

Issue Six | Winter 1996

Reviews and Plugs

Dave Morris takes a look at a few non Tékumel publications.

To Build Jerusalem

by John Whitbourn, published by Victor Gollancz SF

It is the late 20th century, but it's not our 20th century. Here, the Church Universal has kept its grip tight on the world and technology has been judiciously reined in. Papal troops put down insurrection with pike and shot. Steam trains exist, but old fashioned die-hards won't use them. (And monarchs, for reasons of Vatican policy, are not allowed to.) Most importantly of all, magic really works. Not the easy zap bang magic of most fantasy universes, but a dark and dangerous kind of magic that can imperil the sorcerer's soul.

Adam, a Papal agent with a steely single-mindedness that would put an OAL operative to shame, is despatched to the troublesome province of Britain to sort out a bizarre problem. King Charles IV and his retinue have vanished in full view of the entire population of Guildford while on a state visit there. Leveller terrorists soon begin to issue demands to which the King's seal has been affixed. But the best efforts of the state's sorcerers cannot find out how the King was abducted or where on Earth he is being held—if, indeed, it is anywhere on Earth.

This is not perhaps quite as good as John Whitbourn's first novel, *A Dangerous Energy*—not for any fault of this book, though, but because *A Dangerous Energy* was quite simply one of the two or three best fantasy novels ever written. Whitbourn writes with marvellous imagination, terrifying vividness and a droll humour worthy of Kipling or Vance. He really knows the world he's created and (almost uniquely in this genre) his characters are fully realized individuals who seem to speak to you right out of the page. Because they are so real, you care about what happens to them and the world comes vividly to life.

For anyone who admires real inventiveness in fantasy, the work of John Whitbourn is highly recommended.

Skyrealms of Jorune

A world far off in space is colonized by humans, but then contact with Earth breaks down and the colonists are left to fend for themselves. The collapse of society leaves the remnants of Earth technology more precious than gold. Mankind must share the planet with other races—some friendly, some not. Bizarre flora and fauna abound. You begin the game as a foreigner and must earn your citizenship...

You might be starting to think *Skyrealms of Jorune* was written by those wonderful people who brought you the Tsurani empire, but in fact not. *Jorune* is actually not fantasy but an interesting science fictional game in the tradition of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Some of the creatures are tedious—just hairy people with heads like lions or wolves—but to be fair there is a good reason for this, and at least they aren't just blokes with bobbles on their head like in *Star Trek*. The best features of the world are very good indeed—the curious and likeable thriddle (who are like no aliens you've ever seen), the exotic laws and customs, the baroque directions that evolution has taken over the millennia.

The worst thing is the jargon. The rules are full of stuff like: "The sholari should use daijic to handle overactive caji. Casting dyshas in most cities is against the law. If a character throws a dysha without good cause, have him hauled off to herris." That means you'll get slung in jail if you use magic. Imagine the equivalent in a set of *Tékumel* rules. How would even the most confirmed Tekky cope with the likes of: "Any formal tsalmurel must be fought with a display of proper tishemu, or the charukel is at liberty to send the offending purdalmo to the charulu." Does that give you a sense of the exotic, or just a pain in the arse?

That said, *SoJ* is among the best rolegames available today, and has probably poached a good number of potential *Tékumel* fans for one simple reason. The book you buy contains everything you need. So for about \$18.00 you get a complete set of rules and a description of the world you're going to be playing in. Oh, and an introductory campaign. If only it were possible to say the same thing about *Tékumel*!

Borkelby's Folly

[A4, 30 pages]

This describes itself as a "newsletter" for the world of *Jorune*, but in fact that's only the editor being modest. In fact it is a fully fledged fanzine, and a damned good one at that. The first Issue contains an introduction to *Jorune*, a thoughtful analysis of the drenn process (whereby one becomes a full citizen), reviews, interesting speculations about the world background, details of weaponsmith skills, and a good-quality scenario set in a remote mining town. Also there's a news page, including details of *Alien*, the *Jorune*-based computer RPG on CD-ROM, which ought to make *Tékumel* fans go zhaurun with envy.

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