gaming company. Could you save a deck chair for us on the beach at Rio, guys?

New Releases

OK, so you didn't get what you really wanted for Christmas. Commiserate with yourself by buying these new year releases of gaming goodies.

Steve Jackson Games: The *Illuminati: New World Order* card game should be shipping any day now. This has delayed the release of *In Nomine* until later this month. *GURPS Voodoo* is also out this month (boogy boogy!!).

R.Talsorian Games: The *Ravengers*, the first *Cyberpunk* novel is almost done. *Mekton Z*, the game of Japanese anime, is also about to hit the stores. *Solo of Fortune # 2* has also been released.

Chaosium: Rejoice, ye who love big slobbery, tentacled things - *Encyclopedia Cthulhiana* is here. This should be a must buy for all *Call of Cthulhu* fans. The *Chronicle of Awakenings* is the first major new release for the *Nephilim* game. The *Unmapped East* is a background and adventure book for the *Elric!* game.

White Wolf: *Hôl* (pronounced "hole") should be upcoming soon. The story of this science fiction RPG send-up's debut at GenCon 94 sounds suitably mythic to make the enterprise a raging success - four scruffy kids plonk a couple of hundred copies of a wholly handwritten game on the Chaosium stand and ask them to sell it for them. These sell out double-quick to hard-nose industry types who love it. White Wolf snap it up and viola! success.

Palladium: *Macross II Deck Plans Volume 3* is out now (gee, now that'll be exciting). *Aliens Unlimited* sourcebook for *Heroes Unlimited* and *Rifts* fans, and *Rifts Dimension Book II: Phase World*.

FASA: We wanted to announce the appointment of a new developer for Shadowrun developer, but had to bite our tongues because of delays with US Immigration. This shake-up may hold up release of the *Shadowrun Australia* sourcebook - we'll keep you posted.

TSR Inc: Oops! Ran out of space. Can't cover the big boys. Oh dear, how sad, never mind...

...see you 'round like a D100!

THAT WAS THE NEWS

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