ISSUE 25

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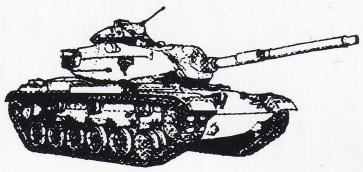

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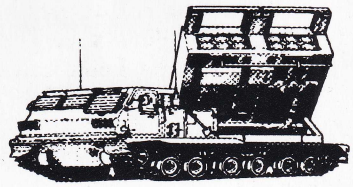

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Editorial Letters

A month late. "Blame it on the new computer, everyone else does it."

Well, I could do that (we spent enough time playing games on it!) but it would be a cop out. Truth is we had a number of equally valid reasons why issue 25 took an extra month, but mainly it had to do with us taking a well-earned breather after a hectic three years of bimonthly production, and also so we could realign our release schedule for US distribution. Now Realms will hit the shelves in each even-numbered month, and there'll be no further delays from now on, we promise... unless... Mike, can I have that new PowerMac I've been drooling over? Mike? MIKE!

Twenty five issues. You little beauty. And we reckon this issue is a ripper. Check out all of the great articles, giveaways, competitions and prizes we've crammed in and I think you'll agree, issue 25 was well worth the extra wait. See page 10 for our reflections on this special anniversary.

This issue we've finally buckled to reader pressure and included computer game coverage... "Yeah. Right. Blame the readers. You know it's 'cos you've got one of them newfangled CD-Rom thingammys". Actually, the software distributors starting sending us these cool games so we thought we'd try them. And you know the Realms team, we can't do anything without writing about it afterwards. So, we hope you approve of this inclusion. If not, please let us know.

Played any good games lately? I've been having a ball running Unae sessions for the 'A-Team players'. We've been exploring Burvoy using R.Talsorian's Metasystem rules (the system in Dream Park). It works well, and despite the chronically poor French accents ("Allo, Allo!") the role-playing has been *very* satisfying.

'Til December, enjoy good reading, and great gaming!

Nick Leaning

Jill Lucas
FASA Corporation

Dear Australian Realms,

Congratulations on hitting the BIG 25! It's been a lot of fun watching Australian Realms grow into one of the best gaming magazines on the planet!

In this age of form over substance, it's rare to see a magazine that can combine good production values, timely reviews and interesting information all into one package.

You guys have it all, keep up the good work.

R.Talsorian Games

Dear Nick & all the Australian Realms Crew,

Congratulations on your 25th issue. Keep up the good work. Hope I look as good at 25 as you do.

Sincerely
Cody Pondsmith

Peter Read
Dynamic Games

G'day Nick,

Congratulations to you and the team at Australian Realms. It's quite an achievement to stay in business these days, let alone in a very restricted highly competitive market. You have done a magnificent job in the past three years. Well done. I must also compliment the behind the scenes workers who get almost no recognition or public praise but without whom you couldn't do the job. Compliments to the wives and girlfriends too for the support they must have given you for without their support, you are fighting an uphill battle. I imagine you have aged 10 years in the past three, in fact, you're not too bad looking for a 45 year old. I could say you have been very lucky, but as one famous person once said "The harder I work, the luckier I get". We know luck has nothing to do with it. It's commitment to quality and service that determines the success or failure of a business and your success is a direct result of your dedication. I guess I had better stop before you get a swelled head, but in all sincerity Nick, you have done a magnificent job. Thanks to you and your team.

Wade Bowmer
Bangor, NSW

Nick and Team,

I am impressed with Australian Realms. It is a magazine definitely trying to go somewhere. Where? Well, I guess we'll find that out when we get there! It is the only magazine I have where multiple issues get opened simultaneously and I lose track of which one is which...

The shift towards "concept" articles is good, and supplying *Plot Hooks* and *Scenario Hooks* is excellent. However, they tend to be fairly "complete" and I would have a little trouble modifying them to suit an existing campaign. So I would like to suggest adding a *Situations* section that is simply scenario ideas, none of them complete hooks, but for putting together, Lego-like, to create new and unique scenarios.

Finally, *The Lonely Halls of Hra Kurban* (issue 21) was very good. I liked the organisation of Lee (but where were the maps?) and the story-telling of Colin, while the drama and horror of Adam were good for contrast. But I don't want you to expand the setting, instead I would like a completely new one with the same amount of "openness".

Wade,

Good news. A follow-up to The Lonely Halls is under construction and should appear next issue... Adam, extract your digit!

Pte Leigh Andrea
Puckapunyal, VIC 3662

Dear Guys,

How are you all? I have a dilemma, I recently joined the Army and with being posted all over the place, my roleplaying life has all but died. By the time I find a RPG group, I get moved to a new posting. So PBM games appeared to be the answer. So far I have started to play Quest, run by Dynamic Games, but I'm interested in more and more games. The problem is where can I find out a bit about the game before I start shelling out money for them.

Is there a PBM magazine or something of similar standing available with a range of PBM reviews? I have been reading the Dice Are Dead articles in your magazine, which I thoroughly enjoy, but I can't wait for the next issue for just one review. I hope you can help.

Leigh, Australian Play By Mail is not so big that we can easily arrange more than one review per issue which is why we are now dropping Dice Are Dead. This does not mean we are dropping coverage of PBM, far from it. From now on PBM reviews will appear in the Reviews column, and PBM news will appear in the News column.

There are two fine magazines for PBM enthusiasts: Flagship, 232 Herston Rd, Herston, QLD 4006 & The World Beyond, PO Box 1957, Toowoomba,QLD 4350 ■

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RE VIEWS

MEKTON ZETA

Anime Mecha Roleplaying Game
Published by R.Talsorian Games
Reviewed by Mike Bell

Mekton Zeta really captures the popular appeal of the Manga/Anime genre in both presentation and game play. The book comes as a softback with 160 pages containing many full colour and black and white plates. The style of the art is in the vein of Japanese anime cartoons; anime fans will be pleased to hear the cover is by anime mecha guru, Yuji Kaida. The layout of the book is systematic, with a logical progression of chapters ranging through character generation, mecha design, combat, referee's section, advice on running anime adventures and gameworld background. All of this information is then conveniently summarised tabular form which makes quick referencing a specific rule in play easy. The overall presentation of the product is crisp and clean; a far cry from the second edition.

This new edition introduces major refinements to the game system in the areas of character generation, mecha design and combat. The rules now offer players a series of character templates which are moulded on the stereotypes of our favourite anime productions. These templates are split into two groups - veterans and rookies. The rookies are best suited for players, and include - anime hero, girlfriend/boyfriend, anime babe, anime stud, big lug, the kid, celebrity - whilst the vets make very good starting points for nemesis NPCs.

A simplified tech (mechas, tanks, ships) construction system based on the Mekton Technical Supplement is supplied so that the PC's can go out and kick butt with big guns. Expect the imminent supplement, Zeta Plus, to largely expand on these basic rules.

The combat system is essentially the same as that of Mekton II but with significant tweaks that speed up the action and make this game fully compatible with **Cyberpunk 2020** - a great idea. The main improvement is that the variable Action Point system used in earlier versions of Mekton has been replaced by fixed action points and a manoeuvre pool (for higher level characters). This is great from a referee's point of view, as trying to keep track of all the action points of a dozen or more baddies while at the same time trying to keep the combats intense and cinematic used to be... difficult.

Mekton Zeta is a vast improvement on previous editions, and is an essential buy for any roleplayer who enjoys space opera in the highly dramatic amine vein.

"Pilots to your Mektons!!"

ALIENS UNLIMITED

Heroes Unlimited Sourcebook
Published by Palladium Books, Inc
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Once again, Palladium gives us a book chocka with new and exciting races from all over the multiverse (and suitable for all Palladium games including Rifts). All are fully described, each with its own top notch line drawing taking out all that "I wonder what that looks like?" blues.

The aliens are categorised by type - Amphibian, Ape, Reptile... Breaux seems to have covered every cliche here, but just in case he hasn't, you get a neat set of tables for character creation so you can custom design your own. Each type is then split into half a dozen or so variation aliens within the type. This is where **Aliens Unlimited** falls down a little. I mean do we really need several sub-versions of a doglike alien, one with a head like a labrador, another with an afghan head, and yet another with a german shepherd bonce? Nonetheless, each subtype is differentiated with its own characteristics - literally an alien for every season.

But wait, there's more! We've got new abilities, magic, mutations, government agencies, new weapons, new vehicles, aaagggh! This is both the strong point and the weakness of Palladium's books; you are flooded with information. A hundred new aliens? Where you gonna put them all? On the other hand, you can never complain about not getting value for money with every Palladium book.

Anyone with a space campaign needing populating need look no further. But then there are those poor lost souls who just can't seem to come to terms with all those spikes and guns and bugs and... Aliens Unlimited: a xenophobe's worse nightmare!

AZTLAN

Shadowrun Sourcebook
Published by FASA Corporation
Reviewed by John Pope

Aztlan, the latest release in the **Shadowrun** line, is much like its predecessors; full of speculative information and plot ideas that are at the GM's discretion to use or not. If you like this style of product you will love this book. Where I believe Aztlan lets us down is in presentation. True the text is well written and easy to read, but the art is, in my opinion, sub-standard.

Aztlan quite comprehensively details the formation of Aztlan and Aztechnology, including additional information not published in the Corporate Shadowfiles supplement. Of the single volume nation books it is by far the best to date; full of tantalising ideas and more hidden agendas and second guesses than you can poke a cred stick at. It is laid out in sections, in a supposed order of importance, with a game information section at the end.

Amongst the hidden agendas are the Catholic Church and the New Jesuits, the Yucatan rebels, and another more enigmatic group. This last group is the reason I really like the book. They consist of the following people: The Big 'D', Jungle Cat, The Laughing Man, Hecate, Wordsmythe, Brightlight, Umsondo, and The Lady of The Court. Just what these people are, and what their agenda is, is sure to be a matter of some speculation amongst Shadowrun players.

This product offers mainly information. There are a some new pieces of equipment, few are of any real use to shadowrunners. The final thing that irks me about this product are the Blood Magic rules. How Blood Magic works is not the problem, it's the "no player character can ever learn how to practice Blood Magic" line. If they did not want PC's to have it, they should not have published convenient rules in the back of the book.

However, overall the product is well worth the money. Get the dark on Aztlan. Pay the creds, the data's good.

STRANGE EONS

Call of Cthulhu Adventure Book
Published by Chaosium, Inc
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Think Cthulhu and your mind instinctively drifts to the fog-haunted hamlets of the late 1800's. Dark rituals played out amongst secret groves by mysterious cults, while withered hermits hide away in storm-ridden mansions. But, sometimes it just ain't enough. Even the most ardent Cthulhuist occasionally feels a nagging urge to leave the bleak confines of Lovecraft's dark worlds, and boldly go where Investigators have never gone before. I mean, if the Old Ones have spent aeons champing at the threshold, how come only the residents of New England know about it?

So, we come to three new **Call of Cthulhu** adventures from Chaosium, each unique, each played out in a different genre. Firstly, we have "Gardens of Earthly Delights". Set in an idyllic Spanish village in 1597, the Investigators set out to discover an alien scheme to repopulate Earth. This has to be my favourite, I mean, who can resist getting involved with the dreaded Spanish Inquisition. Then if that's not enough to satisfy your wanderlust, it's off to deepest space in "Blood Moon". Difficult times on a moon base. The year is 2015, and there are nasty evil entities locked up in that there moon.

To round it all off, a trip to Elizabethan England of the 1600's where we get to do the tourist thing. Visit the Tower, have lunch in the local asylum and to top it off, have a chat with the Bard himself or even catch Marlowe's latest offering in "The King of Shreds and Patches".

Each scenario is a one-off episode and

comes with pre-generated characters all with a sufficiently wide range of skills with which to complete the adventure. The book is filled with maps, handouts and the usual complement of interesting non-player characters. Once again Chaosium has provided a product that is playable without forcing the GM to undertake hours of filling in the blanks.

For those feeling a little jaded with traditional Cthulhu settings, I would heartily recommend this product. The settings are original and varied, and more importantly the actual stories are tightly written and exciting, strong enough to stand alone in any gaming system. All in all, another winner from Chaosium.

LORDS OF MIDNIGHT III

Epic Fantasy Computer Strategy Game.
Published by Domark
Reviewed by Nick Leaning

To be honest, I almost gave up on this game after a few abortive attempts to achieve anything. Then I sat down and read the 48 page manual, and the 96 page "mini novel", pored over the poster sized colour map, and spent an hour just learning the game. The effort was well worth it. Midnight is huge world and it hooks you into its story; a fantasy realm inhabited by 160 fully individualised characters, thousands of grunt troops of various races, all engaged in an epic war between good and evil. Many computer games promise this kind of scope, but only a game with the sheer depth of **Lords of Midnight III** truly delivers. Don't expect for it to happen for you right away, but it *will* happen.

The scenario opens with you in control of handful of characters, (The Alliance) led by good Prince Morkin, with your main objective being to raise an army to hold off the impending invasion of bad boy, Boroth Wolfheart and his Dark Fey. Trouble is, Boroth Wolfheart has taken your father, Luxor Moonprince, captive along with many other nobles of the lands of Blood March, holding them all to ransom. Until these captives are freed, most of the Lords will refuse to join you for fear of their relatives being slain by the dastardly Wolfheart. To overcome this, you send each of your heroes on a quest which he/she will then pursue to the best of their ability.

This is the guts of the game. There are a lot of quests to complete, and initially game time passes quite slowly whilst your characters independently set about their tasks (a time compression option speeds things up). They search dungeons in order to rescue captives; embark on diplomatic missions to rally Lords to the flag; search for magical artifacts which either aid your armies, or given as payment to reluctant allies; recruit troops; defend or recapture strongholds; spy on the enemy; and go to war. Each character has a distinct personality, and part of the skill in this game is selecting the character with the right temperament for the right task - hotheaded types don't make good diplomats!



Once you get deeper into the game and have more characters at your disposal, things become more hectic; there is a lot going on and you soon get caught up in the feeling of Midnight being a living world - events advance whether you keep track or not. If you are doing your job right, the Alliance is steadily building its position but the Wolfheart is relentless and his armies are making bloody advances.

The graphics are attractive. You can switch from the main play area (a menu driven interface in the mode of a book where each chapter controls a different element of the game, and into which the history of your game is being recorded) to a 3-D, 'realtime' animated view of your characters. Some fly over the 3-D scrolling landscape on the back of a dragon, others bash through dark dungeons, whilst others walk the lands or sail the seas with an army at their backs. You can take control of characters in this view and navigate them on their quests, fight their battles and guide them through diplomatic negotiations. Truth be known, however, this is not what the game is really about. I lost important characters in minor duels with dungeon guards. It's best to leave the computer in charge of such things leaving you in the role of overall commander so you get on with the job of winning the war.

All in all an excellent, good value package. Not a fast arcade-style game, it is an absorbing strategic challenge with the added spice of a beautifully realised fantasy realm. Engrossing, with great depth, I'm sure that victory in Lords of Midnight III will be an exhilarating experience... when I can manage to achieve it!

CREATURES of the GALAXY

Star Wars RPG Supplement
Published by West End Games
Reviewed by Martin Gibbs

Ever wanted to know what that warty, toady thing was outside Jabba's Palace on Tatooine? Well... it's called Worrt, and it's on the front cover of this compendium of new creatures for the Star Wars RPG.

All the creatures are listed in the 2nd Ed stats, giving a Move (in metres per sec C/Rnd) instead of a Speed Code. Although the majority of critters are character scale, some are at Starfighter scale (the Miner's Horror, pg.48). West End asked their artists to come up with sketches of the creatures first, with notes, then passed these on to the writers, making for a visual extravaganza. Over sixty new creatures in all.

There is a section for special abilities detailing the characteristics unique to each critter - armour, senses, poison, special attacks, concealment. If a creature can be ridden, then it's given an Orneriness. Not all of these beasties are rampant carnivores, in fact some are rampant herbivores, such as the Cherfer, "Vicious herd beast"! The creatures appear in alphabetical order, however annoyingly, there is no index or contents page. The most pleasing thing is that none of these creations have been published previously, so you can be assured that you are getting a totally fresh batch of critters to amuse, serve or terrify the players.

This is a 'must have' for all Star Wars GM's. Personally, I can't wait to unleash a frenzied, drug-crazed pack of wild Draagax upon my players ... sweet dreams.

JAGGED ALLIANCE

Technothriller Computer Roleplaying Game.
Published by Sirtech
Reviewed by Adam Whitt

If you enjoy movies like Commando and Predator you're going to love this game. **Jagged Alliance** captures the thrill of gun-toting destruction as your group of mercenaries work to secure Metavira Island, home to a very special tree species that produces medicinal sap. The island has fallen into the hands of the treacherous bad dude, Lucas Santino, and his crew of thugs - homicidal maniacs all. It's down to your team of 'specialists' to rid the island of this menace and restore the sap production.

Metavira is divided into 60 sectors, all but one of which start the game in the hands of the enemy. Defending each of the enemy held sectors are Santino's henchmen. These are very aggressive and quite sneaky - they will often lie in ambush awaiting your team, and always use the terrain to advantage. The game can be set on one of three levels of difficulty, and I found the enemy more than a handful even on the Easier level. Once I learnt how to sneak, use the available cover, and out-position the enemy, however, I was able to progress to the end of the game.

Once the enemy are all defeated (which means shooting them all dead) you can deploy native guards to hold a sector against future incursions then search the area for gear. Be careful to avoid the booby traps - use the Quick Save option! New gear means bigger guns, ammo, armour, explosives and other useful gadgets such as listening devices, metal detectors and... steel tubing? I never did find out what that was for!

Game play consists mainly of moving, firing, searching and equipping on a tactical map, with only a few simple strategic decisions to be made - which mercs to hire, what tasks to allocate to them (doctoring, repairing, or combat duty), which sectors to retake first, and where and how many guards and workers to deploy. You're also given "quests" to fulfil, usually searching for special items that affect your sap production.

Playing Jagged Alliance is great fun. As you enter an enemy held sector you don't know where the enemy are lying in wait. The pain of discovering the enemy only when they fire on you is extreme, but the triumph of sneaking up unobserved and slugging them before they get you is neat. Sound effects are excellent, adding to the tense atmosphere - birds and insects chirrup, your footsteps crack twigs and give away your position, the gunshots are meaty (even reloading sounds cool), and each merc has a number of digitised speech sequences which are very amusing. As for the graphics, they are solid without being brilliant - the tactical map is a top-down view with your characters appearing as modest sized, animated sprites moving over a colourful terrain. This game doesn't need flashy graphics to hold your attention, the tense excitement of seeking and destroying the enemy takes care of that.

In the immortal words of mercenary trooper Vinny - "Right on!"

CHRONICLES

Magic: The Gathering CCG Expansion
Published by Wizards of the Coast
Reviewed by T.C. O'Carroll

Everything old is new again: Chronicles is a non-limited reprint of a selection of 125 cards from the first four Magic expansions: Arabian Nights, Antiquities, Legends and The Dark. Cards retain their symbols but are white-bordered to distinguish them from the originals. The card wording has often been changed for clarity, and some of the cards, especially from the Legends expansion, have clearer or cleaner printing.

A lot of controversy surrounds this set. Many players and collectors complain that it will erode the monetary and trading value of their cards. **Chronicles** will not hurt collectors or players; it will hurt speculators, who buy cards simply for monetary gain. Richard Garfield has said that Magic was originally designed as a trading card game simply because all of the cards couldn't fit into one box and still be affordable. Wizards don't care about what happens to speculators; their only criterion for decision is "Is it good for the players?". Chronicles is definitely good for the players. It brings back many fun cards and makes them more accessible to the thousands of players that got into the game after these cards went out of print.

Some of my favourites in the set are Ashnod's Altar, Ashnod's Transmogrant and Obelisk of Undoing. The Obelisk is great with Ice Age cards with cumulative upkeep! Chronicles seems to contain a good mix of cards that are useful in play and other cards that simply have strange effects on play, but aren't necessarily superior to other cards. This is not considered a separate expansion for tournament deck construction limits - it is part of the basic set! Therefore, these cards can be used in type II tournaments, which are restricted to the basic set and latest two expansions. This ought to shake things up!

New players will love Chronicles. Older players will like being able to get out of print cards. Speculators will be spitting chips. Pick up a few boosters, and revitalise your game with some new, old cards.

RIFTS UNDERSEA

Rifts World Book
Published by Palladium Books, Inc
Reviewed by Len Hendersen

Undersea is the latest product for my favourite RPG, Rifts. Firstly, however, I want to make a few remarks about the game.

If one were to graph a timeline of the O.C.C.'s added to Rifts since its release you'd see how the new O.C.C.'s are gradually getting more and more powerful, until no-one really wants to play any of the characters from the original book (except of course the Dragon) because they are just so goddam puny. Rifts now has more than 200 odd character classes, several hundred places briefly described in the world books, enough armour and weapons to sink a respectable sized battleship, enough good and bad guys to ensure a major war with just about anyone, and enough spells and abilities to confuse even a diehard spell caster.

Don't get me wrong, I really appreciate the fact that the design team at Palladium has given us megaheaps of wonderful ideas, exciting places to explore, and truly evil bad guys with really awesome weapons to defeat, it's just I'd like a bit more help so that I can run a Rifts campaign without having to be genius with a computer-like brain to keep track of everything. Why not cut down on the world books and increase the number of adventure books. Give us some detailed maps of areas where adventurers are most likely to be employed, say of some of the levels of Chi-Town or of the monster infested regions. Outline a storyline of linked adventures for a fully fledged campaign. I know its sounds like I'm bitching when Rifts is *the* most exciting RPG on the market, but I just reckon Palladium could make the very best that much better.

Anyway back to **Rifts Undersea**. It holds rules for underwater combat; modifiers for lasers and a whole heap of weapons that keep their normal range under water (in the blue/green spectrum of light); rules on how deep various things can go before crunchies time; rules on what magic can be used underwater; and new magic for over water (eg. Walk As A Human, Breathe Without Water). Add to this a whole trench of new oceanic O.C.C.'s like the dolphin, with the various armour and paraphernalia to go with them; water transports and their sea arsenal; several new places over- and undersea; some new bad guy races; and a really big bad guy and there you have everything you need to create an exciting undersea campaign.

Overall, Undersea is another top-shelf Rifts supplement, but I do feel the time is ripe for less guns and more story.

CAMPAIGN CARTOGRAPHER

Map Making Software for RPGs
Published by ProFantasy Software Ltd
Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

Cowabunga! Just what I've always wanted - a computer based package for drawing maps, including all those quirky little symbols that make RPG maps so visually exciting (little trees, mountains, towns, battle sights etc). Sure I'll review it, just toss me the box. Hang on...what's this? Requires DOS??!! IBM-compatible??!! Who in their right mind uses IBM-compatibles? Why no Macintosh version? (Please tell me you're working on a Macintosh version guys - don't be like every other scumbag designer out there). For those who care about such things, I eventually tested this program on a 486DX-66 with 32 meg RAM, so there were no problems at all with display or drawing speed. **Campaign Cartographer** can be modified for the technical level of your specific computer, so all types of IBM-compatible machines (and printers) can make use of this excellent product.

After a fairly protracted and somewhat technical installation procedure (I imagine a preflight check on the space shuttle would

take less time), you're away. Thankfully, Campaign Cartographer comes with a large and helpful manual, detailing all you'll need to know. Tutorials run you through the basics of drawing your map and placing various items (I was having so much fun placing little ships that I actually laughed out loud at one stage), so even novice map makers will soon be detailing their own fantasy worlds. Don't expect to be putting highly-detailed maps together overnight though - all but the most experienced CAD users will need a fair few hours of practice to feel comfortable with their map-making.

Basically, you start off by first deciding the scale of your map (eg. 1 inch = 100 miles), before drawing your coastlines to define your boundaries. You then fill your land masses with mountain ranges, forests, jungles, deserts, swamps, cities, towns and villages, battle sights, evil temples - the list just goes on. Each of these features can also be shown in an appropriate colour - on screen or (even better) as a printed version for players and GMs. Smaller maps (ie your players' immediate adventuring area) can then be added to larger maps (after removing some detail) to build up a complete picture of your world.

Once you get a hang of the various menu items and installed features of the package, you quickly begin to realise just how powerful this product really is. By using a CAD feature referred to as "levels", it's possible to produce a number of different maps from your one original. You can make some levels invisible for example, so when the players' map is printed, it will only show up what you want them to see. You can show mountains and forests as little 3D drawings, or as coloured contour lines. You can present your map as a simple hex-map, or as a highly illustrated, full-colour playing aid that'll have your players poring over its many details for hours.

Simply put, this product is just brilliant. A number of add-on modules are already being made available, expanding this product's potential even further. If you own an IBM-compatible machine, and have even the slightest requirement or inclination to draw maps for your campaigns, then this would have to be rated as an essential purchase - if there was a Macintosh version, I'd be buying it tomorrow.

My highest recommendation

GALITIA CITYBOOK

Bloodshadows RPG Supplement
Published by West End Games
Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

The cover blurb tells me that Galitia is one of the largest cities on Marl, the setting for the Bloodshadows RPG, and one of the meanest. A quick flick through the inside pages quickly confirms that claim.

The book provides a brief history of the city, its current status, important characters likely to be encountered and a description of each of the city's many "suburbs"; each of these descriptions includes sections on industry, population (attitude and social health, rather than population figures), entertainment, daily life and important places. Scattered within this are numerous adventure hooks and rumours; rumours vague and tantalising enough to tempt, but not lead by the nose, player characters. Later chapters describe the immediate wilderness and the nearby mining town of Galipen (getting there alive is half the fun!).

Galitia is certainly a strange place. Citizens grudgingly share their city with the "Unnaturals", the **Bloodshadows** RPG term for, you guessed it, monsters. Unlike your traditional cannon-fodder monsters however, the unnaturals come across more like unwanted illegal immigrants, their own lives often more depressing and violent than those of their human landlords. That's not to say that they won't rip your heart out if they catch you alone on the streets at night though. The city also has its fair share of magic with spells, alchemical supplies and other sundries readily available for purchase or discovery. There's also a suburb of wizards whose spells backfired and drove them completely insane (that'll learn ya).

My one concern with the supplement is its confusingly mixed tone. The writers have obviously tried to combine elements of both humour and horror, a sort of Cthulhu with sarcasm. While this sometimes works quite well, achieving the Mickey Spillane cynical private eye viewpoint that provides much of the thematic background to the setting, I found that the horrific elements tended to clash with the attempts at humour. Galitia's main industry is flesh mills, hardly laugh material. Having said that however, the book achieves its serious themes exceptionally well, with some excellent descriptive passages; Galitia comes across as a city-sized version of London's Soho district, or our own King'' Cross - it's intensely depressing, yet strangely compelling - like slowing down to watch the carnage at a road accident.

The **Galitia Citybook** provides a novel and dangerous adventure location for the Bloodshadows game, and with a bit of tweaking would also be suitable for other near future games. As a consequence, this supplement is well worth a look.

SHADOWFIST

Collectible Card Game
Published by Daedalus Games
Reviewed by Terry O'Carroll

Shadowfist is a kung-fu movie inspired card game. The premise of the game is a secret war between seven factions from the far past, present and future for control of the world's feng shui sites, which guarantee luck and prosperity for their owners. Each starter deck contains 60 cards, a quick reference card and a 55 page rule book. The rule book is fairly clear, after two or three readings the play of the game is fairly clear. More examples would have been welcome, however. The cards are printed on thin but durable stock which shuffles well. Many of the best known collectible card game artists have contributed to the illustrations, making the cards exceptionally attractive. Jesper Myrfors did the basic card layouts, as he did for WotC's Magic the Gathering. The cards look similar to Magic cards in layout, but are more attractive. Collectors and players alike will find a lot to like about this card set.

The object of the game is to control a set number of feng shui sites- either by playing them from your own hand, or seizing an opponent's. Your last site must be taken from an opponent - passive play cannot win! Feng shui sites also provide power, which is used to bring characters (your agents) into play, as well as equipment, state and event cards. Resources (provided by characters and sites) are needed to bring most cards into play. The combat system is intended to be realistic... in movie terms. It's fast and furious, but unpredictable and still leaves plenty of room for tactics. The game moves at a mile a minute, even in multi-player games; it's much faster than Vampire: The Eternal Struggle, and less difficult to learn than Illuminati.

Overall, Shadowfist is one of the best collectible card games I have seen. I do have a few complaints, however. Counters are used to record both power points and damage accrued so they multiply like rabbits and get all over the table. More serious is the sorting problem in starters: it's simply impossible to create a balanced deck using only one starter. I have around 180 cards and most of the State cards are simply useless due to the lack of ch'i resources to play them with. Daedalus will be releasing a boxed set called Combat in Kowloon which contains two pre-built decks and a supply of counters; anyone who wants to get into Shadowfist without spending too much may prefer to purchase this instead.

I can recommend Shadowfist. The rules are well written, the game is very well balanced and a very high-quality production altogether. If Daedalus can fix the annoying card distribution problems, Shadowfist will set the standard for collectible card games.

THE ADEPT'S WAY

Earthdawn Sourcebook
Published by FASA Corporation
Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

The Adept's Way holds 144 pages of great information and excellent art. Following an introduction to what an Adept is, the book has fifteen groups of essays, these detail what it is like to be an Adept of a particular speciality and how that affects the outlook on life of your character. This is good reading and great game information. Types covered are the Air Sailor, Archer, Beastmaster, Cavalryman, Elementalist, Illusionist, Nethermancer, Scout, Sky Raider, Swordmaster, Thief, Troubadour, Warrior, Weaponsmith and Wizard. There's rules for initiation, training, advancement, attribute improvement and acquiring multiple disciplines plus optional rules for personal visions, talent crises and half-magic. All in all this is a very good product, but only necessary to those want to develop their **Earthdawn** characters further.

WARLORDS II

Computer Fantasy War Game
Published by Strategic Studies Group
Reviewed by Ron Fielding

The only trouble I had installing this game was getting the disks in the first place. Lee just wanted to keep on playing.

Warlords II is a fantasy wargame where you get to command heroes (knights and ladies), special allies (wizards, dragons, demons, elementals, angels) and their armies (there are many types from scouts through elvish archers and griffins up to elephants) in a campaign of exploration and conquest against up to seven opponents (computer or human controlled). At the outset of each scenario (there are several preset, but the software allows you to randomly create your own for a limitless variety of setups), you control one city on a large unexplored map. Each city has a variable income and one to four unit types it can produce. Each unit type has a unique combination of combat strength and movement allowance plus many have special bonuses in certain terrain - eg. elves don't take a movement penalty in forests, catapults reduce the defensive value of enemy cities - so that you can set your production based on your current campaign objectives. Weak, but swiftly flying bats make great scouts for rapid exploration, whilst slower heavy infantry make good garrison units.

The armies you produce, led by hero commanders and their special allies then travel the map capturing cities to increase your income and production base. Meanwhile your opponents are doing the same, building their position until they feel ready to invade your territory. You can also assign your heroes to explore the ruins that dot the map - here they must defeat a monster before they can pick up a special reward which ranges from a swag of money to a magical item which gives a command, movement or combat bonus.

Warlords II is a wargame with a truly fantastic atmosphere - commanding a squadron of pegasi led by a wizard has great appeal to fans of Tolkien like me. The graphics are colourful without being gosh wow, and the sound is modest, but adds to the feel of the game - trumpets blare, armies clash with a clatter of swords on shields, and occasionally a helmed head pops up to tell you how you are going. The game play is everything. The interface is so very simple most players have picked up the basics after a ten minute exploration of the game. And once you are into it Warlords II is very addictive, plus there are enough options in the setup to keep the game fresh for a very long time. The difficulty level can be manipulated in several ways, but the computer opponents are nowhere near as tough as your so-called 'friends'.

In my judgement this is a great game, and I can't wait to get my hands on **Warlord II Deluxe** which promises even better graphics and sound, many new worlds to explore and a scenario editor. Then the Realms office will resound once again to the despairing mutter: "Just one more turn".

CHRONICLE OF THE AWAKENINGS

Nephilim Rules Expansion
Published by Chaosium, Inc
Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Billed as a rules expansion and resource book for Chaosium's immortal role-playing game **Nephilim**, COTA offers a number of new lives to pad out the Nephilim time-line, some new transformations and some major rule explanations and changes.

First up, we have a dozen or so new Past Life Eras. These amount to a brief outline of Nephilim activities during such periods as the Sumeria of 2700BC, to Hitler's Germany. There's tables giving random Simulacra selection, skills, random stasis events and forms. All of these are undescribed, so you gotta fill in most of the missing details. Fairly uneventful so far.

Next we're given a major rule change. Gone are the physical transformations to be replaced by more esoteric metamorphoses - personality traits. Out goes changing into snakes, in comes traits such as Altruism or Calmness. I mean, let's face it, it was always going to be difficult for even the most skilled gamer to role-play someone gradually metamorphosing into a snake in most average downtown cities. I don't care how dumb your mates are, someone's gonna notice you've turned green and grown a forked tongue! But this begs the question, why wasn't this picked up initially?

Also thrown in are four new metamorphoses, including a rather nasty looking Baba Yaga. Some new simulacra such as the beautician (that one will make my role-playing night), and a revised character sheet taking in all the rule changes. In short, nothing we shouldn't have got in the original rules. I'm normally a fan of Chaosium's product, rarely finding one that isn't value for money, but this looks simply like some padding added to excuse making the punter pay for rules that should have been more carefully thought through in the first place.

If you already have and like Nephilim, you'll need this, if not, skip it.

GURPS CTHULHUPUNK

GURPS Cross-genre RPG Supplement
Steve Jackson Games
Reviewed by Lee Sheppard

I must admit that this was my first venture into the world of SJG's GURPS (Generic Universal Role-Playing System). After reading this supplement though I'm quite willing to say that it won't be my last. **GURPS CthulhuPunk** is an extremely well written (kudos to Chris W. McCubbin) and profusely illustrated (some great black & white artwork by Dan Smith) sourcebook for taking the concepts of horror writer H.P. Lovecraft (so lovingly translated into the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG by Chaosium) and transporting them to the world of the near future.

The 128 page sourcebook provides chapters on the Cthulhu Mythos, the CthulhuPunk World, Characters (and how particular CoC features like sanity checks apply to them), how to run a CthulhuPunk campaign, Investigators, Cultists, a Mythos Bestiary and a number of adventure seeds. It is in the adventure seeds that the sourcebook fails to completely deliver, but this is only to be expected in a book that has so much background material to cover. A *CthulhuPunk Adventures* supplement is hinted at, but don't hold your breath (this was apparently a one-book deal).

One of the best features of the book for me was the simple way it described the background to the whole Cthulhu Mythos. After one reading of the first chapter of the CthulhuPunk supplement I now have a far better understanding of the big Cthulhu picture (including the whole sanity gambit) than I have obtained from a *number* of readings of the Call of Cthulhu rulebook (I have the 4th Edition) by Chaosium. Steve Jackson Games have done this before with a number of licensed products, and it's certainly one of their strengths.

It's important to note that this is *not* GURPS Call of Cthulhu. This is the dark future world of 2045, not 1890 or 1920, a world that has been ravaged by both economic collapse and the Tolliver's Disease plague (which, in an interesting side-note for those of us living down under, kills every single person on the Australian mainland in 2037 - bummer, huh?). To this already bleak future has been added the extra dimension of the Cthulhu Mythos, and what a brilliant combination it makes.

Now, instead of running screaming from every creature more powerful than an apprentice cultist, you can face the bad guys all stocked up with BFGs and other great techie stuff. It still won't do your chances of survival any good at all, but at least you can make a really nice mess on the way out ("Eat .44 magnum, you great green @#%*^#!!! - BLAM BLAM BL....aaarrrggghhhh!!!!!").

Seriously though, GURPS CthulhuPunk provides an intelligent, logical and incredibly exciting alternative to the standard near-future RPG. If you really want to scare the pants off your players, or just give them something *really different* to think about the next time they decide to explore a corporate headquarters, definitely have a good look at this sourcebook.

Great stuff.

ON THE REVIEWS PAGE

The new expanded Reviews Page will in future contain all the product reviews in the magazine, with the exception of Peter Crank's Analytical Engine (but then Peter was always the exception that proves there are no rules!). We will review anything that gamers show an interest in - roleplaying games, novels, card games, computer games, play by mail games, movies, miniatures, Kinder Surprise toys, etc. (I'm only kidding about the Kinder Surprises, but my kids have just about the entire collection, so...). So, if there's anything we've missed or included that you want changed... tell us! Nick. ■

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magazine subscriptions

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AUSTRALIAN REALMS A high quality role playing magazine that is produced right here in Australia, in Perth. A bimonthly publication that has already seen 23 issues, it contains 48 A4 pages and a full colour cover. It reviews new products, a regular section on PBM games, book reviews, a brief overview of new products from a host of suppliers, and lots of scenarios, adventures, short stories or source material for many different role playing games, including *ShadowRun, AD&D, Cyberpunk, Mage, Earthdawn, Traveller, Vampire*, as well as popular board games and miniatures games, such as *BattleTech, Space Marine, Warhammer 40,000*, etc, etc.
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BATTLETECHNOLOGY A bimonthly publication that exclusively covers the universe of Battletech & Mechwarrior. Regular departments include: News Service - historical type stuff; Unit Update - a regimental guide; Battle Tac - analysis of campaigns & tactics; plus BattleMechanics - new weapons tech data. Feature articles include short stories, in depth studies of Inner Sphere politics or military prowess, and other such related matters. Indispensable to all diehard 'Mechheads'!
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CHALLENGE Games Designers Workshop's monthly mag' is the definitive publication for Sci-Fi roleplayers. Every GDW system is covered; 2300AD, Megatraveller, Twilight 2000, Space 1889 & Dark Conspiracy. Other games such as Warhammer 40K, Battletech, Cyberpunk et al, are also covered (though not as profusely as the former titles). Articles involve RPG adventures, wargame scenarios, variant rules, new equipment, and general gaming essays. Publication regularity is very good.
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DRAGON TSR's popular monthly magazine. The emphasis is on AD&D with a veritable treasure chest of articles, adventures & ads(!) for Forgotten Realms, Dark Sun etc. Features on Top Secret SI & Marvel Supers are tolerated, albeit with less proliferation. Every issue includes such things as new spells, magic items, strange monsters, NPC classes, short stories, comics, game reviews, and a broad selection of essays on gaming techniques & campaigns. Publication regularity is excellent.
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DUNGEON TSR's bimonthly publication specifically dedicated to AD&D or D&D adventures - with enough danger 'n' loot to satiate the wander-lust of any party. The player's quest for riches, fame & challenges is fulfilled with at least four, moderate to to exceptional quality, mini-modules per issue. Every game is complete, with maps & diagrams included. Some adventures are campaign-specific, set in either the Dark Sun, Spelljammer, Ravenloft, or other such realms. Publication regularity is excellent.
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GENERAL Avalon Hill's great publication that deals exclusively with Avalon Hill simulations (what a surprise!). Each issue highlights a specific (usually new) product, with extensive feature articles. However a selection of popular games (such as ASL, Third Reich, Diplomacy etc) are also regularly covered in detail. Article definition includes series replays scenarios, designer's notes, strategy & tactics, optional rules, coming attractions & (infrequently) variant counters. Good publication regularity.
$50.00 for 6 issues ❑
$80.00 for 12 issues ❑

PROTOCULTURE ADDICTS We've been looking for a top quality magazine on Japanese anime and manga ever since *Animag* disappeared forever. We have found one! *Protoculture Addicts* is brought out bimonthly - there have already been 29 issues. It is produced by *Janus Publications*, the people who have given us *Heavy Gear Fighter*. This magazine reviews all things to do with anime: games, CDs, cartoons, books, manga, and videos. It has full features covering anime movies & videos, with episode by episode descriptions; anime stories, etc. Profusely illustrated with shots from videos, etc.
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STAR WARS ADVENTURE JOURNAL By West End Games. Take a fascinating voyage through the Star Wars galaxy with the Star Wars Adventure Journal. Each issue features exciting new adventures, new source material and tales from the Star Wars universe. Each issue contains original works of fiction, such as a short story by Timothy Zahn or Kathy Tyers. Other features may include: Fragments from the Rim - a humorous look at Star Wars; previews of new Star Wars products by West End; guides to running various characters; short stories; logs, equipment, scenarios, etc. A 280 page softcover book in a large novel format.
$105.00 for 6 issues ❑

PYRAMID Steve Jackson's new bimonthly 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: Hampire: The Masked Ace Raid, and coming is Werecow: Ah, Pork Lips. Gee, which games are they ripping off?
$49.00 for 6 issues ❑
$78.00 for 12 issues ❑

SCRYE : The Collectible Trading Card Game Guide A high quality 68 page magazine by ILM International, that specifically covers Collectible Trading card Games. The first two issues have been a huge success and sold out the world over. I'm looking at issue # 2 while I write this review, and it contains many goodies: the complete rules for the *Star Trek Next Generation Collectible Trading Card Game*, a preview of *Galactic Empires*, some teasers on the *Illuminati Collectible Trading Card Game*, a complete price guide for: Magic: The Gathering Alpha, Beta, Unlimited, Arabian Nights, Antiquities, Legends, Spellfire; a checklist for The Dark; interviews, designer notes for *Jyhad*, the rules for *Galactic Empires* - need I go on?
$35.00 for 6 issues ❑
$63.00 for 12 issues ❑

THE DUELIST By Wizards of the Coast, this is a brand new full colour quarterly magazine that supports Magic the Gathering and future Deckmaster products in the collectible trading card game genre. Every issue features the latest trading card products, articles on game variants, previews of up and coming Deckmaster products, interviews with artists and designers, news from the tournament circuit, and tips on play.
$24.00 for 4 issues ❑
$39.00 for 8 issues ❑

UNSPEAKABLE OATH A professional American fanzine-style B4 digest of arcane lore for the Call of Cthulhu keeper, player & enthusiast. Articles include the standard selection of scenarios, campaign details, new Lovecraftian (?) beasties, background source material, and the other related miscellany. Everyone who enjoys Chaosium's superb horror RPG would be well advised to invest in this magazine. Quality material by known English and Australian authors are regularly included. Publication regularity is slow.
$30.00 for 4 issues ❑

WHITE DWARF A glossy, monthly English magazine solely dedicated to Games Workshop products. Enthusiasts of Warhammer RPG, Warhammer Fantasy Battles, Warhammer 40K, Space Hulk, Space Marine, and all the rest, will find this invaluable. Articles cover adventures, scenarios, new rules, variant counters, backgrounds, and the like. Every issue contains photographs & specifications for new Citadel releases, plus colour pages highlighting superb miniatures painting! Publication regularity is very good.
$36.00 for 6 issues ❑
$72.00 for 12 issues ❑

WHITE WOLF A bimonthly role playing magazine published by White Wolf. It features a mix of articles, scenarios, and regular columns and heaps of reviews. Although published by White Wolf it has an independent outlook, and recent games featured ShadowRun, TORG, Vampire, Cyberpunk, Ars Magica, Werewolf, Pendragon, Call of Cthulhu, etc. It includes both colour and black and white pages, and space is given to PBMs, and regular features on artists and their superb works. 80 pages. A percentage of the proceeds are sent on to sponsor a real life wolf pack.
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$58.00 for 12 issues ❑

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25 ISSUES

Australian Realms would like to say **"Thank you"** to everyone who made this special milestone possible - the subscribers, readers, contributors, advertisers, game companies, distributors and retailers who have supported us. We love you all, and we hope that you'll all still be with us in 25 issues time. And to the critics and nay-sayers - "Up yours!".

"That which does not kill us, makes us stronger." - Nietzsche. I've thought about that quote a lot over the last couple of years, when I've honestly thought that this bloody magazine *would* kill me. If it's not the last minute panic to round up a piece of artwork, or the 56 hours I seem to spend type-setting every article that it's my turn to work on, it's trying to strike a balance between those of you that'd like "more about the elves" and those that "hate elves give us more about the Kult of Flatus". Nietzsche obviously *never* worked as an Assistant Editor.

Personal high points of a turbulent two years for me role-playing coup of the century, when we came *so close* to picking up the Warhammer Fantasy Role-Playing license; being able to regularly interact on a one-to-one basis with such RPG heavyweights as Ed Greenwood, Mike Pondsmith (my role-playing idol) and Kevin Siembieda; getting to review new products; getting SolSpace accepted as an Cyberpunk setting; the "Resurrection of Spud" episode of the A-Team; and working with such Australian talent as Tonia Walden, Colin Taber, Adam Whitt, Paul Mitting, Brad Martin, Steve Scholz, Shaun Tan and many others. Working with Nick and Colin is a bit like visiting a massage parlour that also doubles as a torture chamber - you just never know what you're going to get today! Even so, the pleasures of working on Australian Realms far outweigh the pains - here's to the next twenty five issues. Good gaming.

Lee Sheppard



Some magazines have been around for a lot longer than us but I feel few have given as much raw energy and good ideas as Realms. Some magazines have been around for nearly ten times as long, and while they print twice as many pages as us every month they still manage little more than boring dribble. Realms is a magazine for gamers by gamers, a product filled with the ideas and energy needed to make the material translate well onto the gaming table. Not something churned out to a standard formula.

We're grasped topics such as sexism in a way no other gaming magazine ever has, particularly the 'attitude' magazine that's so hip that its dead - good sales ploy boys!

Realms is put together by people more concerned with producing a quality product than a slick sales slogan. Maybe that in itself has an attitude, and if it does that's just fate, its who we are, not something we had our marketing consultants sit around a jacuzzi creating.

From our own diverse backgrounds and experiences we endeavour to take you to a different place, an entertaining world where you haven't been before, exposing you to new ideas. It is a magazine I am very proud to be a part of.

Colin Taber

EARTHDAWN COMPETITION
Sponsored by FASA Corporation

In this issue you'll find a poster featuring Tony Szczudlio's very dramatic illustration of an Earthdawn Ork Scorcher riding a Thundra Beast. To win the fabulous prize of an **Earthdawn Denim Jacket** plus a swag of **Earthdawn books**, simply send in to Australian Realms with your version of this ork scorcher's "legend". The most imaginative story (of 500 words or less) will win the prizes, and be printed in a future issue of Australian Realms.

Special Thanks to Jill Lucas and Tammy Daniel-Biske

CTHULHU COMPETITION
Sponsored by Chaosium, Inc

How'd you like to win your very own **Death Certificate**? Chaosium will supply this, personalised with your name and the cause of death. All you need do is send in to Australian Realms your name and occupation with the most spectacularly unspeakable description of your untimely demise within a Call of Cthulhu context. Be creative. There will also be a number of books from Arkham Library thrown in so that you have something chilling to read in the after life.

Special Thanks to Charlie Krank

COMPETITION CONDITIONS

You may enter any or all of the listed competitions, as many times as you please. All entries must be sent to:

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Please ensure you clearly mark all entries with your full name and address.

Entries to all contests close **31 December 1995**.

UNAE COMPETITION

The Unae cabalist above is a very pleasant fellow. That look of glee on his face bodes ill for the three horsemen who believe they have his measure. We'd like one of our readers to describe "what happens next". The winning entry will receive a free copy of **Unae World Book One** (due out early in 1996) and a **One Year Subscription** to Australian Realms. You know our address.

Australian Realms is something all Australian gamers should be proud of. Australia is a relatively small campaign setting for a professional gaming magazine to successfully role-play in, and the fact that we've come this far says a lot for the sheer guts and determination of the Aussie battler. Well done to everyone involved.

Our hobby is about communication. And for me, good communication is at least two-way. That is something I've always strived to achieve in the magazine, to involve you in the process of creating the best role-playing magazine ever. Thanks to everyone who has contributed to that dialogue which has resulted in such great moments as the Unae campaign world, the Adventures of the A-Team, Shadowrun Australia, A Woman's Scorn, the How To series, the Historical series, Hra Kurban, Analytical Engine and SolSpace. I can promise that the deep well of Australian creativity has hardly been dipped into yet. We're going to draw buckets more!

From a personal viewpoint, being involved in Australian Realms has completely changed my life. I used to be a nine-to-fiver on a very good salary, now I'm a ten-to-well-after-midnighter on a... well, lets just say we won't be taking our holidays at Club Med this year. But the really positive impact Australian Realms has had on my life is way beyond anything money can buy. I've become much, much happier. I'm now involved in something creative, something I really believe in, something I consider to be valuable to that special world-wide community that we all belong to - the role-playing hobby.

By far the most important thing Australian Realms has done for me in the past three years is to give me the opportunity to make many, many new and very close friends, far beyond that intimate circle where, for me, it all began, the 'A-Team group' (who'd have thought, guys, that we'd be role-playing with metal miniatures representing our very own favourite PCs). Now I have friends all over Australia and the world. I hope over the next twenty five issues that I will be connecting with many, many more.

To my family - Karen, Sarah, Timothy, Christopher, Catty and Deefer (dog) - I love you all more than words can tell.

Thank you.

Nick Leaning

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Describe a character type for Castle Falkenstein inspired by an Australian type of the 1870s (eg. bush ranger). Descriptions should be in the same format as in the CF rulebook (pp145-153). The three winners will be printed in an official CF supplement covering Australia and will also receive a copy of **The Book of Sigils**, a Castle Falkenstein **Beer Stein**, and one of the three (the Grand Winner) will receive a custom engraved **Calling Card Case** (be sure to include 15 words or less of detailing what you'd like on the case).
Special Thanks to Lisa Pondsmith and Chris Williams

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Special Thanks to Peter & Sylvia Read, and Phred

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The first six people to write in to tell us the name of the villain in the new Lords of Midnight computer game (reviewed this issue) will receive a Lords of Midnight **Mouse Mat** and **T-shirt** both featuring the same brilliant art as appears on the cover of this issue of Australian Realms.

Special Thanks to Scott Millard

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Special Thanks to All Of You

THE SISTERHOOD

UNAE'S MYSTIC HEALERS OR MIND-BENDING WITCHES?

Written and Illustrated by Tonia Walden

THE SECRET SOCIETY

Psionics, or as they are called in the lands of Unae, Mystics, are organised into a large secret society known as "*The Sisterhood*". There is little known about this society of Mystics outside its own ranks, and much of what is heard is only rumour-mongering and religious propaganda. One thing that is certain, though, is that the membership of the Sisterhood is exclusively female.

The secrecy of the order shields it from outside influence as there are many groups who consider the existence of the Sisterhood a threat which could no doubt pluck the secrets of the Church, Cabal or kings from their very minds. These groups would like to be able to destroy or control the mystics for their own purposes. But secrecy is a double-edged sword and it also allows the enemies of the Sisterhood to easily spread distrust and hatred among the general populace, using propaganda as a weapon, and there are many areas of Dormetia where the word Mystic is synonymous with witch. The members of the Sisterhood are well aware of the fears their mystic abilities create. It is for this reason they have formed an underground society and they allow no written record of their history to exist, passing their teachings on orally and mystically from the experienced mentor to her students.

The Sisterhood is organised into many local groups known as *Cells* - each Cell comprises of ten to twenty members who organise the testing and initiation of new recruits. At the centre of each cell is a Matriarch - the guide, teacher and focus of the Cell. The Cells have only tenuous physical links with each other and this is almost exclusively through the Matriarchs. This network means each group only knows of the existence of a few nearby Cells, so if they are discovered they are unable to betray the existence of the entire organisation.

The individual power of most of the Sisterhood members is slight and effectively benign, usually involving surface readings of the mind or slight emotion control while the stronger members may specialise in being able to reshape a mind. However it is when the minds of the members of the Cell are linked into a highly disciplined unit known as a *cell mind* that they become truly powerful, as they form a mystic force that is greater than the sum of their parts. Usually it is the Cell Matriarch who focuses and shapes the cell mind.

It is this ability to link their minds that the Sisterhood guards as a jealous secret and no one is initiated into their ranks until they have undergone a strict mind probe to determine their dedication to the cause. The Church of Baimiopia has on occasion sent trusted female spies to infiltrate suspected cells; these spies have subsequently been found wandering the streets, their minds gone, fleeing from internal horrors that only they could see.

The Sisterhood members enter the group consciousness state by focusing their minds - this may be aided with a combination of chanting and dancing, as occur in the Prabesk, Flet and Ogre Cells where the Sisterhood is revered and celebrated, or it could be simple group meditation when the need to be undetected arises, such as is practised by the groups in the Heletian League and Burvoy. This focusing of the cell mind causes a joining of power known as a *Mystic Ring*, and when its energy peaks the group releases it toward accomplishment of a goal, such as a spell. There is a danger if powerful magics are being wrought, that a mistake could cause the energy build-up to "backfire" and cause harm to the group mind. Some say a mis-sung Mystic Ring was one of the major catalysts for the Doom of Ossard (Australian Realms issues 17 to 20).

Cells can link with each other mystically so that they may communicate without betraying their members personal lives or where they live. This linking of the Cells requires quite a bit of organisation as each Cell must focus their minds at the same time; this is one of the main roles of the Matriarch, each of whom stays in near constant contact with the sister mystics in her cell. In recent times there have been signs that a new and frighteningly powerful Matriarch has emerged at the very centre of the Sisterhood. Which cell she belongs to is hidden, but if the events at Ossard point to a new direction for the mystics then the Sisterhood of Dormetia working as one are truly an immensely powerful and terrifying force.

In a tale told to young initiates to demonstrate the power of the group mind, the Sidian Valley cells of the Sisterhood are credited with the ending of the civil uprising in 470EK of the peasants of the Lombaro farmlands against the harsh taxes of the Lord Leonardo DeGrassi. As the troops set out to destroy the rebellion, a holy vision of Kreinta appeared to every man, woman and child in the area, ordering them to stop and be at peace. It so affected Leonardo, he completely changed his ways, retiring his title to become a monk.

Another story recounts the destructive power of the Sisterhood when Miranda Hanouver, much loved Matriarch of a Lixus Cell devoted to healing magic, was imprisoned, horrendously tortured and due to be hanged as a witch. On the day of her execution, an unnatural storm devastated the town, winds toppling walls and raising roofs and lightening causing death and fire. The jail house in which Miranda was imprisoned was also destroyed, but she was unharmed and cooly walked out of the town. No-one dared raise a hand to stop her; she was never seen again.

THE WAY OF THE MIND

The ability to harness the power of the mind seems to be a hereditary trait, passed along from mother to daughter. The mystic gift is not always passed on, however, and will often skip a generation. Occasionally a child with spontaneous mystic gifts is born. For these reasons, a latent mystic usually experiences fear and confusion when her powers start to manifest themselves. It is at this time the Sisterhood attempt to contact her, generally through her mother if she herself is a mystic.

As with all spell casters in Unae, the Mystics are not limited to use only those spells obtained from the discipline of the mind (*Magic in Unae* Issue 21). They are free to use other spells more commonly used by practitioners of Arcane or Divine magic, but they risk only ever having these many powers at trivial levels if they refuse to dedicate themselves to the Way of the Mind.

Cells and members, although often having many minor powers, try to specialise to make sure they have strong mystic magics

at their disposal. These specialisations usually depend on the psionic strengths of their individual members - for example, the renowned mystic Maria Detillo was said to be an empath without peer and once her gifts were amplified by the cell mind of her group, had considerable influence on the politics of the area, until the Cell was destroyed during the Expulsion of 412EK. Even today there are Cells who follow her teachings in empathic magic.

Mind-manipulation magic involves the ability to affect the parts of the mind - from simple reading of surface thoughts and emotions, to being able to spontaneously trigger the parts of the brain that control movement, emotions or olfactory or aural signals and thus control how the person thinks, feels or what they see and hear. Powerful empathic group minds have been able to change or amplify a crowd's emotional state. These feared powers are ironically most often employed in areas where the Sisterhood exists in fear of their lives.

However the Sisterhood have many other powers that are not as malevolent. Farseeing, divination and the ability to see into other worlds are favoured by the members of the Sisterhood who still maintain their shamanistic ways such as the Ogres or the elves of Kaid-Onor. They have also been known to use psychokinetic powers such as cloud bursting.

The Evoran Sisterhood is adept in many fields of mind magic but they also specialise in Psychometry which is the ability to tell the history of inanimate objects, an invaluable skill in a trading nation.

One powerful mind magic is that of giving pure thought physical shape. Beings that have been formed from the collective thoughts of the group mind are rumoured to exist although the concentration required for this spell is immense. There have been stories of these thought forms being able to act independently of the control of the Mystics, though this has been discounted as superstition by the Sisterhood. There is, however, an old legend of the Beast of the Ostmon mountains - this creature was never seen but the number of travellers it claimed attested to its existence. Hunting parties never found any spoor but did find large patches of forest which had been flattened as if an animal the size of a house had wandered through. After the destruction of the local Ogre tribe by Des Sankto Glavos the Beast seemed to disappear and there is speculation it may have been a thought creature conjured to protect the tribe.

Not all power is openly flaunted; the Sisters usually work in more subtle ways - for example only a few know why some areas of Vangre remained disease free during the horrendous Ogre Siege (issues 23 to 25).



THE PURPOSES OF THE SISTERHOOD

The existence of the Sisterhood seems to predate organised religion and may have developed as a form of shamanism. Unlike a religion based on faith in a god, mysticism offers a philosophy of the mind which asks its members to find great power within one's self, and in union with one's sisters.

It is said at one time the Sisterhood was great and its members were respected, but then came the rise of the organised Churches who turned the people against them, accusing them of stealing souls and mind control. During the Expulsion many women were tortured, accused of being members of the Sisterhood, which was said to be a Kult of the Horned God, devoted to the corruption of men by the evils and debauchery of women. Many prominent women were killed and the Church seized their property; the penalty for witchcraft was dispossession and death by pressing or hanging.

The Sisterhood as it stands today has no desire to take by force, and indeed would be hard pressed to do so; rather they want to change the fabric of society more in fitting with their own goals. They encourage their members to marry into families who have previously produced daughters with strong mystic powers, increasing their ranks. People who may be getting too close to their secrets or who pose a threat to a Cell often succumb to "brain fever", (the all encompassing term for unknown madness), and if they recover find they have selective amnesia. Cell members who put the Sisterhood at risk may also find themselves facing similar "disciplinary actions".

The Sisterhood is more aware of what is occurring at any given time in Dormetia than any other group due to their enhanced communication. Although many cultural and racial differences separate the Cells they share a common goal to better understand the mind and its magics - for this reason unusual alliances may occur, but their lack of military might and political influence limits aid they give to members.

CELLSOFDORMETIA

THE HELETIAN LEAGUE STATES

The members of the Sisterhood are as feared and hated as the cabalists and they are often persecuted. Although cells exist to take in new fledgling mystics, fear prevents them from being as active as they would like and this cripples the development of strong group minds.

The Church of Baimiopia is very active in spreading propaganda about the "dark dealings of witches and their covens" and the Priests offer rewards for information about mystic activity. There are stories of women

who are spirited away by the Church's Inquisition, and the Church is also thought to use accusations of mystic powers against people they regard as undesirables and get them tried as heretics. Often these accusations are untrue but they are very hard to disprove. (iss. 12 - *Church of Baimiopia*).

The Mystic Sisterhood should not to be confused with the Sisterhood of the Order of Kreinta, servants of Saint Emile, who are nuns and healers, though there are rumours that some latent mystics have joined this order but keep their powers hidden.

The Sisterhood is worried about the greater control the Church is attempting to place on the Kramer Confederation and also the appearance of Kult activity in Vangre.

The Sisterhood cells of Ossard were destroyed; those not killed were driven insane by the psychic backlash of mass slaughter and divine madness. The death and cries of the city were broadcast and sent shock waves through their Sisters around Unae. Mixed with these agonising cries was also the birth scream of a new mystic power which has the Sisterhood abuzz. The events in Ossard have, however, served to distract the Church greatly and this may present an opportunity for the Sisterhood in the Heletian League to increase its activities.

EVORA

The Sisterhood is not perceived as a threat, but rather it is an honour for promising young women to be selected to train in their ranks. However, discretion by the family is still required. The ability to sense reactions and read minds is great asset for a merchant state and it ensures that at least one side stays honest. (Issue 14 *Evora*).

SALDAE

The Heletian Saldae cells of the Sisterhood refuse to take part in the destruction of the Saldaen Underground - they have communicated with the cells in the Saldae homelands and realise the suffering the loss of their land is causing. The Sisterhood of Saldae has recently had a disturbing vision that the taking back of the lands of Saldae through bloodshed (*Saldae* - Issue 22) will lead to a warping of the Green Way. They say that once the Land has tasted blood, it will want to drink more in order to hasten its healing. This prophecy is generally ignored as superstitious nonsense by the young Salden revolutionaries. Saldaens are unable to weild Mystic Magic, therefore there are no native cells.

FLETLAND

In this battle-scarred nation of the Flets, the Sisterhood is an openly respected organisation dedicated to the healing of deep psychic wounds. The Flets have been hounded across Unae, and even now their flight is not over; doubt and anxiety are two emotions that the Cells of Fletland must heal. It is said that Countess Iris Brumoer of Adonis is a Mystic who has used her powers to (unsuccessfully) attempt a seduction of Karl Van Murren, ruler of Bayner, causing his disturbing mind fevers.

WAIR-RAE

The longevity of the elves means that many powerful cells exist within the region. The Wair-Rae Sisterhood is not generally trusted by the other Cells especially those of the human states. They see the male-dominated and war-like society as a threat to their goals and although the Wair Rae Sisterhood denies wanting the war that seems so imminent, their racial heritage will not be so easy to deny and there is every probability they will aid their brothers on the battlefield with their magics.

KAID-ONOR

The members of the Sisterhood in this region have a distinctly shamanistic feel to their rituals and magics, practising openly amongst their people.

BURVOY

As in the Heletian League, the rise of a monotheistic state religion, in this case the Church of Rosemaigne, has meant a decline in the ways of the mystic. The Sisterhood in Burvoy are more tolerated than in the Heletian states, but it still needs to be careful about its operations. There is talk of a Cell within the very court of King Reynald II, but it is very discrete and whether it lends its aid to the king is hotly debated.

OGRE CLANS

The Ogre clans have much respect for the Vrangs, the women elders who advise the clan head. The Vrangs are often members of the Sisterhood and form cells within their own clans. The ruling tribe of the night clans of ogres, the Blood Tribe, are led by Vrangs who are all members of the Sisterhood, but kill any other form of magic users. The Vrangs of the other tribes are fearful that the Sisterhood of the Blood Tribe may be mixing their philosophy with that of the Horned God. (issue 12 - *Ogre Clans*).

It is 515 EK, and winter is almost passed ✪

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A TANGLED WEB

Introducing politics, intrigue and diplomacy into your campaign.

By Alan Ogden

In every campaign, no matter how well run, you will reach a point where the prospect of strapping on the swordbelt and hefting the backpack won't fill you with the same sense of excitement that it once did. The players are familiar with all the inhabitants of the game world and no longer find them challenging. This generally means that the time has come to either restart with new characters. Or does it?

Restarting a campaign means a lot of work for a game referee, plus it is a shame to throw out all your handiwork, and most players become very attached to their characters. There is an alternative. Politics. I don't mean the boring present day variety where bellicose politicians belabour each other over apparently trivial concerns, I'm talking about the truly fantastic politics of shady secret societies, of guilds and churches, of mighty empires and petty kingdoms. The true workings of the world in which your players have adventured blissfully unaware of for years. The type of game where role-playing of characters becomes more important than how many goblins they can slaughter in a ten second period.

Hack And Slash Is Dead

To my mind a political campaign is one in which the resolution of the problem relies more on thought and planning than on the physical abilities of the players and their characters. Role-playing becomes more important than who has the best set of statistics on paper. A political campaign is one where surface impressions can be deceptive and things are never as simple as they seem. The most critical factors are motivation and result - not method or means. A political campaign revolves around the people of the campaign and since people have multiple layers to their personalities so too should the campaign. Players in a political campaign need to always be asking themselves what the deeper story is, what the hidden catch is, looking for the steel fist in the velvet glove. The referee should always be ready with an answer.

Setting The Stage

On the face of it, political campaigns require a lot of preparation compared to conflict based campaigns. This is only a surface impression. With the emphasis on role-playing you'll find the preparation will go much further as an encounter that takes a short time to outline may result in several hours role-playing to resolve. And, as the campaign develops, the interactions between the referee and the players will generate future encounters and situations in a synergistic fashion. The key to running a successful political campaign is attention to detail. As a referee you need to establish a fairly detailed background to a region, its history, its economics and its people. The development of this background will represent the bulk of the work required in a political campaign but will be well worth it in the long term. Chances are that you have already developed a fair portion of your game world - you've drawn the maps and salted the region with interesting adventure seeds, events, places, creatures and people.

Spend time developing a complete history of the campaign region - how the people who live there came to be, where they came from and why. What has happened there in the last hundred years and once again why, and what are the forces in those events that are still influencing the events of today - like, for example, the past ogre defeats that resulted in the Vangre campaign in Unae (see issues 23 to 25). By asking yourself these questions you will uncover new ideas and plotlines for future adventures.

If a nation has a long history of feuding with their neighbours over a particular piece of land then this may lead to plots to break treaties, start wars etc. Who is to say that the players are not the ones who are causing the trouble in the first place. Players becoming embroiled in these difficulties may find themselves in danger of losing their hard won estates if they cannot uncover and thwart the subversives. Worse yet they may find themselves accused of treason and have to extricate themselves.

Don't be afraid to beg, borrow and steal from other sources - comics, books, movies, television, modern life or real history. Anything that has occurred in any of these media can be turned into suitable material for the history of your world. The American Civil War (with all of its causes and results) can be incorporated into a campaign easily enough, as can the fall of the Knights Templar in medieval Europe, or perhaps Raymond Feist's *Riftwar* saga may provide you with the background you need for a great campaign. Alternatively you can buy the history in the form of a campaign sourcebook or boxed set. These have the advantage that they have the information is ready to use (in most cases) and probably in more detail than you will ever need. The disadvantage (apart from to your hip pocket) is that you have little say over any future development and may still need to adjust published supplements to suit your specific needs.

The Shape Of Things To Come

Once you've developed the history of your world then you need to start on the future. Figure out where the world is going to be in a year, five years, ten years and fifty years. You don't need to do this in any great detail but it does help to have events roughly planned out so that current affairs can be seen to be leading in a particular direction, tremors before the earthquake if you like. By doing this your players will soon realise that insignificant events may be clues to a future crisis point. This means that they will begin to pay attention to the minutiae and try and draw some conclusions - all of which becomes grist for your campaign mill.

A political-style campaign works best when your players are major characters in the world, where their (in)actions affect the course of future history; but then you'll need to develop a couple of possible futures or a only broad outline of what is going to happen to cater for any unexpected turns of events manufacured by the players. Again if you find yourself lacking inspiration then find a source of information that will provide a ready made past, present and future. You could choose to recreate the rise and fall of the Roman or Persian empires in your campaign, or adapt Isaac Asimov's Foundation series as a basis for a science fiction

campaign. If you've chosen a purchased package for your campaign history then this is the area that is most likely to cause you trouble. Either the future won't be defined at all or the actions of the players in your game will render much of it redundant.

Sands Through The Hour Glass

In many campaigns the background can be fairly stagnant and the only things that seem to happen are the events precipitated by the player characters or events used as adventure hooks. In a political-based campaign it is important that, whatever the players in your game do or don't do, the background should continue to move along of its own accord. Life is what happens while your players are making other plans.

Always have more than one plotline going at the same time; think of your political campaign as being a like a soap opera (but with far more plausible plotlines of course) - one plotline leads into another, the elements and groundwork for the next four or five stories are being laid while two or three others are coming to fruition. If you can't bring yourself to watch *Days of Our Lives*, or *Santa Barbara* then try reading some of the long running Marvel/DC comic titles (*X-Men* is one that springs to mind) to get an idea of how the plotlines intermingle and relate to each other.

What's Up, Doc?

Once you've developed the history and plotlines for your campaign the real detail work begins. You need to set up the regional economics and politics. Part of the work will have been done while setting up the historical situation but you will need to go into specifics regarding products, trade goods, any treaties or agreements regarding the moving of goods from one region to another, local customs and laws. Obviously the more detail provided the more intricate your plotlines can be, but I feel that there is a definite point where too much is a waste of time. You will need to find out what point this is in your own campaign. If you consistently write up detail that never gets used then you're providing too much, if you don't have answers to many of your players questions then you need to generate more detail. You should be able to gauge which category you fall into fairly quickly.

I feel that you can get away with just having detailed information to explain the causes of the current situation that the players find themselves in and vague details on any plotlines that the players aren't directly involved in. If you find that the players shift onto an unexpected plotline then the vague outline should allow you to improvise without compromising the integrity of your campaign until you can develop the plotline in greater detail.

The next question is how to generate this information. In a previous article (*Here Be Dragons*, issue 15) I created a quick thumbnail sketch of how three neighbouring regions - Aryal, Bensaba and Carwyn - interacted with each other. This sketch is fine for a conflict-based campaign but you need to go a bit further than this for a political one. The original sketch outlined Carwyn as being a region of nomadic herdsmen (perhaps similar to the Massai of Africa) with few settled regions, Bensaba was a city state of skilled artisans occupying a strategic position on an inland trade route and Aryal consisted of a confederation of mountain mining strongholds.

A political outline of the situation might include such details as the elders of the various tribes of Carwyn, the heads of the guilds of Bensaba and the burgermeisters of Aryal. What it should definitely include are details of how the strongholds are fiercely competitive with one another - always seeking to exploit one another to achieve a greater market share in Bensaba (the only market for their goods). It should also include the arrogant complacency of the people of Bensaba and how they have allowed their defences to fall into disrepair after decades of peace.

Also important is the fact that a plague is killing off the Carwyn herds (foot and mouth, anthrax) and how the hungry tribesmen are now looking to the overfull granaries of Bensaba.

Meanwhile unscrupulous miners, having found that the tribesmen have access to some herbs with unusual properties (eg. tobacco), are forging weaponry and trading it in large quantities to the Carwyn tribes and Bensabi guild masters are spreading dissent amongst the Aryal burgermeisters by playing them off against one another. Plus a new trading colony has been established a few days travel from Bensaba, etc etc.

Having developed an overall picture of the immediate region and surrounds you need to zoom in and develop a more detailed view of the area in which you expect the players to spend most of their time. In a conflict-based campaign players moving out of a region is frequently a problem but this is because the focus is on features of the region (ie dungeons, temples, castles, lairs etc). This doesn't tend to be the case in a political campaign as the focus is on the events (blackmail, manoeuvring for power, treasonous alliances, assassinations, scandals, wars) occurring within the region. You can have a lot of political wrangling going on in a small region without disrupting the realism and consistency of your campaign.

Who's Backstabbing Who?

The type of detail you need to look at developing are the regional power structures. These obviously include the government of the region, major churches and official power groups such as guildhalls and councils but should also include lesser players such as foreign embassies, influential families (nobles and the wealthy), notable figures (powerful mages, local heroes), unofficial power groups such as thieves and assassins guilds, secret brotherhoods, groups opposed to the government for one reason or another, special interest groups (perhaps a women's suffrage movement) and minor churches. When developing these groups you will also need to consider how they interact with one another and detail any alliances or enmities. The relative sizes and power of the groups should also be established.

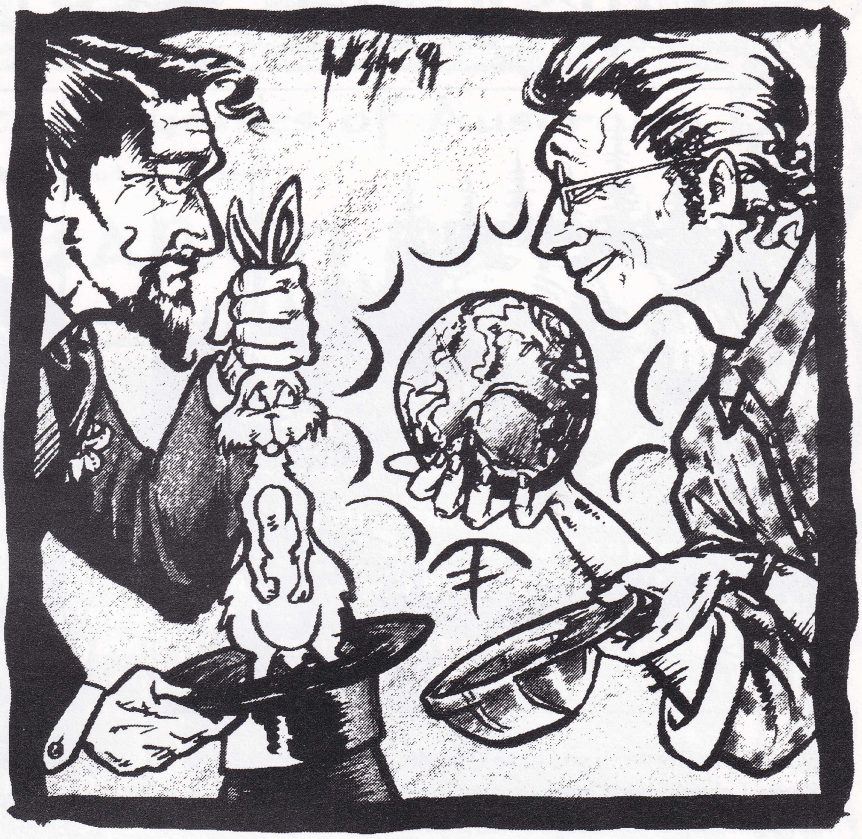
Once again you should develop a brief history for each group, its goals and activities and an outline of its future. The level of detail you need to develop will be dictated by the needs of your campaign. You don't need to develop the details of a taxation system if no-one wants to know how it works. The inner workings of a bureaucracy are largely irrelevant to players until they actually have to deal with it, as is the internal structure of the local church. If the players are going to be dealing with the church (staying there, infiltrating it, working for them) then you will have to develop that area in greater detail.

In the scenario outlined above Bensaba is a merchant city - so money speaks and little else. For this reason we may decide that the government of Bensaba is a council of merchants and artisans. Membership on the council is limited to the heads of the major guilds. Leadership of the guilds is determined by popular vote from the guild membership. The voice of religion is muted and women are (for historical/cultural reasons) considered to be second class citizens with few rights. Due to the merchant mind-set the laws concerning theft and non-payment of debt are more harshly enforced than those of assault and murder.

This outline automatically determines the pathways to political power in Bensaba but also establishes a number of other power groups. An assassin's guild may be able to operate fairly openly (punishing loan defaulters), and members may even be respected. A thieves guild would have to operate in total secrecy. A church that caters predominately for women will find that its voice will be small despite having the largest congregation in the city. Those at the bottom of the political heap will be trying to change their status for the better while those at the top are quite happy with things the way they are. This can lead to all sorts of turmoil (ie.

potential plotlines). As with the historical plotlines you should set these up to run of their own accord, with their own conclusions, regardless of whether the players do anything with them or not.

Having set up the big picture you should have an idea of the major players. As outlined in a previous article (*Thinking Man's Monster*, Issue 8) the protagonist's (ie. the referee's characters) in your campaign should have their own reasons (goals, dreams, desires) for doing what they're doing. When developing characters for a campaign I look at the role they have to play and then develop a suitable character (I don't randomly generate these characters). I give them names, personalities and histories as well as a list of skills and characteristics. If I'm pressed for time I'll do without the skills and statistics as the role-playing aspect is the one I'm more interested in. Having set up a number of personalities you then need to figure how they inter-relate with one another - whether Joe knows Fred, whether they're best friends or mortal enemies.



Information Is Power

Well that's enough of the theory of developing the details of a campaign but how do you go about organising this information into a readily usable format. My personal preference is a computer. With a database, Hypercard or plain old word processor the major benefit is the ease with which the information can be stored and maintained. It becomes relatively easy to disseminate the information to your players since you can edit and print the information as required.

Whatever system you choose (index cards, notebooks, loose leaf folder) it should be be set up so that it is easy to access the information you have developed and to maintain it as your campaign progresses. Of the suggested methods index cards and loose leaf folders fit these criteria the best.

My preference is to split the information into a hierarchical structure - regional overview, local overview and personalities. The first section gives a general overview (races, populations, government, religions, history, current situation and future precis) of all the major areas within the region and how they relate to one another. Very important personalities (heads of state etc.) get mentioned in this area but few others. This overview is all you need for regions that the players are not wandering about in.

The local overview details one part of a region. It contains the same sort of information as the regional view but in greater detail. Less important personalities are detailed in this section and any items or areas of note are also described. Local overviews need to be developed for the area in which the players are currently messing about and perhaps the neighbouring areas (depending on your time and creativity) as well.

You can pass information on by roleplaying the town crier, bard or gossip; by preparing a newsletter that gets handed to the players; or simply by telling the players what they need to know. The first has the advantage of adding flavour to your campaign and emphasising the roleplaying aspect but can result in important information being neglected or forgotten in the heat of the moment. The second method ensures that information is presented in a well balanced manner and it is possible to prepare separate (personalised) information sheets for each player but this can be time consuming - especially since you may need to retain a copy for your own records. Computers are a big assistance in this type of presentation as you can extract/copy/merge the required information from the source documents fairly easily. The last method can require very little in the way of preparation (perhaps a few notes) but does make it difficult to separate information out for different players or characters unless each player is told separately, which may become time consuming.

Come Into My Parlour...

Moving from a conflict based to a political campaign isn't that hard really. The main need is to shift the emphasis from resolving things through conflict to resolving them through thought and role-playing. You can do this in a number of ways.

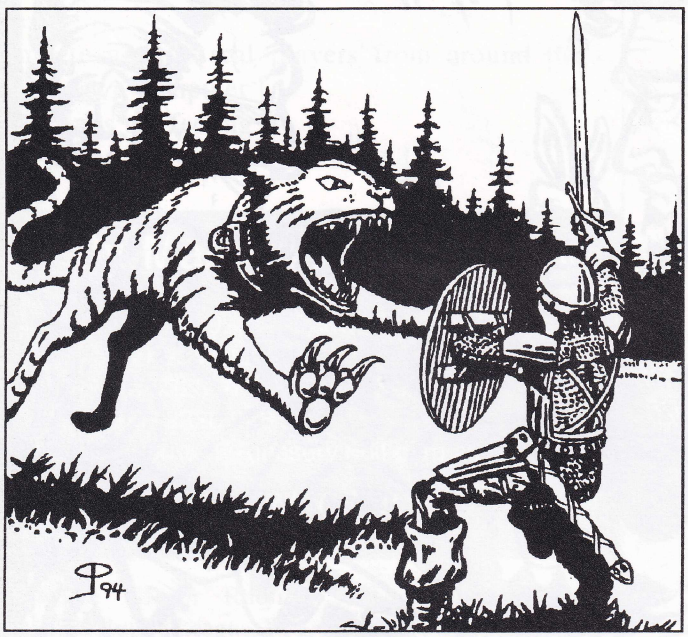
The easiest way in which you can do this is by setting up adventures that do not have a satisfactory resolution via conflict, either by making it clear to the players that the use of force is unacceptable (straight out telling them, broad hints), or by establishing "unfair" scenarios ie. the opponents far outclass the players thereby removing force as an option. This can be done by stacking the odds against them (eg. six versus an army of six thousand), or simply by making non-violence part of the initial adventure "specification".

For example, the players are to sneak into the home of Dealgrond the Almighty (a mage of justifiable note), open a certain chest there, and copy the contents of a letter. The sum offered for the task is generous - perhaps overly so. Dealgrond obviously outclasses the players (they either know this already or can soon learn it - preferably the easy way) and is fully capable of reducing them to slimy pools of goo should he catch them or ever know of their involvement. Stealth will be their best or only option.

In the act of copying the letter the players will learn that it concerns the defence of the nation but no names are mentioned. The ramifications of the job have suddenly become more complex. The obvious question the players should be asking is whether Dealgrond is the legitimate "owner" of the information in the letter. What do they know of Dealgrond? Who benefits from knowing the contents of the letter? Why do they need to copy the letter and not steal or destroy it? What do they know of their employer? What will happen if they do turn over the letter - will they be guilty of treason? Is Dealgrond the spy or are they?

The campaign has just become political. ■

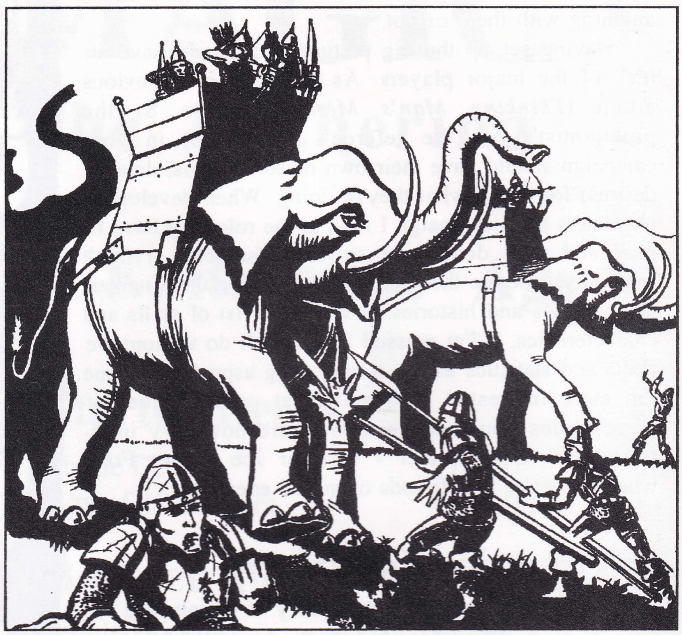
The Last Act of Defiance



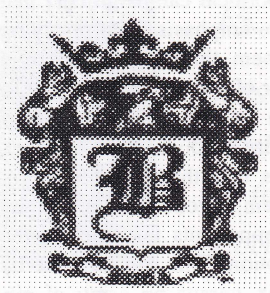
- My ! What Big teeth you have Grandma
- Knew I should have gone for the Tower Shield !!
- It might help if my weapon was facing the enemy
- Run Awaaaaaaaay

you - Gee. Sarkers have those funny things that no body knows the name of at the back of their throat too.

- Wax on. Wax off

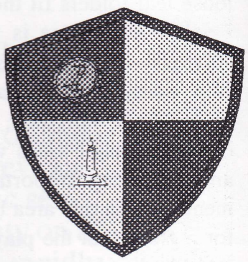


- Knew I should have been a &#^$ Archer
- Can you get Pikes in XXXXXXL size?
- Ouch
- If you strike me down I shall become more powerful than could possibly imagine.
- My brains, his Steel and your strength against 60 Elephants and you think a little head jiggle is supposed to make me happy. Hmm



MIDGARD

The Game of Medieval Intrigue



Siege Combat

Cities are tough. This goes without saying. You can hardly have an established city that gets wiped out every few years by a bunch of bored barbarians out to have a good time. With all those moats, pits, spiky things and above all ('cause they are) walls, would be attackers often find themselves covered more in boiling oil than in glory.

In Midgard, sieges are carried out over a number of turns by a number of players. This is not because you have to, its just that if you don't take your time you tend to die a bit (well, actually a lot). Depending on the size of the city, the battle might have to be fought on 8 different fronts and as either a land or naval assualt.

However, things are not always rosy for the defender. Starvation, popular uprisings, and attackers breaking down your gates are some of the wonderful things that city leaders have to cope with during a siege. You set up your wonderful city, generate a few taxes to help finance some other operations and all of a sudden people seem to be a little to keen to get into your city. (The axes give it away). Things would be a lot easier if their were not all those other irritating people (mostly from Queensland) getting in the way. Oh well

Midgard

Midgard is a mixed moderated Play by Mail game of medieval factions that currently has about 430 positions played by players all over Australia and a few from around the world The Midgard rule book, set up and 2 turns costs $15 with turn costs set at $7 per turn. Ask for a copy of the Free House Magazine

The Baron's Australian Midgard
PO BOX 542
LINDFIELD NSW
2070

The Servants Of Taimhotep

A Novel of New Europa.

by Michael Butler

Introduction:

About This Adventure Entertainment. *The Servants of Taimhotep* is an adventure for three to six Dramatic Characters and one Host. In it, an ancient, evil plot is uncovered and (one hopes) foiled by our brave heroes. After the introductory materials (including this Introduction, and Chapter One) the adventure is presented in Chapters Two, Three, Four and Five.

CHAPTER ONE

What Has Gone Before

New Europa, 1870. A place of danger and intrigue. The mighty Prussian Landfortresses have been stopped at the Battle of Konigsgratz, but the ambitions of the Kaiser and his wily Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, remain a threat to the peace of the civilised world. Arrayed against the might of Prussia stands the Second Compact, led by the noble Bavarians.

But other evils threaten the fragile peace of New Europa. Centuries ago the Unseelie Lord Taimhotep plotted to overthrow the Pharaoh and plunge all Egypt into darkness. She was defeated by the sacrifice of the young Prince Amenemhab, who used the Amulet of Ka to channel his own life force into a spell to banish Taimhotep and her minions beyond the Faerie Veil. One of these minions, a sorcerer named Harkhuf, managed to escape the Prince's spell, and went into hiding.



For centuries he has sought a way to undo the spell of banishment and return his mistress and her fellows to Earth. In recent months, after centuries of fruitless effort, Harkhuf believes he has found a way. According to a fragment he has recently uncovered, if "*the blood of the Prince is spilled on the Amulet of Ka and on the soil of her defeat*," the spell will be broken and Taimhotep may return.

Harkhuf plans to acquire the Amulet by hiring "the Falcon," the most notorious thief in all of France, to steal it from the Dragon (Lord Glitterfang) who possesses it. He also needs to kidnap the male descendants of Amenemhab. To this end, he made the acquaintance of Walter Renz, an ambitious junior member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Easily seducing him with promises of power, Harkhuf had him locate the Djedi family, Amenemhab's descendants. Once found, it was a simple matter to keep track of their movements until he was ready to strike. All that remained was to arrange the details of the sacrifice. To free Taimhotep the descendant of Amenemhab must be killed at the location of her defeat, under a full moon. This place is now a marketplace in Cairo.

Fortunately for Harkhuf, Walter was a friend of the von Lepke family, who had just suffered a tragic loss. At the battle of Konigsberg, both Herr Lepke and his eldest son, Erwin, had been killed at the hands of the Bavarians and their magickal Aerial Battleships. But Herr Lepke's youngest son, Gunther, was hungry for revenge. With the resources and manpower he could bring to bear, young Gunther was an invaluable asset. Preying on his grief, Walter struck a deal. Harkhuf, his "employer," had personal reasons for wanting the Djedis - a situation Gunther understood all too clearly. In exchange for Gunther's help, they would deliver to him the information needed to steal one of the Aerial Battleships and duplicate its secret magickal workings.

The actual plan is somewhat different. The information supplied to Gunther, through "Otto," one of Walter's acolytes, will be false. It will, however, suffice to trick Gunther into trying to steal the Aerial battleship which will be part of the Paris Air Exhibition. This will act as a diversion whilst the Falcon steals the Amulet. It is also vital to maintain the illusion that Walter is merely assisting Gunther out of the same desire for revenge which drives the youngest of the von Lepkes. Once the Amulet has been taken, Walter will be rid of Gunther in whatever manner seems most expeditious. The band will then journey to Cairo to perform the sacrifice. This will free Taimhotep, who will resume her plans of conquest and domination.

CHAPTER TWO

An Interrupted Journey

In which our noble heroes and their shipmates are foully kidnapped whilst at sea. Also in which our heroes find themselves imprisoned in a castle. Making good their escape, they discover a number of clues as to their adversaries' plans and identities.

As our story opens, the players have boarded a small coastal ship, the R.M.S. (Royal Mail Ship) Delilah, en route from the north coast of Spain to Dover, via the south coast of France and the English Channel. The Captain, William Hobbes, is a gruff old sea dog, fond of reminiscing about his days in Her Majesty's Navy. Devote some time to the introduction of the other passengers, including Otto Kemp, Philippe Djedi and his son Pierre. Otto claims to be an engineer in the Bavarian Aeronavy. In fact, he only has a basic knowledge of his "profession," of the level gained by an assiduous reader of Popular Invention and other such journals. This will be evident to anyone with the proper qualifications who spends more than a few minutes in conversation with him on matters technical. This is because "Otto" is in fact Herman Knocke, a member of Walter's cabal from the Temple of Ra. His mission is, when captured, to feed Gunther false information about the Bavarian's Aeronavy so as to ensure that Gunther thinks it will be possible to hijack one of their ships.

Philippe Djedi is a garrulous merchant, an Egyptian expatriot now living in Paris. He brought his only son, Pierre, along with him on his buying trip to begin teaching him the family business. Pierre is a quiet lad with a quick mind and a keen wit. Devise other passengers as you see fit. In any event, the Delilah carries a maximum of twelve passengers and may well be below capacity.

Dramatis Personae:

Gunther von Lepke Vengeful young Prussian officer. Athletics [GD], Courage [GD], Fencing [GR], Marksmanship [GR], Piloting [GD] and Health [6].

Walter Renz Spiritual adviser to von Lepke; member of the Temple of Ra. Education [GR], Marksmanship [GR], Physique [GD], Perception [EXC], Sorcery [GD] and Health [6].

Pierre Djedi Youngest son of the Djedi family and heir to an ancient birthright. Athletics [GD], Courage [GD], Perception [GD] and Health [6].

Philippe Djedi Wealthy merchant and father of Pierre. Courage [GR], Exchequer [GR], Fencing [GD], Perception [GD] and Health [7].

Djehenty Djedi Pierre's grandfather and keeper of the family traditions. Education [GR], Exchequer [GD], Perception [GD] and Health [5].

Sister Gabrielle Michaelis Of the Order of the Temple of Jerusalem Athletics [GD], Courage [GR], Perception [GD], Sorcery [GR] and Health [7].

The Falcon, a.k.a. Charlotte Lemieux The most notorious thief in all of France. Athletics [GD], Charisma [GD], Comeliness [GR], Courage [GR], Social Graces [GD], Stealth [GR], Tinkering [GR] and Health [7].

Lord Glitterfang A dragon. Fencing [GD], Fisticuffs [GR], Physique [GD], Social Graces [PR] and Health [8].

Harkhuf Ancient sorceror and servant of Taimhotep. Courage [GD], Education [EXC], Fisticuffs [GD], Marksmanship [GR], Perception [EXC], Sorcery [EXC], and Health [6].

Acolytes of the Temple of Ra Walter's followers. Fisticuffs [GD], Fencing [GD], Perception [GD] and Health [5].

Prussian Soldiers Gunther's men. Courage [GD], Fencing [GD], Marksmanship [GD], Physique [GD] and Health [7].

Guards and Police To keep the public order and guard the innocent. Fisticuffs [GD], Physique [GD], Marskmanship [GD] and Health [6].

Our Brave Heroes Doughty adventurers and implacable foes of evil.

Come evening, the characters are invited to join the Captain for dinner. The " dining room" is a long table in the wide corridor between the staterooms. As the characters are welcomed to his table by Captain Hobbes, a loud clang is heard from the bowels of the ship, which lurches sharply to port. Simultaneously, the Prussian thugs who boarded the ship moments ago under cover of darkness storm into the dining room, reciprocators and sabres drawn. Captain Hobbes leaps to his feet, only to be shot down where he stands. There are two thugs for each character. They yell for everyone to lie down on the floor, and will move to cuff anyone who seems uncooperative.

Allow the players to react to the situation as they will; for his part, Philippe leaps at the nearest ruffian, wrenches the sabre out of his hand, cracks him over the head with the hilt and, yelling "Avec moi, mes amis, 'ave at zem!" charges another thug. In the ensuing melee, Philippe will be killed by the Prussians. If things go badly for the Prussians, Walter will cast a Time Cessation spell, immobilising everyone. He and Gunther both will be will be furious when they see Philippe's body. Their raised voices will be the last thing our heroes hear before being rendered unconscious.

Our heroes awaken in a dank dungeon cell. It is a full 24 hours since their capture, and bellies are yawning. The cell is approximately ten paces by fifteen and appears to have lain undisturbed for some time. There is a single stout door, of oak shod with iron. In it is a small trapdoor opened from the other side and a hefty lock. There is also a ventilation shaft on the wall adjacent to the door. The characters are manacled to the wall by means of a single iron chain passing from wrist to wrist through an iron ring in the wall 6 feet up. Any faerie characters will be suffering terribly; it will require Courage tests to take any action requiring movement. There is a single (sleeping) guard outside the cell, with the keys to all the locks on a hook in the wall.

Allow the players to devise some means of escape. Some possibilities include a female using a hairpin to pick a lock; using faerie glamour or etherealness to slip free; using brute strength to burst one's bonds; tricking the guard into entering the cell and then overpowering him; climbing up and out of the ventilation shaft high on the wall; or anything else plausible. Once freed, the characters will be either in the ventilation shaft or the corridor. They are in an abandoned chateau near St. Nazaire, on the south side of the mouth of the Loire River. (Use the map of Castle Harlech from Australian Realms #20 for the castle.)

As they travel, observant characters may overhear the "interrogation" of Otto. They will hear a familiar voice (Gunther's) telling Walter to begin. Walter utters some mystic mumbo jumbo [GR sorcery: there is no magic being used], and commands Otto to write down what he knows of the movements of the Aerial Battleship Bavaria, and to draw a diagram of its magickal engine. This is given to Gunther, who says he will meet Walter in Paris.

"Knock out the prisoners again and dump them on a fast train to Italy," he instructs Walter, "by the time they realise where they are, it will be too late."

He then leaves. A new presence enters the room [GR sorcery: a Dimensional Portal spell]. This is Harkhuf. He is extremely angry when told of Philippe's death. Walter tries to mollify him by suggesting that Pierre is sixteen and therefore of age, so the requirement for "that man who banished the darkness" should still be met. Harkhuf asks Walter if "the Falcon" has accepted their offer; Walter answers in the affirmative. Harkhuf then leaves, telling Walter that he will take the boy with him to Paris. As an afterthought, he orders Walter to kill the prisoners. If the characters have been listening in the corridor, they will hear shouts and footsteps from up ahead, atop the stairs. There is a door at the base of the stairs; it leads into a disused store-room.

Walter will send three of his own men to deal with the prisoners. They are armed with long knives; one of them has a reciprocator. If overcome in combat, they will pause just long enough to utter a curse in a strange tongue [AV education: sounds middle-eastern] before biting down on the poison capsules hidden in their mouths. Each wears an ankh Amulet on a chain around his neck. Remember that there are quite a few guards about - a loud fight is certain to attract plenty of unwanted attention. Use your discretion in deciding the rate at which any reinforcements arrive.

If the characters have been using the ventilation shaft, they will exit about eight feet up the wall of the archway containing the entrances to the kitchens and dungeons one one side, and to the great hall and guest rooms on the other. Or, if they have come up the corridor and stairs, the characters will be on ground level. There are doors ahead, on either side of the passageway they are in, which obviously lead to the kitchens and dining hall. Looking ahead they will see that the courtyard is bustling with activity [GD perception: people are getting ready to leave; EXC perception: catch a glimpse of the Falcon as he walks to his ornithopter (he is slim and of slightly below-average height, dressed in black and wears a hat)]. There is another door in the passageway, however, and it leads to an anteroom. This is empty, but it has two exits. One leads to the room in which "Otto" was interrogated; the other leads upstairs.

Stopping in the room where the interrogation took place, the heroes will find a table and a stool, along with a blank journal (with pages ripped out of the top) and a pen. If examined, the pad bears the imprints of writing. A rubbing may be taken of the top page, which will reveal the word written large (as if for a heading) FALCON, a strange-looking diagram of some kind of device (Otto's fake magickal engine) and some other impressions too faint to make out, although the words "Bavaria," "guards," and "precaution" may be made out.

Searching upstairs will reveal a meeting room. In a corner lies an invitation to Mme. Tissier's Ball, to be held on Friday night to celebrate the opening of the Paris Aeronautical Exhibition. It is a costume ball, with the theme being "creatures of the skies." On the back of the invite has been sketched the head of a bird of prey [GR education: a falcon]. "Otto" may be found here; if questioned, he will reveal that he impersonated an engineer to dupe that idiot von Lepke. He will reveal no more, even under threats of death [GD perception: he is scared of a fate worse that

death (!)]. As the characters finish their discussion with "Otto," have your players generate [GR] perception totals. On a high success, they will hear a noise in the corridor and may take one action before "Otto" yells out "they are in here!" and a group of Prussians burst into the room. Adjust the numbers so that the characters have a tough fight on their hands. There are no reinforcements this time, however - everybody is getting ready to leave.

If our heroes decide to continue upwards, they will emerge onto the roof of the tower in time to see Walter taking off in his Ornithopter. He will lean out and sneer as he flies off, and will use a Time Acceleration spell on himself to aid his escape if necessary. From this point, the characters can see into the courtyard. A black carriage is about to leave, with a cavalry escort. A slim figure (the Falcon) is preparing a rather avian-looking ornithopter for take-off. As soon as any characters reach the courtyard, the carriage leaves. The courtyard is bustling with activity, as the Prussians saddle up their horses and make ready to leave. Gunther is riding alongside the carriage. It should be a simple matter to clobber a Prussian and take his horse: have the player generate a [GD] stealth total to sneak up, and then get a free attack on an unsuspecting cavalryman.

Once a character has a horse, however, the alarm will be raised and the shout will go up "The prisoners have escaped! RIDE!" Make the chase which ensues as exciting as possible - there are as many riders as there are characters chasing them, plus two, plus Gunther, plus the carriage. If it looks like the carriage is about to be apprehended, Harkhuf will use a Portal spell to escape with Pierre. Gunther will not fight to the death, nor will he reveal any of his plans, even under the closest interrogation. He will demand his release, as the characters have no proof that he has done anything wrong. In any event, he is travelling to Paris (not that he'll tell our heroes that, of course) for the Aerial Exhibition.

CHAPTER THREE

Busy times in Paris

In which it is found that some of our heroes' fellow-captives are still missing, and also in which tickets are sought for Mme. Tissier's ball.

Depending on their means of transportation, the characters should arrive in Paris some time on Thursday. Try to convey something of the nature of the city to your players; Paris is, after all, the cultural centre of Europe. All society has turned out in force for the Aerial Exhibition and the festivities surrounding it. The streets are bustling with a cross-section of New Europan citizenry; all nationalities and all races are represented. Overall, the atmosphere is one of excitement and faith in progress through technology. The papers are full of gossip about Mme. Tissier's ball and the Aerial Exhibition. The climax of both will be an aerial display by the pride of the Bavarian aerial fleet, the Konigseig. The ship will overfly Mme. Tissier's grounds, give an exhibition of its manoeuvrability and fire off a magnificent fireworks display before landing and heading back to Bavaria.

Lodgings will be easy enough to find; many landlords have opened unused rooms to let, and the hotels have put on extra staff. Having found lodgings, there are a number of activities and investigations that the players may wish to undertake before the ball on Friday night (when the villain's plans will be enacted). These are detailed below, along with some optional events to be used if the players need some help or to be reminded of the seriousness of their actions.

Entry to the ball: The Dramatic Characters possibly have a ticket (from the castle) which will admit a single guest; other means of entry must be arranged. This should not prove too difficult, and there are means available, reward creative thinking on the players part, and allow any reasonable sounding plan a fair chance of success.

Gunther von Lepke: characters with contacts in the military, the civil bureaucracy, intelligence agencies or the aristocracy will be able to discover that Gunther is the youngest (and only surviving) son of Colonel Fritz von Lepke and the brother of Captain Erwin von Lepke. Both Fritz and Erwin were killed at the Battle of Knigsgratz. Gunther had just been commissioned as a Lieutenant in the Prussian Zeppelin Corps, but was not present at Konigsberg. Reputedly, Gunther was heartbroken at the news, and is considered quite capable of making plans for revenge.

Walter Renz: characters with contacts in intelligence agencies or a sorcerous society will be able to discover some information about Walter. Walter recently became an initiate of the Temple of Ra. Confined to the outer circles of the Temple, he has recently become most secretive and unhelpful. Some members of the Order want him dismissed; others, fearing that he has something up his sleeve, want him executed.

The Djedi family: characters with mercantile, government or Egyptian contacts will discover that the Djedis have an address here in Paris. The Djedis live in a modest mansion on the left bank of the Seine. They will be received by Maxine and Djhenty Djedi, Philippe's wife and father respectively. They are clearly distressed. Djhenty tells them how worried he is for the safety of his family, who have been missing since the Delilah went down. If reasons for the abduction of their family are sought, they can think of none. Philippe is scrupulously honest in his business dealings, and neither can think of any personal enemies. If the possibility of some occult connection is mentioned, Maxine will pale and excuse herself.

Djehenty will hesitantly explain that there is a kind of curse on their family. They are descended from a prince of ancient Egypt. This prince (Amenemhab) was responsible for banishing an evil sorceress, Taimhotep, beyond the Faerie Veil. The cost for this was his life. Ever since, the shadow of Taimhotep has lain across their family. Djehenty doesn't recall the name of




NORWAY
OSLO
NORD SEA
Glascow
Edinburgh
Galway
Dublin
Manchester
Liverpool
BRITAIN
LONDON
Plymouth
Nord Hold
Hamburg
Amsterdam
THE INNER SEA
Cologne
Brussels
Frankfurt
LeHavre
PARIS
Strausbourg
LavaRock
Crafthall Throne
FRANCE
Nantes
Innsbruck
Crystal Hold
Black Hold
Rockfall Doom
Lyon
Geneva
Milan
Le Tower Splendide
Kazak Corom
Bordeaux
GreatHall
Genova
San Sebastian
Toulouse
Marseille
Nice
Vesuvio Vente
ATLANTEAN OCEAN
Valencia
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MADRID
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Seas
Roads
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SCALE: 1 inch equals 300mi.

Eric Holtz


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PRUSSIA
Prague
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Steam City
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VIENNA
Buda Pest
AUSTRIA
Szeged
Zagreb
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Trieste
Belgrade
Bucharest
Varna
BLACK SEA
Sarajevo
ITALIA
Sofia
TURKEY
CONSTANTINOPLE
DwarfKesh
ROME
Naples
Tirana
ATHENS
Palermo

Harkhuf, but will if the players mention it to him. He believes that perhaps there is in fact an occult connection in all this, and fears greatly for his son and grandson. The prophecy, he will recall, spoke of a sacrifice "among the people" at a time when "the moon is high." Eventually, Djehenty will recall the other part of the legend - that there was an Amulet which also had to be present at the ceremony. The Amulet has been lost for centuries.

Mme Tissier: is famous for her lavish balls and parties, which are among the best-attended and most prestigious of the social season. Intelligence connections will reveal that she is something of an "operator," often lending aid to French and Second Compact agents in need of help. Her mansion on the outskirts of Paris is only her summer residence. The Ball is being held to celebrate the Air Exhibition; all the dignitaries and officials have been invited. The ball is a masked affair, and the theme is "creatures of the skies."

The Falcon: The Falcon is known to all Frenchmen and most Europeans as the most notorious thief in all of France. He always steals incredibly valuable items from the most wealthy of victims; sometimes, if the security arrangements were particularly challenging, he returns the item as a token of respect. Underworld connections will reveal that the Falcon has recently accepted a big job, one which he claims will establish his fame worldwide. He has made several trips to Prussia and one, just days ago to the coast, presumably to make preparations for his theft, which is rightly suspected to somehow involve the Aerial Exhibition. No-one has ever seen the Falcon's face, and it is rumoured that no-one knows his true identity. Nevertheless, the ladies swoon. If only they knew that the Falcon is actually a woman, Mlle. Charlotte Lemieux!

Harkhuf/Taimhotep: characters with contacts in archaeology or (better yet) Egyptology will be able to get the story of Taimhotep and Amenemhab detailed under "visting the Djedi family," above. The information is not very detailed, as the sources are far from complete. Meter this information out based on the type of contact, the degree of success generated for the Education or Connections total, your player's progress with their investigations and the type of adventure they prefer.

Try to get your players to the ball in one piece and with a fairly clear idea of what's likely to be going on. They may or may not know that an Amulet is involved, but they can probably figure that something has been or will be stolen.

CHAPTER FOUR

A Midsummer Night's Ball

In which our heroes witness many strange events at Mme. Tissier's ball. Also in which they have the opportunity to foil Gunther's plans, whilst offering Harkhuf a grave setback.

Once our heroes gain admittance to the ball, there are a variety of things to see and do. Emphasise the extravagance of the ball - all the guests are in lavish costumes or dress uniforms, and all wear masks, from a humble domino with a feather or two through beaked masks to intricate full-head replicas of various birds, both real and mythical. An orchestra plays in the main ballroom, and various soloists and ensembles occupy the sitting rooms. There is a huge smorgasbord of food and drink on hand as well, all prepared to perfection. The mansion itself is enormous, a typical example of Louis XIV extravagance. The grounds are immaculate, and feature a large mooring compound on the west side), and a gorgeous topiary maze on the east side. Once the characters have acquainted themselves with their surroundings, you may begin the evening's events.

As one of the characters is chatting with a fellow guest, an imposing figure crashes into the conversation. It is none other than Lord Glitterfang, one of Mme. Tissier's guests of honour. "Out of my way, oaf!" he growls, turning his back and striding over to Mme. Tissier. Observant characters may notice an elaborate medallion he wears about his neck. On a high success, the character will notice that it has an Egyptian hawk motif [GR Perception]. Mme. Tissier greets him warmly and introduces him to another of her guests - Lieutenant Gunther von Lepke (!).

Gunther and the dragon chat for a while, with Glitterfang urging Gunther to avenge his father and brother, and Gunther darkly assuring him that when he acts, the whole world will know. Other than this, no details will be revealed. As the characters move away, Gunther will notice and recognise them. He will confront the characters and gloat a little; his arrogance is invincible, as is his certainty that even with the characters on the loose, his plan is safe. If any of the characters are cretinous enough to attempt starting a fight, they will be ejected by Mme Tissier's doormen.

Other characters may notice a slight figure lurking near Glitterfang. If the character also saw the drawing on the back of the invitation found at the castle he may recognise the design of his mask and identify him. If approached, the Falcon will deny any such charges and dismiss the characters as having had a little too much to drink. For the remainder of the evening, however, Falcon will stay near to Glitterfang, but won't approach him.

As midnight approaches, the doormen will usher all guests out of the house to view the fireworks display. If any character wishes to stay indoors, have them generate a Stealth total, opposed to the doormen's perception [GD]. Glitterfang and Mme. Tissier's special guests will remain on the lawn in front of the house. At about this time, one of the characters (preferably a gallant gentleman) will feel a note being slipped into his hand. It is impossible to determine who, in the crush of bodies, has passed this missive. It says " MEET ME AT THE TOPIARY." Turning the card over, it reads "Sister Gabrielle Michaelis, field operative," and bears the symbol of the Order of the Temple of Jerusalem.

Proceeding to the topiary, they will see an attractive young woman standing waiting for them. She is dressed in a fashionable dark blue gown, and looks quite inconspicuous in this setting. She will greet the characters by name and decline to answer any questions. "We must get away from prying ears. There is more at stake than you might realise."

The Knights of the Temple have recently become aware of Walter's evil scheme. They have also been following the progress of our heroes and have decided to risk making contact. The Knights are aware of the Amulet but not of the Falcon's involvement. They are also unaware of the importance of Pierre.

As their conversation draws to its close, a figure will come crashing through the hedge nearest Gabrielle. Just moments ago, the Falcon took Glitterfang's Amulet. Whilst a "drunken" accomplice staggered into the official party's midst another three accomplices, dressed as doormen, and the Falcon himself (similarly dressed) intervened to remove him. During the scuffle, the Falcon lifted the Amulet and replaced it with a replica. The Falcon then went inside, changed into a different outfit (a dress this time) and headed off to his rendezvous with Walter in the topiary maze.

Unfortunately, Walter has no intention of paying the rest of the Falcon's fee. Using a minor spell to detect the presence of the Amulet, he ambushed the Falcon, took the Amulet, and left his men to deal with her. Quickly seizing the initiative, the Falcon hobbled one of the guards and took off after Walter, with the remaining three in close pursuit.

Our heroes will find their conversation with Sister Michaelis rudely interrupted as the Falcon and three Temple of Ra acolytes come crashing through the wall of the maze behind them. Gabrielle will automatically launch herself at the thugs; as they came through the hedge she saw the ankh Amulet one of them was wearing. In the ensuing fight, both the Falcon and Sister Michaelis will be wounded (it will also become apparent that the Falcon is actually a woman). Gabrielle will give the Amulet to the characters and trust them to take it to Mme. Tissier. She is trustworthy, and will know what to do. She stresses that there may not be much time and that speed is of the essence.

At this point Glitterfang will discover the theft. "MY AMULET," he roars, in a voice which carries over the entire

grounds, "WHO HAS TAKEN MY AMULET!" Enraged, he begins to hunt through the crowd, sniffing and growling and muttering to himself. To get into the house, the characters will need to generate Stealth totals opposed to Glitterfang's Perception. If a character fails, Glitterfang will confront him (or her) and demand his property back. If a Charisma total, generated against Glitterfang's Courage, is unsuccessful, they will be unable to ease his suspicions and a fight will ensue.

Once inside, they will spot Mme. Tissier waltzing merrily (Glitterfang's rantings were inaudible over the sound of the orchestra). It is impossible to signal or call to her over the hubbub. Somebody will have to brave the dance floor, cut in on her waltz and inform her of what is going on. This will require a series of Social Graces and perhaps Performance totals, with at least a Full Success needed to latch onto the grand dame herself.

Once approached, Mme. Tissier will leave the floor immediately, gesuring for the characters to follow her. She takes them to her private sitting room. Tissier is an information broker and moves easily among those involved in covert missions. She is also a staunch French patriot and has no wish for Harkhuf's scheme to succeed. Once the characters explain their purposes, she will do what she can to help. Grabbing the register for the mooring field, she starts scanning for vessels likely to belong to the foul cultists. They include a Zeppelin called the Cleopatra, an Ornithopter (the Horus) and an Aerial Rotor Wing (the Sphinx). They are all parked in adjacent rows.

Tissier arranges to equip the adventurers with whatever weapons they require and escort them at haste to the specified mooring berths. The doorman will lead them down a side passage into an armoury, and then into a small garage. A speedy-looking clockwork automotive is being wound. Gesturing to the driver's seat, he waves them off with a "go fix the blighters, sirs!" Have our heroes generate some Piloting totals [say, two GD, one GR and another GD] as they dodge and swerve through the crowds.

If the characters have been acting swiftly and accurately, and generated more successes that failures on their piloting totals, they will arrive in time to see Walter, Gunther & co. boarding the Cleopatra [GD perception]. They may try to sneak aboard [GR stealth, need a full success], or confront the villains on the spot. If they're late, they'll have to steal an ornithopter or grab a mooring rope and climb up whilst dodging bullets.

As the players make their way aboard, Gunther and his men will move to confront them. There are eight Prussians and four Temple of Ra acolytes, one of whom is piloting the zeppelin. Let the duels begin, but give the players the opportunity to make some perception totals. The zeppelin is not heading towards the Bavaria. In fact, it seems to be hovering. If our heroes don't make Gunther aware of this, he will notice it once he is wounded to half health. He will demand to know why his orders are not being followed. Smart characters will realise (or generate Perception totals) that Gunther could be turned. If the characters are successful in their persuasions, Gunther will confront Walter, who draws a derringer and apologises, explaining that there is a greater evil to be wrought tonight. Gunther tells the Prussians to keep back, and his acolytes to be wary. Cleopatra will proceed towards its rendezvous with Harkhuf.

If the characters don't break the deadlock, Gunther will. Leaping at Walter, he yells for his men to follow him in the attack. Walter pulls his trigger - and his derringer misfires! Scrambling back to safety, he pulls the Amulet out from his shirt and frantically begins chanting. It will take two turns for Walter to complete the invocation. If he completes it, the air around the Amulet will shimmer for a moment, then he and it will vanish. Without the aid of the Amulet, Walter is powerless to escape.

If captured and questioned about Harkhuf's plans, all he can reveal is the story of Taimhotep and Amenemhab, the requirements for the Amulet and a male descendant of the prince. He also knows that the sacrifice must take place under the moon on the ground where Taimhotep was defeated - the central marketplace in old Cairo! There is a brief ritual to be performed, but the victim's blood must stain the Amulet and spill onto the ground for the binding spell to be broken. The sacrifice must take place at midnight under a full moon (which will be on Monday night).

The acolytes will give up as soon as Walter leaves or surrenders. The Prussians, if pressed, will fight until Gunther orders them to give up their weapons or six of their number are put out of the fight. Gunther (if alive) will be furious at his betrayal and clever characters may try to make an ally of him if they wish to stop Harkhuf.

CHAPTER FIVE

Never Deal With A Dragon

In which our brave heroes make some unlikely deals in order to pursue Harkhuf to his lair in Egypt. Also in which some strange alliances are made and a young boy rescued.

Once the players land their ship, they will be escorted by Mme. Tissier's guards to the mansion. Glitterfang is in a terrible state, and is demanding that no-one be allowed to leave until his property is returned. Before they are taken into his presence, they will be shown to a small sitting room, where the Falcon waits for them. Dressed comfortably in tight riding breeches and boots, she is holding a shirt up around her shoulders as one of Mme. Tissier's staff wraps a bandage around her midsection.

Once the appropriate introductions have been made, the Falcon congratulates the heroes on their courage and daring, and asks them if they were able to retrieve the item. If they were, she is clearly impressed, but asks them not to hand it over to Glitterfang just yet. She still wants revenge



on the man who dared try to steal from her, the greatest thief in all of France. She will ask one of the heroes to impersonate her in front of Glitterfang and to tell the dragon that the Amulet was lost. If his draconian excellence could grant but a week to locate the item, surely the Falcon could locate it again? She assures them that Glitterfang will be amenable to such an arrangement (it was in fact suggested by Mme. Tissier). If they were not able to retrieve the Amulet, her face will darken. She will ask them if they will help her retrieve it from the man who stole it from her - she has no interest in the Amulet itself, and is content to let the players have it, once she has had her revenge.

If they are unwilling to help a lady whose reputation has been slighted, or if the characters have the Amulet but intend to give it back to Glitterfang, she will make it clear that this is not an option. She informs our heroes that she will be forced to tell Glitterfang that they are the thieves who set upon her in the maze and overpowered the brave guests who attempted to defend her honour. If this does not suffice, she will casually note that she has many friends in low places, and would not hesitate to call them to her aid if our heroes need persuading.

In the next room, Glitterfang is angry, but doing a good job of controlling himself. Mme. Tissier has kept him relatively calm; it's clear from his demeanour however that Glitterfang would like nothing better than to reduce the manor and everyone in it to smoking ashes. After the introductions are over, Glitterfang will ignore everyone but the (false) Falcon. "You will return my property to me. Immediately!" If no-one is impersonating the Falcon, he will address the group generally.

If they have agreed to the Falcon's plan and do not hand the item over, Glitterfang will demand that they find it for him. He will give them one week in which to return his property before he himself takes steps to recover it. He has no interest in or sympathy for the plight of Pierre or the menace presented by Harkhuf, and will be completely unmoved by any sort of appeal designed to get him to willingly surrender the Amulet to anybody. It belongs to him, and as far as he's concerned, that's all there is to say.

If they attempt to give the Amulet back to Glitterfang, the lights in the room will go out as soon as it is handed back to him. There will be a number of shouts and shoves, and when the lights come on, everything is as it was - except that the Amulet is gone once more. The Falcon has struck again!

The dramatic entertainment effectively ends here, but a new one will begin as the underworld of France goes to war against our heroes. If the heroes have not made an enemy of the Falcon, she will ask them if they have any knowledge as to Harkhuf's destination. She can arrange passage to anywhere in the world, and hopefully, after interrogating Walter, they will know where to go. If they do not, they will have to find out. The best source of this information is Djehenty, who will give them the same information as Walter would have (last chapter).

If you wish to give characters who have alienated the Falcon the opportunity to complete this dramatic entertainment, let Djehenty contact them again. If it doesn't occur to ask Djehenty, an academic contact may be able to help, but around noon the next day (Saturday) Sister Michaelis will contact the players and give them the information they need. She will also have them followed and will tail them all the way to Egypt.

As soon as they have a destination, the Falcon will be able to arrange travel. They will go by overnight train to Marseilles, then by private vane clipper (the S.S. Samson) to Cairo. Barring complications, they will arrive on Monday evening. This gives them until midnight that night to find Harkhuf and foil his plan.

Cairo is an entirely different city from any in New Europa. The streets are full of hustle and bustle, true, but it is an hustle and bustle of another sort. Camels snort and spit as they shuffle down the streets, robe-clad Arabs haggle and trade at all hours and in all places, and everywhere is the smell of sweat, dust and dung. Yet this sprawling city has an unending supply of vigour and life. The Falcon has booked them lodgings in the Cairo Plaza hotel, a combination of New Europan sophistication and Middle-Eastern opulence. She will head off to make contact with some associates.

In the meantime, Harkhuf has been busy. He has booked a stall in the markets for Monday night, performing magic tricks for the crowd. This will give him access to the location where the sacrifice must take place and the Ka he requires. He is keeping Pierre captive in a hovel in the poorest section of the city, under constant watch from a few newly-recruited acolytes.

Our heroes will presumably head straight for the Marketplace (be certain to stress the immediacy of their task). Have the players generate Perception totals of increasing difficulty until a full success is achieved, whereupon Pierre will be spotted, surrounded by a number of burly-looking toughs. It will require a series of [GR] athletics totals to gain on him (the streets are very crowded). Each player may generate five totals; only full successes count, and they will determine in what order they arrive at the Marketplace. The toughs will eventually hustle Pierre off to Harkhuf's tent, where he will be killed at midnight. Have our heroes arrive in order of the number of Athletics successes gained, in one-turn intervals from highest to lowest.

Harkhuf's plan of action is as follows: Turn one - introduce his magic act to the crowd. Turn two - summon Pierre to the stall. Turn three - tie Pierre's legs to the table. Turn four - tie Pierre's arms to the table. Turn five - begin the spell of Summonation. Turn six - continue chanting. Turn seven - draw sacrificial dagger. Turn eight - kill Pierre and return Taimhotep to Egypt.

Our heroes must interrupt the ritual somehow; this shouldn't be too hard. Remember, however, that the Marketplace is full of people and that if a fight does break out, Harkhuf's only goal will be to complete the ritual. The police will arrive in six turns - they will arrest everyone and sort out the events later. For his part, Harkhuf has few mortal allies (four thugs, in fact), but will, at the first sign of disturbance, throw down a charm (interrupting his schedule for one turn) which will release a number of bound spirits double that of the heroes. Treat them as members of the Unseelie Host; they will arrive at the rate of two per turn. Needless to say, this will send the crowd into a frenzy.

Just as things are looking grim, or just as our heroes are about to defeat Harkhuf and his minions, Sister Michaelis will appear. She has been following our heroes and has come directly from the docks. If Harkhuf has completed the ritual, she will plant her feet and use her magical power to keep our heroes immune from the energy drain which is reducing the bystanders to unconsciousness. The Falcon will also be present, getting stuck in to Harkhuf's minions as the characters battle their way towards him. If he us unable to complete the ceremony he will try to flee, escaping the Marketplace by horseback until he can find a calm moment to use a Portal spell. If he escapes, our heroes have made themselves a bitter enemy.

If he succeeds in completing the ceremony Taimhotep will return. The consequences of this are left up to the Host, but some possibilities (depending on the desired course of future Adventure Entertainments) include Taimhotep embarking on a massive campaign to subjugate the world, cutting deals with the Adversary in Europe, becoming a local menace or even no menace at all, due to a change of heart, insanity or inexplicable loss of Faerie powers (thus requiring further quests with Harkhuf to restore her abilities).

In the aftermath of the evening's events, both the Falcon and Sister Michaelis will thank the heroes for their brave efforts. Michaelis will want the Amulet; however she will quickly sense that it is no longer magically active, and will hand it back as in such a state it is of no interest to the Order. The Falcon intends to have it returned to Glitterfang (she is a thief of honour, after all). The dramatic characters are at liberty to act as they choose, but remember that the Falcon is determined to see it returned to Glitterfang and has no few resources to ensure that this happens. For the time being at least, our brave heroes may rest. Fin.

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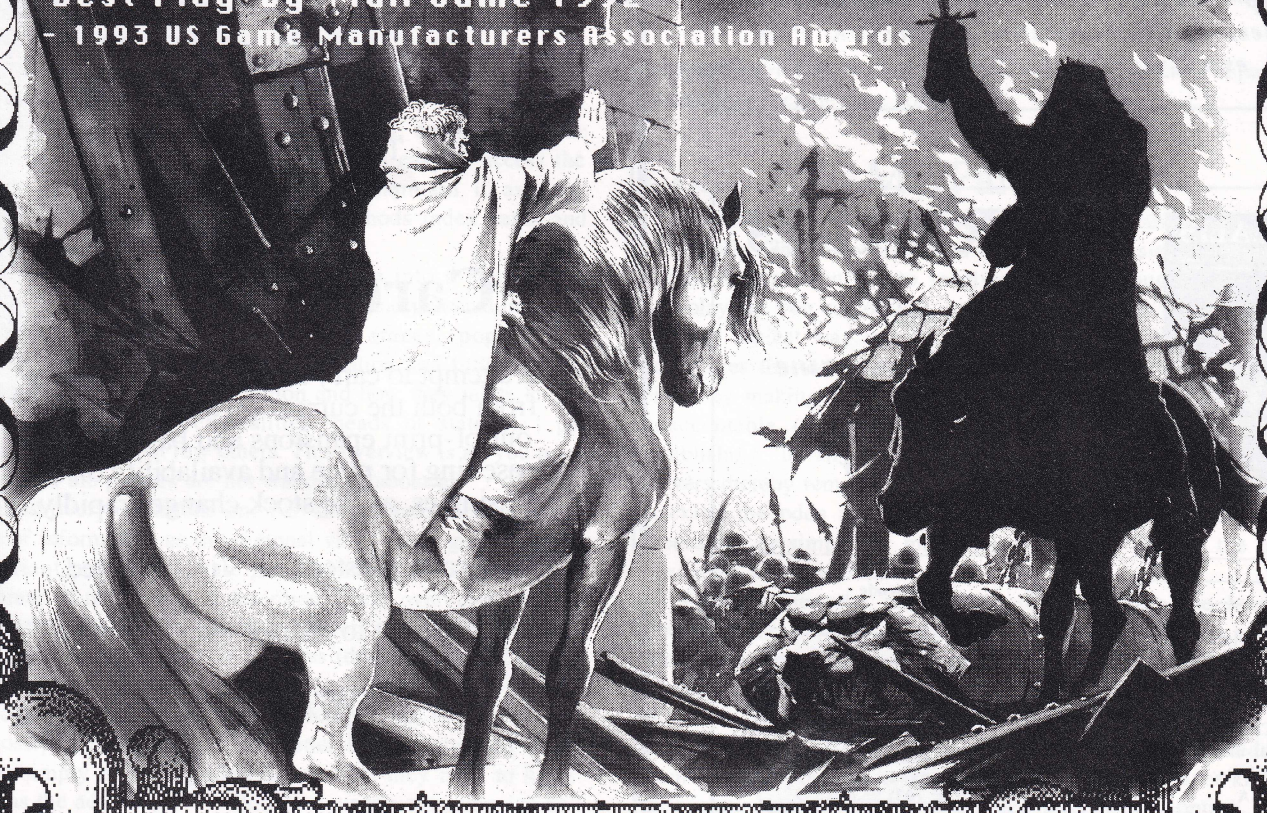

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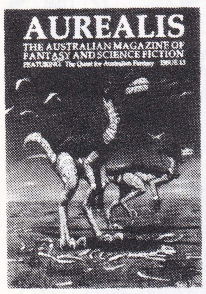

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The year is **2037** and mankind has expanded throughout the Solar System. Worlds are colonised, mining and prospecting occurs in the Asteroid belt and small moons, manufacturing plants orbit high above. Racing through the darkness are Corporate cargo ships, Navy gunships, Pirates and Free traders.

Wars have been fought in the deep reaches of space and tensions are high. Colonists have declared independence and revolts have been crushed. Cyborgs mine the hell world of Mercury and rule their own nation.

Beyond the solar system flies the Gateway station of Project Longreach, accelerating towards our nearest stellar neighbour.

Political Power

In 2037, the most powerful nation in space is the Re-United Kingdom (RUK) under the rule of Her Majesty Queen Victoria the Second. A proud but lonely figure, her life marred by personal tragedy, she rules her kingdom from New Buckingham Palace, an armoured space station that lies in Geosynchronous orbit above London. Her Royal Navy guards the precious Gateway stations and patrols the dark reaches of space.

The Commonwealth has been strengthened and many of the nations that once departed have rejoined. Major countries in the new Commonwealth are India, Canada, South Africa, Singapore, New Zealand and the twin nations of Australia, whose own Australian Navy rivals the Royal Navy in size and skill at deep space warfare.

Another major player is the United Nations, which has the official mandate across the solar system. United Nations space cruisers enforce international and interplanetary law and protect neutral zones from interference. They are responsible for maintaining law and promoting trade. All independent worlds and colonies have to be affirmed by the UN. Once affirmed, their independence is meant to be upheld by the UN forces. In actuality, the nations of the Commonwealth enforce UN policy, and in many cases, decide it.

Other nations and corporations struggle to gain and maintain power and resources in the turbulent worlds and societies forming in the depths of space.

The destruction of Tokyo and the Imperial City in the earthquake of 2027 meant a loss of both wealth and dynasty. Apart from the loss of the Emperor's line, Japan also lost much of it's key industry in the quake. To rebuild Tokyo, Japan was forced to call in all of it's massive foreign capital, consequently losing both it's substantial leverage in international monetary politics, and most of it's allies. The Japanese corps that survived fled for their space bases, both in orbit and on Luna and Mars. The Japanese are more than keen to reassert their place in international and interplanetary politics.

Europe (apart from the RUK) almost completely collapsed with the resultant Crash of 2027. It, like the United States, was so closely tied in with world trade that the fall took them down hard. Civil uprisings have crippled the European mainland, and a new Reich is rumoured to be growing in a desperate Germany.

America is now the Incorporated States of America. The American government is controlled (sometimes subtly, sometimes overtly) by a number of powerful corporations. The ISA and it's controlling corps suffered badly with the Crash of 27, and it now spends most of it's efforts keeping it's population under control. In that, it is failing rather badly. Anyone with money or influence has left the States and resides in one of the Orbitals or on Mars at Carter Base.

The Soviet nations survived the Crash better than most, mainly because they still had little to lose. Soviet space industry in fact prospered as more people struggled to leave Earth for the "better life" in space.

In Space, the independent worlds of Lunar and Mercury are spreading their influence. Mars and the Belt are striving to gain independence as nations, and there are constant rumours that revolt is not far off.

The People

Inhabitants of the worlds and colonies are a blend of cultures and motivations. There are the teeming masses of the Mars colonies, the anti-septic corporate O'Neill stations, the rugged and deadly Asteroid miners, the extended family Rovers who travel where they will, and the desperate people of a dying Earth.

Their occupations and lifestyles are manifold. There are Asteroid Miners, Cargo shippers, Pilots, Naval Personnel,

SOLSPACE TIME LINE

1997
Tycho/Luna colony founded

2002
Coppernicus/Luna colony founded

2012
Restoration of Queen Victoria the Second

2017
Hall Station established on Phobos

2021
NASA's Chryse base completed on Mars

2022
Start of the Edgerunner Wars.
Marriage of Queen Victoria II to Captain John P. Adams
O'Neill war fought between ESA & Highriders. ESA/Sov
Isidis base completed on Mars.

2023
Birth of Princess Eleanor to Queen Victoria II
Kirkwood station completed on Ceres. Four mining bases established on smaller asteroids.

2025
First use of virtuality net.
Discovery of Gateway technology by Professor Theodorsen.
Attempted colonial revolution at Isidis base fails.

2026
Chevoit Hills uprising.
Royal Marines quell revolt with minimal loss of life.
Martial law declared across UK.
First Gateway built in Lunar Orbit.

2027
NFU commences terrorist actions against UK Government.
Scotland and Ireland attempt to gain independence.

Corporate Soldiers, Algae farmers, Orbital Chemists, Free Traders, Pirates, Privateers, Arms dealers, Fixers, Smugglers, Terrorists and so on. They live in isolated ships in the inky blackness, on small asteroids hollowed out, on Orbiting colonies, in the massive Mars and Luna deep sited bases, on the moons of Jupiter.

The advances in Genetic manipulation, Cybernetics and NanoTech have created many new and different types of humanity.

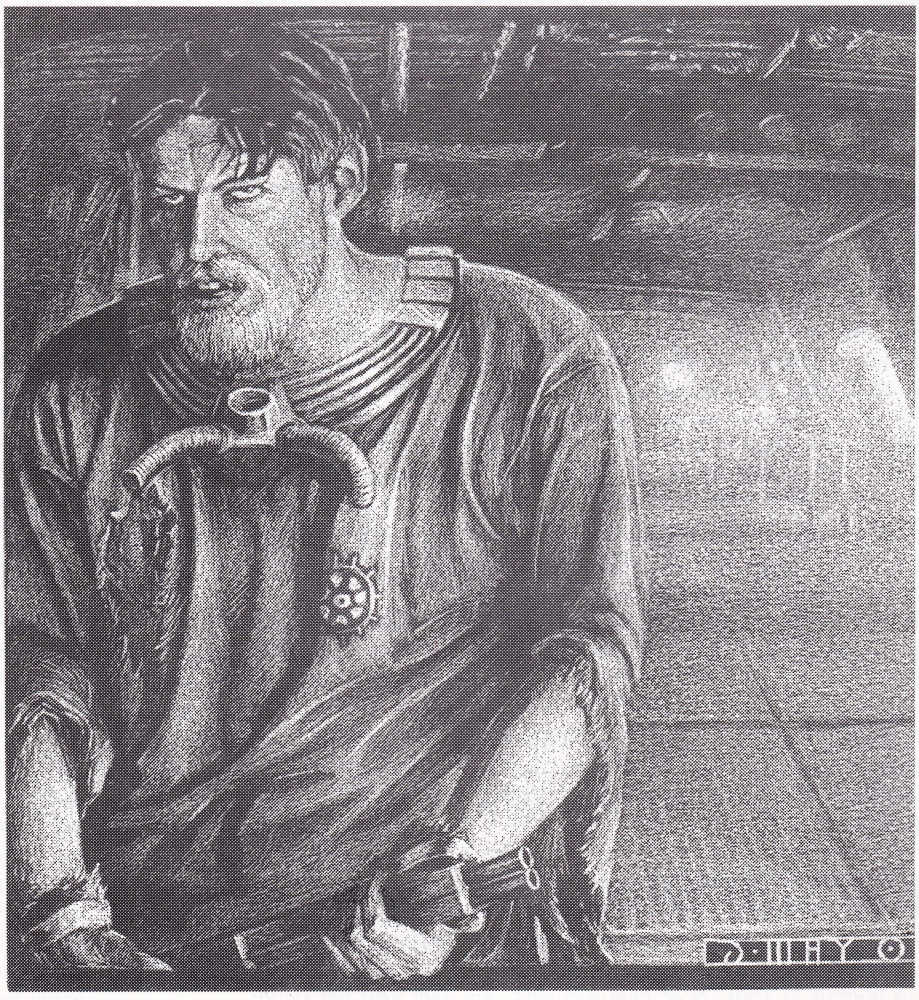
Cyborgs - On Mercury, and in isolated pockets around the system, Full-Body borgs are developing their own society. They welcome all full conversions, and even those with predominant replacements of organics. New members of the society are typically adults who have undergone the conversion, many on Mercury itself. Programs are rumoured to be well progressed in taking artificially fertilised embryos, raising them in special wombs, and then transplanting the young brains into cyborg bodies.

Cyberforms - Originally developed in the early 2020's, Cyberforms are an engineered amalgamation of organic brains and organs with cybernetic bodies. They are normally used as guards or scouts, or working in hazardous environments. Most people consider them only just intelligent, but there have been stories of Cyberforms with near human intellect and emotions. This causes the creatures to be generally feared unless under obvious control. Intelligent Cyberforms have been readily accepted into Cyborg culture on Mercury. The distinction between a created Cyberform and a human converted into a full borg is rapidly vanishing.

Martians - The human born on Mars of 2037 will grow to an average height of 2m tall with a slender build and dark skin. Specially engineered nano-viruses keep them as strong as humans from full Earth gravity, and they are far more resistant to extremes of temperature and air pressure.

Jovians - Closer to the Earth norm, Jovians tend to be dark skinned and have standard builds. They do use nano-viruses to protect themselves from the high radiation levels, in particular their reproductive organs.

Spacers - The spacers are experiencing the greatest variations from the human norms in appearance and mentality. Some, such as the Asteroid Highriders and Rovers, are growing with long slender bodies and prehensile feet. They utilise nano-tech



"Do you want to know what my definition of a free-market economy is?

If you can take it from some other poor drek-head without getting yourself caught or fragged by the original owner, the UN Marshalls or the RUK Space Marines, well then it's free..."

Edgar Kilbain
Rover

viruses and genetic manipulation to give themselves stronger bones and muscles, radiation protection and rumoured mental abilities. Some of the manipulations have been engineered into the basic genetic code, so they breed true.

Solar Roamers - Few in number and falling somewhere between the Cyborgs and Spacers, they have had their brains and essential organs grafted into space ships and roam across space. The Roamers finance their ongoing needs by ferrying cargoes and passengers around the system. Some are employed by Corps and Governments to undertake exploration missions around the system that other regular crewed ships wouldn't take. Some are military ships, run by an organic brain but with a full military crew. These ships are amongst the deadliest fighting vessels ever built, with human mind driving ship systems at computer speeds.

V-Dreamers - The prospect of life in the Virtuality Net (V-Net) has appealed to many since it's inception. Now, many have taken up that dream. Their bodies are kept "alive" in special tanks (supercooled, fed and maintained by automated machines and nano-tech viruses in their bodies) while their minds are permanently logged into the V-Net. Most people who undergo this are either old and rich, or rich and just want to spend all their time in the V-net. Some simply run through endless simulations, while others earn money by performing data work. They are often better at this than still-living Runners because they can stay in the V-net permanently.

Earthers - Born on Earth, the human of 2037 is still the same basic shape and comes in the old variety of colours and beliefs. Despite the increasing numbers of modified humans, Earthers and their offspring are still the most common life form in the Solar System. Earthers who travel to space are often extensively checked for viruses, diseases and so on before being allowed into the new planets.

The Planets

Mankind has come a long way since the beginnings of space travel, when half a dozen astronauts returning from a two-week shuttle mission was a world-shattering event. The establishment of the Theodorsen Gateways has now brought space travel within the reach of the "average" man and woman. Almost 10 million people now call space their home. Luna and Mars are certainly the most populated, with 4 million on the moon and its surrounding orbital space stations, and another 2.5 million on Mars and its moons. The vast economic potential of the Asteroid Belt has turned it into the California Gold fields of the 21st Century, and estimates put the current population at 1.5 million.

Luna - a trip to the moon is now as commonplace as any form of travel was in the late 20th Century. Many Earthers now use the moon as a holiday destination, or to acclimatise themselves to the idea of living in space on a more permanent basis. Dozens of cities dot the Lunar landscape, providing housing and other facilities for workers, scientists, military personnel and visitors.

Whole populations have been moved to the moon over the past few years, relocated in an effort to alleviate some of the overcrowding problems experienced on Earth. The four Luna cities of Glasgow, Liverpool, Belfast and York are the most recent examples of this, built in 2033 to house over a million people, refugees from the shattered cities the Luna colonies were named after.

Mars - the development of the Theodorsen Gateways did much to speed up the colonisation of Earth's nearest "habitable" planet. Only a remote scientific outpost 10 years ago, Mars now boasts one of the largest off-Earth cities in the Solar System, Olympus Base. With a population of almost one and a half million, Olympus Base stands as both a symbol of what man has achieved in the last 10 years, and an indicator of the way in which society is likely to react to long-term space settlement. For those who live and work in the Mars Colonies, life is hardly the stuff of dreams, but it sure beats what was left behind.

The Martian Assembly is comprised of members elected from the colonies and bases established on Mars. These representatives have towed the party lines of their respective governments and corporations in the past. Now there is a new unrest - the people of Mars are demanding their own government, free from outside control. Earth is not willing to let this jewel go, and so the unrest is turning into riots. The computer models are predicting civil war within the year.

Time Line Cont.

civil and financial chaos. Mercury base established. First solar power stations commence transmitting power to Earth orbit. Mars Gateway completed in orbit.

2028
Captain Adams and Princess Eleanor killed during attack on Buckingham Palace. Queen Victoria is injured but recovers. Olympus base completed on Mars. RUK Naval Base "New London" completed on Phobos.

2029
Project LongReach launched from Mars.

2030
Europa colony founded on Jovian moon system. Mining bases established on various moons.

2031
First operational Bio-suits developed on Ceres. Polar city established on the northern polar ice-cap, Mars.

2032
Jovian Corp War ("Moon War") fought.

2033
Asteroid Gateway completed at Ceres. K471 Massacre - belt mining installation containing 80 space miners attacked and destroyed by pirates, three weeks before RUK Naval Base "Yorkshire" completed on Ceres.

2035
Belt War fought between pirates and RUK Fleet in asteroid belt. RUK Flagship *Victory* disappears without trace during conflict.

2036
Privateer Charter signed by all major space nations. This allows independent actions against Pirates and the arming of Merchant vessels for self defence.

2037
Present time.

Asteroid Belt - life in the asteroids of 2037 is dangerous and dirty, with the chances of great wealth offset by the much higher chances of a nasty death. Many of the smaller mining conglomerations (some as small as one person) have mortgaged their great-grandchildren to finance their operations in the Belt, and are consequently prepared to do anything to protect or establish their claims.

The Belters are a mixed bag of people. Highriders and the more infamous Rover clans make up the largest population groups. Mixed amongst them are Earthers, Martians and the Jovians. Cyborgs of all types are feared, particularly after the rumours of Mercury-funded Pirate ships.

The Belt is also home to the infamous Prison Mines. Amongst the Belt there is upwards of 50 large prison mines. These have between 500 and 1000 prisoners. The largest of all is Andrei Base, a facility of 5000 prisoners and 50 guards and techs. Life in the Prison Mines is brutal and deadly. Few survive longer than 3 to 4 years, and those that are paroled are typically broken men and women.

Mercury - Mercury was never considered a world suitable for colonisation. However, the development of human augmentation technology, perhaps best displayed by the creation of cyborgs, meant that Mercury's potential as a source of immense solar power could be fully exploited.

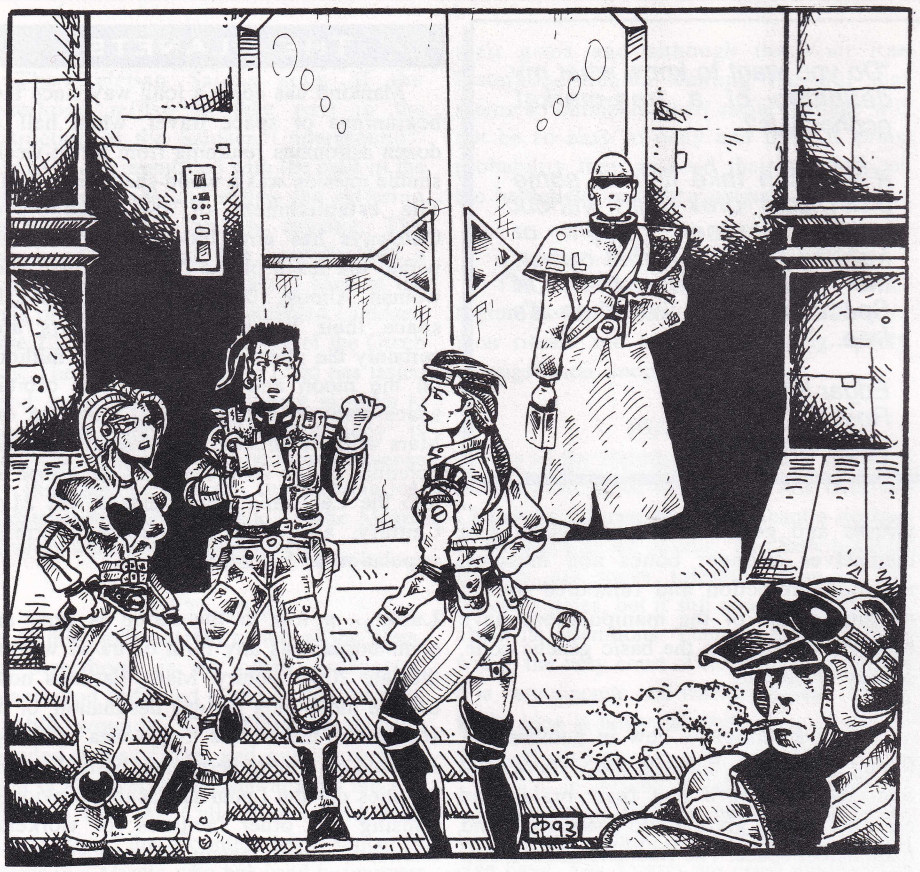
The "One Day" war of 2032, when the solar reflectors around Mercury were refocussed to destroy a UN transfer station in Earth orbit, gave complete independence to the now completely cyber-populated planet.

There are grave concerns about the future intentions of the Mercury colony, and the various cyberforms which inhabit it. Many rumours exist about Mercury-funded pirate raids, cyborgs posing as humans and even humans being captured by cyborgs for experimentation and as contestants in the famous Cyber Warriors games.

Jupiter - completion of the Jovian Gateway in Europan orbit in 2034 heralded the opening of the Jovian colonies to full trade with Earth and the Mars and Luna colonies. It also brought a new influx of miners and colonists, which quickly overloaded the facilities available.

The lack of living space has seen a rush of new bases being built, nearly all deep sited to avoid the dangerous radiation. Food production has been a major concern in the system, and several new research centres have been established to develop viable lines.

Jovians have embraced life in the harsh worlds with courage and enthusiasm. The people are eager to succeed and will allow very little to stop them.



The Technology

Deep space travel relies on the Theodorsen Gateways to allow jumps between stations around Luna, Mars, The Belt and Jupiter. In 2025, noted British scientist Patrick Theodorsen discovered the principle of opening a portal between the known physical world and a newly discovered "hyperspatial" realm. The exact nature of this new realm is still under intense scientific research. However, the practical aspects of the discovery have been in use for nearly 10 years.

By building a Gateway station in space, ships can be transported across stellar distances in a fraction of the time taken by realspace travel. Two Gateways are required, one to send the ship on it's way and one to receive the incoming ship and "gate" it back into realspace. Journeys that would normally take 1 to 2 years by conventional spaceships can now be completed in about one week.

Currently the system is only usable within the Solar system, as so far only 4 gates have been built to transport and receive ships. One orbits Luna, another orbits Mars, the third orbits Jupiter and the fourth has just been built in the Belt. A fifth Gateway station is in operation (Project LongReach), but it is being accelerated towards Proxima Centauri in order to open up the Earth's first interstellar path to another system.

The ships are of all sizes, from the enormous Cargo freighters to the tiny Interceptor craft of the military. Space weapons include all types of missiles and rockets, mass drivers and gauss guns, lasers and remote mines.

Stations and colonies use highly efficient reactors and solar collectors to power their life support and defences. Remote controlled weapons stand ready to defend their existence, and semi-sentient computers aid humanity to take and protect lives.

Onwards to Adventure

The scene is set, but we've only just touched the tip of the ice-berg. The next few issues will reveal more about the worlds of 2037, and many of the issues and concerns that currently lie beneath the glossy high-tech surfaces of the deep space cruisers, orbiting stations and planetary bases will begin to come to light.

Future background issues will highlight more about the RUK, the new Commonwealth and the various planets within the SolSpace campaign setting.

Next issue, however, takes us to Mars, the Red Planet, for the first SolSpace scenario. We look forward to seeing you then, dirt-siders.

AFTERMATH

FORWAO's SECRET REPORT TO HIGH KING CAEMAROU

By Lee Sheppard and Colin Taber

Your Majesty, you will have seen my earlier report concerning the siege and near-destruction of Vangre, one of the chief mercantile cities of the Heletian League, and of our subsequent efforts to repair the damage caused to the Elven quarter of Aiman-Ro by the Fletlander residents of that city. You will also be aware that the siege allowed us to observe at close hand the tactics and defensive strategies used by Vangre's forces, observations that could prove most beneficial in the future.

In addition to this, the siege has also revealed much about the character of the Heletians. While their militia and cabalists fought with valour, the general populace displayed it's expected selfishness, cowardice, gullibility and ignorance - traits all too common in humans and wonderfully exploitable. In fact, without the efforts of the Cabal, I doubt that Vangre could have withstood the Ogre attack at all.

There have been strong indications that the Vangre population has developed a new-found respect for those who practice the Art. In fact, I have been told that the Inquisitors sent to Vangre have not found their task as easy as they had first hoped. The Vangre chapter of the Cabal are again moving their activities underground, something the grateful population is aiding them in, regardless of the coin and blessings the Church of Baimiopia offer as reward for informants. As a consequence, we would be well advised to continue our feigned assistance to those who have the potential to do us the most harm, when we decide to move against the Heletians.

Vangre was not the only city besieged by the Ogres however, and a study of the reports sent to me by our spies in Portre, Baimiopia and Qebelle has proved quite revealing.

Argentia suffered for the ignorance and overconfidence of it's leaders, and the lack of any real magical power, a result of years of Cabalist persecution by the Church of Baimiopia.

When the Ogres attacked, the initial response was to man the walls and simply wait out the siege, at least until reinforcements arrived from Baimiopia. It now appears that the Benefice of Argentia was not happy with this simple, yet



appropriate, defensive posture. Four days into the siege, in what can only be imagined as a fit of religious lunacy, the Benefice ordered all of his Des Sankta Glavos knights to leave the city and face the Ogres in open ground, perhaps convinced that his soldiers would be armed with divine powers to defeat their foes.

Those few survivors that were rescued from Argentia after it was razed have revealed that the Des Sankta Glavos appeared to fight well at first, so well that some of the city's defenders also left the safety of the walls to join the battle. It appears that the initial Ogre retreat was just a feint however. The Ogres suddenly turned on their attackers, quickly overwhelming the Des Sankta Glavos and forcing their way into the city before the stunned defenders could react in time to properly secure the gates they had so foolishly opened.

Once the Ogres had managed to secure a way into the city, it was only a matter of a hours before Argentia succumbed. Of the 15,000 human inhabitants of the city, only 2,500 women and children survived.

The relief force from Baimiopia managed to intercept the Ogre wounded who were trailing their victorious army, making its way back to the Darner mountains. After dispatching the wounded they pursued the trail of the retreating force into the foothills. I managed to obtain a copy of a report from a Des Sankta Glavos patrol that tried to follow the Ogre army to its ultimate destination. The report states that they came across a large mountain valley, some two days ride into the Heletian Spine. There they found evidence of a huge battle, with thousands of dead littering the valley floor. It would appear that the returning Ogre army was itself ambushed and destroyed by a different Ogre army, as the patrol found evidence of Ogre tribes not present at the Argentia siege being in the valley battle.

The Heletians have had nowhere near as much conflict with the Ogres as the Burvois have, and my contact in Qebelle thinks that it may have been the rogue Clans of the Night (see Realms Issue 12) that were responsible for the ambush and subsequent carnage. How ironic - the Ogres' first victorious army for some 200 years, wiped out by their own brothers.

This event raises some particular concerns - that the Ogres clans of the Darner mountains and the Heletian Spine could have managed to organise themselves to mount four separate, yet simultaneous, attacks is amazing enough, but for the various Clans of the Night to also organise themselves into an army of sufficient size to destroy the one that besieged Argentia (estimates put that army at 12,000 to 14,000 warriors), borders on the supernatural. Even given the crushing defeats that the Ogres have just faced, we shall have to continue to watch the mountains.

The ruling council of Portre showed none of the stupidity or prejudices of their compatriots in Argentia, involving the Cabal in the defence of Portre from the very beginning of the siege. Even so, it would appear that the attack on Portre may only have been conducted to try and draw reinforcements away from Vangre, for when initially confronted by a large magical presence on the walls, the besieging Ogre army quickly decided against a direct confrontation, playing a waiting game instead, only making occasional attacks to test for weak points. After fourteen days, the Ogre army withdrew completely, quickly returning to their mountain strongholds.

What is most interesting about the siege though, is the ruling councils attitude to the Cabal. It has been passed on to me that no less than three admitted Cabalists actually sit on the ruling council of Portre. I also understand that there is a motion soon

to be put to the council, a motion that will declare Portre a city of "free denomination", namely that the worship of Gods other than Krienta will soon become legal, as long as the majority of the council approve the application for construction of each new church or temple (which will still mean that the Kults of the Horned God will have to continue to operate in secret). I expect that I shall soon be receiving a number of interesting reports from our agent in Portre.

The defence of Pont De Faselle, or more specifically Boureux Castle, showed only that the Ogres had learned little from the past 400 years of war with the Burvois, who were alerted to the impending siege by their Arbohalae scouts.

Once prepared, the knights of Boureux were able to give their full might and attention to the Ogres. The Ogres' attacks against the walls of Boureux were like the ocean waves striking a stone breakwater, and just as ineffective. The Burvois counter-attacks, however, were ruthlessly efficient, with the heavy cavalry of the Burvois Paladins decimating many Ogre units, and Burvois foot-soldiers wreaking their own savage toll. Little magical combat was said to occur throughout the siege, probably because the Burvois found that it was not needed. That said, our previous indications are that, had they actually been required, the Burvois have a powerful force of Cabalists at their disposal. Their regular forces have managed to fend off all previous Ogre attacks however, so the Burvois Cabal remains a relatively unknown quantity. This ignorance on our part cannot be allowed to continue.

So what of the Ogres? Estimates put the total Ogre forces involved in the four sieges at around 50,000, far more than any of us had actually imagined existed. Apart from the success in Argentia, and to some extent Vangre, the attacks were a failure. Less than 15,000 Ogres may have survived the offensive, although this figure could have been much higher had it not be for the treachery of the Clans of the Night who also massacred the retreating Ogres from Vangre.

Indications are that this was a last desperate attempt by the Ogre race to halt the advance of the Human races into their few remaining territories. In that, it may have partially succeeded, but at a great cost. Even given the uncertainties of the strength of the surviving Ogres, and the apparently growing power of the Clans of the Night, I cannot see them proving any long term threat to us.

It is 515 EK, and winter is almost passed ✪

Vangre Honour Roll

Gilbert of Karlamar, Mercenary,
Hugh Capet of Qebelle, Mercenary
Mms Tate, Priestess of Rosemaigne
Jacques Garotte of Tyon, Cutpurse...

If you have been following the event of the Ogre Campaign and the Siege of Vangre in Unae over the past three issues then you will be aware that Australian Realms wants to hear of your player characters' exploits in the valiant defence of the city. If you have played these adventures please forward the *name, class/career* of your adventurer plus a brief description of their most *memorable moments* during the siege to:

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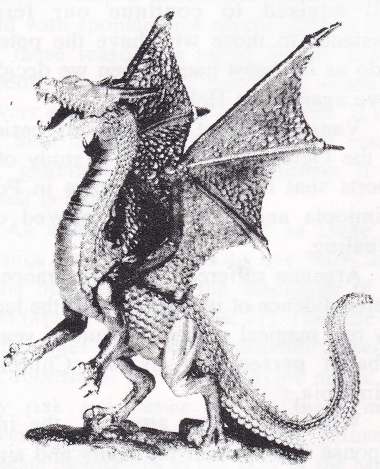

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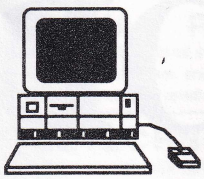

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FOR GOLD, GLORY & GOD

The Growth of Commerce from Ancient Greece to the British Empire

By Brad Martin

For millennia mankind had practised hunting and gathering or subsistence agriculture to survive. Interaction between peoples was limited, as either the land provided enough, or it did not. Only with the development of urbanisation was it possible for a division of labour to emerge, and for some people to develop skills with which to create a surplus of food or goods, which could then be sold or exchanged for surpluses produced by other peoples. This trading in goods and services broke down the geographical, language, and cultural barriers that isolated tribes, leading to the growth of states and empires.

Any referee who seeks to emulate realistic economies and societies in their role-playing campaign must understand the nature of commerce and why people undertake this activity.

GREECE AND ROME

The invention of coinage by the Lydians of Asia Minor in the seventh century BC greatly facilitated the exchange of goods and materials. Coins were struck from rare metals; at first from iron, then later from copper, silver and gold. The rarity of these metals gave the coins an intrinsic, internationally recognised value. The use of coinage thus removed the necessity of both parties to an exchange having to physically transfer bulky goods.

The search for markets caused some cities to set up trading outposts. Many of these developed into colonies which then helped to spread Greek culture throughout the Mediterranean world. Corinth was the first city to develop a significant trading empire. Its pottery was to be found as far afield as Britain and Egypt. Athens also developed an extensive trade network. Her main exports were manufactured goods, olive oil, and wine. In return she imported grain, iron and slaves.

The slave trade became increasingly important for the Greek city states. Native chieftains in Illyria, Scythia and Thrace collected the slaves and delivered them into the hands of Greek slavers. These were then transported to holding areas such as the island of Delos in the Aegean, where they were kept until sold. Eventually the Greek cities were transformed into slave economies with up to a quarter of the population being slaves. The slaves were considered to be property, under the absolute control of their masters. They did all the dirty and menial tasks, leaving the citizens free to concentrate on politics, warfare, and culture.

The growth of Rome took place over several centuries. Romans borrowed heavily from the Greeks, and like the Greeks before them, looked down on commerce. The virtuous life of a man of quality was one in which he did no "work"; the ownership of land determined one's position in society. Commerce was a means by which land could be acquired, but the parvenu would still be of inferior status.

The ships that brought their cargoes of grain into the port of Ostia returned to North Africa or Egypt empty - Rome had nothing to export. It lived off its empire. Vast sums of money and numerous slaves poured into Rome as it conquered one nation after another. After most of the known world had been absorbed the aristocracy gained its wealth by governing the new provinces. Agents denuded the Sahara of wild animals to supply the arenas. Traders travelled as far as China to bring back the luxuries demanded by the elite. As long as this inflow continued there was no incentive to invest in manufacturing or agriculture.

Rome is famous for its roads, but these had a purely military use. Land transport, by four-wheeled wagon or pack animal, was slow, expensive and dangerous. A journey to market of more than 30 miles usually resulted in the draft animals consuming more in fodder than they transported. Most trade in the ancient world was therefore by sea, in small sailing ships of less than 150 tons. Navigation was traditionally restricted to coastal waters, and poor sea-going qualities limited voyages to the summer half year.

There was little recognition that investment in agricultural improvements or public infrastructure would increase productivity in the long-term. The nobility were only concerned about the immediate. To maintain the glory of their rank against "new men" the elite had to continually display their wealth. This was primarily done by spontaneous gifts of public buildings such as bath-houses and shrines, gladiator fights, public banquets, and festivals. This wasteful competition was unsustainable.

Long before the end of the western Roman empire there was a tendency towards self-sufficiency, and thus a decline in trade. Barbarian invasions made travel more dangerous, increased taxation by a government desperate to strengthen defences discouraged the generation of wealth, and towns declined reducing the market for surpluses.

THE VIKINGS

The Vikings are excoriated as brutal and bloody pagan raiders. This is only the partial truth, for the Vikings were also explorers, settlers, traders, townsmen, and kings. Driven by overpopulation, a sense of adventure and a desire for profit the men of Scandinavia began leaving their northern homelands in the late eighth century. They travelled throughout Europe, from Ireland to Spain, from Constantinople to Paris, and onto the fringes of the known world - North America in the west and the Khazar Khanate in the east.

The success of the Vikings was mainly due to their navigation and ship-building skills. Operating without a compass, the Vikings were nevertheless able to undertake cross-ocean voyages, using dead reckoning and celestial navigation techniques. The famous Viking Longship was typically a wooden vessel with a curved keel and a hull built of overlapping planks, about 18 metres long and 2.6 metres in breadth. The main source of power was the oar. This enabled the longship to operate in any weather. The



shallow draft let the longship penetrate up rivers, and it was easily beached. The crew of thirty served as both sailors and soldiers.

Initially destructive of the monasteries and open trading centres the Vikings ultimately stimulated the growth of commerce. Rulers in France, Germany and England were compelled to organise permanent armies and to fortify towns to defend against the raiders. Towns built for defensive purposes attracted merchants and artisans as secure places in which to live and work. They also served as a focal point for the surrounding rural community, hosting the local weekly market. Urbanisation was thus brought to areas such as Ireland, Russia, and the Baltic shores, which had not experienced Roman civilisation. Viking traders travelling down the great Dniepr and Volga rivers in Russia linked into the great caravan trade routes to Persia and China. They exchanged slaves, furs, wax, and honey for silver, silk, wine, jewellery, and spices. With the west the Vikings exchanged iron, fish, timber and hides for wheat, woollens, salt, tin, pottery, and glass.

VENICE

The growth of towns and of a money economy in Europe created a demand for luxury goods. Situated at the head of the Adriatic, and protected by its lagoon, Venice developed into the major entrepot for trade between East and West. She obtained a privileged status at Constantinople, and despite the differences in religion, with the Muslim ports of the Levant and Egypt. The silks and spices obtained in the east in exchange for European metals and manufactured goods were shipped to Venice, then by overland caravans through the Alpine passes to Germany. Venice prohibited any foreign traders from using its trade routes, enforcing this with a large fleet of oar-powered galleons which dominated the Mediterranean. The kingdoms of Europe could not contest this monopoly for from the twelfth century they were dependent on the Venetian fleet to supply the Crusader kingdoms.

THE MERCHANT BANKERS

The growth of commerce persuaded many noblemen to leave the countryside to live within the walls of towns. In northern Italy this migration formed a new class of citizens outside the traditional social hierarchy of cleric, landlord and peasant. The bourgeoisie formed themselves into communes and declared their independence from the old feudal order.

Increased trade between cities caused people to realise that the method of payment for goods by transferring coins from buyer to seller was inefficient. Using their knowledge of the ancient world gained through the Renaissance the merchants of the Italian cities developed the system known as "book transfer in the bank". The merchant-bankers recorded in their books the transfer of money (through new instruments such as the contract and the bill of exchange) from one client's account to another. This was the beginning of the concept of "paper money".

Clients left money on deposit with the merchant-bankers, and rather than leave these funds idle, the bankers began extending credit at legally recognised rates of interest. The main borrowers were kings and the great lords of western Europe. As well as earning interest the bankers secured valuable trading privileges in the wool and cloth trade from England and Flanders.

THE MEDICI

The Medici are famous as the ruling dynasty of the central Italian city of Florence. They gained their wealth and hence their power from banking. The Medici bank was founded in 1397 and had branches in Rome, Venice, Milan, Pisa, Avignon, Geneva, Bruges and London. Most profits however came from its role as the Pope's banker. The profits were then loaned to the government of Florence which was constantly in search of funds to finance its expansionary policies against its neighbours. In just two years the Medici advanced the massive sum of 560,000 florins (at an interest rate of 30%). Soon the very solvency of Florence came to depend on the Medici. Through a web of patronage and alliances they built up a strong faction and, after Florence lost a war with Lucca, the Medici called in their debts and forced the ruling oligarchy into exile. The Medici ruled from behind the scenes, using their financial power to ensure that suitable people were elected to government positions, and co-opting potential rivals through patronage and marriages. Only the French invasion of 1494 broke their hold on power.

THE NEW WORLD

1492 saw the fall of the Kingdom of Granada and the end of Muslim control in Spain. But the Catholic monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella were not satisfied with the conversion of the Moors and Jews of Iberia, they wanted to convert new peoples to Christianity. The Orient promised to be the most likely target. Financed by Italian bankers the joint-monarchs sponsored Cristobal Colon's voyage of conquest.

Colon was a skilled navigator and had extensive maritime experience in the Mediterranean, the North Atlantic and along the coast of west Africa. He believed that he could discover a direct route to the East by sailing westwards from Spain. His was a divine mission, yet the desire for the gold, jewels and spices of the Indies was always close to the surface of his thoughts. One of his first acts on arriving in the Caribbean was to set the natives to digging for (non-existent) gold. Colon forced himself and his men to believe that the islands he had discovered were Japan, and that the island of Cuba was the Asian mainland. He and the monarchs hoped to set up a factory on the islands from which to trade with nearby Asia. The



profits from this trade were to be used to finance the conquest of Jerusalem.

The three motives of commerce - gold, glory and god - are most definitely revealed in the activities of the conquistadors that followed in the footsteps of Colon. The Florentine Amerigo Vespucci's discoveries convinced Europe that the new lands were not part of Asia but a New World. Others discovered that this new world was filled with many peoples. The advanced American civilisations of the Aztecs and Incas were overthrown for their treasure-houses of gold, and their peoples enslaved. Montezuma is said to have asked Cortez why the strangers had such a hunger for gold, and Cortez is said to have replied that Spaniards "had a disease about the heart, for which the only cure was gold." The conquistadors carved out vast empires and forced the Indians to mine silver, work plantations, and to build churches and public buildings.

All trade with the New World had to go through the Spanish port of Seville, which prospered greatly. Yet Spain could not meet the colonies' demands for manufactures, and German and Genoese merchants benefited most. The vast inflow of silver was not invested productively, mostly going on wasteful court display, warfare, and to repay Italian and Dutch bankers.

THE SPICE TRADE

Whilst the Spanish were busy conquering the New World, the Portuguese painstakingly pioneered a trade route to the East by the Cape of Good Hope. Alfonso d'Albuquerque carried the war between the Iberians and the Moors to the Indian Ocean. Gunpowder and superior maritime technology allowed the Portuguese to disrupt Arab trade, severing the Spice route to the Mediterranean, and thus breaking Venice's monopoly on this rich commerce.

The Portuguese then worked to redirect the Spice trade route around the Cape to Europe. When Vasco da Gama was asked what had brought him to India, he replied "the search for Christians and Spices". Missionaries such as the Jesuit Francis Xavier certainly brought Christianity to India, the Malay Peninsula and Japan, whilst merchants set up trading posts. The principal commodity gained from India was pepper; from Ceylon came cinnamon; mace, nutmeg, and cloves came from the Moluccas - the legendary Spice Islands; and ginger from Malabar. Magellan's ship Victoria was the first to bring a cargo of cloves directly to Europe, where it sold at a profit of 2500%. The Portuguese allied with the local Sultans to maintain high prices by establishing a trade monopoly and restricting exports.

For decades the Iberian monopoly of trade with the New World and the Spice Islands resulted in their dominance of European commerce. The example of Iberia was not however ignored. New mercantile powers such as England and the Netherlands emerged in north-western Europe.

Increase in population growth from C16th increased the demand for grain. This opportunity was seized by the Dutch. They were the first to develop a purpose-built ocean-going boat (the "flyboat") which, when combined with cheap freight rates, allowed them to gain control of the bulk trade in corn and timber from the Baltic. The new merchant elite spent some of their profits on social advancement, but they were also willing to risk their capital overseas. The Netherlands revolted from Spanish control, and in 1596 a Dutch fleet was sent to Sumatra to challenge the Portuguese spice monopoly. By 1598 they were dispatching a yearly average of twelve ships to the East and had displaced the Portuguese from Indonesia.

Voyages to the Baltic could be undertaken by individual merchants or groups of investors, but longer voyages into the dangerous waters of Asia or the Americas required greater resources. In 1602 twelve groups of Dutch investors amalgamated into the United East India Company, which had a fixed capital base and an independent organisation, and shares which could be traded on the new Amsterdam Bourse. The Dutch demonstrated that a people without natural resources could prosper purely through acting as middlemen facilitating commercial relations.

The replacement of a Portuguese with a Dutch monopoly did not result in a fall in prices, in fact it resulted in the opposite. In England the price of pepper rose from two shillings and eightpence to eight shillings per pound. Such prices soon had English merchants sailing eastwards to in turn break the Dutch spice monopoly. They formed their own East India Company, and in 1603, Captain James Lancaster returned to London with 1,000,000 pounds of pepper which he had purchased for less than sixpence a pound!

THE SLAVE TRADE

Disease, starvation, and overwork caused the population of New Spain to decline from 25 million to 1 million by 1605. The demand for labour could only be satisfied by importing slaves from Africa.

A triangular slave trade route soon developed. Ships set out from their European home ports loaded with rum, arms, and cloth, for factories established along the coast of west Africa. Their cargo was traded to local chieftains in exchange for slaves collected from interior tribes. The slaves were chained together and closely packed into the ship's hull. On reaching the Americas, the survivors (an estimated 20% died during the voyage) were off-loaded into holding pens where they awaited sale. The ship was then loaded with the products of the slaves' labour on the plantations - sugar, tobacco, and cotton - and returned to its home port. The slave-trade became the most lucrative commerce in the world, easily outstripping the spice-trade.

The human cost of this trade was enormous. It has been estimated that more than 15 million slaves were transported to the Americas. The economies of Brazil, the islands of the Caribbean, and of southern North America, were transformed into slave-economies of a nature unseen since the time of the Roman Empire.

THE WHITE MAN'S BURDEN

The Slave-Trade came to be dominated by the English. Its vast profits enabled them to use sea-power to dominate the world's oceans, and to kick-start the industrial revolution. Industrialisation caused a shift in commercial practices. Spices, sugar, and slaves became less important, to be replaced by increased demand for raw materials such as cotton, wool, jute, dye stuffs, and vegetable oils for industry. Unlike the more exotic products, these new raw materials were not available just for the collection, they had to be grown on a large scale. Industrialised Europe thus had to send out large numbers of skilled settlers to organise plantation agriculture. The existing social systems were transformed as small farmers lost their lands to commercial farmers. Small trading outposts became colonies with large European populations.

Industrialisation also meant that Europe produced far more manufactures than it could consume, and thus the surplus had to be sold to the rest of the world. The colonies therefore had to be made into markets for the European goods. A money economy was introduced, people were made into wage-labourers, and local industries were curtailed.

Just as the conquistadors justified their conquests, the European colonists of the nineteenth century justified their commercial imperialism by saying that they were civilising the natives by making them good Christians. The young men of Europe were encouraged as Rudyard Kipling wrote, to take up "The White Man's burden":

Go bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives' need
To seek another's profit
And work another's gain.
Take up the White Man's burden
And reap his old reward
The blame of those ye better
The hate of those ye guard.

Each nation struggled to carve out a colonial empire. Apart from the profits from agriculture and mining, the ready access for manufactures gained by having a captive market, the sense of superiority gained from seeing their own religion and race dominating native peoples, nations competed for glory. Some of the colonies created in Africa and Asia never produced a profit, but they did allow parts of maps in school atlases to be coloured pink, or blue, or whatever, thus proving that the nation was a great power. The colonial and commercial rivalry between nations for "a place in the sun" was largely responsible for the conflagration of World War One.

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SCENARIO HOOKS

The Silken Thread: The nobility of a vibrant kingdom must be seen to be men of wealth and power - they must be able to dress in the most exquisite gowns and wear the rarest of jewels. For too long the nobles of Sardonnia have had to pay exorbitant prices for the silk cloth of the East. The characters are called before Vice-Chancellor Mengris Dortaang and charged with acquiring the silk-worms of Cathay. The worms are said to thrive on exotic trees found within the walled monasteries of the Monks of Lazarus. The method of rearing them is a closely guarded secret and all previous agents attempting to gain this knowledge have returned minus their tongue, eyes, and hands.

The Long Road: Barbarian traders have always served as intermediaries between the city of Ventura and the realm of Nippon. The players recognise that an alternative trade-route could gain them, and their city, great wealth. Financed by the grossly rich merchant Iulius Cacellii, they disguise themselves and join a barbarian convoy returning to the East. They can travel with the caravan until it reaches its destination and then negotiate with the merchants of Nippon, or they can strike out on their own after learning all they can from the barbarians. The journey will take at least five months, and pass through vast deserts and rugged mountain ranges, until Ocean is reached, over which lies the island of Nippon. The barbarians will not take kindly to people trying to undermine their livelihood.

Westward Passage: The characters and their trireme Apollo are chartered by the Great King Xerxes to find the way between the Pillars of Hercules. The waters between the islands of Scilla and Italia are notorious for their swirling currents, unchartered rocks, sea-monsters, and Sirens. Only the chosen of God will find their way through this hell gate to open the route to the iron-working people of Elba. A visit to the Oracle of Siwah may be in order before the party sets out.

Gold or God?: All men of the world must be allowed to worship the one true god Yahweh. The Order of the Holy Crescent has decided that the peoples of the New World must be given the Truth, and have chosen the characters to be the harbingers of this Message. The small ship Faith has been fully equipped and crewed, but just as the island of Havana comes into sight, a storm comes up blowing the ship southwards for three days. Faith is grounded on a jungle-clad shore. Striking inland the party contacts bronze-skinned natives who immediately throw themselves to the ground and refuse to look at the characters. It appears that they are awe struck. Careful probing may reveal that the natives have an ancient legend which tells that one day white-skinned gods will arrive out of the sun to renew the world. Will the characters take on the role of Gods and exploit the natives to gain their hoards of gold, or will they remain faithful to their mission?

Black Gold: The characters arrive at the factory of Freetown to collect a cargo of slaves for transport across Ocean. The 249 slaves are in fine health and will fetch a great profit if delivered safely to the auction-blocks of Savannah. The problems begin when the merchants of Freetown triple the prices of their foodstuffs claiming the effects of a drought. The Sea Raven's treasure-chest will not extend to buying enough supplies for the whole cargo for the 20-day journey. Other obstacles may include: the unwelcome attentions of a fiery missionary attempting to agitate the mob into an anti-slavery frenzy; pirates; a slave uprising; cholera outbreak; stormy weather; or contaminated food.

SIXTY CARDS

DECK IDEAS FOR FOR PLAYING MAGIC: THE GATHERING

by Len Henderson

THIRD EDITION MAGIC

AAAAAARRRRRRRGGGGGGHHHHHH!!!!!!!! What have they done?????? How could they do it?????? All my favourite cards removed from the Revised edition!!!! Demonic Hordes! Rock Hydra! Vesuvian Doppelganger! Clone! The Multilands! Noooooooooo!!!!!!! Ah, well, not to worry, considering I already have four of all the above. However, there are some really interesting cards that have just come in that leads to some diabolical combinations. And with the Ice Age cards (some of which are really amusing), some new decks immediately suggest themselves. And as I have moved into my 100 card deck phase, all of those cards that I have always wanted to play, but have never found room for, are now appearing in my decks.

One such deck is called the Return of the Multicoloured Ones. It is a deck type, not an actual deck (like the Chess Deck). The basic rules for constructing this deck are: 13 cards of each colour and 7 mana of each colour. However, you may not have more than one of any card except basic land. This deck allows you to play a different game each time with the same deck (unlike the more conventional decks which, as we all know, get rather monotonous after a while).

EAT YOUR OPPONENT II

Okay, now for the first deck of this issue. This deck is known as Eat Your Opponent II, a variant of the like-named deck we constructed last issue. The deck is *wonderful* in a multiplayer game, especially if you are the emperor in an Emperor game.

Deck Name: Eat Your Opponent
Number of Cards: 60
Colours: Black/White
Artifacts: Yes
Expansion Sets: Fallen Empires.

Black:
- 4 Murk Dwellers
- 4 Fear
- 4 Nettling Imp
- 4 Sengir Vampire
- 4 Word Of Binding

White:
- 4 Seeker
- 4 Farrel's Mantle (FE)
- 4 Spirit Link
- 4 Disenchant

Artifact
- 4 Tawnos' Wand

So, you ask yourself, what's the point of this deck? Okay, aside from the obvious Nettling your opponent's creatures so you can eat them with your Sengir Vampire, have you thought about putting Farrel's Mantle on a Murk Dweller, and then Fear on the Murk Dweller, or using Tawnos' s Wand to make it unblockable. You then have a creature that can do 6 points of damage to any creature. ie. waffle over to your opponent with an unblockable 2/2 creature. If the Murk Dwellers hits your opponent, it gains +2/+0. If then you use your Farrel's Mantle, it can do X+2 to any creature, where X is the power of the Murk Dwellers, 4 at this point. There are not all that many creatures that can handle 6 points of damage. And if you happen to have a Spirit Link on it as well, all the better. Then, if you should be emperor in an Emperor game, who better to belt with your Murk Dwellers than one of your generals, who will conveniently forget to defend himself, and then you can put 6 points of damage on any of your opponent general's creatures (the range of 2 rule still applies).

THE ICE AGE COMETH

What do you people think of the Ice Age expansion set? There are some very interesting cards in it. A lot of repetition of some of the Revised cards with different pictures (oh, if only Counterspell had a different name!). This "accumulative upkeep" really amuses me. Remember, if you don't pay for the upkeep, the card is buried, not destroyed, so you cannot regenerate them. Snow-covered land walk is moderately useless, until more people use snow covered lands. (I am pretty sure that I will be sticking to normal lands for a while yet). Note that snow-covered lands *are* considered basic lands. The illustrations are a step up; really good.

Unfortunately, I have not yet purchased any Ice Age (at the time of writing this, I'm saving up for the Chronicles expansion), but seeing as how Ice Age will be around for some time, I will definitely purchase some in the future, and will be working up some decks based on this expansion.

IT'S RUDE TO INTERRUPT!

So, some stuff on interrupts, as promised. Interrupts can be played at any time, can cancel each other, and are resolved in reverse order. No matter what, an interrupt must be resolved before any other effect in play. If an interrupt is played on a target, and another player plays another interrupt, making the target illegal to the first, the first interrupt is still considered cast, ie. the card does not go back to your hand.

For example, my opponent casts Red Elemental Blast on my Air Elemental (blue), threatening to destroy it. As an interrupt I chose to play Chaos Lace on the Air Elemental, changing it's colour to red. The Air Elemental (red) is now an illegal target of the Red Elemental Blast, and the attack fizzles because the interrupt is resolved *before* the effect of the Red Elemental Blast.

Another interesting point: All interrupts must be targeted when cast. So, if you cast Red Elemental Blast, sneakily intending to use a Sleight of Mind on your card once it is cast so that it can be used to destroy a black target in play, it won't work out as you planned. See, you must declare the target of the Red Elemental Blast at the moment of casting, and as the black target is not a legal target until the Sleight of Mind is cast, it cannot be targeted in the first place. [*Confused? I was, and I read it through three times. Thank heavens roleplaying games have rules that are very simple to learn, memorise and play... we wish! Nick*].

COUNTER THE WORLD

I had hoped, this issue, to bring you some really interesting decks that people are playing around the shops and tournaments these days. Unfortunately everyone is playing with boringly efficient decks. People either play Protection From The World decks (White. C.O.P.'s) Denial decks, or Sooner Than Instant Destruction decks: hey, easy. Red. Chuck in anything that does direct damage to anyone else, and a few Mana Flares. Average killer deck. Mine has an average kill in the fourth round. The other popular deck doing the rounds is the Counter The World deck.

Counter The World is a fairly pointless, annoying Nup deck - "You played X, nup, you can't do that". The whole point of this deck is to disrupt everything your opponent tries to bring out with the exception of some creatures, which you promptly steal and use to beat him up with. This deck requires a long time to work itself up. An interesting variation on the basic blue deck is using a Life Force, and then Sleight of Mind-ing it to an appropriate colour. This version of the deck uses that combination.

Deck Name: Counter The World (Nup deck)
Number of Cards: 60
Colours: Blue/Green
Artifacts: No
Expansion sets: Fallen Empires

Blue:
- 4 Counterspell
- 4 Spell Blast
- 4 Power Sink
- 4 Slight of Mind
- 4 Control Magic
- 4 Steal Artifact
- 4 Vodalian Mage (FE)
- 1 Copy Artifact
- 1 Braingeyser

Green:
- 4 Life Force
- 4 Stream of life
- 1 Channel
- 1 Regrowth

This deck is very mana hungry. You may want to stick in some storage lands, and some mana batteries. Multi-lands are definitely the way to go. If you don't have some of these cards, Glasses of Urza might be something to put in, Black Vice, Magical Hack, Tranquillity (but be careful), Clones, some of the Legend cards (like Remove Soul, etc) are all good options. One other small thing: If you intend to put in stuff like mana batteries, put in one in place of a land, but only one for every ten lands. So for the deck above, I would have 9 blue lands, 9 green lands, 1 Green and 1 Blue Mana Battery. Note that blue decks and denial decks in general seem to have a really big problem with getting out enough mana. You may want to consider making it a 70 card deck with 10 extra mana, mana batteries, multilands, storage lands etc.

Okay, that's enough for now, I will see you next issue with more fascinating looks into the world of rules-lawyering. By the way, if any of you have any questions on rule clarifications, or any general Magic related questions, or if you'd just like to share some of your deck construction secrets, please don't hesitate to send me a letter, either at the regular Australian Realms address, or at PO Box 9 Forrestfield Western Australia 6058.

Chow for now dudes! :-) ■

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The Analytical Engine

by Peter Crank

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"She stood there laughing,
I felt the knife in my hand
and she laughed no more"

And they say the new music is sick...

Do you believe in ghosts? I worked with a guy who was a rational being, capable of reasoned argument and who had more than the minimum level of education. Yet this guy believed in ghosts (still does), what's more he claimed to have seen two. Not one, but two, when most of the rest of us have never even seen a single apparition. That in itself should be a giveaway to an intelligent person, "Hey pal, what are you? A Ghostbuster?" No amount of argument could sway him and I can be an argumentative bastard.

I worked with a fundamentalist Christian who had the same enlightened approach to an argument - blind faith. This sort of blind faith can produce bizarre results - ask any Japanese why he wears a gas mask in the subway. This Christian guy said there was a whole branch of the faith devoted to apologetics, the justification of the belief set - to protect it from the slings and arrows of outrageous reason. He had a magazine for Christians that laid out counter arguments to use against pagans like me, pages and pages of so called evidence to support his case. A picture of dinosaur and human footprints intermingled, "proving that they co-existed before the flood"; or how about an elaborate cosmology based on the fact that the speed of light gets faster the farther away from Earth you get (otherwise you are faced with the embarrassing fact of radiation from Quasars billions of light years away starting before Genesis - so if light travels much faster than light (huh?), and then slows down, it explains that problem away - yeah right - for me it raises all sort of questions: like haven't these people ever heard of Occam's razor? Or how about common sense?). "I don't care how irrational I sound buddy, I just know, okay!" God is! Ghosts are! Socialism works! The Japanese are truly sorry about World War Two! There is no corruption in the (pick a State) Police Force! And other great Truths.

All I wanted was some evidence from these people that the things they put so much store in had some basis in fact. But truth is more ephemeral than any ghost and ultimately we're wasting everybody's time in arguing questions of faith. But all that aside ghosts are good box office, they sell lots of books and movies starring Demi Moore, and in their non-material way they are a lot of fun. My Ukrainian Grandfather gave me goose bumps, as I sat with him in his rocking chair, listening to his ghost stories and his tales of the Nazis and the Bolsheviks. If only I'd written them down. I remember scaring myself silly reading *The Shining* in a strange house, very late at night, when I saw my reflection in my peripheral vision. Good, you might even call it wholesome, fun. But I didn't believe it! Ghosts aren't real like Spock isn't real. Get a grip!

The ghosts that you find in Tim Powers' **Expiration Date** (Harper Collins, $12.95) are not particularly scary, but they are dead and they do haunt the living. If you know Powers then you know you can expect a roller-coaster ride with more detail and action than most mere mortals can manage in a lifetime of novels. Thomas Alva Edison features as a Big ghost, whose loosing in LA during the last US Presidential campaign starts the nightmare for young Kootie, who comes home late to find his parents dead, taped to their chairs, gory eyeless victims of a ghost catcher called Sherman Oaks (actually a district in LA - home to a large cemetery). Oaks eats ghosts (say that fast three times) and deals them to numerous ghost addicts and lowlife afterlife dealers. Sherman stalks the corridors of hospitals in search of the newly dead or sets ghost traps to snare his prey or bottles the dying breath of the powerful. He had been drawn to Kootie's house by the powerful emanations of the Edison ghost and tortured Kootie's parents for more information. The eating or snorting of the ghost gives the eater a "rush" of sensation and experience as the spirit life is consumed; the better the ghost the better the "hit". Go too long without "getting a life" once you're hooked though, means a nasty fate awaits. Throw in a parallel plot dealing with the son of a Cinematographer murdered by his wife, and the said wife who now eats ghosts and wants to snare the ghost of her departed husband, and a disgraced Psychotherapist whose staged seance-for-therapy turned disastrously real and who wants to make amends to the ghosts of her dead patients (pant, pant)...and so on. As stated above, the usual Powers potpourri. I love the notion that street bums are actually ghosts who have accumulated enough debris that they have physical form - typical Powers; way, way cool. The contemporary setting, and the subject matter and telling, put it in the same basket as Powers' *Last Call*, reviewed some issues back. There are more things under heaven and earth...

Meanwhile I was still thinkin'.

"He's incorrigible. He's conniving. And he's the greatest antihero ever to go ripping through the future. He is Slippery Jim diGriz... The Stainless Steel Rat." So says the blurb on the back cover of **The Stainless Steel Rat Sings The Blues** by Harry Harrison (Bantam $10.95). The only one making the Leadbelly noises will be you if you waste your time with this poor excuse for an adventure. I loved Slippery Jim before Harry tried to make him relevant and hip. Harry is too old to tell Rock'n'Roll jokes and so is Jim diGriz. We should all feel insulted that Harry has soiled the memory of the "Rat". It doesn't work at all and nothing here is new. The only marvel is that I managed to stay with it all the way to the end. Harrison was considered a laugh-a-minute in the seventies, now it's like watching repeats of The Dick Emery Show or Are you Being Served? - old, tired, boring. Harrison is to funny as Boris Yeltsin is to moderation. Recommended for old farts who think they're "Livin' in the Seventies..."

Next Victim! If you think I'm cruel try **Rack, Rope and Red-hot Pincers - A History of Torture and Its Instruments**, Geoffrey Abbott (Headline, $14.95). There are some sick mothers out there - hey, it takes one to know one. You'll learn a lot here, hopefully never putting it into practice. This book is a catalogue of pain and degradation through the ages, but an amusing little book for all that. My personal favourite is pressing, also known as *peine forte et dure*. The lucky prisoner, having refused to plead his crime at the bar and being presumed mute through malice rather than just plain dumb, is laid on a board (sometimes with a sharp stone under his back for fun), another board is laid on top of the prisoner and stones piled on that until he pleads or croaks. Our ancestors were remarkably even-handed with respect to gender and pressed women and men with equal fervour. Example:

"She was in dying about one quarter of an hour. A sharp stone as big as a man's fist had been put under her back. Upon her was laied to the quantity of seven or eight hundredweight (nearly 900 pounds), which breaking her ribs, caused them to burst forth of the skinne."

Cool.

Thank god for Amnesty International. I recommend this book not because I'm a sick little droid with a passion for human blud (well not much) but because it's very interesting stuff. People who moan on at you about how violent society has become and how little johnny or joanne sees too much violence on telly should remember that 300 years ago said brats could have been out watching a hanging, or a whipping, or a

burning, or a branding, or any number of unsavoury spectacles put on for the edification of the masses.

When you think of it torture was pretty much a no-win situation; a damned if you do, damned if you don't sort of thing. If they wanted information they racked you until you died or talked. If you talked they hung you for a traitor - and probably had you drawn and quartered as well. How fair? In the enlightened Nineties you can chrome the inside of your nostrils with metallic paint, steal someone's car, crash it into seven police pursuit cars, kill a family of five and still be out in time for breakfast at the big M. That's called progress.

Actually, I couldn't think of a more cruel and inhuman punishment than making someone sit through an episode of **Earth Two** without benefit of a barf bag. Will somebody tell me the point of that show?

I don't know why, but I sat down and read William Shatner's (with Chris Kreki ghost writing) **Star Trek Memories** and **Star Trek Movie Memories** (Harper Collins again $19.95 each) back to back over one week while holidaying in Albany, Western Australia. Browsers in these pages know me for a Trekhead from way back but William Shatner's memoirs? Isn't that for people who buy Star Trek 3D chess sets from Franklin Mint? Well, no. While I wouldn't soil my column with Tekwar reviews I do think there's value here. For me the value lay in the studio politics, in the humanising of Gene Roddenberry and Bill Shatner himself. Shatner doesn't tell all, especially about himself, and there are lots of gaps in the story, but as a starting place in a study of the Trek franchise it's near perfect.

Talking of the Franklin Mint, considerable amusement can be gained from the pages of Science Fiction Age - a rather pricey ($9.20 at my newsagent) American zine with an obvious focus. Example One: "Star Trek Checks [American for cheques] - The Adventure Begins", yeah, I'll say, especially when you try to cash one. Each one of these beauties carries a photo or graphic from the original series and an inspirational message like, "Live Long and Prosper...". My personal favourite is the one with the tasteful Federation Seal and the message, "The signatory of this document is a member in good standing of the United Federation of Planets". Wave that paper under your bank manager's nose and see what happens! Example Two: The International Arthurian Society presents "Merlin's Crystal Ball" only $225 (in easy monthly instalments). Example Three: The Hamilton Collection Presents "Millennium Falcon" a tastefully painted porcelain of the aforesaid fleeing through an asteroid belt with Imperial fighters in hot pursuit. Perfect for serving the cheese & crackers on at the next Con. Example Four (The creme de la creme): "Own the Buck Rogers XZ-38 Disintegrator Pistol - the first and only licensed collector's model of this 25th century masterpiece". (What's more it's the 60th anniversary collector's edition). Okay, one more. Example Five: "The Official Star Trek Star Fleet Academy Ring (Call toll-free 1-800-523-0124)". Wear it while writing your Star Trek cheques. (Damn I forgot the Borg drinking mug!)

Finally and briefly a word about a big book that got me thinking, well changed the track for a while anyway. **The Lucifer Principle - A Scientific Expedition into the Forces of History** by Howard Bloom (Allen & Unwin, $24.95). This one will get the politically correct up on their hind legs! Bloom sticks Darwinism, Info Science, Biology, Sociology, Anthropology, Philosophy and Religion in the blender and hits the puree button. You may not always agree but it's a great ride. Genes and memes are the building blocks of Mr Bloom's thesis and challenging stuff it is too. If you are religious, especially if you are a follower of the Prophet, there is plenty here to offend. Heartily recommended to those of you who are looking for a fresh viewpoint. Deliciously Incorrect Politics. I'm a DIP, and proud of it.

Later Dudes. ■

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INWO Success

Steve Jackson Games' **Illuminati: New World Order** won the Origins Award for the Best Card Game of 1994. *INWO*, the trading card game of global conspiracies, beat out some stiff competition, including *Dixie, Jyhad, On The Edge, Spellfire* and *Star Trek: TNG*. And with the addition of some good old Aussie input (see our INWO competition winners' card given away in this issue. Thanks, Steve.) we're sure the *Assassins* expansion will also be a winner.

Conventions

Heaps of convention fliers in the mailbag over the past few weeks. Here are some of the events to mark on your calender:

Terror 95 is presented by the Australian Horror Society (what's that sticky stuff all over them?) and will feature make-up and special effects artists, movie screenings, a horror masquerade and more. To be held at the Caulfield Arts Complex, Victoria 27th to 29th October. Contact: Terror 95, PO Box 7545, St Kilda Rd, Melbourne, VIC, 3004.

DarkCon will be held at the Queensland University of Technology 1st to 3rd December, and will feature an *Australian Realms* sponsored *Warhammer FRP* event, *Prelude To Doom* set in Unae. See their ad on page 35 for full details.

RQ Con Down Under is a convention for fans of *Runequest* and the world of *Glorantha*, and other great games produced by *Chaosium*. Guest of honour will be Greg Stafford and Sandy Peterson (also creator of *DOOM!*). To be held 19th to 21st January 1996 in Melbourne. Contact: Michael O'Brien, 48 Barcelona St, Box Hill, VIC, 3128. Phone: (03) 9899 8539.

Macquariecon '95 is on for the weekend 8th to 10th December at the Macquarie University Campus. Covering freeforms, Paranoia, systemless, Shadowrun II, Call of Cthulhu, Vampire and MTG it offers something for everyone. Contact: Macquariecon, Box 83, Student's Council, Macquarie University, NSW 2019.

Play By Mail

With the ever expanding web of the 'net comes an increasing demand for top quality online entertainment. Two Australian PBM companies offering just that are, **Dynamic Games** and **SFGA**. Dynamic are now offering a play by email option for their popular fantasy role-play PBM - **Quest**. Contact: dynamic@sydney.dialix.oz.au.

Similarly, SFGA have taken Tolkien into cyberspace with the launch of **Middle Earth Play By Email**. Fred Martin of SFGA says: "This should be of particular interest to players in WA & New Zealand as some of them have been having difficulties with normal mail delays.". Contact: 100351.136@compuserve.com.

New Releases

In the aftermath of GenCon '95, the world's largest gaming convention (Chuck McGrew, *Australian Realms'* US agent was there, flying the flag for us), it's probably appropriate to give a little bit more space to our friends in the other gaming companies...

R.Talsorian Games: *Cybergeneration* is now being released as a completely stand alone RPG, with a second edition of this very popular game hitting the shelves any day. *Mekton Zeta Plus*, the first supplement for the *Mekton Z* Anime-RPG is out now. Also promised to arrive soon are the *Castle Falkenstein* supplements *Comme Il Faut* and *Sixguns and Sorcery*. Down, Lee, down!

Palladium: A recent press release from Palladium begins "Role-playing is Dead! - Bull Feathers!". Apparently, first week sales for *Rifts Undersea* were among the best in Palladium's history. Released at Gencon was *Nightspawn*, a complete RPG about vampires, the shape changing Nightspawn, dark secrets, conspiracies, discoveries and the supernatural (there's probably a haunted kitchen sink in there somewhere) in a contemporary setting. If the promo poster art by Brom is anything to go by, this game will have an authentic horror atmosphere.

Steve Jackson Games: *GURPS Robots* is with us now. With it you can create cyborgs, androids and even biomorphs for use in your GURPS campaigns (Paul Mitting drooling over this release was not a pretty sight, I can tell you). Expect a review next issue.

Chaosium: have announced a release date for the *Call of Cthulhu* collectible card game - March 1996. Could the card game bubble have burst by then? Could the rumours of a certain collectible dice game sweeping all before it dampen the Great Old Ones' spirits? Not likely. As the PR states - "Two Billion Years in the Making!". So what's a few more months to Cthulhu?

Gold Rush Games: recently announced that they will be publishing (in late 1996) a third edition of the *Bushido* RPG, one of the cult classics of the gaming world. *Bushido* is set in a Nippon populated by strange legendary and mystical beings, as well as powerful political figures, honourable samurai and other dangerous and shadowy folk. GRG have plans to release a number of supporting products as well as the 3rd edition, so new and old *Bushido* gamers alike will have a lot to look forward to.

West End Games: seem to be the one for picking up licences. Already signed up for their impressive *Masterbook* line are *Indiana Jones, Tank Girl, Species*, and *Necroscope*. West End also produce the very popular *Star Wars* RPG. Now they're turning their eyes toward a major fantasy license (reportedly *Tales From The Crypt*). So just watch our Bart Simpson - you could be next!

TSR Inc: Throw your cards away people! Inside word is that *Dragon Dice*, TSR's new collectible combat dice game, is a hit. Apparently it's a really fun and addictive game. It combines the portability and ease of play of card games with one of gaming's most enduring accessories - weird dice.

The *Birthright* new campaign setting looks good. It is designed so that you can legitimately play high-powered characters right from the outset; characters have a destiny to fulfil in the mode of the classic high fantasy novels (David Eddings, Terry Brooks etc). Sounds very interesting.

Perhaps more interesting when reading through Ram Rumblings in *Dragon Magazine* is the number of staffing changes that have occurred at TSR in the past year. Every issue announces another major turnover in design and editorial staff. If this keeps keeps going on... perhaps that's why Lee's been working so hard on his resume!

Unae World Books

As we speak, Colin Taber is working on the first of the **Unae World Books**. With four such books slated for 1996, the Unae dark fantasy campaign world is set to explode in size (there's already been over 120 pages of free Unae source material in Australian Realms over the past 20 issues). The books will be fresh material further detailing the world, and introducing new characters, events and storylines.

... see you 'round like a D100!

THAT WAS THE NEWS



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Thomas Riccardi, *Inphobia Magazine*

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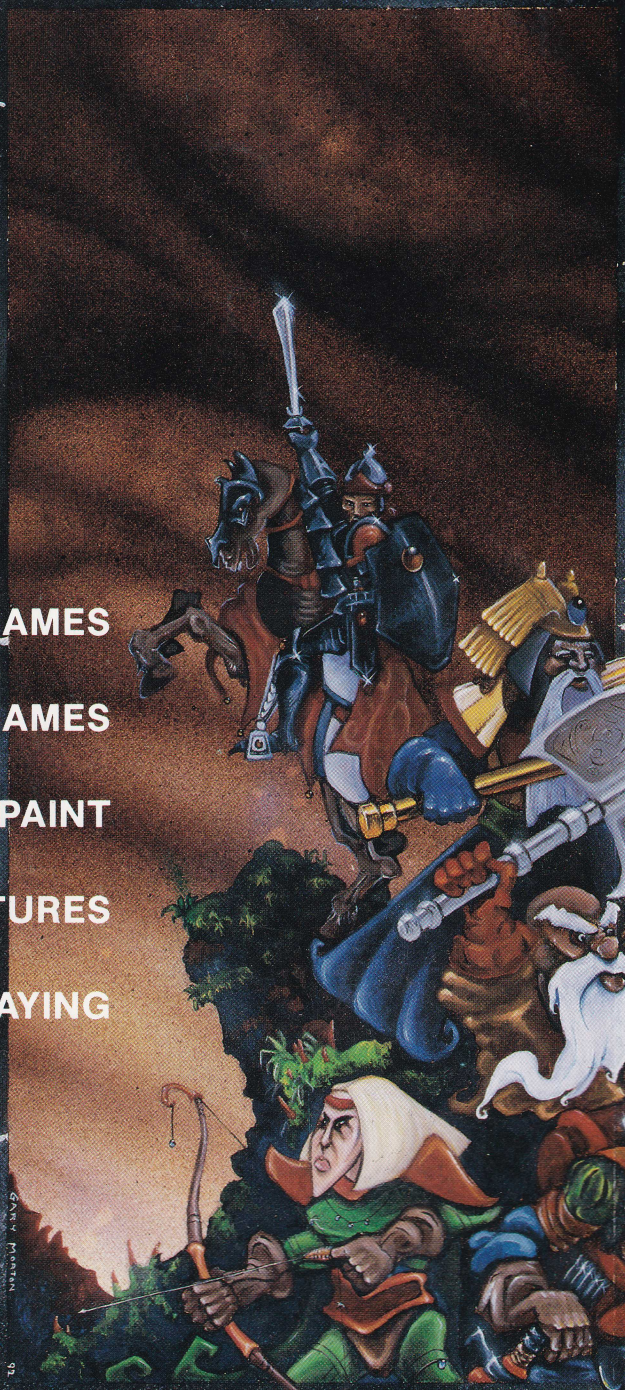

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