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MARCH 1996



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Issue #24
February 1996

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Causoban

by DBA Productions
Page 44

*A city chock-full of bad
guys for Earthdawn.*

Strange Vistas

All That Cuts

by Douglas Hulick
Page 26

*Immortal Combat: Fiction
from Legacy: War of Ages.*



The Edge

Page 65 et. seq.

Breaking news, reviews, and similar good stuff.



About the Cover

This month's cover comes to us from the talented hand of Robin Wood. Three adventurers plot their way to glory. They seem impressed by this month's line up, don't they?

Articles

EditorialPage 4
Faux pearls of wisdom.

New Perspectives FarewellPage 6
Ken Carpenter
Ave atque vale.

MailPage 7
Comment from our readership.

ORK: A New Look At An Old EnemyPage 8
John Wick
What things look like from the other end of the sword.

Lights, Camera, Action!Page 19
Adventures on the fly.

LEGO® Pirate Wars Optional RulesPage 20
Stephen W. Gabriel
Time to bribe your kid brother for his LEGOs again.

You Ain't From Around Here...Page 35
Douglas Seacat
Vampire: the Masquerade somewhere other than downtown.

Bug Hunt (conclusion)Page 53
DBA Productions
You left the frying pan for this? More Battlelords.

Comics

DirkPage 96
Dirk and the warrior-princess.

Guide to Advertisers:

Alderac Entertainment Group	1
Black Gate Publishing	41
Chaosium	93
FASA	10
Iron Crown Enterprises	16, 64
Kenzer & Company	33
Midnight Gamers Guild	28
Mind Ventures	13
New Millenium	49
Nightshift Games	42
Optimus Design Systems	5, 34
R. Talsorian	74
RPGI	57
TSR	24-25
Virtual Magic, Inc.	Inside Back
Weapons Emporium	32
West End Games	42, 78
White Wolf Game Studios	Back Cover
Wintertree Software	29
Wizards of the Coast	15, Inside Front



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The staff of SHADIS is determined
to keep this publication independent
and bringing our readers the best
coverage of the gaming industry
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Although the Alderac
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Our policy — written in stone — is
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This policy actually penalizes AEG
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rather than having an unfair advantage
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policy demonstrates our determination
to keep SHADIS truly independent. □

Editorial

"Goin' Fishing — Bring Your 'Net"

Recently one of the other guys in the office said, "Hey, I'm going to start up an **Amber** campaign; you want in on it?" I had read through the office copy of the rulebook, and it seemed interesting enough, so I said, "Sure!" I'd just reread the novels over Christmas, and I knew the basics of the campaign. Since I had a grounding in the world and the rules, my next step seemed obvious: go onto the Net.

I've been lurking around the Internet for about seven years now, and for me it's a more basic research tool than my local library. This can be attributed to a simple fact, which I'm sure somebody has codified into an Axiom of the Net: "For any topic, no matter how offbeat or obscure, somebody somewhere has devoted net resources to it." For instance, once upon a time I was the keeper of the unofficial discography for the San Francisco-based a-cappella group "The Bobs".

This time, however, I was going to search for somebody else's resources. I started on the World Wide Web. (Once, in antediluvian times — i.e., 1990 — I would have checked the Frequently Asked Questions list for the newsgroup `rec.games.frp.misc` and found an FTP site, but these days the first stop is the Web.) I went to Yahoo (<http://www.yahoo.com/>), which is the Yellow Pages of the Web, and told it to search for sites with the keywords "Amber" and "roleplaying." Sure enough, it found a page, and pretty soon I was staring at a truculent unicorn and a bunch of Amber Diceless material. Furthermore, that page (The Brokedown Palace, <http://www.interealm.com/p/bear/amber/amber.html>) had a pile of links to other places on the Web with Amber material. The design of the Web encourages people with similar pages to link back and forth, so once you've found one resource, you can usually get to most of them.

After a couple of hours, I had a large pile of Amber material, including stuff from the Amber FTP site (with a really neat Macintosh utility for keeping track of characters), locations of the various Amber MUSHes, and a disk full of text —

variant rules, campaign logs, &c. — for the gamemaster to peruse. (As you all know, an iron-clad rule in RPGs is *Bribe the GM Early and Often.*)

This is merely an illustrative example; the net is in no way restricted to Amber (or to roleplaying, or indeed to games). No matter what you're playing, there is a resource for you out there somewhere. Usenet News is an obvious place to wander around in search of information; my news program found over a hundred newsgroups with "game" in their title. One of them is likely to hold some interest for you, since by definition it's frequented by people with similar interests. If the newsgroup has a FAQ, it'll be available at <ftp://rtfm.mit.edu/pub/usenet-by-hierarchy>. The FAQ usually contains pointers to the real repositories of information on some FTP site or another.

I don't want to leave out the online services; I know there are game-related areas on all of the major players, but the only one I have direct knowledge of is America Online. AOL has the Online Gaming Forum (Keyword: OGF) which contains all sorts of gaming goodies, including message folders for manufacturers. If you dig deeply enough, you can even find the SHADIS folder.

Obviously this is only a brief summary of the places you can find useful stuff on the net. As a general rule, if you're looking for information on a particular topic or game, use Yahoo or one of its brethren; if you're just interested in a general field of games, try the newsgroups.

If there's enough interest, and we manage to free up the man-hours, we may start running a section of "Web Pages of Interest To Gamers" somewhere in SHADIS. If you find this sufficiently of interest, the best way to show it would be to send us a batch of URLs with descriptions; if we get snowed under by them, we'll probably conclude it's a Good Idea. Meanwhile, I have to go; there's a little something I have to attend to on `rec.games.frp.misc`.

—D.J. Trindle

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New Perspectives: “...and into darkness”

By Ken Carpenter

Welcome to the brief, yet informative, final installment of *New Perspectives*. Because of the magazine's upgraded look and organization, new miniatures releases will be covered in *The EDGE* with stunning photography and a minimal amount of text — after all, a picture is worth a thousand words (not that I actually ever got paid at that rate...).

I will still be ranting about on these pages on occasion, in a miniatures sort of way — the ranting will just appear in the form of nifty miniatures scenarios, optional rules, play tips, and other generally obnoxious drivel intended to drive you away from miniatures games altogether. The weak will go, but the strong shall survive.

I'm really only tooting in here to announce a winner in the UNIVERSE SHATTERING, REALITY ALTERING, and OTHERWISE REALLY NEAT New Perspectives GIMME contest, in which certain greedy parties (namely you) sent entries for an opportunity to win a box of goodies (namely miniatures) from a great, world renowned philanthropist (namely... you guessed it... me).

A partial list of the contents of said box (hereafter referred to as “the goodies”) includes: a nasty **Greater Daemon** and a couple of **Helsing Knights** from *Harlequin*; an assortment of cool **Rafm** figures (including some **Mekton** and **Jovian Chronicles** figures that had to be pried from the bloody, unconscious hands of two SHADIS staffers named Matt); gobs of really neat **Ral**

Partha issues including **Vampire**, **Mage**, and **Shadowrun** figures, plus some great fantasy stuff like Jeff Wilhelm's **Red Dragon**; superdetailed **Shatterzone** figures from *Simtac*; **Townsfolk** from *Thunderbolt Mountain* (what else needs to be said?); some nifty fantasy and **Magic: the Gathering** miniatures from *Heartbreaker*; incredible **Warhammer** and **Warhammer 40K** miniatures from *Games Workshop*; and the continuing list includes some fantastic figures from *Grim Reaper Casting*, *Grenadier*, *Lance & Laser*, and *Reaper Miniatures*.

All told, “the goodies” have a retail value of well over \$300. Not a bad haul for Mark Goldberg of Las Vegas, Nevada!!!! Mark, by the time you read this, you will already be staring at a box that Arnold Schwarzenegger couldn't lift. Hopefully the postman can....

Thanks to all of the readers who sent entries. Some were brief, some long, some profane, but all of them were addressed properly. Talk about your group of highly intelligent, literate readers! I would like to have responded to each letter, but there were just too many to allow that. Plus, my crayons kept breaking.

Thanks again for all of your support over the years. I will be helping in other areas of SHADIS, so don't stop sending your miniatures related questions and comments. Maybe we'll pull them all together every once in a while and run a miniatures Q&A. Good luck and good gaming — KC.

Comment From Our Readers

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Attm Scurilous Comments By Post



Dear Shadis,

I recently got a subscription to Shadis just prior to "the big change" and was a bit disconcerted when my magazines started arriving. Now that I have gotten my second issue I have begun to adjust to the changes and even appreciate them But...

I'm really quite upset by the removal of articles such as "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly" and "Hook, Line, and Sinkers". Why were these removed? I really enjoyed these and would like to see them back. Without them I am tempted to stop frequenting the pages of your magazine. I am very impressed by the new layout and reviews, but without the articles it once possessed it really doesn't seem like Shadis anymore.

Also, perhaps you should review games and game-related sites on the Web. This is probably the fastest-growing area in every aspect of our society including gaming and gamers' interests.

Thank you for your time,
Bhoso Heathen,
Minister of Titles and Disinformation
Dogon P.O.E.E.
"Hail Eris!"

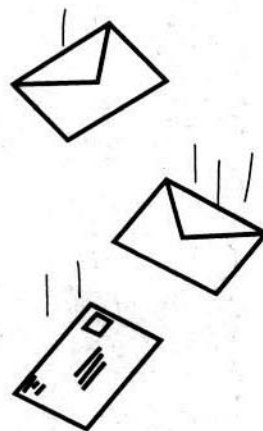
The two sections you mention aren't gone and forgotten; they were merely on hiatus. You'll notice this issue's "Lights, Camera, Action!" which looks quite a bit like its immediate predecessor, HLS. This issue doesn't have a "Good, Bad, and Ugly", but it will return in future issues.

Last issue there was a "Close Encounters of the Random Kind", but although there is none this issue, it hasn't vanished permanently either. There's a CERK in the chute, for that matter, called "Scenario Creation System": it'll turn up sometime in the next few months. Competition among articles for space in every issue's 96 fixed pages knocks the sort of thing you see in a biology lab into a cocked hat. The short version of all this is that "The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly", "Lights, Camera, Action", and "Close Encounters of the Random Kind" will all be appearing regularly, but I don't guarantee that all of them will appear every issue. Not yet, anyway.

I agree wholeheartedly about the Web — see my editorial — but I'm not yet convinced that there's a demand. I would like to be shown otherwise, as it would be an excuse to use the computer for something other than layout. The best way to prove me wrong would be for SHADIS readers to cry out, with one voice, "Web content!" — again, see my editorial.

I'm sure it's no coincidence that there are five sections in your letter.

—D.J.T.



OPK



A NEW LOOK AT AN OLD ENEMY

The night was cold and the wind howled like a weeping woman, frightening the little ones as they clung to each other, hanging on the storyteller's every word. He stood tall before them, moving his arms and his torso, making the heroes and monsters of his tales come to life in the eyes and minds of the children.

All through the night he spoke until his throat was as dry as the desert outside. And then it was time for the last story of the night. He paused long enough to wet his lips and his aching throat, and then he turned back to the children, so eager to hear the tale they had waited for all night.

"Know and beware of this thing of which I speak, children," the storyteller said. "For this thing is merciless in its cruelty. It steals and loots, murders wherever it goes. Only those that are clever and wise may defeat it, for it is too strong for us. Not because it is brave, but because it is a coward. They do not stand alone and fight as we do, but gather in small bands like the cowards that they are, and they raid through our villages, taking what they want and leaving only dust, ash and blood in their wake. They kill fathers and mothers and children because they do not want us to prosper. They fear us, children. That is why you must learn their ways, for you can learn to use their own fear against them."

One of the children stood from the shadows. "And what is this thing called, Master?"

The storyteller looked into the child's eyes and in those eyes, he saw wonder and terror. "It is called 'Man', child. And you would be wise to fear it. Any Ork would."

(The following was taken from a letter written by the noted Ork scholar GÖttASALCRÖ, official diplomat of the Ork Kingdoms to the Wizard's Guild.)

To make a dissertation on Ork culture to an audience that is filled with misconceptions is a difficult task, but recent actions in the halls of the

Guildhouse have made it impossible for me not to address the incredible prejudices that reside here with me. Too often, misunderstanding has brought Orks and the kindred races to blows, but perhaps knowledge will save lives on both sides of the racial fence.

THE CHEATER'S GUIDE TO ORK

I have chosen to use the Ork language with all of the proper nouns in this writing to provide the reader with a basic understanding of the Common Language of "ORK." A phonetic guide to pronunciation is provided at the end of this writing. I have also provided the pronunciation with every new ORK word (in italics) along with its translation. While ORK has over two hundred dialects, these phonemes provide the reader with a basic understanding, allowing them to communicate with ORKS from any tribe. The word ORK has many meanings and cannot be translated well into the Common Tongue of Man. It is a non-gendered greeting, a noun, an adjective and an adverb. Anything that has qualities an ORK admires is considered to be ORK. A sword may be ORK, a good drink may be ORK, and even some humans have been considered ORK, although these are few and far between.

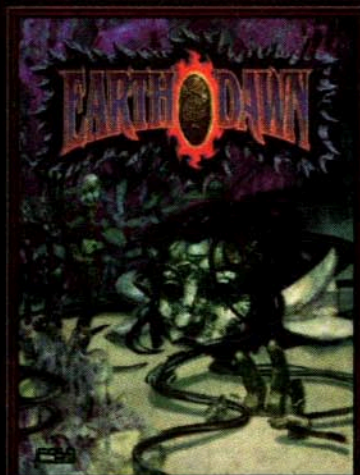
HOW TO KNOW WHEN YOU'RE BEING INSULTED IN ORK

It is considered very ORK to be able to insult with cleverness. Wit is an attribute that ORKS value very highly, and it is also considered very "un-ORK" to not know when one is being insulted. For these reasons, I have included some of the more common ORK insults so a ggIP (gip - non-ORK) will not look like a fool in the company of ORKS.

One of the most common insults among ORKS is to refer to another's body parts as MÖGD (moogd - "yellow"). Since ORK skin is green, human, dwarf and Elven skin all appear to be very yellow to an ORK. These races are not ORK, and

by
John Wick
illustrated by
Matt Wilson

Goblins? Been there!
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Ogres? Next!!!



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therefore are weak. MÖGD hands are shaky hands, a MÖGD tongue is a lying tongue, and one with MÖGD feet is a coward. And, of course, to have MÖGD privates is to have lusty feelings for the ugly kindred races.

Having "yellow feet" is to insinuate that one is a coward who runs. ORKS never run, they charge. In ORK there is a very distinct difference between the two words. When an ORK charges, they are running into battle, and when an ORK runs, they are running away from battle. An ORK never turns away from a good fight, and for a very good reason. (see "The Cult of BØssttRaKa" below.)

To refer to another's DØMGA (*dowmga* - mother) in a derogatory way is not a very intelligent thing to do in ORK. Motherhood is considered a very holy thing, and to disrespect an ORK'S mother is to disrespect the Mother-Goddess herself.

Having NAttrPATs (*nathrpats*) is to have "a tongue that waggles." An ORK knows when to shut up. An ORK that talks too much will inevitably get BLINDRBO (*blinderbow* - a konk on the head).

These are some of the more common insults, but it takes a skilled ORK speaker in order to use them. One cannot simply go out into a crowd full of ORKS and begin calling them yellow. Verbal challenges are just as real and honor-testing as physical challenges in an ORK'S eyes. Both kinds of challenges will be discussed in "The Cult of BØssttRaKa" and "The Cult of Pugg" below.

ORK Religion

According to the sacred scrolls of BØssttRAKA, the ORK race was born from the Goddess-Mother, QttDØMGA. At the dawn of time, she gave birth to one hundred and seventeen children. The children were all born with armor on their bodies and weapons in their fists, screaming battle cries. They fought with each other until only three remained: GØttDUKu, BØssttRAKA, and Pugg. QttDØMGA still remains the chief deity of the pantheon, although she appears in few of the stories.

THE CULT OF QTTDØMGA

QttDØMGA (*keethdowmga*) is the Chief Goddess and Mother of all ORKS. She is the keeper of all secrets of femininity, secrets that no male ORK could ever hope to understand.

ORK females are called ORKe (*orkay* - "little one") until they reach the age of maturity. Then, they are initiated with all the secrets of womanhood and they become ÖRK (*oork* - the best translation is "woman", but this is insufficient to convey the true meaning in all of its contexts).

ÖRK are taught all of the secret rituals for womanhood, including the birthing rituals. No ORK is ever allowed to view an ÖRK during

birth, for it is a time when the spirit of QttDØMGA enters the mother, filling her with a divinity that only ÖRKs can bear to view. All of this is done with the Goddess' blessing. Unlike the elves and dwarves and humans, ÖRKs do not recognize paternity; there is no ORK word for "father."

Once an ÖRK has given birth, she is considered a DØMGA (*dowmga* - "mother"). An DØMGA is the head of the NJÖ (*neeoo* - "home"). Her authority is unquestioned when inside of the NJÖ. There is no ORK unwise enough to challenge the authority of a DØMGA in her NJÖ.

While the DØMGA is the head of the NJÖ, she may chose a favorite consort to live with her. This favorite - the ggINE - stays in the NJÖ, protecting the NJÖ, the DØMGA and her children.

The only ORK clerics are those of QttDØMGA, and all of them are Mother ÖRKs. Their miracles are performed in the NJÖ, the Holy Place of the Mother-Goddess, and may not be performed anywhere else. They are powerful miracles of healing, restoration and protection.

THE CULT OF GØTTDUKu

GØttDuKu (*Gowthduhkuh*) is the God of Storms. He appears in the tales of the ÖRKs as a massive warrior with a black hide and a great spear. It is said that it is his battle with the blue dragon of the sky that causes storms. You see, the sky is the belly of the blue dragon, and whenever the thunder begins to roll, that is the dragon's growl when he sees the mighty ÖRK Storm God approaching. Lightning flies from the dragon's maw and GØttDuKu raises his great spear GØttRINDR and battles the beast.

It is during this time that ÖRKs make war, when the Thunder God is full of fury and might. He throws his thundering spear, drawing the crystal cool blood from the dragon's body. And just when the storm has reached its worst, GØttDuKu and the dragon slay each other. His black blood, which has spilled across the dark sky, is carried away by the wind and the blood of the dragon gives him — and the dragon — life once more to fight another day. Any day that brings weather is a holy day in the calendar of the worshipers of GØttDuKu, but because their War God dies when the sky clears, ÖRKs will never fight under a blue sky.

The GØttFRAttA (*gowthvrahthah* - "child of GØttDuKu") dedicates his life to the worship of GØttDuKu. Some scholars have even gone as far to call them "knights", but this is a mistranslation.

The GØttFRAttA use just about any weapon they can get their hands on, but they do not consider any victory to be tribute to GØttDuKu unless they use his holy weapon, the spear. GØttDuKu only uses a spear and a shield in war, and the ÖRKs know that the sound of thunder is

ÖRK Phonetic Guide

UPPER CASE

A	match, catch
E	eel, steal
I	sit, split, git
O	snow, row
Ø	doubt, rout
Ö	tooth, truth
B	bum, blunderbus
D	dingaling, duty
F	finer, flaunt
G	rolling "grr" like a growl
J	young, yellow
K	catastrophe
L	lollipop, longhorn
M	mangrove, militia
N	nancy, naughty
P	pomegranet, pony
Q	"kee" as in keel
R	roundabout, ring
S	sin, single, slant
T	tin, tantamount

LOWER CASE

e	fetch, wretch
u	cut, pluck, luck
ff	very, vigilant
gg	great, git, grove
ll	aspirant "h" made by putting the tongue between the back teeth and blowing
rr	rolling "r", scottish "r"
ss	shush, slush, shower
tt	thimble, thick

WHAT DO AN ORK, A PICKAXE AND A MERMAID HAVE IN COMMON?

They all come from the same root word! The word "orc" comes from the Old French *orque* (whale), which comes from the Latin *orca*, which comes from the Greek *oruga*, the accusative form of *orux*, which means "pickaxe." That last bit is *probably* in reference to the horn of the narwhale, which in many cultures has been mistaken for a mermaid. That makes orcs the distant relatives of mermaids. Sort of.

his spear smashing against his shield, and so the GØttFRAttA follow his example.

ORKS follow a very strict code of honor called QRsÖNttuNK (*keershoothunk* - "wearing the warrior"). This is a very difficult concept to convey to those who are not raised with it. In every ORK community, there is a place for GØttFRAttA to bathe after battles. In this building, they hang their armor and walk home in simple cotton long shirts. "Never wear the warrior when you should be at Home" is a common ORK proverb meaning that one should not profane the sacred place of the Mother with the presence of war.

PHYSICAL CHALLENGES, DEFTY DEATH AND ORK JUSTICE

ORKS do not look forward to the Afterlife. It is not a pretty picture that awaits them and they know it. But an ORK proving that he is not afraid of death is truly a noteworthy act. ORKS call a display of courage ggJKLO (*geeiklo*) and to have it marks you above others. The more ggJKLO an ORK displays, the more respected he is by his fellow ORKS.

It is impossible for humans and the other races to show ggJKLO because their Afterlives are not as dreadful as the one ORKS have to look forward to, and so they cannot prove their ggJKLO through defying death. But there is another way to earn ggJKLO, and that is through ffAEggÖttu (*vaheegoothah*). ffAEggÖttu is the display of a certain kind of courage: the courage to make right what is wrong. The closest word that can be used to describe ffAEggÖttu is "justice." This is the only way ggIPS may achieve ggJKLO, and the ones who have gained ggJKLO have never found themselves alone in ORK company.

THE MISCONCEPTION OF ORK CANNIBALISM

GØttFRAttA are known for pillaging a field after battle, but one of the great misconceptions of the ORK race is the fable that the Dwarves spread about ORKS eating the bodies of their enemies.

No ORK would ever eat the flesh of an Elf, Human or Dwarf, and certainly not the flesh of a goblin. ORKS believe that the body is inhabited by a soul, and it is this soul that keeps the body warm. For once a body dies, the soul leaves the body behind, leaving it cold.

When an ORK dies on the battlefield, ORKS are very concerned with keeping the body warm so the soul cannot escape to the Afterlife. Then, after the battle, the ORKS eat their own dead, so the soul of their fallen brothers can rest within the bodies of their living brethren. This allows the strengths of the fallen ORK to live in the body of his devourer. This act, called PJIEA (*pyieeah*) is one of the most sacred duties of GØttFRAttA, for they must keep their brothers from going to the cruel Afterlife that has been prepared for them,

and also makes their brothers stronger to defend ORK lands in danger of being raided by the kindred races.

I hope that this discussion will dismiss the superstitious belief that ORKS eat their enemies. They do not. They bury them in fire.

You see, ORKS believe that if you keep a body warm, the soul will stay within the body. ORKS bury their enemies with hot coals so their souls will stay in the ground and not be able to enjoy the Afterlife that has been prepared for them.

THE CULT OF BÖsstRAKA

BÖsstRAKA (*bowshttrahkah*) is the tall, slender older brother of GØttDuKu. He was born before the Thunder God and was born mute. Because he could not speak, he spent his days learning to write, and it was then that he invented the ORK language. Not only did he invent the ORK language, but it was he that taught the ORKS many secrets (although he did not create fire; that story belongs to his younger brother, Pugg).

Because BÖsstRAKA was tall and slender and mute, he learned to make up for his ggIP-ness by observing the other races. He saw how the Elven Gods used magick and how the Dwarf Gods made machines and how the Human Gods made steel, and he wrote all the secrets down. BÖsstRAKA is often called FJueK KAFJÖN (*fjuheek kafyoon*), "The Secret Keeper" because of his still tongue and his keen eyes. After he wrote the secrets down, he passed them on to the ORKS in the form of scrolls. The Sacred Scrolls of BÖsstRAKA are holy artifacts, for they contain the oldest ORK knowledge in the world. There are supposed to be thirteen scrolls, but only six are held by ORKS today.

THE ORK "SCHOLAR"

The idea of an ORK scholar confuses much of the academic community, but I would put forth that JQDODItt (*ykeedohdith* - "the one that watches") are scholars in the traditional sense of the word.

ORKS do not possess the ability to use magick as do the kindred races, but there are ORK practitioners of magick, and some are the most courageous ORKS I have ever met.

ORKS learn everything from watching. They watch humans fold metal, dwarves build war machines and (sometimes regrettably) elves use magick. They know the strength of each race and have drawn knowledge from each of them through observation. JQDODItt observe and write down what they observe, thus giving them a record of the experience. Then, if a JQDODItt needs to use his knowledge, he pulls it forth from his pouch of scrolls and remembers the knowledge that he observed.

This leads to great deals of trouble for some



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scholars. Imagine an ORK "sorcerer" carrying about scrolls full of magical observations that he copied from another JQDODItt. He does not know how the spell is cast, but is reading the writing and improvising as he goes. Yes, ORK magick is a thing that must be seen to be believed.

The JQDODItt obviously follow the path of BØssttRAKA the Watcher. They gather knowledge through watching and learning and are respected and feared throughout ORK. There are ORK "sorcerers", ORK "engineers", and ORK "blacksmiths", all who practice trades and hold secrets regarding those trades. Respecting the silence of BØssttRAKA, they maintain a solemn silence with their knowledge, often spending their entire lives without speaking (except to use an occasional spell or two).

There are many groups of JQDODItt each with their own DØttA (*doothay* - guild) that maintains the secret of each trade. In order to become a member of a DØttA, an ORK must go through a rigorous apprenticeship to prove his worth. Much like the secret rites of DØMGA, these rituals are religiously guarded and cannot be spoken aloud. The secret rituals of BØssttRAKA are silent as they are performed, with only a set of hand signals being used to communicate. All ORK scholars know the secret hand symbols, and often use them without any ggIP ever knowing that communication was occurring. The system is slight and quiet and subtle and I shall mention it no more.

THE CULT OF PUGG

Pugg (*pug*) is the ORK God of Tricks. He is often portrayed as a small ORK with a maimed hand and foot. It is said that GØttDuKu crushed his foot and bit off four fingers from his right hand for stealing his spear and shield just before a battle.

Pugg is not only the master of tricks, but he is a shapeshifter as well. His cloak PØssttLAKA (*pooshtlaykay* - "the cloak of a thousand faces") allows him to take any form he desires. He sometimes shares PØssttLAKA with his brother BØssttRAKA, but he always demands a secret as payment. There is an old ORK saying that goes "BØssttRAKA LMNØ OE ssKLAM Pugg I Ø BuDR ggIP" or "BØssttRAKA may be wise, but Pugg is no fool."

Of all ORK tales about the Gods, Pugg populates most of them. All ORK storytellers know at least a dozen stories of how Pugg fooled one God or another, for ORKS must always be full of wiles and tricks. Even GØttFRAttA appeal to his wisdom by wearing a black feather in their helmets, for his cloak of a thousand faces is made from black feathers.

TRICKSTERS AND THIEVES

ORKS that are too small to be GØttFRAttA or too maimed to become JQDODItt often turn to

Pugg for a role model. The Trickster is often called "the Bringer of Misery" because ORKS believe that Pugg sets tricks and traps for ORKS to test their wits. If they are caught by the trick, then Pugg has gotten the better of them, but if they are clever and quick, they can get the best of Pugg, thus proving themselves to be worthy of his attention.

ORKS often whisper quiet prayers to Pugg, but they are not the prayers you may be accustomed to. Prayers to Pugg often curse him for his cleverness. An ORK can often be heard to whisper, "RSTM sslIØ, EIOØ" or "Not this time, limper." The reference is, of course, to the maimed foot Pugg has. As was mentioned above, it is honorable for an ORK to throw courage in the face of death, and what better way to prove one's courage than to taunt the master of tricks?

Another reason to insult Pugg is to draw his attention. An ORK who proves his wit to Pugg can sometimes draw his favor, thus being one of the PØttggattØ, the Lucky Ones.

THE ORK BARD

The ORK Bard, called MeffDØGttA (*mehvdowthay*), is an ORK of high respect and regard. A MeffDØGttA does not live his own life, but lives for FRAttu (*frathuh* - "the Truth"). FRAttu is the word used to describe the body of ORK mythology, folklore and history. A MeffDØGttA must know all the stories there are to know, going through an intense apprenticeship under the direction of an elder MeffDØGttA. The apprentice learns dozens of stories, and memorizes them all. But more importantly, learns what each story means. For to tell a story without passing along its meaning is to be BRAKAFRAttu (*braykayfraythah* - "untrue"), and to a MeffDØGttA, there is no greater insult than to be called untrue.

A MeffDØGttA carries his stories wherever he goes — literally. For each story that he knows, he gains a small favor that is stitched onto his clothes. Sometimes these favors are stitched onto a coat, making a kind of storycloak that may be removed when not needed (this is a recent trend as ORK adventurers are becoming more prevalent in the society of Man, and ORKS have learned that Man likes his city streets to be "QUIET!", although quiet is definitely not ORK). So, if you wish to hear a story from an ORK, you simply point to the story you want to hear and the ORK will tell it to you. "What is the story of the bell?" and "What is the story of the button?" are questions ORK Bards hear every day from little ORK children.

THE FIRST TRICK

ORKS love to tell stories. Of course, the concept of "truth" is a bit different for an ORK than for a human or an elf. As discussed above FRAttu is the ORK word for "truth." It is a very

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complicated issue to discuss in a paper of this length, but to give you a taste of it, when an ORK finds a story to be FRAttu, the story holds some kind of truth. Just as the tales of the gods are true because they teach lessons, so is the story of tricking a human is true because all humans are stupid.

As said before, almost all of the stories MeffDØGttA tell are about Pugg. ORKS value

But Pugg had a solution. He invited all the other Gods to a great feast on the mortal plane. He did this for many reasons, but the main reason was that it was a neutral site where no powers could be used (he didn't want his ttWAK going foul on him).

At the feast, he revealed a great table of food. "Enough to feed us all, for surely none of us here could finish such a table themselves."

"Do not be so sure of that," said the Dwarf God. I think I might be a match for your table."

"Well, now that would be something to see. But I do not think that you could perform such a feat. In fact, I would wager you something very precious for such a feat..." and Pugg pulled a bag out of his cloak of shadows (which is said to have one hundred pockets). "This is a very special pouch, my little friend. For every one thing that you place inside of it, seven things you may pull from it. Now wouldn't it be nice to put a big fat roast in my little bag and pull out seven?"

"Indeed!" cried the Dwarf God. "But, what would I wager against that?"

"Oh, nothing, really. Just a tiny slice of that land that you claimed when all of you divvied up the Afterlife. Just a small slice is all I would wager against my magical bag — if I were you, of course."

Well, the Dwarf God's eyes were filled with loaves of butter-smothered bread and steaming pies and crisp cold chocolates and try as he might, he could not resist Pugg's offer.

So the contest was on, and the Dwarf God started eating. In no time at all he had finished a third of the table, the appetizer all but gone, and he was beginning to work on the entrees when Pugg shouted to him, "My, my little cousin, you must've not eaten for a week, knowing that you were coming to my feast. Here," he said and took the wine from the table, filling his glass. "Here, drink some wine to wash down the dainties. After all, the wine was sitting on the table, and you'll have to finish it off sooner or later."

"Indeed," said the Dwarf God and he swallowed up the goblet of wine faster than you can say KRUNKITS. Then, in not half a breath more, he was finished with the entrees and beginning to



trickery, but abhor cheating. To an ORK, a JIP (yip - cheat) is when one breaks the rules. A ttWAK (thwak - trick) is when an ORK uses the rules to his advantage. There is a very old ORK tale regarding the four most famous ttWAKS in ORK history, performed by Pugg on the Human Gods, the Elven Gods, and the Dwarven Gods. As it turned out, all the Gods decided to gather together to divvy up the Afterlife and someone "forgot" to invite the ORKS. Well, they didn't think very kindly of that and they decided to crash the party. The problem was that by the time they got there, all the land was already claimed by another pantheon, and so the ORKS were left out in the wind.

work on the deserts.

"Slow down!" cried Pugg. "You eat so fast it is easy to see why you'll never grow any bigger. Here, take another drink of wine to wash down what you've eaten before you begin on the desserts."

"Indeed," said the Dwarf God and swallowed down the wine faster than the first time. Then, turning his attention to the desserts, he began to chew away like a suckling on his mother's breast.

And just when it looked as if the Dwarf God would finish the table, just when there was only one tiny cake left, Pugg raised his hands and cried, "Enough!" All the other Gods cheered and Pugg scooped up the wine flask and poured out two goblets and handed one to the Dwarf God. "You have all but beaten me, little one. Let us drink now to your health, as I salute your victory and my humility."

"You are a very gracious host," said the Dwarf God, "for an Ork" (this misspelling is to show that all the other races do not know the proper way to pronounce ORK). They both drank to the Dwarf God's victory and when the goblets were empty, the Dwarf God finished off the last little cake and raised his head in victory.

"Now, give to me what is mine," said the proud little God, "for I have won!"

Pugg shook his head, heavy and low with sadness. "I do not wish to correct you, Dwarf, but you are wrong. You have lost."

"And how have I lost?" the Dwarf God demanded.

"The wager we agreed upon was for you to eat all that was on the table."

"And I have done so. Look! The table is empty." He stretched his hands over the table, and indeed, it was devoid of eatables and drinkables.

But Pugg smiled and said, "You have missed one swallow. A swallow that you can never finish, little God." And as he spoke, Pugg raised the goblet that he drank from and slammed it empty on the table. "For this swallow of wine that I took from the table to drink to your victory is one swallow that you missed and cannot finish. So you have lost, and I have won!"

And that is how Pugg fooled the Dwarf God out of one small sliver of his claim to the Afterlife.

Now ORKS consider this to be FRAttu. It teaches a lesson, and makes Dwarfs seem to be gluttonous fools who cannot see beyond their own puggy little noses. And because that is FRAttu, the story is FRAttu.

There are many other stories, including the three other ttWAKS that Pugg used to fool the other Gods out of portions of their Afterlands, how BØssttRAKA learned the ways of magick from the elves and mechanics from the dwarves

and steel from the humans, and of course, the tale of GØttDuKu and the Dragon of the Sky, and all of these stories are FRAttu.

THE LAST TRICK

It has been told how Pug tricked the other Gods out of their places in the Afterlands in the beginning of the world, but the tale of the end of the world is the one that concerns ORKS most.

All ORKS know what awaits them in the Afterland; it is a great toad called GORLAM that waits for the warm souls of fallen ORKS.

GORLAM devours the ORK souls when they pass on, and they must spend the rest of eternity trapped in his belly, forever aware of the Afterland that has been prepared for them. GORLAM was created by the kindred races to keep ORKS out of the Afterlands in revenge for their being ttWAKD by Pugg.

But one day, a great ORK hero will arise. There are many prophecies concerning his appearance, but the greatest was told by the blind MeffDØGttA GÜttRBAN. Called "The Last Trick" it talks of an end time when all ORKS must join with the kindred races in a battle against a great shadow. One ORK rises to bring all the Clans and Tribes of ORK together to join with the kindred races. He fights the shadow beside a human, an elf, and a dwarf, and it is his spear that kills the shadow. But his wounds are so great, even his DØMGA's miracles are not enough to keep his soul on the mortal plane.

And so the ORK hero's soul (filled with the souls of a thousand fallen brothers) will rise up to face GORLAM. After a terrific battle, he defeats the enemy of the ORKS, splitting GORLAM's stomach with his spear, allowing all the swallowed souls of the ORKS to spill into the Afterlands they have been promised. Such is the end of the world as ORKS understand it.

Conclusion

I hope this scroll will help in establishing better relations between the races. It has always been my goal to educate myself and my fellow ORKS, and that is why I followed the path of the MeffDØGttA, and that is why I came to this college. But ever since I came to this College, I have heard all the whispers that have passed behind my back, and I have tolerated them, but no longer. I will not stand idly by while insufferable ignorance in this "academic community dedicated to the search for truth" continues.

There is nothing I despise more than hatred and fear. Those things are for ggIPS. It seems that many of my whispering and snickering compatriots have forgotten that ORKS have ears... and we carry them in a little pouch tied to our belt.

**"ALL ORKS
KNOW WHAT
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THE AFTERLAND;
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What is *Lights, Camera, Action?*

Long-time SHADIS readers will recognize this feature immediately. Need an off-the-cuff storyline for your RPG campaign? Match the party's current situation to the one described in "Lights," then switch on the "Camera" and drag them into the "Action"!

Not only is this feature back after a short hiatus, but it will also continue regularly — some readers became quite passionate about it! We encourage that, and would love to see your scenarios. Send them in; there's a good chance they'll be used. Meanwhile, sit back and marvel at the prolific and under-handed Larry Granato, who brings you this month's trio of LCAs.

The Jewelry Store

Lights: The party goes to the jewelry store to sell some of their treasure.

Camera: The jeweler offers unusually low prices for the gems and jewels, and continues dropping the values if the party grumbles or argues.

Action: The person behind the counter is actually a highly-skilled assassin in disguise who killed the real jeweler and was in the process of looting the store when the party came in. If the PCs become suspicious (a fairly good chance) he will pop into the back room and backstab characters with a poison dagger as they enter, and then try to make his escape.

Larry Granato

The Once But Not Future King

Lights: The party is approaching a new town.

Camera: They see a sword in a stone, on which is written "Whosoever pulleth out this sword from this stone is the true-born king." The first character who tries easily pulls it out. There's a sound of trumpets, and within minutes a delegation of elders from the town arrives, bearing royal regalia. They ask the "true-born king" if he wishes to accept the crown of their constitutional monarchy. If the PC agrees, he's escorted into town and crowned in front of a crowd of cheering townspeople. The elders ask if the new king wants to appoint royal officers (marshal, constable, steward, chancellor, etc.) from among his party; appointees are given heavy golden chains and jeweled tokens of office.

Action: At the modest palace, an elder remains with the new king to advise him on the laws of the kingdom. The party is supplied with jeweled

equipment, fancy armor, and magic items while their own stuff is taken away to be "cleaned" and their money deposited in the royal vaults. Although they're treated well, they soon learn that the positions of the king and royal officers are purely ceremonial and have no power. In addition, it is treason for them to leave the palace grounds! If they sneak off, no one will stop them, but all the jeweled and golden items turn out to be fakes, and the magic gear is cursed or has only one charge left. If the party decides to abdicate, they're told that all their items and money now belong to the state. However, the elders are willing to give back most of their stuff if the party promises not to tell anyone about the incident. The party will not be attacked as the townspeople don't believe their scam is worth dying for, but if they're belligerent, they won't see their equipment again.

Larry Granato

The Peasants Are Revolting!

Lights: The party is traveling across an isolated barony.

Camera: A burning village and troop movements are seen in the distance. Investigating the village, they see the corpses of men, women, and children. A pitiful survivor asks for their help, but then a group of mounted knights approaches.

Action: The local baron is putting down a peasant revolt, caused partly by his own callousness. He is not an evil person, but his troops have gotten out of hand and massacred innocents. He will threaten and try to intimidate the PCs, accusing them of being outlaws, consorting with rebels, etc. He really wants to scare them off and cover up the incident. If they're not cowed, he'll offer bribes for their silence. He will only attack if the party refuses cooperation.

Larry Granato



Lego® Pirate Wars: Optional Rules

Stephen W. Gabriel

The original set of rules for conducting miniatures naval combat with Lego® model ships ran back in SHADIS #19, and was quite enthusiastically received. Mr. Gabriel has run games under these rules at the last couple of GenCons, and will in all likelihood do so again this year. By popular demand, then, here are the optional rules for Lego Pirate Wars!

The following are optional rules for *Lego Pirate Wars* and are intended to add more options and complexity to the game.

Running Aground

Whenever a ship travels through shallow water, either reefs or near islands, the ship runs the risk of damaging its hull on the sea bottom. The draft of the ship, the distance the hull extends below the surface, is equal to the interior width of the ship's hull. Narrow hulls have a width of 8 and wide hulls have a width of 12. Damage from running aground can never exceed the ship's remaining HF. Ships that lose all of their HF by running aground do not sink, they become obstacles that must be maneuvered around. The ships that are aground are out of the game and cannot fire cannons or guns at passing ships. The crew may use launches to go to other friendly vessels or islands.

A ship runs aground if it passes an island at a distance less than its draft. If the ship is going past the island or rock, it takes only one point of Hull Factor in damage. If the island is within 45° of the ship's heading, the ship then takes one point of Hull Factor for every 8 dots of movement it had left when it began to run aground. In addition, the ship takes an additional point of damage for every four dots less than their draft that they are closer to the island. A narrow hull ship takes one point of damage if it is from 4 to 8 dots from the island and two points of HF if it is within 4 dots of the island. A wide hulled ship takes one point of dam-

age if it is from 8 to 12 dots from the island, two points if from 4 to 8 dots and three points if less than 4 dots from the island.

Example: A Skull's Eye Schooner rounds an island and is forced to cut it close. The ship passes the island with 6 dots between the edge of its hull and the edge of the island. The Skull's Eye Schooner loses two HF, one for running aground and one for being within 8 dots of the island (more than four dots less than its draft, but less than eight dots less than its draft).

Example: An Imperial Flag Ship maneuvers for a shot but the Captain forgets that they can't turn until they move forward a full length. The ship has its full move of 60 dots and is 16 dots from a rock. On the next turn, the ship moves forward 16 dots before running aground. The ship has 44 dots of movement left, which divided by 8 results in six points of HF damage. The ship only has 4 HF of damage and stops dead on the rock, a navigational hazard for the rest of the game.

Reefs are set up at the beginning of the game and have a specific area they cover and a specific depth. The depth may vary along the length of the reef. The reef may be 4, 8, or 12 dots deep. A reef deeper than 12 dots does not affect ships because it is deeper than the draft of a wide hull. The damage is taken when the bow of the vessel crosses the edge of the reef and is not taken again unless the ship leaves and then reenters the reef. A depth 4 reef does two points of HF damage to a narrow hull and three points of damage to a wide hull. A depth 8 reef does one point of damage to a narrow hull and two points of damage to a wide hull. A depth 12 reef does one point of damage to a wide hull. A ship that enters a reef in a deep area and then travels to a shallow area takes additional damage equal to the difference between the damages of the two depths.

**Artwork by
Tonia Walden**

Lego® Pirate Wars

Example: A Man of War (an Imperial Skull's Eye Schooner with 8 cannons, 4 per side) is chasing a Renegade Runner. The Renegade runner crosses into a reef to try and lose the Imperials. The reef is depth 8 and does one point of damage to the Renegade Runners hull. The Man of War follows and loses two HF from hitting the reef because it has a wide hull. The Renegade Runner then passes into depth 4 water and takes an additional point of hull damage. The Man of War decides to steer clear of this and heads back out to open water.

Oversailing

Oversailing is a sacrifice of cargo area in order to add additional sails to make the ship faster. A narrow hull may add one additional sail over its maximum for every ton of cargo space it allocates to additional sails. A wide hull may add one additional sail for every two tons of cargo space it allocates to additional sails. Each additional sail adds another figure to the sailing crew. The speed of the vessel is increased according to the number of sails added.

Overloading

Overloading is a sacrifice of speed for extra cargo. A narrow hull adds one additional ton of cargo space for every sail withheld. A wide hull adds two additional tons of cargo for every sail withheld. Sails that are withheld are not removed from the ship or the damage chart and the crew is not lost. Instead, calculate the speed of the ship as though it had lost that number of sails and then begin numbering at the first sail with that speed and reduce by one Sail Loss for each SF down the chart. Fill in all the remaining slots with a speed of 8 once the speed drops below 8.

Example: A Skull's Eye Schooner overloads by adding two additional crews of men and two tons of treasure chests. The Skull's Eye Schooner then moves as though her speed were reduced by two Sail Factor. The original speed was 64 and with a Sail Loss of 8 the new starting speed is 48 dots. The player puts this at the top of the chart and then fills in the remaining 7 SF slots with 40, 32, 24, 16, 8, 8, and 8.

Launches

All ships carry launches, small rowboats used to get the crew to and from shore. Each ship carries one launch for every 8 figures, dropping any remainder. Launches move at a speed of 24 dots and turn like ships. Launches may move backwards at one half speed and are not affected by wind. They do not get damaged when they run aground. Launches may not fire cannons and are at -1 to hit with a cannon firing ball. Launches have only 1 point of HF and sink when hit using the standard rules for sinking ships.

A Launch may be placed next to a ship with up to seven figures on board as a single action in the

Action phase of the turn. The launch moves normally on the next turn. A Launch may land on a beach or at a pier as an action. The figures on board may not leave until the next turn, but they may fire muskets and pistols. A launch may not leave a beach or a pier until the turn after the last figure boards it. Launches may not be used in a turn that a ship sinks, but they may be used to flee a ship that has run aground.

Launches may carry up to seven figures. A treasure chest or barrel counts as two figures and a cannon counts as four figures.

Some launches are equipped with a gaff rigged sail on a mast mounted on a small turn table. These boats use the standard sailing rules with a speed of 36 dots. They have one SF which cannot be reset and may carry four figures.

Wind Heading by Sail Types

The type of sail a ship lofts affects the direction it may travel with respect to the wind. Ships that loft square rigged sails may only travel with the wind from beam to beam and may never head into the wind. Ships that loft only gaff rigged or lateen sails may tack as per the normal rules. This rule reflects the reality of sailing these ships. If this rule is used, the Skull's Eye Schooner and Black Seas Barracuda will never be able to move up wind and the Imperial Flagship will only be able to move at tack if the main square sail is struck. To do this, two additional sailors must be tasked to bring the sail down and the ship then moves as though it had lost 2 SF. This rule drastically changes game balance and is not highly recommended.

Firing Cannons

The older ships have cannons that actually fire. This rule may be used with firing cannons to determine hits and damage. The player loads the cannon with a grey round for shot and a black round for ball. They may then fire the cannon at the target.

If the shot hits the target and bounces beyond it, it does one point of damage. If the shot hits the target and bounces back toward the attacker, it does two points of damage. If the shot hits the target and stays on the ship, then it does three points of damage. All damage is applied according to the basic rules. Please note that the normal ranges for cannons still apply even though the cannon may be able to physically shoot farther.

Fortresses

Fortresses represent stone and brick structures capable of withstanding cannon hits. Fortresses are typically controlled by the Imperial Marines; pirates would rather be free to move about.

Fortresses cannot be sunk, nor can they be destroyed within the scope of the game. The figures manning the fortress can be killed, allowing the fortress to be overrun. Due to the solid con-





struction of a fortress, the first success of every cannon strike is eliminated. A cannon firing shot only kills one figure for each success after the first. A cannon firing ball kills one figure for each success after the first, but it also destroys a cannon and its crew if it gets three successes. Figures can fire muskets at the fortress with a penalty of -2. Each success kills one figure.

Entering Fortresses

There are two ways of entering a fortress, scaling the walls and blowing down the doors. Once inside, all casualties from cannon fire is split between the attackers and the defenders, with the defenders always taking the first loss.

Any pirate figure that lives long enough to get to the wall of a fortress may scale the wall. The figure must end a turn adjacent to the bottom of the wall. At the end of the next turn, they are placed on top of the wall. Any figures on top of the walls are at +1 to hit a figure climbing the wall.

Cannons outside of the fortress may destroy the doors, if any. The doors require two successful hits to destroy using ball and the cannon firing at them must point at them. The first success is not dropped when firing on doors.

Figures on Shore

Figures on shore, including in fortresses and on docks, follow the standard turn sequence. However, the figures move during the Movement Phase and may still fight during the task phase if they moved. They may not reload cannons, muskets or pistols if they have moved.

Figures have a base movement of 24 dots, except figures with peg legs which move only 18 dots. Count the number of dots from where the figure is to where it is going and move the figure after you reach 24 or the desired position. The length of the ramp on the mountain base is 18 dots and a figure may only move onto the ramp if they have enough movement to reach the top. Figures on stairs pay two dots of movement for each dot moved forward. Figures on ladders pay 12 dots of movement for each level climbed up or down.

All figures must be firmly attached to the base plate, building or pier. Any figure that falls over must spend the next task phase standing up. Figures that fall off of a building are killed unless they fall off into the water.

Cannons firing shot on figures in launches or on the ground outside of a fortress kill two figures for each success. There is a -2 penalty for any figure outside of a building that fires at a figure inside of a building. There is a -1 penalty for any figure firing at another figure that is partially obscured by parapets, barrels, cargo, etc.

Fortress Design

The size and configuration of a fortress is left to the discretion of the designer with only a few conventions.

A fortress may have only one cannon for every 24 dots in length of outer wall, not including the main entrance doors. The mountain base plate has a perimeter of 88 dots and can have up to three cannons. The perimeter can be increased by building out over the edge, but the structure must be supported from below. Docks do not increase the perimeter of the fortress, but enclosed buildings on the docks do.

Buildings are considered to be enclosed when they have walls or structure on three sides and a roof. The fourth side is left off as a convention to allow the easy placement and removal of figures and it still gives a -2 fire modifier to targets inside the building. Buildings can be of multiple levels and cannons can be located on any level. There must be a ladder or stairs to provide access to all levels. Typically, each fortress sports a tower at least two and sometimes three levels high.

Cannons can be mounted anywhere within a fortress with at least 4 dots or one floor between them. Cannons may be mounted on wheels, slides or turn tables. Cannons mounted on wheels may be turned and moved inside the fortress. It requires two figures to move the cannon and the cannon can only be moved 12 dots per turn. Cannons on slides have a fixed direction and cannot be removed and fired. Cannons on turn tables can be turned freely, but cannot be removed and fired. Cannons on parapeted structures are considered inside the fortress for determining hits.

Fortresses receive 4 Imperial Marines for each cannon. The Marines may fire and reload cannons in the Fortress as well as their normal tasks. Each Fortress also receives one Imperial Marine Lieutenant as a commander.

Hauling Loot

Cannons can be moved from ship to ship or ship to shore by tasking four figures to move the cannon. The cannon is moved to the other ship or pier at the end of the turn. The ship or pier receiving the cannon must be in hull to hull contact with the ship moving the cannon. The cannon can be loaded into a launch with two figures and may be unloaded on shore by a team of four figures. Treasure chests and barrels can be moved by tasking two figures to carry each one.

Revised Renegade Runner

The Renegade Runner model is a basic stripped down ship that is frequently seen as being unworthy of battle.

The speed of the Renegade Runner is 48 dots, which leaves it slower than just about any other vessel. To increase the speed, add one of the gaff

rigged masts from a launch, replacing the compass on the stern castle with the mast. This adds one Sail Factor and one sailor to the ship and increases the speed to 64 dots. This makes the Renegade Runner a quick moving and agile ship.

The single cannon limits the ship's firepower. Remove the center mount cannon and use two four long by one wide bricks on each side to support a turn table mounted on the ships hull. The Renegade Runner gets two cannon crew for each cannon and now has sufficient firepower to make people worry.

These modifications will result in a crew consisting of four sailors, four cannon crew, the Captain and the First Mate. The revised Renegade Runner moves as fast as the Skull's Eye Schooner and can make three 90° turns at full movement. The dual turret cannons allow it to shoot at just about any target. These modifications are highly recommended to increase the worthiness of the smallest ship in the line. Without these modifications, its better to just strip the ship and use it as a target vessel for pirate captures.

Stern Chasers

Stern chasers are cannons mounted out the back of the ship that are used to discourage tailgating and boarding approaches from the rear. Only wide hulled ships may mount stern chasers

and they may mount one or two. Due to limited space, stern chasers are mounted on slides. A slide is constructed using two one by four bricks, two one by two bricks, two one by four smooth tiles and a one by two smooth tile. See the illustration below. Other bricks may be substituted to achieve similar function.

Rules Clarification for Resetting Sails

After lengthy playtesting and many requests, the rules for resetting sails are changed as follows. A player may reset as many sails as desired providing they have the necessary number of figures available and tasked for sailing. The player may reset the excess sails at the top of the damage chart as long as they have not lost any HF. As soon as the first HF is lost, any remaining sails above the HF are lost and cannot be reset. After that point, the number of sails cannot exceed the number of HF.

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There are seven

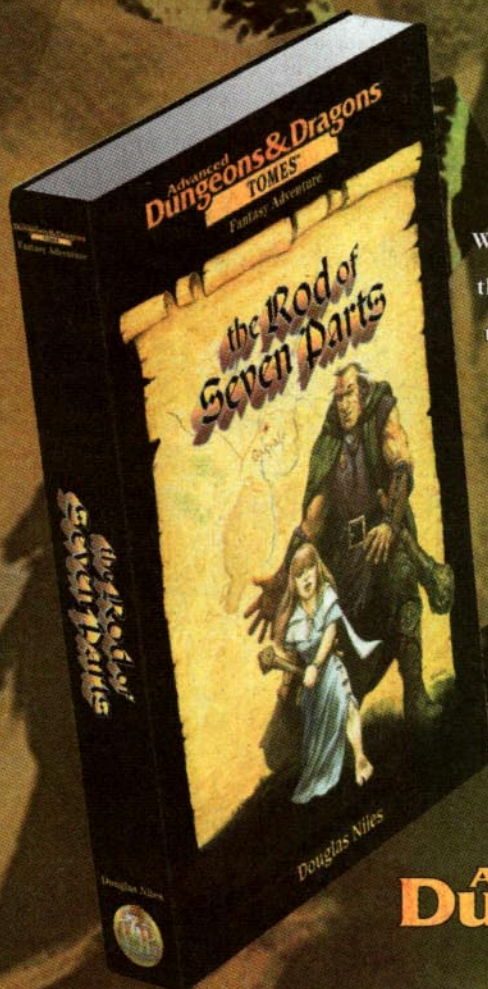
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gave the newly formed artifact to the Captains of Law and bade them vanquish their foes.

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through his body. There was a massive explosion, and the artifact shattered. Miska was thrown through a planar rip and vanished, his terrible scream and the foul blood left on the seven broken parts of the *Rod* the only reminder of his passing. The war was over.

Chaos had not prevailed.

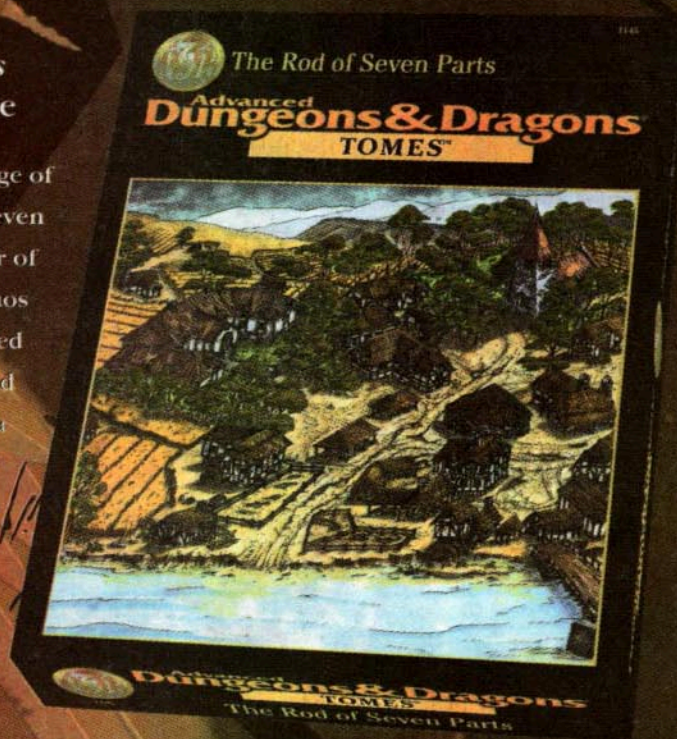
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Strange Vistas



Matt Sturm '95

All That Cuts

by Douglas Hulick

From the world of Legacy: War of Ages by Black Gate Publishing

The feeling came over her all at once: small, tiny pricks of cold that began between her shoulder blades and climbed up the back of her neck. Others of her kind experienced it in other ways, but for Isabelle, the Foreboding had always felt like a spider of water and ice walking slowly up her back. And this spider felt pretty big.

"Belle?" came a voice off to her right. "Belle, you okay?" Isabeau d'Acre, now Isabelle Dacer, ignored the man standing beside her as she scanned the dusty street for the source of her premonition. He'd feel it soon enough, anyhow.

A small flatbed wagon rattled past, the farmer on its buckboard blissfully ignorant of the two Immortals standing just inside the doorway of Granger's Feed and Dry Goods. It was a dry, if not overly hot day in Mesilla and town natives, farmers, and range hands milled about in the fading glare of the late afternoon sun. Isabelle squinted as she looked from shade into sunlight, her head still as Moise had taught her. *Let your eyes do the looking, the moving, she heard his voice say across the centuries. It's harder for others to spot you if you don't let them know you feel the Foreboding. Let them give themselves away first.*

Beside her, Jason gasped as he became aware of the other presence. Reflexively, he reached for his revolver with one hand as the other slipped towards the sword she knew hung inside his duster.

"No!" she whispered. "Whoever it is, he's good." He had to be, given the size of the spider Isabelle felt perched just inside her skull.

Damn, but this Immortal was *old*.

Then, suddenly, she found him. Across the open square, near the livery stable. He stood next to his horse, hat tipped back from blond brows, head turning as he studied the busy street. He was dressed like a rancher, hand on a battered cavalry saber that hung from his saddle, but she knew him. Even behind the handlebar mustache and three day beard, she remembered that face.

"Damn!" she said as she grabbed Jason and dragged him back into the feed store.

"What...?"

"Shut up and move!" said Isabelle as she shoved the young Immortal before her. "Out the back. Now!"

Jason Rawlins opened his mouth to argue, shut it when he saw her take a long hickory axe handle from a barrel on their way towards the back of the store.

"Hey!" came a voice from behind them. "Hey, those ain't free!"

"On account," said Isabelle as she and Jason stepped out the rear door. A line of low adobe buildings faced them across a brief expanse of rutted ground. To their right and left, the backs of several other buildings, both wooden and brick, stretched off for a short distance, then stopped abruptly. Past them, the arroyos and mesas of the New Mexico Territory extended to the horizon. Little cover, too much ground, and no time to spare, she thought.

Isabelle guided Jason across the rough road and around a corner, stumbling all the way. She cursed long narrow skirts, heeled boots,

leg-of-mutton sleeves, east coast fashions, and her inability to hide a sword in any of it.

"Hold up," said Isabelle as she stopped and leaned on the axe handle. Jason obeyed, but continued to dance from foot to foot, hand on his Colt.

"Who was that, Belle?"

"One of us." She bent down and began tearing her skirt along a side seam. When the split reached just above her knee, Isabelle reached beneath the skirt and drew the bowie knife she kept strapped along her thigh. She ignored Jason's wide eyed stare at her revealed leg as she straightened.

"Uh...but why are we running?" he finally managed.

But Isabelle did not answer. It had been like this the first time she had seen that face, she remembered, ages ago. The heat, the fear, the mud-brick walls on every side. They had been running, too, but through crowds. Dust had choked her every breath, her throat so dry she could barely answer when Raynaud had asked in Old French:

"Isabeau? Are you all right?"

In answer, she had held up her own sword, nodded. Her voice had come out as a thin rasp, like sand against the city's walls. "I'm here," she had said.

They were in Acre, the last Christian stronghold in the Holy Land, and the Mamelukes were battering at the walls even as they spoke. She was disguised as a young boy in leggings, a loose coat, and soft cap. It was 1291.

Raynaud gathered his charge beneath his cloak and drew her into the shelter of an arched doorway. People filled the narrow streets, screaming, praying, looting. They all seemed to be headed for the harbor.

"It won't be long now," Raynaud said. "Today, probably tonight at the latest, and the city will fall."

Isabeau watched the masses washing by in the street, felt the undercurrent of terror that ran there. She remembered the stories about the atrocities committed by the Mamelukes at Jaffa and Ascalon: entire cities wiped out, not always quickly. And now, Acre was falling too.

She felt a pressure against her, looked up into Raynaud's face as he held her closer.

"I know, little one," he said. "It is always hardest to see your first home fall to the march of history." The knight's eyes softened, but only for an instant. As Raynaud's hand fell away from her shoulder, a hardness entered his eyes, and she felt the coldness on her back: another Immortal. Here. Now. The Foreboding.

Isabeau scanned the street, the alleys, the roofs, and saw him first. He was leaning casu-

ally against the remains of a fruit-seller's shop down the street, seemingly unaware of the river of bodies that flowed between them. His blond hair and fair eyes looked strange above flowing caftan he wore, out of place even in a land where Frank and German had been known to don the infidel's robes from time to time. Isabeau felt it at once: he was ancient. But there was more something almost unwholesome about his presence, his Foreboding. She would later come to realize it was his insanity she felt.

The Immortal favored her with a slight grin, then turned his attention to Raynaud.

"A knight, Gaisric?" he shouted over the noise. "Since when does a Goth take the cross?"

Raynaud took half a step out of the doorway, and Isabeau saw fear and rage cross the knight's face. "Caligula," he said. "False godling! Kin slayer!"

"You aren't still mad about my killing your whole tribe, are you, Gaisric? That was centuries ago!" And a twisted smile crossed his face.

Raynaud practically howled, "Bastard!"

The blond Immortal laughed as he drew a scimitar and began absently cutting his way through the crowd. Arab and Christian fell screaming in the street as Caligula came towards them, his grin never failing. After five paces, the Immortal's caftan was a study in gore from waist to hem. Isabeau felt her stomach churn, tasted bile, but could not look away.

Raynaud drew his sword with one hand, his old Frankish axe with the other, and stepped fully into the street. He gestured at the fleeing people. "Leave them out of this, damn you! They've no part in it!"

The scimitar stopped against a woman's throat. "You promise not to run this time, Goth?"

Isabeau saw Raynaud's shoulders tense. "I swear."

The other Immortal's face went slack. "Good." He let the woman go and she bolted away. By now, the street was nearly empty. Raynaud and the other Immortal watched one another warily, but Isabeau saw only the corpses. She fell to her knees and emptied her stomach onto the street. Caligula began laughing.

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"Still spending time with fledglings, I see, Gaisric."

Raynaud ignored the jibe, spoke to her without turning. "Run to the docks, girl. I'll be along if I can."

Isabeau blinked once, releasing a tear in the process. "No."

"Go. You can't interfere and he'll only end up killing you. He and I have had this coming for a while."

Isabeau shook her head, whispered, "No." Raynaud held his sword out towards Caligula, who nodded. The knight turned, bent down before her.

"Isabeau," he began, and his eyes met hers. Raynaud's eyes were the color of old leather, of sun-dried earth, and it felt as if they were digging into all the secret places of her self. She stared back hard, trying to hide the terror she felt welling up inside. He held her gaze for a long instant, then grunted.

"Very well," he said. "But you must promise me something." His voice was quiet, pitched just for the two of them.

"What?"

"Caligula is mad, but he is also strong. Promise me you will not try to avenge me if I fall."

Isabeau looked past Raynaud, saw Caligula staring directly at her. She felt her mouth go dry, then forced her eyes back to Raynaud.

"I promise," she said, hating herself even as she said it. "But only for now." And Raynaud had nodded once, rose, and walked calmly to his death. The next fifteen minutes had been the longest in Isabeau's life, watching Raynaud slowly give way to the Roman until the knight finally fell, his body a mass of ugly wounds. Isabeau had run then, but not before she saw Caligula take Raynaud's head, triumph lighting the Roman's mad eyes. Tears had filled her eyes in Acre, but there were no tears now.

"Belle, what are we doing?" repeated Jason.

Isabelle blinked the memory away, brought herself back to New Mexico.

"Keeping a promise," she said. "Now, let's—"

The spider suddenly came back, strong as all hell. At the same moment, she heard the crunch of brittle earth beneath a boot. There, beyond Jason, just around the corner.

So much for promises.

She was past Jason and catching a sword

stroke on the axe handle before the young Immortal had time to protest. The impact of steel on seasoned wood reverberated up the length of her arm, but Isabelle kept shaken fingers around the haft even as her other hand lashed out with the bowie. The attacker twisted away, and Isabelle swung the hickory handle in a wide backwards arc, bringing the tip forward and up, aiming for his throat. It was then she saw his face, just before he slipped inside and put his fist to her jaw.

"Hold it!" she heard Jason yell as she hit the ground. The click of the hammer on his hoogle being pulled back ended any arguments.

"How many times have I told you not to get fancy, Isa?"

Isabelle looked up into the dark eyes and bright smile of Moise Carvahel and sighed.

"Damn your unbelieving hide, Moise, where the hell have you been?"

The Immortal shrugged. "I just got into town." His voice was heavy with the Spanish accent she remembered so well, and Isabelle felt a shiver run through her at the sound of it. He must have been down to Old Mexico recently. Somehow, she doubted she would

ever get over him.

Moise looked past Isabelle and his smile turned patronizing. "And this is..."

Isabelle glanced behind her, frowned. "Someone who should know better than to interfere in combat between our kind."

Jason lowered his pistol. "But Belle, he would've —"

"Killed you after he was done with me, thanks to your interruption." She held out a hand and Moise helped her up. "Damn it, Jason, I told you about that: never interfere in a duel. Combat is a private matter for us. No one ever steps in. If you help someone else, sooner or later you'll find yourself outnumbered in turn."

The young Missourian scowled and put his Colt away. "Even if a friend's gonna die?"

Isabelle bit down on her lip, barely sealed in her shout. *Don't you dare accuse me of Raynaud's death, damn you!*

Her voice low, she said, "Even then."

"It was proclaimed so, long ago in Jerusalem," added Moise, "when Immortal cut down Immortal even as Rome butchered my

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people in the streets."

Jason stared. "You're a Jew?"

Moise bowed slightly. "My apologies for leaving my horns at home today, but yes, I am a child of Abraham."

The Missourian looked back to Isabelle. "I ain't going with no Jew, Belle."

Isabelle sighed. "Shut up, Jason. We have bigger troubles right now."

Moise raised an eyebrow beneath his hat.

"Caligula's here," she said.



"You can't kill him, you know."

"Why the hell not?"

Isabelle sat against a log, absently digging a furrow into the sandy earth with her sword. Beside her, Moise tossed a small twig into the fire, watched it burn before responding. On the other side of the blaze, Jason stared out pointedly into the night. He was still young enough to hate to run, Isabelle knew, and to hate her for making him do it.

They had stayed in Mesilla long enough for Isabelle to return to the room at the boarding house to gather her and Jason's things. Inside, she had found an old, well cared for Frankish axe lying on her bed, a piece of folded paper beneath it. The paper had held several words: Calvin Augusta, Imperial Ranch, New Mexico Territory.

Isabelle had taken the axe, her sword, a change of clothes, and Jason's saddlebags. The rest stayed behind; either she could get it later, or would never need it again. Then the three of them had ridden out into the brush and grassland, southeast towards La Mesa and Old Mexico.

Moise took a sip of coffee, continued. "Well, aside from the promise to that Hospitaller you told me about, there's the matter of Caligula himself. Crazy or not, he's been around for over eighteen hundred years now, Isa. You just don't walk up to an ex-Roman emperor and cut him down."

"Sounds like a good plan to me."

"Good enough to get you killed. Do you know why no one's killed him yet? Not

because he's that good, but because no one wants to chance his Legacy. He's older than you and I combined, Isa; what do you think will happen when you take his head and the Rapture overcomes you?"

She had heard the same argument before. When one Immortal killed another, a portion of the slain Immortal's being — call it memories, call it soul, call it karma — passed into the slayer, and for a brief, singular instant, the two foes became one. Isabelle had felt the Rapture before, had experienced the unity of not only one soul with another, but with the whole of eternity that the Rapture encompassed. And always afterwards, she had found a fraction of that slain Immortal still within her. With all the others, though, they had been roughly her age or younger. But Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus: he would be the eldest Immortal she had ever tried to slay.

"I won't go insane," she said, sounding more confident than she felt.

Moise stared at her, hard. "Can you be sure? He might just overwhelm you."

Isabelle swore and drove her long sword into the dirt. "Damn it, Moise, what do you want me to do? He's rubbing Raynaud's death in my face! I walked away in Acre and I walked away in Lombardy — I'm not walking away here."

Moise leapt to his feet, as it seemed to Isabelle that the fire cast a devil's mask over his face.

"Walked away? I walked away when I was driven out of Spain, walked away when Jews were forced out of every decent city in Europe. I had to turn to your Infidels to be welcomed, then had to pretend to be Catholic when I returned. I don't like walking any more than you do, but sometimes it has to be done!"

"Like hell it does."

They both stopped. Across the fire, Jason had turned, stood.

"Walking is just plain cowardly," he said, staring straight at Isabelle. "You face a person down, no matter what."

"Oh Jesu!" More of that damn American heroism. She hated it. "You're not coming with me, Jason. I told you that before. Moise is going to train you: I don't have the time." Or the ability, she reminded herself. Moise was one of those Immortals who spent what seemed like most of his time training for combat and hardly any time living. While Isabelle had long ago decided she would never understand such a one-dimensional approach to

life, she nevertheless accepted its limited value. Moise would teach Jason combat and she would reclaim the boy later to teach him about the world. "And you're not going to be there when I settle with Caligula," she concluded.

"She's right," said Moise. "But she's not taking him on, so it doesn't matter."

"Now hold on!" Jason stepped through the fire, ignoring the flames that licked his legs. "I can handle myself when it—"

"ENOUGH!" Isabelle got to her feet in the stunned silence and took up her sword. She pointed it at Moise. "I asked you to come here to take Jason and help him, like you did me. If I'd known Caligula was going to be here, I'd have left word to meet some place else, but we found out together. Now let me handle it my way."

Moise Carvahel of Valencia let his scowl slowly soften, but failed to turn it into a smile. He did manage a deep bow, however. "Madame, in the end, I always listen to my elders."

Isabelle snorted and turned the point of her blade to Jason. He stood, arms crossed, defiant. Just like the first time she had seen him, gunslinging in Kansas.

"And you — I found you trying to build a reputation when you discovered you couldn't die. Stupid. You're lucky Butch Cassidy didn't ride down from Colorado and take your head just for being a fool." Actually, she reflected, Cassidy and Sundance had nearly wanted to take hers for defending the boy. It had taken some fast talking and several favors to placate the two, that was sure. "You're going with Moise, and I don't care if you don't like Jews, Catholics, Buddhists, or Shamans, with him you go."

"And if I won't?" Isabelle saw Moise wince even as the flat of her blade connected with Jason's temple. The boy fell like a piece of lumber. Isabelle stepped forward, put her sword on his gun before his hand could reach it.

"Then," she said, "I get angry."



Isabelle awoke groggy and ill-tempered the next morning. She had had nightmares.

She had been a Plague Doctor again in Abruzzi in 1433, only this time she hadn't gotten out of the city before Caligula found her. Instead, he had dragged her back to the plague district and sat himself down on a battered throne. There, in a foul smelling piazza, she had been chained to the slimy cobbles and forced to watch as he held his twisted court of the damned. Caligula's diseased subjects had praised his false prophecies and blasphemous blessings, crying to him for salvation even as they expired and rotted before her eyes. Then, suddenly, Caligula was standing above her, a lop-sided grin on his face.

"Bad news, I'm afraid," he had said. "Turns out you can get the plague, so I think I'll just watch you rot and rot, but never die."

Now, with the burn of true daylight in her eyes, Isabelle turned her mind to the future. Breakfast was brief and silent, and Isabelle was on her horse within half an hour after rising. She looked down at the two men, offered up a weak smile.

"You're sure you want to do this today?" asked Moise. Jason was still stewing over the previous evening and said nothing.

Isabelle nodded. "I have to start sometime. Besides, I know you won't try to come after me for at least a day."

"And why is that?"

"It's the Sabbath: you can't travel or do business today."

Moise rolled his head back and laughed. "My own fault for being devout. Be careful, Isabeau d'Acre."

"Go with God, Moise Carvahel." She held out an open hand towards the other man.

"Peace to you, Jason Rawlins. May we meet at the final battle."

Jason said nothing, merely inclining his head. So be it, she thought. Isabelle wondered if she had been as dense when she first discovered her immortality. Probably.

They had only gone a half day out of Mesilla, so the ride back was quick and uneventful. Isabelle drifted to and from the Holy Land in the solitude and caught herself switching unconsciously to side-saddle several times. She wondered briefly how the Crusaders would have fared in dusters and denim, with Winchester in their hands. All things being equal, she decided, we still would have lost.

She rode through Mesilla, pausing long enough to stop at the land claims office and discover the location of the Imperial Ranch, then pressed on to Las Cruces. In the dis-

tance, a railroad whistle signaled the impending arrival of the train from Albuquerque headed south towards El Paso. Isabelle listened to the whistle as she dismounted in front of the local saloon, recalling Cugnot's experimental steam road carriage in 1769. She smiled, imagining what his expression would be if he could see the mighty iron beasts of today. Out of habit, she pulled the Winchester rifle down from her saddle to keep it from being stolen.

As her hand lifted to the saloon door and her mind turned towards the sandwich board that would be within, a small, cold leg pricked tenuously at the skin between her shoulders. The rumbling in her stomach stopped abruptly, and Isabelle knew there was more than roast beef, beer, and mortals beyond that door. Her grip tightened on the Winchester but stayed away from the sword inside her longcoat. Too many people around, even for him.

He had already sensed her, was staring at door when she came in. Caligula raised his glass, downed the whiskey in one smooth motion, and turned his back on her. It was then she felt a small, hot spark flare inside her, challenging the spider on her neck.

Isabelle turned and walked out. Damned if she'd play his game this time.

When he came out of the saloon she was already down the street, reading the announcements on the post office door. From the corner of her eye, Isabelle watched him come, hands in the open, his step lazy. He paused beside her, and the spider gave one last freezing burst before fading to a dull sensation in her head.

"Walk with me," said Caligula.

Isabelle turned to meet his bright blue eyes, surprised at how young they looked. "Only until we're alone. Then..."

The Roman chuckled. "Ah, so melodramatic! Good, good...I like that. Makes it more entertaining." He gestured, and they began moving back towards the saloon again. "Not like Gaisric, no. He was a complete boor. Arianist, you know. Actually, I'm surprised a devout girl like yourself could stand being around a heretic of his—"

Caligula broke off to look down at the barrel of the Winchester that had been shoved against his ribs.

"One more word about him," said Isabelle, "and I drop you here, witnesses or no."

He smiled. "Ah, but it won't kill me, you know. I'm on a voyage: nothing can truly harm me."

"No, but it'll shut you up, and right now, that's good enough." Caligula shrugged, twisted his mustache once, and walked on. As they gathered up her horse and continued on to collect his from the livery stable, Isabelle found herself staring at the Immortal beside her. *Eighteen hundred years old!* Three times her life span so far, and she could hardly comprehend all the things she had seen and done. What must it be like for him? If he had gone insane during that time she might have been able to understand it, but by all accounts, Caligula had been mad before he discovered his immortality. Some kind of cruel joke of fate? Two millennia of insanity, in one neat, undying package?

Not mad enough to be bested in all that time, though, she reminded herself. He was twisted, vindictive, and megalomaniacal, but he was also still alive.

They saddled up and left town in silence, Isabelle still studying her foe, he seemingly studying the clouds. By the edge of town, it had begun to bother her; by the time they were over the first low hill, she had to ask.

"Why are you using that?"

"What?"

"A cavalry saber."

"Why not? It does an admirable job."

"But..." She opened her coat to reveal her own blade, a Crusader long sword in a carefully oiled scabbard. "But everyone I've met uses a blade from, well, their original..."

"Life-period?"

"Yes."

Caligula laughed. "Oh, I still have my old gladius, dear girl. Even use it on occasion. But I've always liked a challenge, so I switch around a bit. Do you know how I decide?" Isabelle shook her head. He smiled. "I simply use whatever my last victim used against me! Then, when I kill again, I add the old blade to my collection at the ranch. Charming, don't you think?"

Isabelle looked away from the gleeful smile. "Trophies," she said. "I'm surprised you didn't mount the heads, too."

"They didn't keep well early on."

Isabelle snarled and reined in her horse. "Far enough," she said, sliding from its back. They were in a range of low foothills now, far enough away from town to not worry about interruptions. The sky was clear, blue, and big, with only a few clouds on the horizon. With the mountains at her back, Isabelle

decided it was a pretty place for either vengeance or death. She recited a quick prayer as Caligula climbed down from his own mount, crossed herself, and decided against asking him to hear her confession. He'd probably just laugh, anyhow.

The former Roman emperor tossed his hat to one side, drew his saber, and stretched. "Say hello to Gaisric for me, dear," he said, and lunged.

Isabelle parried the thrust, riposted in turn, and back-pedaled away just in time to avoid a slash at her abdomen. She shifted to a two-handed grip as Caligula began humming. He beat her blade once, twice, three times, then pressed. Head, arm, body, legs — it was a classic series of attacks and she parried them with ease. As he brought his tip on line with her eyes again, Isabelle swung her own blade up towards his head, followed through with his parry into a figure eight, and saw the edge of her sword heading straight for his side. In theory, his saber should have been forced to ride along the top of her own blade, but for some reason, it wasn't there. Instead, it was coming

right at her throat.

Isabelle collapsed her back leg and rolled. She saw the saber slide above her as she fell, felt a boot catch her in the thigh hard enough to numb the entire leg.

As she scrambled to her feet, Caligula took a step back and waited. Waited! Isabelle felt her face flush with rage. The arrogant...how dare he!

She stamped her leg once, twice, and feeling started to return to it. Backing away, she adopted a false limp to throw Caligula off, switched to a single-hand grip, and mentally cursed herself. She had left Raynaud's axe in her saddlebags. So much for poetic justice.

Caligula closed again, his blade weaving and thrusting faster than she could parry. A cut appeared along her sword arm, another on her shoulder, then a slash inside her leg. Isabelle found herself giving ground she desperately wanted to keep, leaving openings she thought were closed. And though it all, Caligula kept humming.

She used every technique she knew: every feint, every cut and thrust combination, all the distractions, even the lay of the ground, but her sword never seemed to be able to get past Caligula's defense and wipe that damn smile off his face. Her lessons with Raynaud, and later Moise, came back to her, but the drills and practices somehow weren't enough. She was good, she knew that, but Caligula was better. He knew all the moves, all the feints, all the...tricks? No, no tricks!

Isabelle parried another slash, dropped to one knee, and stop-thrusted. A simple, basic move. To her surprise, she felt her blade meet flesh, saw her sword enter Caligula's stomach. He dropped to a knee as well, but began rising even as she drew her blade out. His face became a twisted, frightful thing, and Isabelle took a step away despite herself.

"Pray to me, child," he said as the now of blood slowed, stopped. "Your death shall bring me closer to god-head. Be glad."

He moved. There was a clash of steel Isabelle could not follow, and suddenly her hand was empty, her sword sailing into an arroyo. Isabelle ran. Caligula began to sing.

She made it her horse, reached for the saddle bags, stopped.

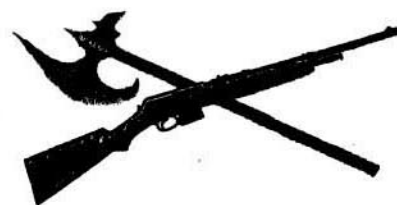
No.

Why not?

As Caligula walked towards her, opera spilling from his mouth, saber raised for the kill, Isabelle Dacer, formerly Isabeau d'Acre, turned and fired five rounds into him from her Winchester. Caligula fell, a startled look on his face. It became even more so when Isabelle bent down and quickly tied his hands and feet.

"No courage?" he asked through the blood in his mouth.

"No chances," she replied.



Isabelle stood up from tying the last rope to

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the rail and wiped her forehead with the back of her hand. Beneath her, Caligula stared up with contempt.

"Gutless bitch!"

Isabelle ignored him, instead making a production of shading her eyes and looking down the tracks towards Las Cruces. A thin line of smoke was becoming visible in the distance.

"Ought to be along any time now," she said conversationally.

Caligula spit at her, missed. "It won't kill me. You know that as well as I. Running me over with a train will only make it worse for you when I recover."

Isabelle grunted. "I suppose, except I don't think you'll be getting up from this one, Gaius."

"Oh?"

"No. See, that's the problem with you really old ones — you don't appreciate technology. And I think it's a man-thing, too. Women accept change more easily." She crouched down, tapped the rail beneath Caligula's neck with her bowie knife. "You're right when you think I don't want to behead you. Hell, no one wants to dirty their minds with your Legacy: it's probably what's saved your life more than once. But that doesn't mean I don't want to kill you."

"Seems you have a problem then."

Isabelle smiled. "Not really." She looked down the tracks again, saw the smoke getting closer. "Way I see it, sword or train wheels, doesn't really matter, as long as you lose your head. I'll just let the Southern Pacific have the honors."

Caligula turned pale for a moment, then began to giggle. Isabelle frowned. "What?"

"All your careful thought, and you forgot one basic thing!"

"What's that?"

"I'm destined to be God, of course!"

Isabelle snorted and turned away. As she walked back to her vantage point on a near by hill, she could hear the whistle of the train in the distance. Funny, she thought, it didn't remind her of Cugnot anymore. Instead, it just sounded like a lonely, vain cry in the wilderness. ✕

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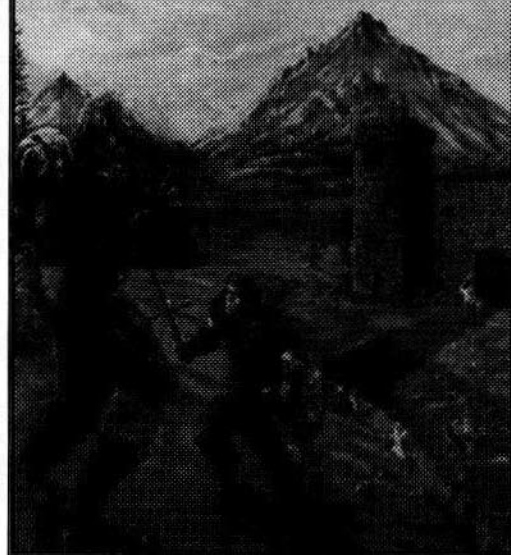
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You Ain't From Around Here...

GM: "Okay, so the Prince's ghouls, under the direction of the Toreador Primogen Madame LeFou, drag you into his audience chamber and force you to your knees in front of him."

P1: "This sucks."

GM: "Prince Regul speaks: 'Foolish Anarchs, I know of your blatant defiance of Elysium. It was you and your cohorts who dumped manure all across the modern art wing of the Figgerton Museum! I do not brook insolent neonates.'"

P1: "Wait a minute, how the hell did they find us in the first place? That's no fair, we didn't leave any traces!"

P2: (Whispering) "I've seen St. Louis by Night... Prince Regul is nearly two thousand years old and he's got some amazing powers, including five Auspex. He's nasty. Also, he has Prestation on the Tremere Regent, and the Regent has this ritual that lets him look back on the past at any location, and he's got six Auspex."

P1: "This really sucks."

GM: "You all feel yourselves amazingly awed by the Prince, cowed by a palpable aura of authority. Without realizing it, you all look directly at him, and he speaks to each of you in turn, looking deep into your eyes..."

P3: "Forget that! I'm not looking at him. No one look at him; he'll Dominate the hell out of you!"

GM: "Sorry, you have to look at him. You can't help it. His Presence is extremely strong."

P2: "I'm using a Willpower point then. I'm not looking, but I'll keep submissive, like bowing to the ground."



GM: "Nope, his Presence is so strong you can't use Willpower. Anyhow, he looks into each of your eyes and commands you to obey him from this day forth, and warns that he'll force you to drink his blood the next time you disobey." (The GM rolls about fifteen dice) "Okay, you're all completely Dominated. Madame LeFou leads you out of his chamber, a snootish sneer on her delicate features."

P1: "I'm going to beat the hell out of the uppity Toreador snob, I don't care what the Prince says! Let's see how she likes a Brujah pounding. I'm pumping Celerity and kicking her in the teeth and then backhanding her across the room!"

GM: "You forget, she's over eight hundred years old and fought in the French Revolution. She's not so fragile as she looks. She takes your kick without flinching and then nails you four more times in the next few seconds." (Rolling dice) "Okay, you're torpored. Your friends drag you away as you hear the tinkling of her laughter from behind."

As much as Vampire: The Masquerade is a

Roleplaying in
Small Towns
with
White Wolf's
Vampire: The
Masquerade

by
**Douglas
Seacat**
Illustrated
by
**Anthony
Grabski**



“...What is more natural than moving to the country, taking up a haven in a small town, and living like a king? Instead of **Worthless Chicago Anarch**, why not **Prince of Sheboygan?**”

great game, it can be extremely frustrating to play. Players take the role of neonates in a world where age and power are won almost entirely from centuries of existence. A vampire of less than a hundred years is treated with almost no respect by anyone in the Camarilla, and even the Anarchs have their share of potent elders. The *White Wolf* supplements, while finely done, are no help. They are filled with NPCs of enormous age and power, beings with whom even a creative and determined group of neonates can't hope to compete. This is exacerbated by the fact that *White Wolf* seems determined to neglect the weaker and more reasonable neonates, which should theoretically make up the majority of vampires. Several supplements (most notably *Los Angeles by Night* and *Dark Colony*) list only the most powerful Cainites, leaving the others (hundreds of them) to the GM to create. Given that a GM has paid good money for the supplement, and has fully detailed NPCs at his disposal most don't take the time to create any interesting characters of comparable power as the players.

What ensues is a game of impotence and frustration, where the GM is the only one enjoying himself (and why not? He's got powerful characters to play!), and the players are relegated to punching bags and mindless pawns. A good GM will find ways to avoid this syndrome, but players are still likely to become envious of the powerful NPCs which occupy prominent positions in every major city. Using the limits imposed by the *White Wolf* character generation process (which is quite good, and makes well-balanced characters), the players are destined to start the game at the lowest end of the pecking order.

Is there any way to get around this problem? The GM can (and should) try to limit exposure to other vampires, spending most of the game among mortals. Compared to mortals, even the weakest neonates is a god. Nothing helps a player's flagging ego more than letting them ply their powers on hapless mortals. However, in a bustling city, it is unrealistic to expect the actions of neonates not to draw the attention of rival undead. Particularly if the players begin gathering power and influence, or (much worse) threatening the Masquerade, the elders will take notice and take measures to keep things under control. Under the guidance of a good GM, a solid political conflict chronicle can be shaped under these conditions. But after a few games like this, it's likely experienced Vampire players will want something different.

Why not a vacation? Perhaps a little time out in the country will do the trick. Although it seems sacrilege, small towns are one of the best settings for Vampire: The Masquerade. Moving away from the overcrowded urban setting can provide a wealth of new challenges, and an entirely different tone. Most importantly, doing so allows vampire players to fully realize the potentials of their supernatural powers and limitations. Why should-

n't we play Altoona by Night?

The Overpopulation Myth (Too Many Bats in the Belfry?)

The first question raised by the concept of “small town vampires” is: can a small population support vampires? The rulebook clearly states that there is approximately 1 vampire per 100,000 people, and that more would severely strain the populace, as well as putting the Masquerade in serious danger.

This makes sense, but it's entirely possible the old stooges in the Camarilla have overstated the danger, leading to some misconceptions about the limits of human society. In Sabbat territory, for example, such population limits are usually ignored, and despite blatant displays of vampirism, the Masquerade has remained intact. This is because there are a lot of agencies which don't want vampires to be discovered, and some of them are potent indeed. Not only do the elders in both sects work to keep things quiet, Mages (most particularly the Technocracy via the New World Order) have pervasive control of the media and have a strong interest in convincing the masses that they live in a rational world. Even the Arcanum, the Society of Leopold, and the FBI Special Forces (all mortal agencies which know some of the truth) know it'd be a disaster if the public learned about the supernatural world.

One also shouldn't forget the lack of credibility given to small-town media. No one particularly cares what an eccentric reporter of the Kankakee Tribune says about mysterious disappearances. Indeed, some degree of superstition and quasi-religious gullibility is expected in small towns. Thus, even were a tiny local breach of the Masquerade to occur (which is probably a lot more common than people expect), it could be swiftly contained and ignored by the world at large.

Speaking ecologically, there isn't any hard and fast reason why a single vampire would need to live among 100,000 people. Even a town of a thousand people could easily support a single vampire who was careful enough not to frenzy, and who maintained a small but dedicated herd of victims. Things would be a lot different if the World of Darkness was like Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* series where the Kindred have to kill every day. Happily, this is not the case, and *White Wolf* vampires can feed without killing. A vampire with the third level of Domination (allowing them to erase memories) could feed liberally among a moderate sized town with very little problem. Presence is another invaluable interpersonal tool, making a “victim” far less likely to rat out a charming vampire. That this is possible on a wide scale has been demonstrated in *Vancouver (Dark Alliance Vancouver)*. While not a small town, Vancouver has an extremely low crime rate, forcing the Kindred there to be very careful and selective hunters.

One also shouldn't forget that a large portion of the population lives in cities under 100,000 people. In some states, such as Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico (as well as others), it's difficult to find cities over 100,000, yet the statewide populations are reasonably large. Surely scattered among these communities are a few vampires, even keeping to the 1:100,000 ratio. Particularly as neonates are exiled or marked for death in larger cities, what is more natural than moving to the country, taking up a haven in a small town, and living like a king? Instead of Worthless Chicago Anarch, why not Prince of Sheboygan?

Playing in a town under 100,000 does not necessarily mean exile to the backwoods with a bunch of rednecks and white-trash (although such games can be fun). There are numerous smaller communities which are nonetheless vibrant and interesting. Santa Barbara, California and Boulder, Colorado are two examples of small cities (approx. 77,000 & 75,000) with night life, partying college campuses nearby, and a good number of young people, not to mention their own politics, industry, and active artistic communities. By the same token, there are still places in the United States where people don't have plumbing or electricity.

Elements of the Small Town Game (Finding Things to Do)

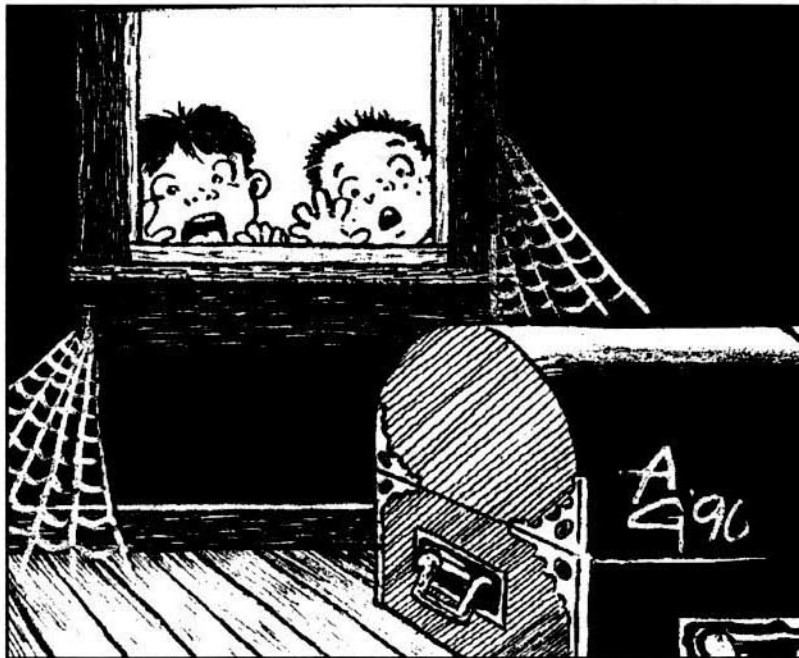
Once a GM decides to take the plunge, there are some intimidating questions. A lot of the meat and potatoes of Vampire — the complex interactions of the vampiric elite — have been removed. No more sect politics, no more Elder vs. Anarch, no huddling about in dance clubs worrying about the Tremere, nor making the rounds in Elysium trying to catch the eye of potent Cainite allies. However, if the GM is willing to overcome this unfamiliarity, they will find the new setting can breath life back into a stagnant chronicle.

The biggest necessary element to a small town game is detailed mortal NPCs. Since one of the

big advantages of playing in a small community is the lack of competition from other vampires, the mortals must be created and role-played with the same devotion and enthusiasm as any ancient Kindred. The GM should invent at least a dozen interesting mortals who are important to the town, or who the players are most likely to deal with. This can include the mayor, business leaders, police officers (sheriffs and deputies), local celebrities, upper-crust socialites, and the intelligencia. Less glamorous types shouldn't be neglected either, such as the vampire's possible neighbors (the friendly couple next door with seven ram-bunctious and curious children, for example).

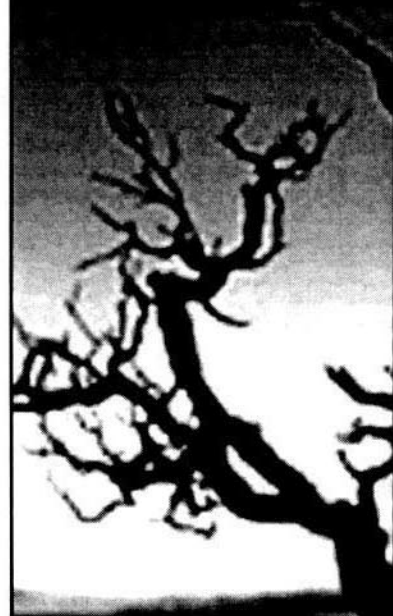
It's a good idea to include a few humorous eccentrics for flavor, particularly people who might "take to" the notion of knowing a real-life vampire. Some of these people might become Contacts and Allies; others may cause problems for the players. In a small town game, roleplaying is usually much more important than combat or direct conflict, so vivid and realistic characters are a must.

For similar reasons, small town gaming works best with a small troupe of players. While the threat of overpopulation has probably been exag-



gerated, there is only so much most small communities can take. Nonetheless, there isn't any reason why a small group couldn't work together as a loose Primogen overseeing various areas of control. These settings are also perfect for a mixed mortal/vampire troupe.

Almost any Clan can participate in such a chronicle, although some are better suited than



others. For obvious reasons, Nosferatu and similarly cursed bloodlines (Samedi, Gargoyles, some Tzimisce) have difficulty interacting with mortals under normal circumstances, but could use Obfuscate to disguise themselves. Both Brujah and Malkavians can be dangerous given the danger to the Masquerade; the last thing a small town

More than anywhere else, in a small town the actions of the players will have big consequences. This applies in particular to breaches of the Masquerade, but should also be considered for other actions. Even in good-sized towns, gossip is frequent and common. The bonds between family and neighbors are stronger than in a big city, and



needs is a wild Brujah frenzy or sadistic Malkavian pranks! On the other hand, Gangrel, Ventrue, and Toreador are all (for different reasons) well equipped to deal with such an environment. Tremere can operate anywhere, of course, but would need a good reason to be allowed to remove themselves from more critical Kindred politics.

people are always watching one another. In particular, there are always some nosy people looking for flaws in others, or "peculiar" mannerisms. Xenophobia toward strangers is common. The smaller the community, the more likely diversion from the "norm" will be noticed. Certainly an extremely pale stranger who is only seen at night

and who keeps company with a dozen different young women is going to draw talk. Even where such gossip doesn't revolve around the Masquerade, it can be unnerving to the players. Imagine a few town matrons trying to arrange for one of the players to woo an eligible young woman, or a small time con-man who decides the

suspicious attention of local law-enforcement. Considering their advantages, even an otherwise harmless bar fight can become deadly serious when Kindred are involved. Displays of Potence, Celerity and even Fortitude are bound to be noticed and wondered about. The most likely explanation will be the use of drugs, and sheriffs



important seeming "businessman" is the ideal target for a sham.

Similarly, most small communities have low crime rates, and thus serious criminal activity is rare. Vampires in small towns don't have to leave a bloodless corpse lying in the gutter to attract the

are bound to take a dim view of strangers bringing their drug habits into their "happy family neighborhoods."

This isn't to say that all is sweetness and light in these towns. Quite the contrary; such communities always have their dark side of perversity and



evil, particularly in the World of Darkness. One need not look as far as Stephen King's Castlerock to find small towns where peculiar and disturbing

obstacles in order to provide tension and conflict. There are plenty of sources of antagonism in small towns, including some which take on special significance

outside of the large city. The dangers of an alert community, as described above, can do much to help create a tense mood, particularly if the players must quietly deal with determined adversaries.

Whenever possible the GM should try to develop mortal enemies for the players. This can be difficult since any mortal is greatly outmatched by the vampire's supernatural abilities. However, such conflict is likely to be subtle and indirect, and can place the players in awkward situations where their strength can turn against them.

Vampire hunters

(whether allied to the Society of Leopold or not) are always a good and frightening choice, although reserved for when the players have made enough mistakes to be detected by a trained eye. At the GM's discretion, small towns might have a higher concentration of True Faith, and a particularly fervent man of God can make a good antagonist, particularly if the players have any humanity. They should be encouraged to deal with the problem without harming the zealot directly. So too can a persistent and cunning law officer cause problems which aren't immediately easy to deal with, particularly if the man in question is a Neutral or has high Willpower (see *Milwaukee by Night's* Lieutenant Wilks as a good example). Certain superstitious oldsters know charms, wards, and tests which work on Kindred (so-called "Hedge Magic"), and could take it into their head to "cure" or drive away the evil blood-suckers.

Reversing the paradigm, vampires in the small town could stumble upon the evil and corruption of normal humanity, and try to use their unholy abilities to clean up the town. Perhaps the mayor is secretly involved in a ring of child-pornography, or a ruthless serial killer has turned the sleepy town into his base of operations. Satan-worshippers or just plain gang violence could invade a growing town, and the Kindred could become unlikely heroes. This is one good way to provide eventual acceptance for the players despite their "weird habits."

Aside from mortals, there's no reason why a chosen town won't already be occupied by a simi-



things are going on behind the pleasant facade. However, this dark side is always hidden behind old habits of good manners and gentility. Allowances are made for old and respected — if "eccentric" — families and individuals, but newcomers are given no slack.

Hunting takes on particular significance in these chronicles. Particularly early in any such game, the players should never be allowed to hunt by rolling a few dice and picking up a random supply of blood. Especially in the smallest towns, there is no such thing as a "faceless person in the crowd" whose disappearance won't be noticed. Not every vampire has Disciplines which help them deal with victims (Presence and Dominate being the best), and even those who do don't always use them correctly, or may botch a roll. How a vampire chooses to go about feeding will determine many of his/her initial difficulties and encounters. A Don Juan will become scorned by the moral majority, while a Sandman might be caught "breaking and entering" the house of a sleeping victim. The entire game need not focus on such trivialities, but it is important that players realize they are on restricted and difficult hunting ground. Once they have established adequate herds, this detail can be neglected, but even here the GM is encouraged to flesh out members of the herds and bring them into the vampire's life at times which are not always convenient.

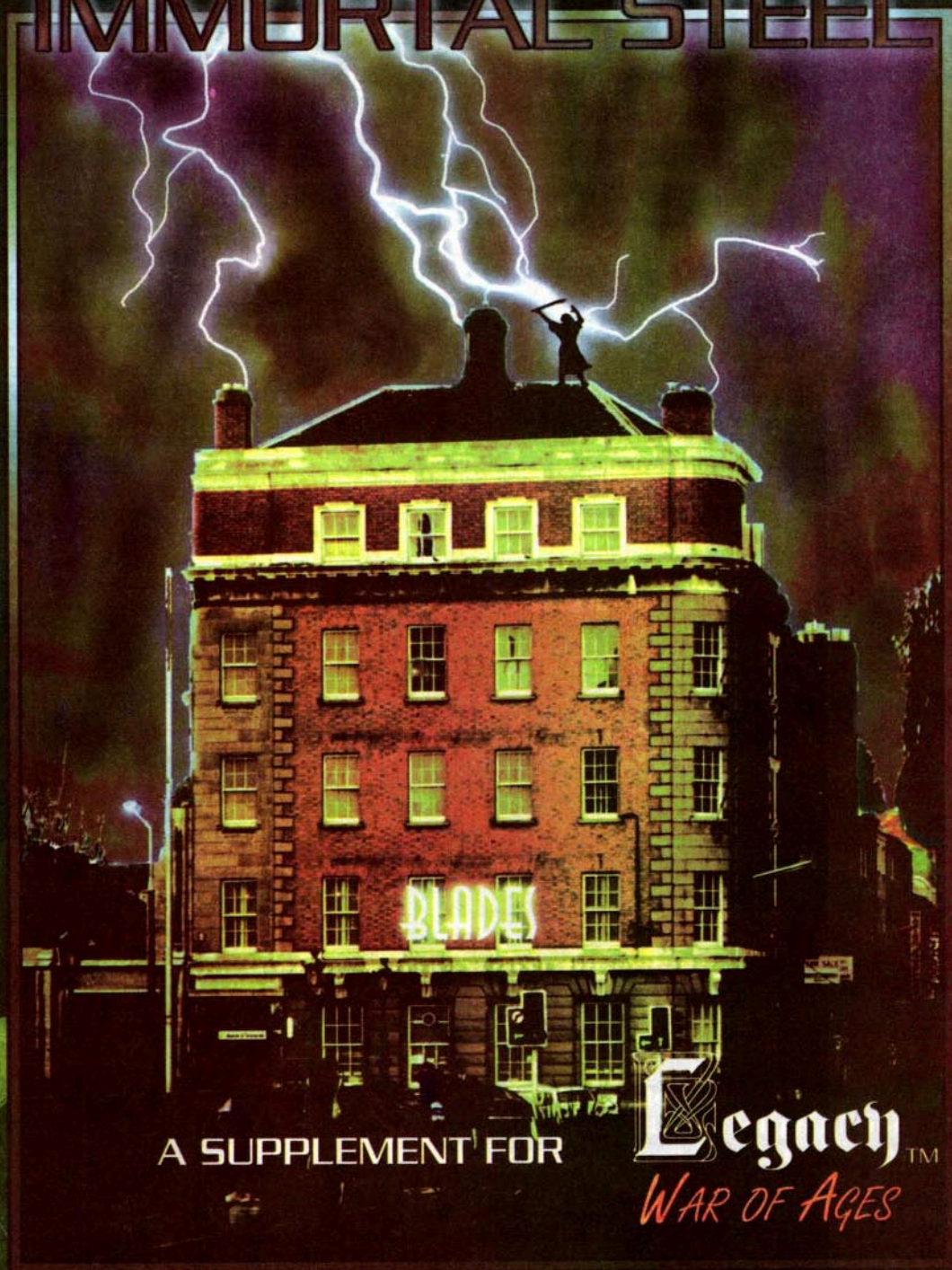
Antagonists and Tension (Enemy Mine)

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larly minded Kindred or two, particularly those near the 100,000 mark. Although one of the reasons for playing a chronicle like this is to isolate the players from other vampires, having them initially clear out the territory can make for a good initiation. In this instance, the Kindred in question is liable to be less powerful and invincible than his more ancient city brethren, so defeating him should be a task the players can accomplish given sound strategy. (Although weaker in Disciplines and raw power, the GM should give these residents have home-turf advantage, including intimate knowledge of the citizens, which can be a formidable defensive tool.)

Earlier the topic of Vampiric Ecology was mentioned, and there is one strong ecological reason why vampires are uncommon in small towns: Werewolves. Even though they won't admit it, most vampires have an almost instinctive fear of sparsely settled areas and the Lupines who roam there. The Garou can make for a perfect nemesis for an isolated small-town Prince. Since most werewolves dislike the city, they prefer to establish their kinfolk in more rustic settings, and are notoriously protective against outside interference. Their hatred of the "leeches" is legendary. Once again, the players shouldn't immediately attract the Garou, but can be discovered over time. Perhaps one of a Toreador's new Herd is actually a talented Kinfolk of a nearby pack of Fiana, or the logging company whose president has been Dominated into submission is a target for an upcoming Get of Fenris strike force.

Conflict between Kindred and Garou out in these sparsely settled areas don't need to be violent, and can actually be turned to a player's advantage. A number of Garou have become more tolerant in these days of their decline, and could be willing to make a truce with a sufficiently benevolent and persuasive vampire (those of the Gangrel clan are particularly adept at such negotiations). Trying to convince the militant warriors of Gaia not to be so quick to destroy the "Wyrms" (by ripping out the vampire's throat!) can be ground for a number of tense and challenging stories.

Similarly, the other supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness are not so harshly constrained by rules of population ecology. Many Mages prefer smaller towns, finding them more conducive to research and less scrutinized by the hive-minded Technocracy. Wraiths exist wherever people live and die, and Faeries can presumably be found wherever the Changelings have been planted among unsuspecting mortal families. Those familiar with the *Storyteller's Guide to the Sabbat* could place a family of the enigmatic ghoulish Revenants on the fringes of town. Encounters with such unfamiliar beings can provide a different slant on the small town game, as well as providing dangerous enemies or extremely valuable allies.

†††

After the players have settled the conflict and

are comfortable with their position within the town, it can be used as a launching point for further chronicles. Other internal difficulties could arise, or the players could use the (relative) security of their base of operations to venture into the more important cities, now with some influence at their disposal. Back among their peers, the players can participate in vampiric intrigues with a new perspective.

Elysium Harpies and other sophisticated elders are likely to treat such Kindred as backward and peculiar, and will enjoy scoffing at any supposed status possessed by these "country cousins." They may invite the players to elaborate parties and gatherings for the sole purpose of "showing them off" while laughing behind their backs. Such behavior is most typical of Ventrue, Tremere and Toreador, but will extend to Brujah and Anarchs, a group with a decided preference for the excitement of the big city.

GMs should engineer stories where clever players can — despite these prejudices — use their position to advantage. Perhaps the Garou tribes with whom the players have arranged a truce now threaten a larger city, and the elders are forced to swallow their pride and ask for advice in dealing with them. Potent Ventrue might request favors from small-town "Princes" who have control over politicians (including Congressmen) or business leaders from their region. Nosferatu might want access information only available from these remote locations. Gangrel will be better disposed to such "exiles" than other Clans, and may contact players to hear their stories and test their wisdom.

Of course, most Kindred will try to mesh the players once more into their personal schemes and feuds, and the players will have to be wary as always of intrigue. But this time, when it gets too much, they can pack up their belongings and return to their comfy fireplace away from it all in a ski-resort at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, or some similarly removed locale, secure in the knowledge that they're the only vampire within a hundred miles.

GM: "You see a hulking silhouette in the doorway of a large man holding what seems to be a shotgun. He's not looking very friendly; there's a gleam to his eye which makes you uneasy."

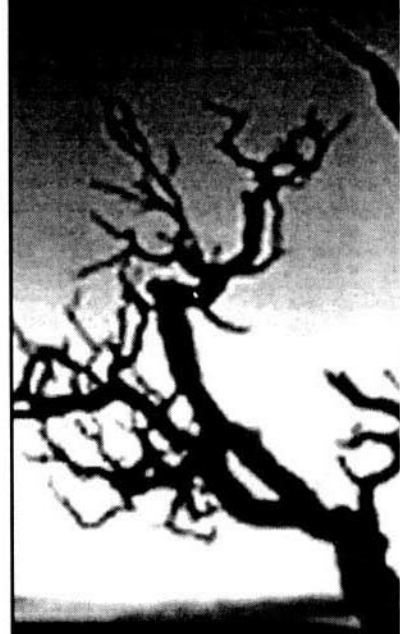
P1: "Great! What the hell is that, a werewolf? We're screwed. I'll read his aura."

GM: "Nope, it checks out as human. Seems he's just a farmer angry that you woke him up. He looks handy with his shotgun, though, and he's looking nervous and cranky."

P2: "Piece of cake. I'll walk up and awe him with my Presence. 'Hi there, we're sorry it's so late, but we got stuck out on the road.'"

GM: "The farmer brightens right up and puts his gun aside. 'Well, you fellows ain't from around here, are you? Come on in, we'll fix you up for the night. Welcome to Dodge City.'"

"Hunting takes on particular significance in these chronicles... there is **no such thing** as a 'faceless person in the crowd' whose disappearance won't be noticed."





EARTH

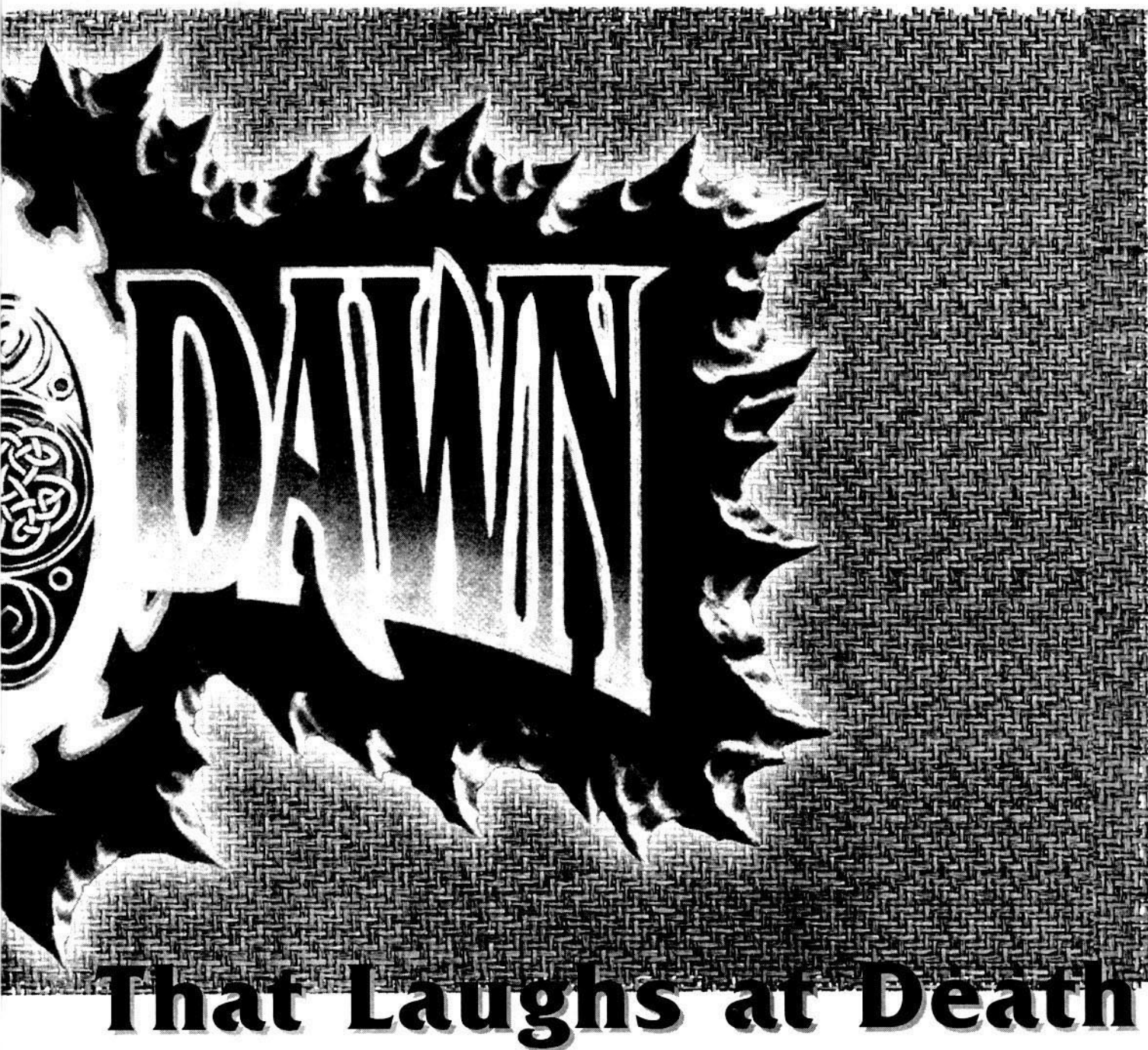
Causoban, the City

The City of Causoban was a thriving civilization eight hundred years ago. Then came the time of the Horrors, and the people had to leave their beloved city behind to find shelter from the centuries of devastation that was to follow. Now those eight hundred years are over, Causoban is once more a thriving civilization, but not it is not the city it once was. Before, the city was ruled by a beneficent king; now it is ruled by five Lords who wage guerrilla war over the city's streets. Welcome to Causoban, the City That Laughs At Death.

INTRODUCTION

The City of Causoban is a starting setting for your **Earthdawn** players. If you've never played **Earthdawn** before, this article is for you. It is a complete city (as complete as we can do in eight pages, anyway), filled with intrigue, mystery, romance and adventure. Causoban will be covered in two parts. In Part One, we will cover the geography of the city, its history and politics and the main players in its daily drama. Part Two will include dozens of short adventures that link together to form one grand *Arabian Nights* kind of thing. You can use either part individually or as a complete campaign, it's up to you.

Causoban (*cowsohbahn*) dates back thousands of years. No one is really sure who built the city, although dwarven engineers can easily show where



DAWN

That Laughs at Death

much dwarven technique was used. Elven scholars can also show where Elven magic was clearly a key to its structure. Of course, there are also homes with runes the Orks use to keep evil spirits away, and the list goes on. There is no written documentation of Causoban and there is no mention of it in the histories that were kept during the Scourge. It is a city of complete mystery. One thing is certain, however; whoever once ruled Causoban rules it no longer.

Since the Scourge, new masters have come to the city. They vary in strength and cunning, but everyone acknowledges that they are the Masters of Causoban.

THE MYSTERY CITY

There is another thing the people of Barsaive know about Causoban: its engineers never planned it being built on a lake. During the eight hundred years of the Scourge, much of the geography of the land was changed dramatically. The engineers that built it carved the city from the very rock of the mountain, and now, fifty feet of that city is under water. The lake comes from a fresh water source somewhere in the mountain. The water flows down from a spot high atop the mountain and falls in waterfalls down into the city. The excess spills over the sides and creates the fifty feet of water

CAUSOBAN

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and
**The Redoubtable
INTERN JEN**
Hypnotic
Suggestions &
Spot Illustration

**Illustrations
courtesy of FASA**

If you don't play Earthdawn...

You should try it out! But if you're happy with your current campaign, you can still use Causoban. The city has been specifically designed to be used with the *Earthdawn* setting, but with a little tinkering here and there, you can make it fit just about any FRPG.

that now cover the lower sections of the city (see diagram, below).

That is only the first of many surprises for those who returned to Causoban. The second is in the face of the mountain, embedded in the rock. It is a crystal of impossible proportions, as large as the city itself, and trapped within it is a Horror. It would seem the Horror cannot free itself from the crystal, but the crystal has a hairline fracture down its center, and many magi have said that it is only a matter of time before the crystal shatters. When they saw the Horror trapped in the crystal and the remains of their sunken city, the races that founded Causoban turned away. Who would want to live in such a city?

The answer is simple: Desperate men.

Pirates came to the city for refuge, knowing that no authority would chase them into the city for fear of freeing the sleeping horror. Eventually, the city became a haven for criminals everywhere, and as soon as you have a haven, you have to have a boss....

THE FIVE MASTERS

There are five men who rule Causoban, and they do so through treachery, villainy and pure brute force. Each of the five bosses are detailed below along with the territory they control.

Thoren Tügel, the Slave Master

The attitude toward press gangs in Causoban is simple: if you can't protect your freedom, you never had a right to it. That serves the slave market quite well in Causoban, and the one man who would know best is Thoren Tügel.

Devoted to Dis, the Passion of Slavery, Thoren Tügel has been dealing in the human trade ever since the end of the Scourge. When Dis visited him in a vision and told him to bring his slave trade to Causoban, Tügel listened. He has prospered since he followed the Mad Passion's orders, and intends to go on prospering. He is a little man who has found pleasure in binding big men to his service and binding beautiful women to his bedposts. Without his guards, he is nothing more than a whimpering, snivelling little man, but his wealth has allowed him to purchase some of the best bodyguards in Barsaive. He single-handedly controls slavery in Causoban. No other slaver would dare interfere in his trade. Slavers come from all over the countryside to Barsaive to purchase slaves from Tügel, who always offers the best meat at the best price.

Uthar Duldred, the Guildboss

He is a fat man who seldom rises from his cushions and pillows. He is the picture of pure decadence, a man who enjoys excess and isn't ashamed to show it. His name is Uthar Duldred and his control of Causoban's imports and exports is the key to his power. He was once a pirate, a

captain of a very successful ship. Now he owns a fleet of ships that bring food, slaves and supplies into the city. If anyone ever questions his authority in the city, all he needs do is stop his ships from bringing in fresh food to the city. He is also the Master of All Guilds, meaning that 10% of all transactions go into his pocket.

Trogu Gursha, the Mad Wizard

Trogu Gursha was a wizard who came to Causoban to study the Horror. He spent many days sending searching spells into the crystal without success. However, one night, he awoke from a dream and followed the voices in his head to the crystal. He pressed his hands deep in the fissure and was possessed by the mind of the Horror.

Now Gursha rules his section of the city through sheer terror. He has notified the other bosses that he knows how to free the Horror and will do so if anyone interferes with his actions. He has gathered quite a following of retainers, and while the other bosses cannot figure out his motivations for changing the angles in certain buildings or pouring gallons of pig blood into the river at midnight, they allow him to do so out of fear of the Horror being freed.

Gurtog Greytooth, the Mob Boss

Gurtog Greytooth is a big, bad Ork. He brought a bunch of his friends with him to Causoban because he knew a city that bad would offer plenty of opportunity for a thug of his caliber. Gurtog doesn't care about "right" or "wrong." He doesn't care about justice or fair play. All he cares about is getting paid to do what he does best: beat people up. Gurtog doesn't really control any sections of the city, but he is one of the most influential men (don't let him hear you call him that) in Causoban.

The King of the Beggars

No one is really sure about his name. No one is really sure about his race. But one thing is for sure, nobody kicks a beggar in Causoban, not if they want to live through the night, that is. Beggars are everywhere in Causoban, and they even have their own King. The King of the Beggars is a broken little man whose fingers and teeth collectively add to up to seven. There was a time when it was dangerous to be a beggar in Causoban, but when the King arrived, all of that changed. Now, everyone in Causoban knows that picking on beggars is bad news, so much so that the phrase "kicking a beggar" has become synonymous with stupidity.

The real secret of the King of the Beggars is that he was once a mighty sorcerer, but somehow got locked out during the Scourge. Somehow, he survived the experience, but it marked him forever. He is a master of many magics and is not one to trifle with.

COMMERCE

Causoban cannot supply itself. It needs shipments and supplies from other cities to survive. There is not much the city has to offer in exchange for its needs; however, it survives despite this fact through many avenues of commerce.

Slavery. If you want a slave, there is no market in Barsaive that can compete with Causoban. The most prominent building in the city is the Temple of Dis (the Passion of Slavery), erected by Thoren Tügel. Of course, along with the slave market, there is an underground smuggling runaway slaves out of Causoban. For more information on the underground, see *The Deep City*, below.

Safe Haven. Pirates seeking refuge from the authorities often find safe haven in Causoban. Of course, this costs them a pretty penny.



DEFENDING A CITY OF VILLAINS

At first, it may seem rather fantastical for a city such as Causoban, filled with slavery and villainy, to exist. After all, there are plenty of good men to band together to take care of a city of bad men. Such a thing is not always practical. Causoban has also taken measures to make certain that a nautical attack against the city will never occur. The approaches to the city have been mined with iron spikes that will drive up into the hulls of warships as they approach, causing them to sink like rocks. Only a pilot who has knowledge of the

bay will be able to direct ships through. In order to attain a pilot, an approaching ship must send in a small boat to fetch a pilot and bring him back to direct the ship.

THE STREETS

Causoban was once a mighty city carved from the stone of the mountain. Now, the first fifty feet of it are under water. Needless to say, this changes things a bit.

The city no longer has streets, but floodways with quick currents. Bridges had to be built in order for people to make their way from one side of the city to the other. Complicated pulley driven gondolas can be seen floating over the rooftops and pull barges fight against the strong currents of the waterways. The streets are too narrow to allow boats larger than canoes and the current is too strong for such small craft.

THE DEEP CITY

Those that have found pockets of livability under the dark water have dubbed the section "The Deep City."

Runaway slaves often find refuge in The Deep City, and no one would like to see it crumble more than Thoren Tügel. What the Five Masters do not know is that Greytooth's most trusted sergeant Thuthel is the Deep City's most valuable spy.

THE CITY

Temple of Dis, Passion of Slavery

The Temple is one of the most prominent in the city. It is also the residence of Thoren Tügel. It is a five story building with dozens of guards. More information on the Temple of Dis can be

About Earthdawn

Earthdawn is FASA's game of high heroic fantasy, based in the region of Barsaive. The world recently went through a massive upheaval as the Scourge settled on the land. The Scourge was foretold by many wise men, and the wise prepared for it. The foolish suffered. As it approached, terrible creatures called Horrors began to manifest all across the land. It was these Horrors that were the first sign of the Scourge. Entire cities used magical and mundane means to protect themselves from the Scourge, but some of those protections failed, and of all the races that suffered, it was the Elves that suffered worst. Now, eight hundred years later, the Scourge is finally over, and the people of Barsaive open the great stone gates of their kears and awaken to a world that is quite different from the one their ancestors left behind. It is the dawn of a new world, a world filled with mystery and exploration and danger.

The Twelve Passions

The people of Barsaive worship "The Twelve Passions." Much like the gods of Greek mythology, the Passions are personifications of virtues and (in the case of mad Passions) vices. It was the Scourge that caused three of the Passions to go mad. The adventure in the second half of this city setting will present the players with an opportunity to begin an ancient ritual known as "The Healing of the Passions." The Twelve Passions are:

ASTENDAR:

Love, Art, Music

CHORRIOLIS:

Wealth, Trade, Jealousy, Desire

† DIS:

Slavery, Bureaucracy

FLORANUUS:

Revelry, Energy, Victory, Motion

GARLEN:

Hearth and Healing

JASPREE:

Growth, care of the land, Love of the wilderness

LOCHOST:

Freedom, Rebellion, Change

MYNBRUJE:

Justice, Compassion, Truth, Empathy

† RAGGOK:

Vengeance, Bitterness, Jealousy

THYSTONEUS:

Physical Conflict, War

UPANDAL:

Building, Construction, Planning

† VESTRIAL:

Deceit, Manipulation

(† indicates a Mad Passion)

found in Part Two of this article, next month.

Temple of Vestrial, Passion of Deceit

The Temple of Vestrial is the second tallest building in the city. It is a tower made from black stones. The glass is stained red and it seems as if the bricks were mortared with blood. But of course, this is the temple of the master of deception, so it should be obvious that this is not the true temple. The true temple can be found across town in the ruins of the old Causoban theatre. See that location for details.

The Broken Compass Inn

The sign above this tavern house shows a compass with directions reading from top to right "N, S, E, W." This is the Broken Compass Inn, a favorite hangout for pirates. The tavern is owned by a lovely elf named Corlyn who can outdrink just about any sailor that's walked through the tavern's door. There are three serving girls and a serving boy. The cook, Ysiah, is a large man who sings as he cooks. More can be found on the Broken Compass Inn in the second part of this article next month.

Magical College

Ruined beyond repair, the College of Magic was once a beautiful building, but Trogu Gursha destroyed the place after he plundered it clean of everything he needed. It went up in a blast of black and green fire and destroyed an entire city block. No one comes close to the block any more because they say it is haunted.

They are right, it is haunted, but not by ghosts. In the ruins of the college is the doorway to the Deep City.

K'sven the Barterer

He promotes himself as "The only honest man in Causoban," and he may just well be that. K'sven isn't interested in money, he's interested in something much more valuable: favors. He can get you anything you want in Causoban, but K'sven's price is non-negotiable. If the adventurers

ever need something, they can go to K'sven. He will listen patiently, twist his fingers in a knot and roll his eyes up into his head and think. Sometimes, he even mutters or whistles a tune.

Then, very suddenly, he slams his hands on the table and shouts, "DONE!" as he produces a "simple agreement" for the adventurer to sign. All the agreement asks is that the adventurer return the favor when K'sven needs it, no questions asked. No one has ever welched on K'sven, but then, no one has ever had need to. K'sven has hundreds of

agreements, each one ready to be fulfilled at any time. Some of them (and he will show them to the adventurers, make certain of that) are signed by the most notable killers in Causoban. As I said, *no one* has ever welched on K'sven.

The Forgotten Temples

Located in Causoban are many temples that are not looked on as favorable. The Temple of Astendar lies vacant. Floranuus' temple also sees very little occupancy. The Temple of Garlan and Jaspree have all but fallen into shabby disrepair. However, the Temples of Lochost and Mynbruje have been burned to the ground. Many would consider this dangerous, but the Five Masters simply consider it another sign that the Passions they pay homage to are much more powerful than the ones they disdain.

The ruined Temples would make obvious safe houses for the Deep City, and that is the main reason they do not use them as safe houses.

The Cat and Mouse

In the midst of The Ruins is the most popular house of ill repute in Causoban, the Cat and Mouse. Of course, the big Obsidiman standing at the door just doesn't fit too well amongst the plush pillows, soft skin and silks, but there he stands, the doorman who doesn't take no for an answer. His name is Strun, and the girls of the Cat and Mouse love to flirt with him; they all have a running bet on who can make him blush first. Of





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Causoban Map Key

- 1 Temple of Dis
- 2 Temple of Vestrial
- 3 Forgotten Temples
- 4 Punishment Square
- 5 House of Forgiveness
- 6 Inn of the Broken Sign
- 7 The Cat & Mouse
- 8 Crossed Swords Tavern
- 9 Embalmer
- 10 Physicians' Guild
- 11 Magical College
- 12 Theatre Ruins
- 13 Blacksmith
- 14 Cemetery
- 15 Pilots' Guild
- 16 House of Guilds

THE GRAPFISH

One of the most dangerous aspects of living in Causoban can't be found above the water level. The fish that inhabit the lake bear a striking resemblance to the Pike of Earth. It makes falling into the river somewhat dangerous. These fish ("graps") are solitary hunters, but are quite easily offended. There are nearly fifty species of fish living in the lake, but the graps are the ones mothers use to scare their children.

course, none of them are sure whether or not an obsidiman can blush. The owner of the house is Davmn Threishen, a dwarf. While there are many houses in Causoban, Threishen is proud to be running the only "slave-free" house in the city. All of his girls are professionals and they are all making him a great deal of money. Of course, he shares his fortune with his "employees", a very certain way to keep them operating at peak performance.

Shivnæ Dyth

The Tailor's Guild is run by Shivnæ Dyth, a very old elfin maiden who never married. Every day she appears in the shop with her hair perfumed and her cheeks delicately highlighted, wearing the most beautiful dresses that anyone in Causoban has ever seen. She is a seamstress without peer, using special magics to make her works shine. "I took the breath of a moonbeam and the sigh of a star to make that cloak for you, sir," she may say, and there is not a soul in Causoban that would doubt her. Despite her age, she is a cunning flirt, and knows how to make young men blush.

Weaponsmith

The ogre that runs the Smithy is Gruungach. He is a no-nonsense fellow who "inherited" the store from "his cousin." People may wonder how he became related to a dwarf, but no one ever voices their curiosity. Besides, Gruungach is a fine blacksmith and weaponsmith. Surprisingly, no one ever complains about his work. No other smith has ever had the courage to open a shop in Causoban. There used to be three, but each of them went out of business, right after Gruungach inherited his own shop. But there is another reason no one ever complains about Gruungach's work: it's darn good, and pretty darn cheap. Just don't try to barter the price. Gruungach's got a big hammer behind the desk with the words "NO DEAL" branded into the handle.

Theatre (ruins)

The ruined theatre of Causoban stands as a reminder of the city that once was. The ruins suggest that the original building may have been even as great as the current Temple of Dis, but now its blackened walls are crumbling. No longer the source of culture in Causoban, it is now the home of the Temple of Vestrial. The temple that is located on the other side of town (see above) is a false Temple. The real Temple lies below the city streets, far from the peering eyes of the city's masters. More information about the Temple and the worshipers of Vestrial will be found in the

adventure *The Lesser of Two Evils*, next issue.

"Punishment Square"

This is where criminals are "hanged until they are dead." Hanging is the common form of capital punishment in Causoban, mainly because it's cleaner than decapitation. But it's also a great show, and that's what the Masters want when the people of Causoban see criminals: they want them kicking on the end of a rope with their faces turning blue. (A "criminal" in Causoban, of course, is anybody who has annoyed one of the Powers That Be: usually this means Duldred, as Tügel will enslave you, Gursha will experiment on you, Greytooth will turn you into a small greasy spot on the floor, and the Beggar King... well, a formal hanging isn't his style.) For more information on punishment in the city, see *The House of Forgiveness*, below.

"The Inn of the Broken Sign"

The ruins of an Inn stands in this place, and this is where the beggars meet. For no reason at all, at random intervals during the day, the beggars gather at the Inn and whisper to each other in quiet tones and exchange the goods they've received. Occasionally, the King of the Beggars

can be found at the site, and if anyone wishes to meet with His Majesty, waiting at the "Inn of the

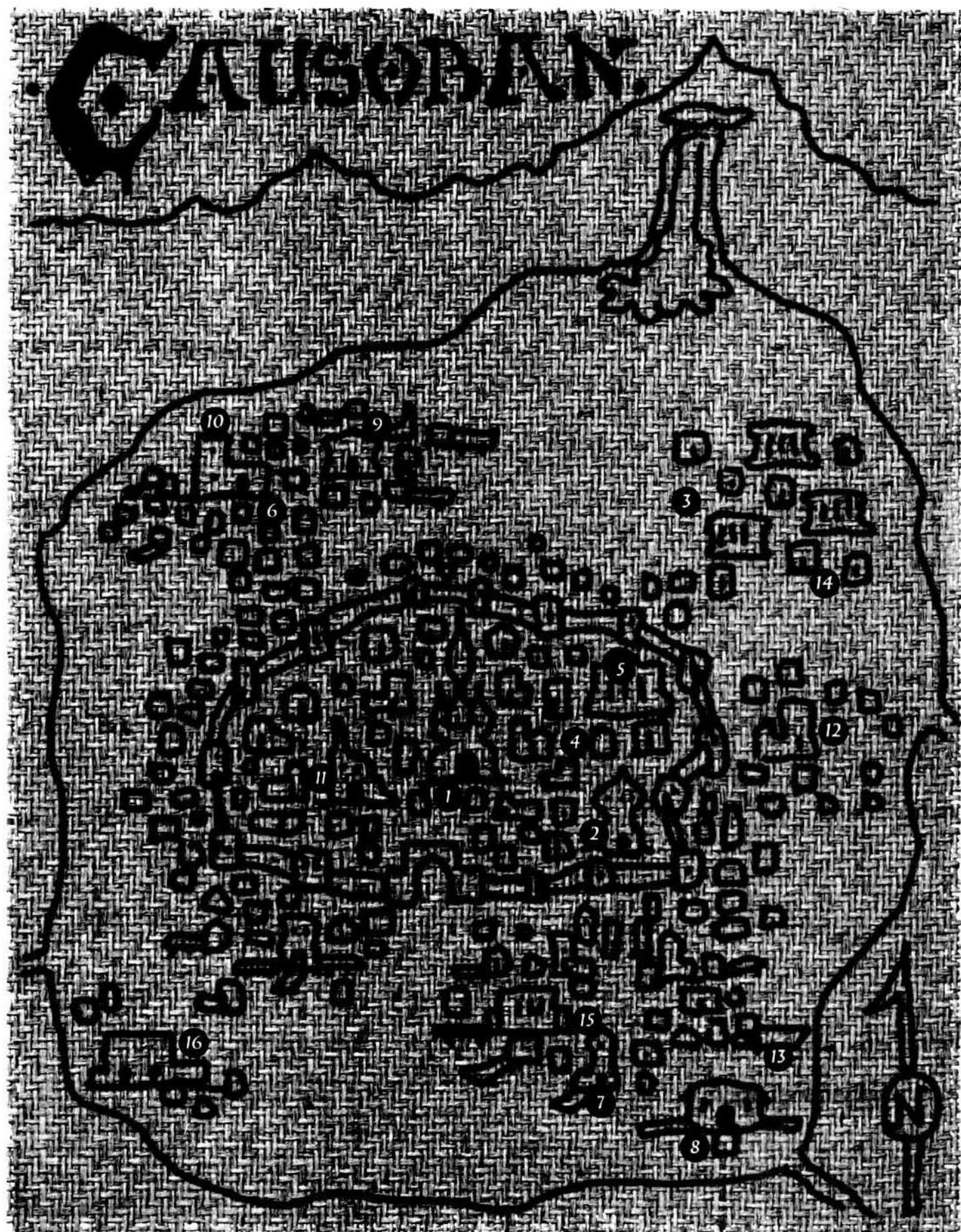


Broken Sign" (as the Causobanians call it) will eventually bring them face to face with His Ragged Sire.

The House of Forgiveness

No one is quite sure what the building was before the Scourge, but the sign above its door read "Forgiveness." Now, it is used by the city executioner to hold prisoners before they marry

CALIFORNIA



BURIAL IN CAUSOBAN

Getting buried in a town that hasn't got any dry land can be tricky. Those that can afford it are buried in floating mausoleums, while those that cannot get a rock tied about their necks and get tossed into the drink. Of course, the current of the river usually carries them off, but not before the poor corpse gets chewed on by the big, carnivorous fish that live in the waterways.

OBSIDIMEN & T'SKRANG

One of the most peculiar races in Barsaive are the Obsidimen. As their name implies, they are huge humanoid creatures of stone. They are born from a "mother rock" and often return there for religious and sentimental reasons. While they look rather monstrous, they are often quite calm and rational beings and a whole lot of fun to role-play.

The T'skrang are the dragon-men of Barsaive. They are most often found in the role of storytelling sailors who roam the riverways and oceans of Barsaive in search of adventures. For more information regarding the T'skrang, Obsidimen and the other fantastic races of *Earthdawn*, be sure to check out *The Denizens of Earthdawn* series. They provide wonderful examples of how to build a complete race from scratch.

the ropemaker's daughter. The city executioner is D'thm Slorn (a tall, lithe elf), and while it is his duty to hang criminals, it is also his duty to catch them. He has been employed by Tülgä to make certain the city is safe, and so the Master of Espionage makes certain that no spies that enter the city ever leave.

Pilots' Guild

The men and women who pilot the small barges along the city streets are represented by Sk'kren, the T'skrang "Master of the Waterways." He proudly represents his fellow pilots at the meetings, and is a master storyteller. He is also the most reliable source for gossip on the waterways, and his gossip is always at "no additional charge." Sk'kren just loves telling a good story. Only those that belong to the Pilot's Guild have riverway barges. Those that "scab" the riverways often end up being "grapmeat" (see "The Grapfish" below).

The Embalmer

The dwarf who lives in the ruddy old building that reads "Embalming" is nearly two hundred years old and very, very grumpy. His name is Dundren Dunjun and he hates you. In fact, he hates everyone. But that doesn't matter. Sooner or later, you'll end up just like all the others. Dundren hates his job, but it's the only thing he's ever been good at, and he is very good at it. He is familiar with the religious burial rights for every race and knows all the proper etiquette when dealing with "the departed." He is a short man with a short temper. Just don't use the "s" word in his presence, or your dear departed grandma may end up with something...unnatural stitched into her innards.

Grave Digger (& Cemetery)

Not many people come out to the Causoban cemetery. Not because it's a particularly spooky place — which it is — but because the grave digger gives anyone who talks to him the willies. Jarnan Mah is a big bad mean ogre, but that's not even what's spooky about him. The fact of the matter is, Jarnan Mah can look at anyone and know their deepest, darkest secret. He doesn't know how he got this talent, and he's not one to ask. When he uses his talent, the target can feel it. That's why Jarnan Mah is — perhaps — the loneliest man in Causoban. (Also, there's a quarter of a million gold pieces buried in a nameless grave. Good hunting!)

Physician's Guild

The Physician's Guild is located in the richer

section of Causoban and is run by Ulban Ruthwel. Ruthwel is feared for his knowledge of the human anatomy and his skill with magical skills and a suture. Of course, the way he got his knowledge was not through practice alone. Ulban Ruthwel has been collecting corpses from the streets of Causoban for years, performing magical experiments that would shock the populace of any other city, but would probably only make a Causobanian chuckle. He acquires the corpses from two ogres who bring him the cadavers when he needs them. He does not question how or where they get them and he doesn't care. He goes through about one corpse a month, although his appetite for new cadavers has grown recently. This is because a Horror has set seed in his brain. The Horror's name is Thorthalin, and it is growing in the stem of Ruthwel's brain. Even now, he's

beginning to feel the compulsion to eat the fingers of the corpses he's dissecting. Ruthwel's natural reflex to this sensation is disgust and fear, and it is the fear that is causing the Horror in his brain to grow. Give Thorthalin a few weeks, and it'll burst Ruthwel's head like a ripe melon.

Rat Catcher

The city's only Ratter is Jaq, a scrawny fellow who is, perhaps, one of the best dressed men in Causoban. You would never know he was the city Ratter by looking at him; the only tool of his profession that he carries with him is his tiny hammer he calls "Bad Boy."

The hammer looks as if it's never been used.

Since Jaq is the only Ratter in town, he has made quite a bit of money from the profession. His secret? Very simple. A very long time ago, Jaq found that he could speak to rats, and rats could speak to him. When he arrives in the house, Jaq asks the owners to leave. Once they're gone, Jaq calls all the rats to him, tells them he has a much nicer place for them and they all climb into his bag and he takes them back to his home where he keeps all the rats in Causoban. Because Jaq has spent the majority of his time speaking to rats, he doesn't always make sense when he's talking to anyone else. Sometimes, random sentences come out of his mouth, and he giggles to himself and wanders away. Some of the Causobans think Jaq may be a bit unhinged, but as long as he keeps rats out of the streets, they don't mind so much.

So much for the first part of Causoban. The second part (presented next month) will include more details about the Temple of Dis and the Temple of Vestrial, a whole series of interlinked adventures for your players, and give further details on the city inhabitants. Until then, don't go kicking any beggars!



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Part Two

A BRIEF RECAP

The first part of this scenario (presented last month) told the tale of our adventurers who awaken out of cryosleep to the sound of laserfire. They quickly discover that they are under attack by giant spider things and have absolutely no knowledge of where they are, why they are there, or even who they are.

They further discover that the ship they awoke upon is infested with these spider creatures. The ship appears to be a drop-ship of sorts and they are mercenaries. Armed with a pitiful supply of weapons and ammunition, they advance through the ship to the bridge where the emergency Artificial Intelligence (Alice) lets them know that she was activated after HTTR (Hatter, the ship's main computer) crashed only a short while ago. She also has no knowledge of the mission, being programmed only with the information necessary to keep the mercenaries alive in case of an emergency.

When the mercenaries attempted to restore Hatter, the unthinkable occurred: Hatter tried to kill them. Overriding Alice (who is programmed to protect them) and using the ship's defense systems, Hatter did his best to wipe them out. He was unsuccessful, and the mercs were able to shut him back down. Unfortunately, Hatter was able to erase all information regarding the mission, once again denying them the answers they wanted. However, when Alice searched through Hatter's command priorities, she discovered a disturbing fact: The mercs were sent here to obliterate a research lab one mile from their landing sight and Hatter was programmed to erase their memories of the entire event; upon failing that, Hatter was ordered to "liquidate all compromising commodities." Yes, that means the mercs. That was also when they learned just who they were working for: ARM, the anti-human terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of civilized space. That's right, our heroes were the bad guys.

There's even bad news the mercs aren't aware of. One of them has a dormant egg sack implanted on the base of his neck. This little egg sack contains about a dozen baby spiders slowly growing into maturity. A curious side-effect has caused this particular merc to be "linked in" to the communal mind of the spiders. There are times when he can almost read their thoughts. It's a painful experience, however, and he's going to suffer for it.

The only option the mercs have now is to go to the science bunker and find some answers. They have very little time, however. ARM is coming by in just over fifty hours to pick them up, and ARM has a nasty habit of solving problems by dropping orbital nukes... just to be sure.

BUG HUNT

A DBA
Production

Based on a
story by

**JOHN ZINSER
&
JOHN WICK**

Written by
JOHN WICK

**TECHNICAL
ASSISTANCE**
David Williams

**TECHNICAL
SUPERVISION
& ADVISOR**
Matt Staroscik

FX DIRECTOR
Matt Wilson

PRODUCED BY
D.J. Trindle

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Your hapless
players

DIRECTED BY
YOU!

HOW TO MAKE BUG HUNT FIT INTO YOUR EXISTING CAMPAIGN

Battlelords Adventure is the second part of a two-part scenario. The first part can be found in SHADIS #23, but you can also play BH as a stand-alone adventure with a minimal amount of editing. Send the PCs to investigate the base and clean it out from here, ignoring all the back-story. You could also simply finish one plot-line, then the next week you meet for gaming, have the PCs awoken out of cryochambers to the sound of laser fire and the screams of an NPC as he's devoured by a nasty spider-thingy.

PICKING UP WHERE WE LEFT OFF...

When we left our intrepid mercs, they had just gotten hold of a big transport/buggy/tank and were ready to investigate the science bunker. The ride is almost exactly one mile (1.043 miles for those that are picky). The terrain is rocky, but with a successful navigation or drive roll, the mercs should be able to make a clean shot for the science bunker. When they arrived for the first attack, the mercs had scouted out and found the quickest route that provided the most amount of cover. This time, however, they shouldn't have a reason to be worried about cover, right? Heh, heh. In case any of them have the forethought to plan ahead, Alice can give them a map that will show them the quickest route.

On the way to the bunker, they may notice that the spiders seem to avoid them while they are in the machine. The fact of the matter is the spiders do not know what to make of the thing. It's not safe to say that they are afraid of it, but they don't know how to deal with it. Mercs, on the other hand, they know exactly how to deal with.

Inside of the transport are ten life-support suits. The mercs are going to need them. The atmosphere outside the ship is oxygen rich, but it is also sulfur rich and will kill them if they try to breathe it. The spiders have no such problems. There is another problem as well. The mercs are using laser weapons, and there is a terrible dust storm outside the transport. Laser weapons are not going to operate well, if at all. Reduce the range of all laser weapons by 70%. Each time a weapon is fired, there is a 50% chance the weapon will misfire as the light particles are disrupted by the thick dust. This effect remains until the mercs can get out of the storm.

**SCENE ONE: "So the frying pan wasn't
good enough for ya?"**

THE RUN-DOWN

Lots of spiders outside and the mercs trying to get inside.

There are two open airlocks that will have to be opened manually.

THE SET-UP

As the mercs approach the base, they will see that the bunker is set up as a single circular unit with two arms, stretching east and west. There are bay doors on the arms and a set of double doors on the base that open into a small decontamination area. There is another set of pressure doors inside the decon room that are also open. There are spiders moving freely from the inside of the base to the outside. The inside of the decon room is not covered in webbing.

As the mercs approach the base, the spiders will begin to scatter. The ones close to the base will run inside and those not close enough will run for the rocks. It will be at this time that our friend with the egg sack in his neck will need to make an Intuition Check. If he makes it, he will begin to panic. He will feel claustrophobic, breaking out into a cold sweat and feel that someone is looking over his shoulder. Whether he shares these feelings with his comrades or not is up to him. If he fails the roll, nothing happens.

THE ACTION

Once they've waited long enough for the spiders to run, the mercs will eventually want to get into the base. They have a choice. They can either try getting into one of the bay doors located on the "arms" of the base, or they can try the front door. The bay doors are closed and look very, very heavy. The front door is wide open. If they chose to try to open the bay doors, a quick look (Perception or some associated Skill Check) shows that nothing short of detonating the doors will open them from here. The doors are opened one of two ways: 1) from the inside, or 2) from an electronic key code that is set up in the bunker's vehicles. The mercs have to get inside before they can open these doors. The decon room is (strangely) not coated in webs.

The next room they come to is the equipment room. The spiders have not touched anything in this room. It is a small room, rectangular in shape with four atmosphere suits. The suits have been torn open at the chest cavity, but are otherwise intact.

The controls to shut the pressure doors here does not operate. Once again, the mercs are going to have to unscrew a small panel under the controls and manually close the door. As soon as the door is closed, there will be no new spiders coming in to the science bunker. However, if for some reason the mercs do not close the door, a new adult spider will enter the building every ten minutes. Keep track of that.

THE FOLLOW-UP

The next few rooms will have little evidence of spider activity. The spiders are very busy elsewhere and are not concerned about this section of the base.

SCENE TWO: The Control Center

THE RUN-DOWN

No spiders. No webs.

Four doors from this area (including the one the mercs just came through).

There is an elevator in the center of the room. There is a nest in the elevator shaft.

The communications terminal and the life support terminal are here, along with a map of the complex.

THE SET-UP

This room appears to be a control room. There are many terminals, each with vid screens that are all dark. There is evidence of a struggle here, but no bodies can be seen. An elevator tube is in the center of the room, along with four doors — one in each direction (including the door you just entered through).

The marks of struggle include blood stains on the terminals and overturned furniture. The chairs of each terminal are lying on the floor. One is broken. There are papers everywhere, but again, there are no signs of webbing or spiders in this room.

THE ACTION

When the mercs begin a thorough search of the room, they will discover that the two terminals are set up for communications and life-support. The communications terminal has been ripped apart, but anyone with an Electronics Roll will be able to make repairs in about forty-five minutes (with a successful roll, of course).

On the wall between the doors to the eating area and the crew quarters is a map of the complex. The only markings on the map show where to go during emergencies and some other rather important information, including where to turn the power back on (the third floor). It also shows them where the stairs are located that will allow them access to the third floor without using the elevator.

The life-support terminal is also dark, but undamaged. Anyone with an Electronics or Computer skill will be able to turn life-support back on once power has been re-established in the base.

The elevator doors can be opened manually, but the car isn't moving anywhere until power is

turned back on. The car is currently on the third floor and once the mercs open the elevator doors, they'll be in for a big surprise. There's a nest in the shaft, and once they open the doors, it will fall out onto the floor and break open, spilling fifteen baby spiders all over the floor (or anyone stupid enough to stand in front of the door as it opens). The spiders will scurry this way and that, lost in confusion, and then they will all make their way to the nearest source of warmth: namely a merc. They will not attack the merc, they just want to get warm. They will bite if they are smacked, however, each one causing a point of damage. They are not mature enough to have poison sacks, and so the merc doesn't have to worry about that. Each spider has only 2 hit points and is easily squished as their carapaces and skeletons are still rather soft.

Once the nest problem has been taken care of, the mercs can direct their attention to the elevator shaft. The top portion is covered in webs and if they peek down they will notice another nest on the second level. A flame-thrower or other incendiary device will destroy the nest neatly, however, the liquid from the flame thrower will linger for almost an hour and a half before flaming out and the adult spiders will come to investigate as soon as they can.

FOLLOW-UP

The other four doors are easily opened just by pushing them open. The doors to the eating room and the crew quarters had no lock and the lock to the officer's quarters has been destroyed. If the mercs want to go down the elevator shaft, go to SCENE SIX. If the mercs chose the west door, go to SCENE THREE. If they go through the east door, go to SCENE FOUR. If they go through the north door, go to SCENE FIVE.

SCENE THREE: A Letter To Home

RUN-DOWN

Nice furniture and a door to the head that can be pushed aside.

Three cubicles that have a desk, a cot and personal stuff.

A hidden journal can be found in one of the three computer terminals.

The spiders are watching the mercs from above the ceiling.

THE SET-UP

The officers' quarters have also been ravaged, but not by spiders. There are many signs of search and struggle, but no bodies. There are three cubicles, each with a desk and a cot. The desks look rifled through and the beds have been thrown over. There are four computers on the floor as well and one has been melted. There is a

HOW TO RUN A DBA PRODUCTION

It's simple, really. The adventure is split into SCENES. Every Scene has 4 Parts:

1. The Run-Down

The pertinent information you need to remember before the Scene starts.

2. The Set-Up

A dramatic description of the layout of the scene.

3. The Action

All the mechanics that you'll need to run the Scene.

4. The Follow-Up

Things that will happen later that may be affected by the outcome of the Scene.

AND WHAT IF I DON'T PLAY BATTLELORDS?

That's okay. **BUG HUNT** was designed to be run with any SFRPG. Feel free to adjust it to make it fit the needs of your existing campaign. Imagine your players' surprise when they wake up, not remembering *anything* about their past and having to fight for their memories. Suddenly, everything's like starting over ...

EQUIPMENT LIST

ARMOR

Improved Body suits (each armed with kinetic field generators)
TDR Helmets

WEAPONS

- (5) PC-6 Pulse Rifles (all mounted with infra-red sights)
- (2) Marsral 12g double barrel riot control shotguns
- (1) Blazer flamethrower
- (1) M-L50 grenade launcher

WEAPON ACCESSORIES

- (10) 00 Buckshot shotgun shells
- (10) Pulse weapon recharge packs (each pack will fully recharge a rifle 3 times)
- (3) Fragmentation grenades
- (15) P-4 grenades (handheld)

doorway in the back of the room that appears to lead to a shower facility. The door is blacked and blasted and on the floor.

THE ACTION

Once again, there are no spiders in this room. They are above the room, looking down and watching the mercs as they move through the officers' quarters. They will not attack the mercs — not yet. The computers are useless to the mercs. They've all been smashed beyond repair and one's even been melted. Among the scattered papers, there is a letter that may be of interest to the mercs:

The ability of the spiders to communicate is amazing. It appears to be a kind of shared telepathy. I can't help but think of Professor Alderidge's theories of "hive mind" telepathy back in school. He'd give his right hand to be here now.

Jane, I can't wait to tell you all about them. They hunt together, they share equally amongst their own, they seem to live in small families and there's even evidence that they mate for life. We haven't seen evidence of a "queen" yet, but Rodriguez says that he thinks that there is one.

I asked Rodriguez your questions, and here are his answers. No, the implant does not hurt, but it does make him dizzy sometimes. He seems to be able to communicate with the spiders, but only under very limited circumstances. We don't have any hard evidence just yet. Like I said, he thinks there may be a queen, but he can't be sure. I have to tell you, Jane, he's a braver man than I. The sack is scheduled to be removed in a few days, and we're very curious to see the babies' reaction to their new "mommy!"

Well, Jane, I have to go. There's so little time with everything going on. Jackson says that the radar's picked up something, but it's bound to be just another weather anomaly. There's so much wind out here, and when it's cold at night, I miss you so much. Just another few months and I'll be home - I promise.

I love you,
Allie

FOLLOW-UP

The letter is the only thing of interest to the mercs here. Everything else was destroyed by the mercs on their first visit. The shower room is pretty devoid of interest and everything else in the room is pretty useless, but who knows, players can get pretty ingenious with dirty clothes and toiletries ...

SCENE FOUR: From The Belly Of The Beast

THE RUN-DOWN

No spiders (visible). No webs. No bodies.

Two doors, both open: one to the control center and one to the head.

Lots and lots of tools and a little lost puppy.

THE SET-UP

The door to this room is easy to open. The room has been turned upside down, with cubicle walls toppled on the floor, beds overturned and mattresses slashed open. Everything is a mess and there are blaster marks on the walls and bloodstains on the floor. No sign of spider activity again, but that's not the first thing that strikes your attention. The first thing that you notice is the overturned tool box on the far side of the room, spilling power tools all over the messy floor.

THE ACTION

Remember to tell the mercs that there is also a door that leads to the crew's shower room just beside the toolbox. A Perceptive (very Perceptive) merc will hear whimpering coming from the shower room. The bunker's mascot, Jonah, is very hungry and can't find his dinner dish. Jonah is a little black Lab. He's hungry and scared and will make a lot of noise from the little storage box he managed to get himself locked into. (If you feel really mean, have the mercs make Reaction Checks to see if they can keep from firing at a small furry thing jumping up and down and making a lot of noise from a very fragile container.) Jonah managed to survive only because the box is airtight. He's quickly running out of air, however and will die if the mercs don't get him some oxygen.

The other great find of course is the tool box. Here's the stuff they'll be able to scavenge:

Wrenches, sockets, ratchets, pliers, hammer, hacksaw, screwdrivers (both heads), duct tape, tape measure, drill bits, file, leather punches, chisel, mallet, visegrips, soldering iron, welding torch, wire strippers and a crowbar.

FOLLOW-UP

By this time, your players should either be

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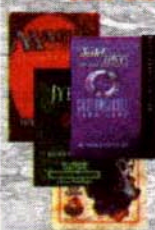
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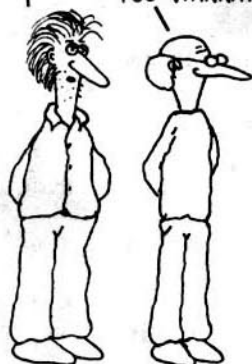
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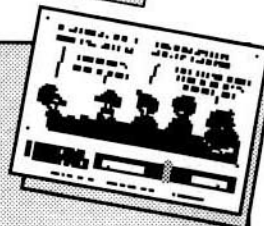


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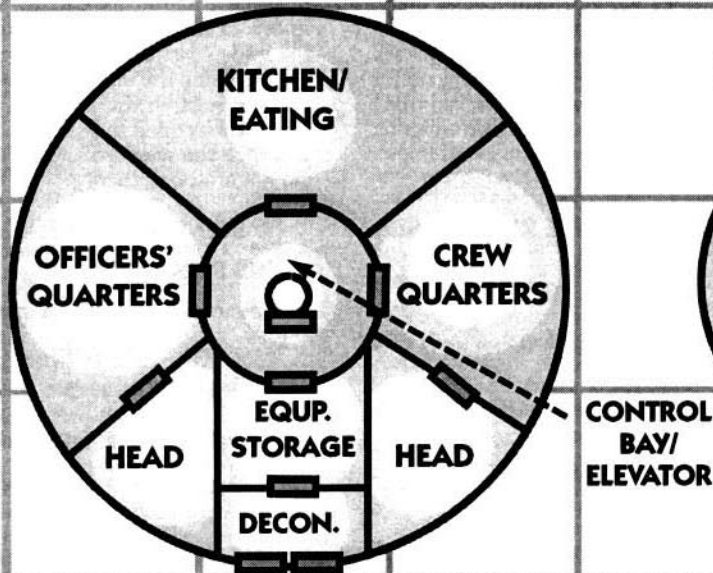


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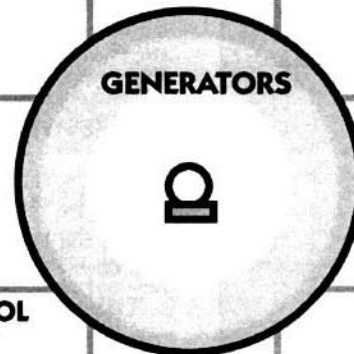
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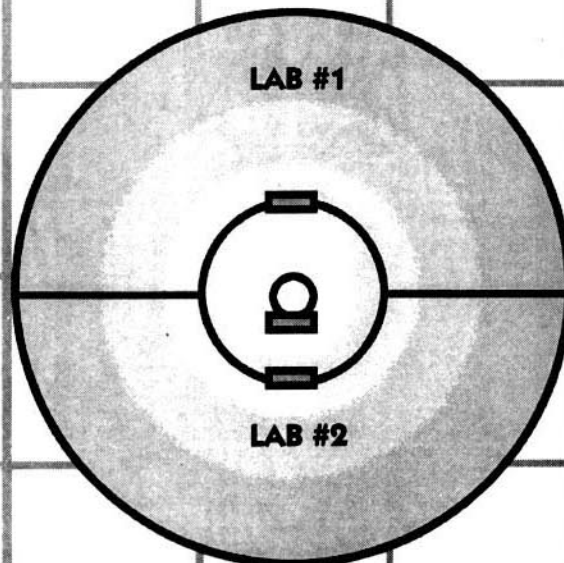
GROUND FLOOR



SECOND BASEMENT



FIRST BASEMENT



LAB NOTES

Remember, this is a *research* lab. It's going to be filled with lots of safety equipment, chemical fire extinguishers, sinks, decontamination showers, and all the other stuff that you remember from high school biology and chemistry class.

DRISCOLL VII RESEARCH LABS

 = DOOR

EQUIPMENT LIST

(Cont.)

(1) Motion

Detector

(2) DD-48

Vaporizer

(5) IR Goggles

(1) Box of 30

flares

(1) Digital

compass

(5) Backpacks

(1) Flaregun

(1) Grapple gun

(1) Cutting torch

(5) Com systems

(headsets)

(2) **Medical**

Packs:

(4) Massive BRI's

(1) Paramedic Kit

(1) Rad Treatment

Syrum

(3) Relfex Tablets

(there were ten; the seal on this has been broken and a few already used)

getting rather complacent or nervous as hell. They have seen neither hide nor hair of spiders and they've just had a puppy jump out at them. Now's the time to start hitting them with stuff to make them jump. Describe every shadow, ask detailed questions about their actions, and ask for (boy, has it been a long time since I've said this:) marching order. Make them afraid to do anything stupid, and make everything they do sound stupid. Keep 'em on their toes.

SCENE FIVE: Who's In The Kitchen With Dinah?

THE RUN-DOWN

Lots and lots of food going bad and stairs that lead down.

THE SET-UP

The eating area has lots of overturned tables and half-eaten dinners. The food dispensers are off and all the food is very cold. In the back of the room is a simple manual door that is open, showing a staircase leading down into the lower levels of the complex.

THE ACTION

Once again, there are no spiders on this level. The mercs should be getting concerned by now. The trackers can't pick up any movement except their own and the stairs are pretty dark and forbidding. The stairs are safe, just dark. Unfortunately, they are also filled with rubble. Apparently, the mercs had to blow the stairwell on their way back up for some reason or another and now it's filled with fallen walls and ceiling pieces. There's no way of safely blasting through the rubble. In other words, the mercs are going to have to go down the elevator shaft.

FOLLOW-UP

There is a pretty

important clue in this room. One of the ceiling panels has fallen to the floor, and the opening in the ceiling is just large enough to fit a young adult spider. In fact, it did. There are a great many of the spiders just above the mercs heads. They are not attacking the mercs because they are wearing pressure suits — the same kind of pressure suits the scientists used to wear. Right now, the mercs look like the scientists, which is why the spiders are not attacking them.

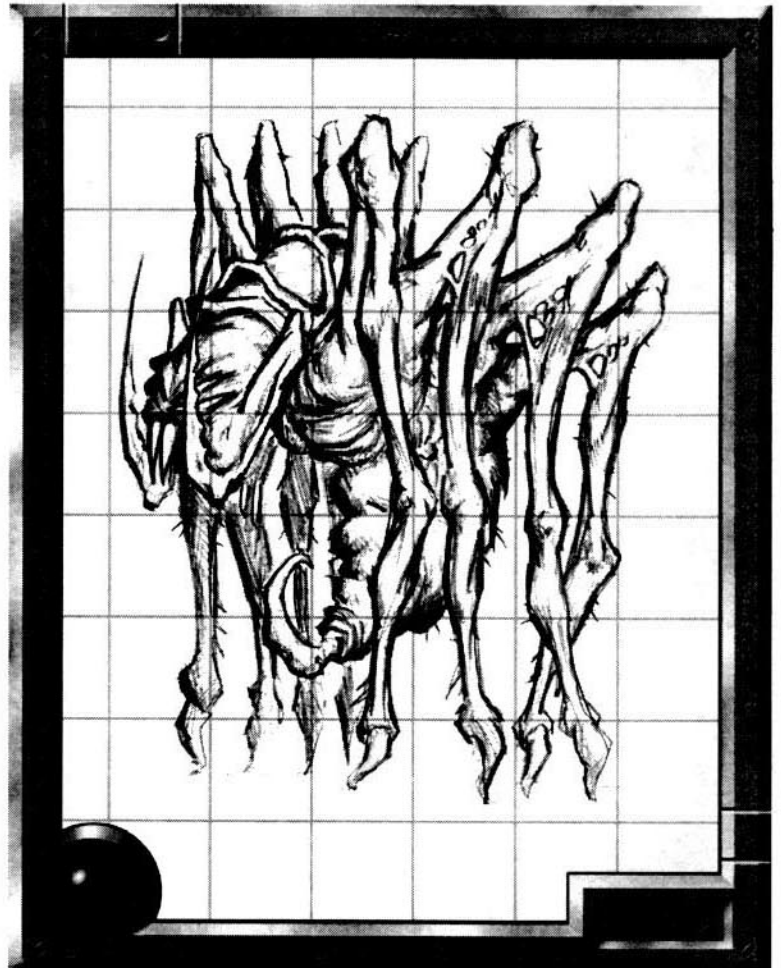
SCENE SIX: The Elevator Shaft

THE RUN-DOWN

A pungent stink, and a long drop.

No spiders, but be patient. Soon.

There are two doors that are both easy to open at the bottom of the shaft. The north door leads to SCENE FIVE, the south door leads to SCENE SIX.



THE SET-UP

The elevator shaft is long and dark. Lights do not reach the bottom. Lights can detect the second floor, however, almost three hundred feet down. There is no sign of spiders other than the nest that was behind the door. There is a hand-ladder on the left of the door that you can use to climb down to the second floor. There is a smell drifting up from below that you can't quite place since it's coming through your filtering system on your pressure suit.

THE ACTION

The climb down should be pretty uneventful. Have everyone make Climb checks if they try to do something stupid like climb with one hand and carry their gun with the other. It's three hundred feet to the second level, and once they get there, they're going to have to get through the door somehow. The crowbar they find in the toolbox in the crew's quarters will be very helpful here. The door opens up into a circular room with two other doors: one to the north and one to the south. If they chose the north door, go to SCENE FIVE. If they chose the south door, go to SCENE SIX.

SCENE SEVEN: The One You Warned Me Of

THE RUN-DOWN

Corpses, corpses, corpses.

The bodies of the scientists are lined up here with their hands tied over their heads and their throats cut.

Lots of chemicals and other really explosive stuff.

THE SET-UP

You open the door and discover the source of the smell you've been given hints of. The room is a laboratory, and a gruesome one at that. Lined up along the length of the lab, with their hands tied up above their heads are seventeen bodies. Blood and gore are all over their bodies and their eyes are empty of any life. Their empty eyes stare at you from across the room, and you suddenly notice just how silent it is in this room, save for the sound of your suits inhaling and exhaling the cold, cold atmosphere and the hum of the purifier on your back.

THE ACTION

The bodies are the remains of the researchers. Each of their throats have been cut and their blood is thick on the floor. Their flesh is pale and livid, but not yet putrid. The cold of the atmosphere has preserved them very well. They've all been dead for just under nine hours.

(For a very detailed and educational description of what has happened to the corpses, see Matt

Staroscik's article "Dead Men Do Tell Tales" in SHADIS #19.)

If the mercs have the guts to check the rest of the room, they can find a great many of things that may be of help to them, including:

Mass spectrometer: a kind of tricorder about the size of a printer that biologists put samples in and it outputs data as to its molecular structure.

Nuclear Magnetic Resonance (NMR): Another printer sized device that probes atomic structures. This device is powered by a magnetic superconductor so powerful that you can feel it tug oh so slightly on metal weapons, helmets and zippers from the other side of the room.

Sinks, eyewashes, safety showers and a washing machine for tools and dishes, etc.

Scales, small hotplates, cell culturing equipment (petri dishes, culture bottles, etc.)

There are warning stickers everywhere warning the mercs about radiation, poison and biohazards.

The chemicals the mercs will find will not be very useful when it comes to making explosives. Some of the more common chemicals will be casamino acids, acrylamide (very toxic, but not extremely deadly), and phenolchloroform (highly toxic). If the mercs want to make these into chemical weapons, let them. They will be carrying around big bulky fragile bottles instead of their lasers. It's a free universe, man!

FOLLOW-UP

There is nothing to learn here other than the fact that the scientists are all dead — killed by execution. Let this really sink in. Then, mention the fact that they haven't seen any spiders lately. Let them chew on that for a while.

SCENE EIGHT: Mommy Won't Wake Up

THE RUN-DOWN

A room identical to the northern room, but this time the corpses are on the ground, including one covered in baby spiders. The spiders will not attack the mercs, nor will they run away. They stay with their "mother", waiting for her to milk them.

THE SET-UP

You enter the southern room to another grisly sight. This time, however, the bodies are not strung up. There are three bodies on the floor and one is completely covered with tiny spiders.

THE ACTION

The tiny baby spiders are not frightened of the mercs. They're part of the hive-mind and they believe the mercs are actually more scientists. They stay very still on the deceased body of their

FILENAME:

ARM-1138-B

SUBJECT:

SPIDERS OF
DRISCOLL VII

SIZE:

Adult: 2.5 m/300 kg;
Y. Adult: 1.5 m/150 kg;
Youth: 30cm/6 kg

BODY

POINTS:

Adult: 20+d10
Y. Adult: 10+d10
Youth: d10

MOVE:

15/18/300

INIT. MOD.:

Adult: 10
Y. Adult: 5
Youth: None

VISION/SMELL/

HEAR

-20/+30/+30
(see below)

ATTACKS

See Below

DAMAGE

Spike Impale: 1-10
Bite: 1-5
Crush: "Give it up"

SPECIAL

ATTACKS

See below

IQ:

5-20

SPIDERS OF DRISCOLL VII (CONT)

SURVIVAL

MATRIX ROLLS

CHEMICAL: 99
BIOLOGICAL: 99
POISON: 99
ELECTRICITY: 40
ACID: 30
RADIATION: 99
MENTAL: 99
SONIC: 99
FIRE: 20
COLD: 100

Using psionics on the Spiders isn't going to be very beneficial. Imagine our poor little psyker trying to connect up to a "hive mind" intelligence. Clever mercs may also try using vibrations on the Spiders.

Rhythmic vibration is very effective on terran spiders and may prove equally effective on Driscoll Spiders—at least at first.

The Spiders have both an exoskeleton and an endoskeleton to support their massive weight. The mother spiders don't move about much. Mother spiders also have a toxin they spit up to 50'. It works as a poison and has a save mod of -20. If the save fails, the merc becomes numb and the mother crawls over and sits on the merc with all her weight, crushing him completely. The baby spiders on the underside of the mother's body then feed on the goo that's left over.

"mother."

One of the experiments that was taking place in the bunker involved a voluntary implant of an egg sack in one of the scientists. He experienced the same side-effects as our merc who is in the same predicament. The usual feeding technique for an adult spider is to devour food then regurgitate it for the babies to eat. However, mommy isn't moving and she is very, very cold. The tiny spiders want mommy. Then the mercs enter and things get very interesting.

Have the merc with the egg sack make another Intuition Roll. If he makes it, he will fully understand what is about to happen. If he fails, he will probably panic and cause seven young adult spiders to fall from the ceiling to protect the young.

You see, when the merc with the egg sack enters the room, the baby spiders will sense him as a "mother." They will be confused for a moment, but then they will flee from their cold mother to the new "warm" mother. If the merc makes his Intuition Check, he will feel very natural about allowing the spiders to cling to him for warmth. He will even feel protective of the babies, backing away if the other mercs try to harm them. If not, well then, we're going to have some disappointed baby spiders.

If the mercs harm the baby spiders, seven young adults will fall from the ceiling, completely surrounding the mercs, but they will not attack!

Whether the mommy merc makes his Intuition Check or not, he will suddenly feel a strange sensation in his head and a pain in the back of his neck. Hundreds of voices will fill his mind and he will be unable to take any action but scream in severe pain. The spiders will all begin swaying back and forth as the merc screams and his back bursts open and five tiny spiders (about the size of silver dollars) rip their way out of his back. This means that he will have babies crawling over the inside of his suit and the outside of his suit. The spiders will then approach the new mother. If they are fired upon, they will run away. They will not fight back. After all, it's now mommy's duty to protect the young.

If the merc survives the birth (he'll take about ten hits from the whole experience), then he will now have a bunch of hungry babies attached to him. His mind is now fully attuned to the hive-mind and he can communicate with the spiders. Unfortunately, he cannot communicate words, only emotions and simple ideas. "Yes," "no," "run!" and other simple single words will communicate well. Anything else will require a successful Intuition Roll. Oh!

Battlelords

And he no longer suffers -20 to all of his rolls. However, he does suffer -20 to any Dex related rolls because of his new "bundle of love." If the merc dies, the babies will remain attached to the body, waiting for food. Quite a sad sight.

FOLLOW-UP

The mercs now have a solution to their problem. Kind of. They have a link to the spiders, and a means to communicate to them. Much experimenting should go on as soon as they put two and two together. If they don't, then they are really screwed. If they haven't figured out that the spiders are intelligent and generally a "don't mess with me; I won't mess with you" kind of species, then they are going to have to deal with two sets of enemies: the spiders and the swiftly approaching ARM ship.

Down the shaft three hundred more feet is the power source of the complex. Another climb is in order.

SCENE SEVEN: Sending Out An S.O.S.

THE RUN-DOWN

The third floor has to be entered through the roof of the elevator.

The power generator is found on the third floor and requires a little maintenance to turn it back on.



Bug Hunt

As soon as power comes back on, doors will open and shut again, lights will flicker to life and the main computer will come back on line, restoring the atmosphere.

THE SET-UP

The mercs are going to have to crawl through the emergency trap door located on the roof of the elevator in order to get into the third floor. The panel slides aside quite easily. The elevator itself is empty. Once they enter get inside the elevator, the door has to be pushed aside with brute force. (Remember that crowbar?)

The room that holds the power generator is dusty, dark and dirty. There are no signs of spiders. There are footprints in the dust that match the mercs' boots. A little set of tools and a greasy rag are in the corner.

THE ACTION

The spiders do not have access to this level. There are airducts that connect the second and third level that allow young adults to move freely, but the airducts that link this level with the others are too small for the young adults to move through.

It's a simple procedure to bring the power back on line. The nuclear reactor located three more miles down under the third floor has an "On/Off" switch — completely dummy-proof. Once the power has been turned back on, the systems will also begin to turn on.

If there are mercs left up in the control center when the power comes on (resourceful mercs will think of doing this), they will be able to take full advantage of the computer and monitoring stations. They will also be able to use the communication system.

If the mercs scan for passing ships, they will notice that there is indeed a ship passing by. He's moving at a sub-light speed and he's also rather surprised to get a call from the planet. His name is Bremma Dthale and he's a smuggler. While he's not very keen on dropping down to pick up a bunch of mercs (with lots of guns and machismo), he's willing to listen to reason. In other words, the mercs are going to have to pay.

They can promise him whatever they want, but they're going to have to convince him to drop down to pick them up. His ship is large enough to put the entire drop-ship in the hold, so offering him a few of the transports might be in line. If the players really blow it, Dthale can offer to tell the officials where they are... right. If the mercs believe him, then they are really in trouble.

FOLLOW-UP

Once the power comes back on, the spiders are going to begin to panic. The planet is a pretty

dark one, and they are not accustomed to floodlights. The mercs will hear scurrying over their heads and behind walls as the spiders move for cover, and they'll hear a lot of it.

Now that the power is back on, the mercs will be able to open and close doors easily along with the fact that in one hour the atmosphere will become breathable again. All they have to do now is wait for Dthale to show up, but then they've got a big decision to make.

AFTERWARD: If I Go There Will Be Trouble ...

With ARM showing up at any time, the mercs have a big choice to make. Capture of ARM equipment, ships and personnel (dead or alive) is worth a lot to just about any government. ARM is expecting to arrive and pick-up a bunch of mind-wiped or dead mercs, not cognizant mercs who have a telepathic link to the spider population. The mercs could just take off when Dthale shows up, or they could take some real action. It's up to the mercs from here. If the mercs go back to ask Alice for the information she's got, she'll tell them that the ship is only an hour away. She's been in contact with the ship and she's informed them that the mercs were in cryo ready for pick-up. She is programmed to protect them, after all. When ARM does show up, it'll be a big ship with forty commandos and four commanders. Statistics for the ARM troops can be found on a side-bar nearby. There are enough spiders to distract the commandos for a good while so the mercs can either engage in hand-to-hand with ARM or they can peg them off from a distance.

What happens here is really up to you. If your players handle the situation well, give them the benefit of the doubt and let them take out the ARM guys. If they lose their cool, kill 'em without reservation. However, if they've gotten this far, they're probably a good batch of players who deserve a little bit of a reward. If you feel they didn't perform their best, don't allow any prisoners. If they perform even worse than that, have the ARM guys retreat and blow up the ship. If they do even worse than that, get them captured and enslave the spiders and laugh at them.

The booty they get from this trip should be more than enough to justify their hidden pasts. Besides, now you've got a real good beginning to a new campaign. They've got a ship and a reward and new friends. Sure, the spiders don't look all that friendly, but in **Battlelords**, sometimes that's the best kind of friend to have.



PARTING SHOT: "If One Of Us Gets Lazy"

Ever watch a film or TV show and see the SWAT go into a hostile environment with their guns pointed at the roof? What do these guys think they're going to be shooting at? It takes a long time to get that muzzle back down, boys and girls, and in that time, a lot of things can happen. REAL entry teams use the motto "Eyes Follow Muzzle." This means that wherever your eyes go, that's where the muzzle of your weapon should be. Also, teams use "tag team" tactics when they cover each other. When I enter a room and you're my cover, you should be looking in all the places that I can't look. Likewise, when you move across the room, I'm watching all the places that you can't watch. If one of us gets lazy, both of us get killed.

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THE EDGE

GROOVIN' TO THE BEAT OF THE INDUSTRY

CONTENTS

NORMAL STUFF

- This and That • pg 66
- Weasel Games • pg 68
- Industry News • pg 69
- Plays Well with Others • pg 73
- In the Trenches • pg 79
- Casting Call • pg 80
- Earthdawn Contest • pg 92



REVIEWS

- Earthdawn Line • pg 76
- Games and Software • pg 84

MORE DIVERSIONS

- Intern Jen • pg 94

NAVIGATING THE EDGE



Point of Interest
Check it out!



Dead, stinky fish.
You figure it out.



Trés Excitement!



John Wick was
here.



Just another data
point.



You can fry ants
with this.



Matt Staroscik was
here.



Squid Zone!

THIS AND THAT



Back when I first got into gaming in the early '80s, I went off the deep end. Not in the Mazes and Monsters sense, mind you — I wasn't running around in costume pretending to cast spells on my friends. What I mean is that I had a voracious appetite for game products. At the time I was a big AD&D and Gamma World junkie, and I spent countless hours reading the books, designing scenarios, and adventuring in dungeons and radioactive wastelands. I also eagerly awaited each issue of *Dragon*, which gave me a monthly TSR fix. Back then it still had Wormy, too, which was a big bonus.

Well, now it's 1996 and I find myself in the curious position of actually working for a game magazine. Instead of waiting for *Dragon* in the mail I'm in the business of helping to dish out SHADIS. I never thought I'd be able to turn my biggest hobby into a career. If you ever get the chance, jump at it... It's a big change going from reader to provider though, and I'd like to enlist your help in making the transition. Pick up the phone, send us some email, or shoot us a fax if you've something to say. Start a thread on rec.games.frp.misc, or join the fray in our folder on AOL. Believe it or not, your input means a lot to us. Hey — without you, we wouldn't be here.

We were really surprised to hear all the rumors flying around after #23 hit the streets. My personal favorite was, "ODS — the *Battlelords* guys — bought SHADIS!" Rumors of some insidious relationship between AEG and ODS flew thick and fast, based on the review and scenario we ran. Well, you guys, you might want to sit down before you page through this issue any more, because there's a lot of *Earthdawn* material in here. Has FASA bought us out? Nope. We're just doing our best to support as many of the great games on the market as we can. Each issue we're going to cover something different, and there will be subscription deals, contests, and scenarios.

This issue I'd also like to welcome our newest contributor, Matt Patterson. Matt publishes the ezine *Ooze*, home to some of the most irreverent humor I've yet to find on the net, or anywhere else for that matter. I've managed to cajole him into providing *The Edge* with a monthly humor column after reading an absolutely hysterical account of his experiences at a Los Angeles game

convention. Being a gamer himself he's well-suited to poke at the soft underbelly of our hobby, so check out "Plays Well with Others" on page 73. Afterwards cruise over to the *Ooze* home page at <http://www.io.com/~ooze>. The humor-impaired need not make the trip.

Well, I don't play much AD&D anymore, and they canned Gamma World, but I have found other vices like *Vampire*, *Millennium's End*, and *Call of Cthulhu*. Now I even get to run around in costume pretending to cast spells on my friends, when I game in the IFGS. Compared to most people I suppose I'm still off the deep end, though, with land nowhere in sight. But come on in—the water's fine, and SHADIS doesn't bite.

Be seeing you.

MATT STAROSICK

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PROVIDING US WITH THE SPACE YOU CAN
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BY LESTER SMITH

WEASEL GAMES #2

'ET TU, WEASEL?'

According to legend, when asked to define the term, "human being," the Greek philosopher Plato responded, "A featherless biped." Then some wisecracker handed him a plucked chicken.

Words are awfully shifty things, even at the best of times. Definitions are less a matter of delineating parameters than of pointing in a general direction. That's why, in attempting to define the term "weasel games" in this series of articles, I have opted for discussing various aspects of such games and offering examples from my own experience. If you have played similar games, my descriptions should strike a resonant chord in your memory. And if — heaven forfend — you haven't played any such games before, I hope that these vignettes will pique your interest and encourage you to get involved in them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF 'BACKSTABBING'

When I bring up the topic of weasel games among colleagues, there is always some debate as to what delineates the class. One commonly cited criterion is "backstabbing." In my opinion, a game doesn't have to incorporate backstabbing to earn a weasel designation. But for most people, the two terms seem virtually inseparable.

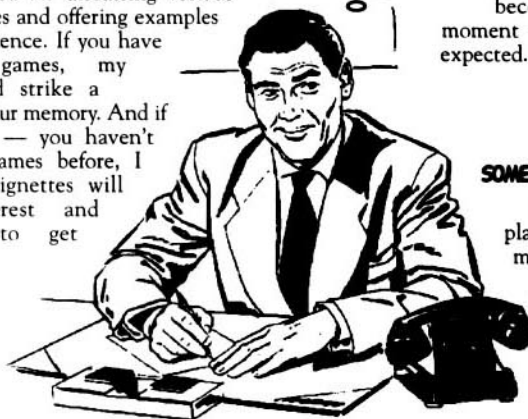
So what exactly is backstabbing? For players of at least one well-known fantasy RPG, of course, backstabbing is the sinister ability of thief characters to gain bonuses to hit and do damage to targets by sneaking up behind them and striking without warning. But the term has a somewhat different meaning in general parlance. In that usage, stabbing people in the back implies that they trust you as a friend so much that they allow

you to be behind them with a weapon, and you heartlessly use that friendship to strike them cruelly from behind. Therefore, when my colleagues speak of backstabbing in weasel games,

they are referring to the shifting conditions that create allies of convenience, with the full awareness that those allies could

become enemies at any moment — and strike when least expected.

HOW FORTUNATE I AM
TO HAVE SUCH A
TRUSTWORTHY ALLY.



SOME TREACHEROUS EXAMPLES

In *Cosmic Encounters*, players each have a chance to make two attacks on their turn, with the target of each determined by a random draw from the "Destiny Deck."

In each attack, other players around the table can be invited as allies.

But the randomness of the Destiny Deck means that a person who allies with you on the first attack might actually become the target of the second attack. So much for the continued alliance.

The *Castle of Magic* game makes alliances even more iffy. Everyone starts the game with a secret background defining country of origin, guild membership and desired position of bell, book and candle for the grand spell to be cast at the end of the game. As the game progresses, players gain chances to learn secrets about other players' backgrounds. But when a player learns a secret about you, you have no way of knowing what that secret is! Consequently, that player may

OUR FAVORITE WEASEL GAMES ARE ILLUMINATI 'CLASSIC', ILLUMINATI: NEW WORLD ORDER, PARANOIA, AND THE EVER-POPULAR DIPLOMACY.

know that the two of you are deadly enemies in the game, while you are ignorant of the fact. Armed with that knowledge, your enemy may convince you to help with some aspect of the grand spell, only to betray you when the time is ripe. This makes for a wonderful political game.

But **Diplomacy** is undoubtedly the most treacherous of all backstabbing games. (Actually, this game is useful in illustrating quite a number of weasel game aspects, but we'll confine ourselves to discussing backstabbing, for the present.)

At first glance, **Diplomacy** appears to be a fairly standard wargame. In this product, armies are maneuvered much as in **Risk**, for example. But what sets **Diplomacy** battles apart from those of other games is that there are no dice. An attacker gains territory simply by outnumbering the defender's forces. Considering that everyone starts the game with the same number of counters, that may seem something of a trick to accomplish.

But this is where the game's title comes into play. Between each set of combat turns, players spend ten or fifteen minutes away from the table, talking in small groups, trying to convince one another to support their battles. The trick is to make deals in which you gain more advantage than you give away. Not surprisingly, that often involves knowing when an alliance is about to become a liability, and dissolving it just before that happens. Frequently, the first signal that an alliance is dissolved is betrayal of one of its members by another — i.e., the backstab.

Here is a particularly apt example from my own experience. I was playing France, and a friend was playing Russia.

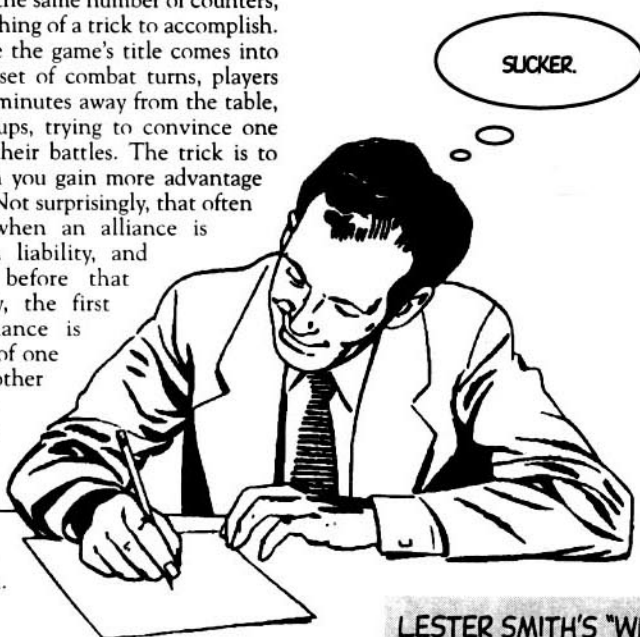
Those positions put us on opposite sides of the board (which represents Europe, Northern Asia, and Northern Africa). Consequently, we were natural allies, having nothing to fear from each other as long as there were other players in the middle for us to battle. My friend Russia had sent several fleets through the North Sea and down the western coast of Europe, to finally arrive in the Mediterranean. By this time, I had captured the entire Iberian peninsula, so his fleets were just off my shore; but I didn't worry much, because they were too far from his armies in the North to do any long-term damage to my territories.

In Tunis, however, another player had part of his dwindling forces. I wanted him to do me a favor in Austria. During our diplomatic talks, he agreed to that favor, if I would promise not to invade Tunis. I assented, and my Russian friend added his assurance that if I broke the agreement, he would use his fleets to punish my Iberian

homeland. A deal was struck, and Russia and I went away to discuss other things. When the time came for movement and battle, the "Tunisian" fellow kept his promise to me in Austria.

Then in a surprise move Russia invaded Tunis, and I treacherously supported his attack with some of my units. By the "letter of the law," Russia and I had both kept our promise to Tunis. I did not invade; he did. By doing so, he certainly insured that I wouldn't. Either way, our poor Tunisian victim lost Tunis to two supposed allies.

It was a perfect backstab. Years later, I'm still ashamed of it.



LESTER SMITH'S "WEASEL GAMES" COLUMNS FIRST RAN IN TSR'S POLYHEDRON NEWSLETTER MANY YEARS AGO. LESTER, HAVING PARTED WAYS WITH TSR, ASKED US IF WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN REPRINTING THE COLUMNS, SINCE POLYHEDRON HAS A RELATIVELY SMALL CIRCULATION. NATURALLY, WE JUMPED AT THE CHANCE TO ENLIGHTEN OUR READERS ON THE FINE ARTS OF DECEPTION, RUTHLESSNESS, AND TREACHERY.

WARBENDING

THE OTHER STUFF

GAMING
INDUSTRY
NEWS BY
STEVE
JOHNSON



RIP GDW

The designers of the very first science-fiction RPG, *Traveller*, have shut down (not declared bankruptcy as rumor has it). *Game Designers Workshop* was one of the first game companies in our industry. *Space: 1889*, *Twilight 2000*, and *Challenge Magazine* were just some of the fine products released by GDW, not to mention the game *Harpoon*, which is still used by the United States Navy as a training tool, and was the main inspiration for Tom Clancy's book *The Hunt For Red October*. We wish them luck and hope for the best.

A NEW TREK ON THE BLOCK

There's going to be a "Classic Trek" card game on the market soon, but it won't be produced by *Decipher*, it'll be produced by *Fleer/SkyBox*. It will be released during the 30th anniversary of the show this summer. *Fleer/SkyBox* has been doing *Star Trek* cards since 1991, and collectors are looking forward to the release.

EX-WHITE WOLFERS GO BALLISTIC—I MEAN, HOLISTIC
Two ex-White Wolfers, Andrew Greenberg and Bill Bridges, have joined up with *Holistic Designs* to produce a new science-fiction RPG called *Fading Suns*. "Science fiction in games has been missing of late," says Bridges, "and this is our chance to bring sci-fi back to the gaming arena, but from our own original viewpoint, without all the stereotypes it has languished under before." Andrew and Bill joined *Holistic Designs* teaming up with Ed Pike and Ken Lightner to design the *Fading Suns* computer game, *Emperor of the Fading Suns*, which will be released by Gametek in October. You can contact *Holistic Design* at 5002 N. Royal Atlanta Drive Suite H, Tucker, GA 30084 or by calling (770) 934-8HDL. (We WW squids here at AEG remember the names of Bridges and Greenberg and their great work at White Wolf and wish them good luck in their new endeavors.)

THE STARS ARE RIGHT!

It's a whole month before it gets released, and it's already sold out.

Mythos, the new card game from *Chaosium*, is based on the works of Lovecraft and Co., and *Chaosium's* popular *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. Some folks in the office got to play it at Dundracon, and it looks like a load of fun. Releasing in March, *Mythos* will be released in three booster sets, *The Expeditions of Miskatonic University* in March, *Cthulhu Rising* in late April and *Legends of the Necronomicon* in May.

RIFTS ON SCHEDULE, BUT PALLADIUM FANTASY RPG FACES DELAYS

February will see the release of *Rifts Index & Adventures Vol. 1*, but the long-awaited 2nd edition of *Palladium Fantasy* has been delayed. The book is 320 pages, and "Siembieda and his team have taken no short cuts."

Palladium promises this book is worth the wait. *Rifts* fans can also look forward to *Juicer Uprisings* in March and *Coalition War Machine* in May.

PAGAN PUBLISHING TAKES ON CROWLEY AND CO.

One of the best sources for *Call of Cthulhu* source material is *Pagan Publishing*. And now, John Tynes and crew announce *The Golden Dawn*, a sourcebook on that mysterious cabal of the 1890's. Including info on *Hermetic Magick*, astral travel and several sanity-blasting scenarios, any GM of the horror genre should seriously consider giving it a look-see.

... AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

Kenzer & Company has announced their acquisition of the worldwide license to produce and distribute (gulp) a new collectible card game based on the film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*. Imagine cards bearing *Brave Sir Robin*, the rude Frenchman, and the vicious *Chicken of Bristol* all woven in to the *Pythons'* ridiculously brilliant script. From what we've heard, it sounds like it's going to involve singing the songs, reciting the long and tiresome tirades and when the cops show up, the game's over! Watch out folks, this one could be fun.

ARS MAGICA GOES FULL CIRCLE

The highly praised RPG Ars Magica has found a home at Atlas Games. Atlas was the first publisher of the RPG written by two college buddies Jonathan Tweet (Over/On The Edge, Everway, and the revised Talislanta) and Mark Rein•Hagen (never heard of him). After a stay at White Wolf and Wizards of the Coast, the game of High Magick will be produced by the Minnesota company once again.

GOLD RUSH GETS WEBWISE

Gold Rush Games asked us to let everyone know they've got a Website. Least we could do, guys. Here's how you can find the Web Page of the folks that produce Heroic Adventure, Bushido 3rd Ed., Usagi Yojimbo RPG and Cyberpunk: Night City Trax. <http://members.aol.com/goldrushg/index.htm> You're welcome, Mark.

EVEN
MORE
NEWS

INFINITE IMAGINATION GOES WHERE NO GAMER HAS GONE BEFORE

The Quest for Power series is the flagship product of a new company called Infinite Imagination, Inc. Promoting Quest as "the next step in the Role-Playing experience," With Quest for Power, "It's no longer needed to have a GM invent a plausible story... there's no need for a Game Master." The release date for the first Quest for Power module is Spring 1996. This will be followed by more information, you can contact Infinite Imaginations at IMAC100@AOL.com or at Infinite Imagination c/o Consumption Dept. 19 Skyline Terrace Nanuet, NY 10954.



COOL ARCTIC ADVENTURES

Wizards of the Coast have announced Alliances, the first expansion for their Ice Age set. Players will find that many characters found in Ice Age will return in Alliances. "We received a lot of positive feedback from players who liked the creatures and characters introduced in Ice Age," said Skaff Elias, one of the four designers. "So, many of the story concepts were continued." Almost 200 new pieces will be included in this, the ninth expansion for Magic: The Gathering.

LOST & FOUND

For those of you who are new to the gaming industry, you may not remember those little dueling books with the words **Lost Worlds** printed on the front. Well, we do, and while they may have taken a hiatus, they're back with a vengeance. **Lost Worlds** is a system of dueling books that allows you and one opponent to go at it using such fantastic characters as elves, ogres, trolls, pirates and knights. It's quick, easy and a whole lot of fun. The first four books in what Chessex Manufacturing calls a 12-volume set have been released with Doug Shuler providing the graphics. Mike Kimble and K.C. Lancaster will provide art for future releases. Game companies that remember the **Lost World** books have been caught in the wave of nostalgia and are getting ready to co-produce dueling books based on RPG settings (such as Flying Buffalo producing four books based on their **Tunnels & Trolls** RPG). Look for **Lost Worlds**;

RUMORS, RUMORS

Word is that fantasy writer Michael Moorcock's Elric saga maybe making an appearance on the silver screen. Keep your fingers crossed! There's also talk of an interactive movie game based on Elric, coming from Origins. No date is available for this vaporware product.

TUBE WATCH

Kindred: The Embraced is coming to TV on April 2nd. The show, produced by Spelling, is based on White Wolf's "World of Darkness" game setting, which we all know and love. Mark Rein•Hagen supposedly wrote the pilot—the show may go far if they can keep the Hollywood hacks away from it. Here's hoping it's not Vampire: 90210.

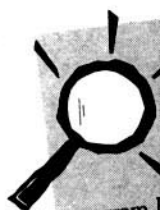
Tube
Watch

WILDSTORM GOES TO THE HOLE

Wildstorm Productions is releasing **Fastbreak: The Basketball Collectible Card Game**. Players of the game will be able to coach one of eight teams (the New York Thugs, San Diego Wildcats, L.A. Stars, Texas Rough Riders, and the Moscow Czars to name a few) to victory. Starter Decks come with players from NY, San Diego, L.A. and Texas, while the other 4 teams are available only in the 12 card Booster Packs. Boosters also come with ultra-rare chase cards, 8 in all.

SALES

NEWS



CHAMELEON ECLECTIC TO RELEASE BABYLON 5 ROLEPLAYING GAME

Press Release

Chameleon Eclectic Entertainment, Inc., in association with WireFrame Productions, Inc., Babylonian Productions, and Warner Bros. Consumer Products, announced today the upcoming release of *The Babylon Project*, a roleplaying game based on the groundbreaking Warner Brothers science fiction television program *Babylon 5*. The *Babylon Project* will be released this fall.

Babylon 5 has an audience of almost six million gamers and science fiction fans. It features a richly-detailed background and an intricate, ongoing storyline. The roleplaying game focuses on a time period shortly before that detailed in the main *Babylon 5* story. Players take up the roles of humans or aliens in the tense period following the Earth-Minbari war leading up to the emergence of the Shadows and the Nam-Centauri war detailed in the television program.

"This is a really exciting project for us," said Chameleon Eclectic president Charles Ryan. "With a cohesive, detailed, and intricate background, the *Babylon 5* universe has incredible gaming potential, and the show has an enormous following. It's probably the most eagerly anticipated licensed roleplaying game ever."

WireFrame Productions, Inc. has been awarded the roleplaying game license for *The Babylon Project* by Warner Brothers. WireFrame will be creating the game and related material for co-publication with Chameleon Eclectic. "This is a project which is long awaited, and one that we're very excited about," said WireFrame president Joseph Cochran. "The *Babylon 5* story is set in a richly detailed epic universe, borrowing from myth and history to create an exciting world. We're very happy to be working with all of the people at Warner Brothers and Babylonian Productions to translate this world to the roleplaying setting."

The *Babylon Project* will launch with the release of the main game book and *The Earthforce Sourcebook*, first in a line of sourcebooks and supplements, in early fall 1996. These products will quickly be followed by two more—the *Earth Colonies Sourcebook* and the *Game Resource Kit*—before the end of the year. Additional sourcebooks, adventures, and supplements will follow.

EVERWAY(TM) & ARS MAGICA(TM) FIND NEW HOMES

From WotC press release dated 3/6/96

Wizards of the Coast® announced today that it has found new homes for its roleplaying lines *Everway*™ and *Ars Magica*™. Seattle-based Tynes Cowan Corporation has acquired *Everway* for release through its roleplaying game imprint, Pagan Publishing. In addition, Minnesota-based Atlas Games has bought the publishing rights for *Ars Magica*. These transfers are effective immediately, and come less than three months after Wizards of the Coast announced it would no longer pursue its roleplaying lines and would begin looking for new homes for the games.

"It has been a top priority at Wizards to find good homes for our roleplaying lines," said Peter Adkison, CEO and President of Wizards of the Coast. "I am confident that Pagan Publishing and Atlas Games will give them [the games] the attention they deserve to succeed."

Pagan Publishing's initial product plans for *Everway* include the release of *Spherewalker Source Cards*—a set of fantasy art trading cards used as inspirational material and visual reference in the roleplaying game team.

"We have the experience, the reputation and the passion to make this work," said John Tynes, president of TCCorp and editor-in-chief of Pagan Publishing. "In the five years since we went into business, we've never settled for anything less than the best—and *Everway* is as good as it gets. This is a dream come true."

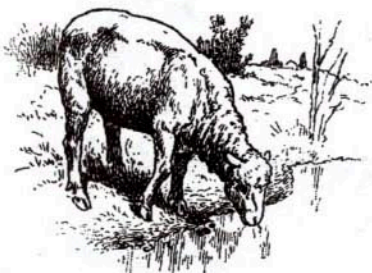
Atlas Games' plans for *Ars Magica* include the long-awaited fourth edition and a steady schedule of supplementary titles over the coming years.

"This is a very exciting acquisition for us, in both strategic and historic terms," said John Nephew, President of Atlas Games. "*Ars Magica*, as a fantasy roleplaying game, is a complement to our current product lines. The game has a dedicated fan base and great potential for future growth. The game also brings Atlas Games back to its roots."

Excellent
Satisfactory
Unsatisfactory

Plays Well with Others

by Matt Patterson



ON THE VALUE OF LIVESTOCK IN AD&D

Sometimes I get annoyed by people who take their games too seriously. People who get creamy over colorful many-sided dice. People who think that a new list of spells is better than Christmas. And especially annoying are those rules mechanics who never seem to let up and have any fun. I don't know what it is when I get around these people, but I want to mess with them. Ruin their day and make them cry. This might seem cruel, but I see myself doing these people a favor. If I don't bring them back to planet Earth they could wind up wandering around in a zombie-like state, spittle dangling from their lips like Tom Hanks' deranged character in the movie *Mazes & Monsters*.

I like going to gaming conventions. They're cheap entertainment, and I meet some funny people, although none of them are cute girls. Unfortunately, these places are also a haven for the uptight nerds I've come to hate. I recently went to a convention and decided to play *Dungeons & Dragons*, a game I hadn't played in years. Why? Call it a fit of whimsy. When I entered the hotel room and saw the Dungeon Master standing on a chair lecturing another player on the often-overlooked importance of weapon speed factors, I knew I had made a big mistake.

"I'm running an official *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* game," he informed my fellow adventurers and I, "so this is going to be by the book. Or should I say books." He pointed to the huge stack of hardcover tomes before him. He had not prepared any characters, so I snagged some pseudo-marble dice from another player and rolled up a cleric — an ordinary 18 STR, 17 WIS kind of guy. Then, I became paralyzed by the

medieval K-Mart that is in the *Player's Handbook* when I tried to equip my character. I asked the DM if there were anything we couldn't purchase. "ANYTHING in the *Player's Handbook* is official!" he said ominously, the spiritual weight of E. Gary Gygax resting squarely on his shoulders.

I purchased some armor, a mace, the requisite 10' pole, and the balance in sheep. That big list of livestock just proved too tempting, and sheep were a bargain. I stipulated on my character sheet that the flock was the physical manifestation of my cleric's god, Mooooo, and that I was to defend them 'till the death. Before we started, the DM looked over my sheet and asked if this was what I really wanted to do. Oh yes, it was.

For some reason, everyone else was very annoyed by the introduction of Holy Sheep into the adventure. They didn't like underground passageways, and were pretty noisy. One ostensibly "good" character went as far as pushing an errant sheep off a cliff. As I raised the mighty scepter of Mooooo to slay the infidel, I realized there was a better way — I would defeat him with the very rules he venerates. I demanded that the DM penalize the character for not acting according to his alignment. The DM chuckled, remarking he already had. Then I smote the heretic adding injury to insult. As tempers flared the game descended into a free-for-all: Magic Missiles let loose, Paladins battling Rangers, and half-orcs and elves holding hands. Meanwhile, the Acolyte of Mooooo stood back, petted the remainder of his holy sheep, and realized they were the best 10 gp he ever spent.



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HIM AT

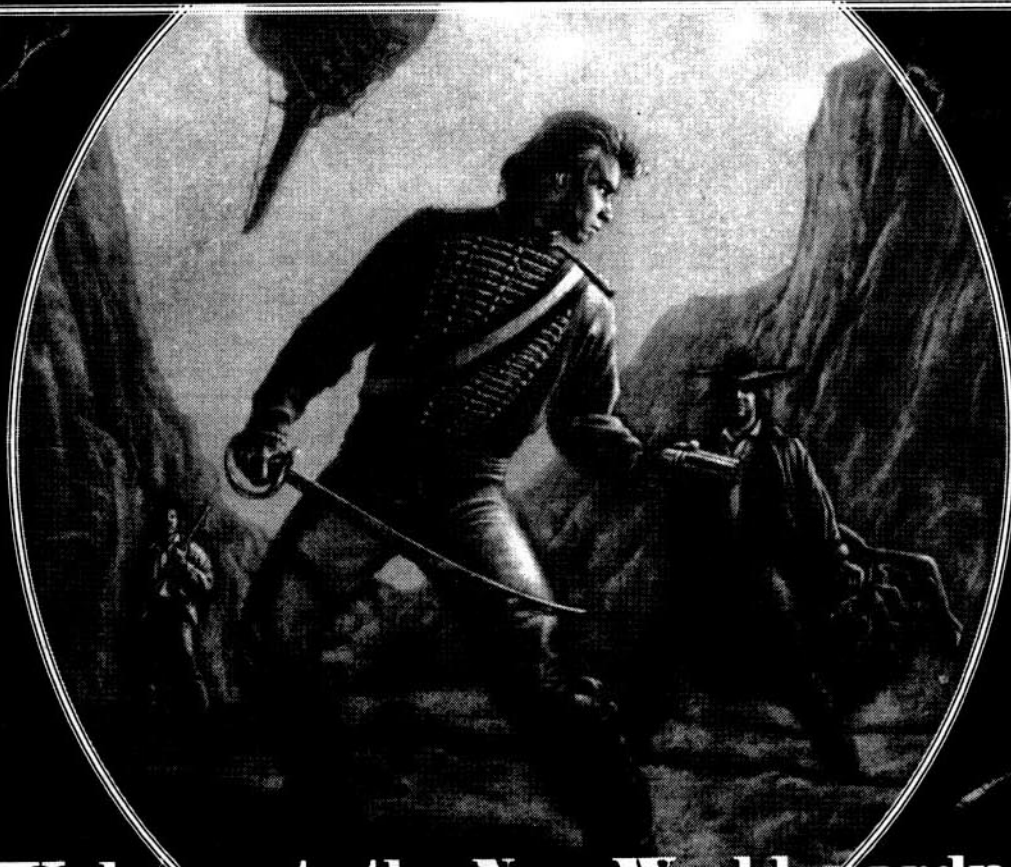
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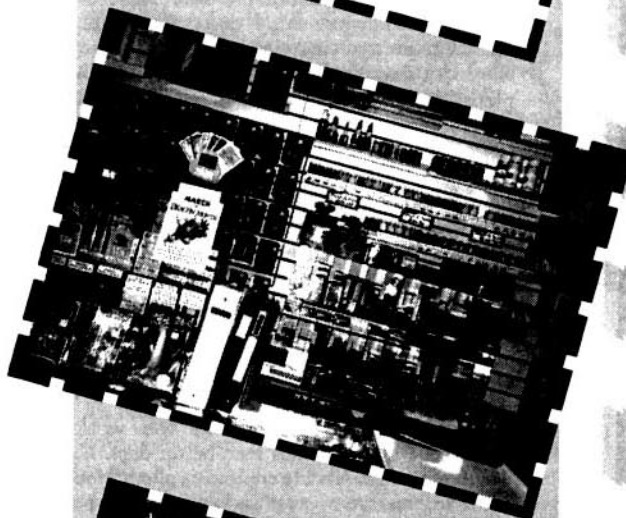
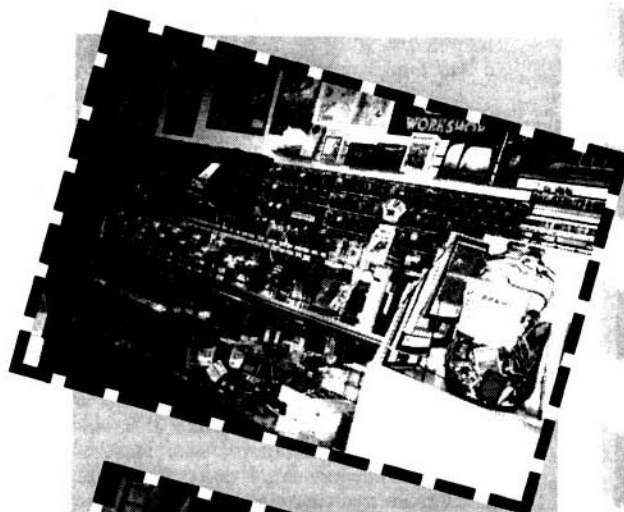
JOHN WICK
REPORTING

THERE'S LITTLE IN LIFE THAT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN A FIRST IMPRESSION, AND IN THE WORLD OF RETAIL, THERE'S NOTHING MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE FIRST THIRTY SECONDS A CUSTOMER SPENDS IN YOUR STORE. ALL-STAR GAMES IN DIAMOND BAR KNOWS THIS AND THEY MAKE GOOD USE OF IT. WHEN YOU STEP INTO THE STORE, YOU ARE MET BY A SMILING FACE, A CLEAN UNIFORM AND A "HOW CAN I HELP YOU?" THE NEWEST INVENTORY IS PLACED RIGHT AT THE FRONT DOOR, RIGHT IN YOUR FACE, SO THERE'S THE NEW SUPPLEMENT YOU CAME LOOKING FOR RIGHT IN FRONT OF YOU. THE PLACE IS CLEAN, WELL-LIT, ORGANIZED AND FRIENDLY AND THAT'S THE WAY A GAME STORE-THE WAY ANY STORE-SHOULD BE.

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WARNING



•FASA
 •\$20.00/335 PAGES
 •REVIEWED BY JEROME RYBAK

I take a look up on my role-playing shelf and I see a menagerie of fantasy role-playing games. There's *D&D*, *Stormbringer*, *The Fantasy Trip*, *Talisanta*, *The Arduin Grimoire*, and even a beat up copy of *Tekumel*, a little game designed by a University of Minnesota professor. Yup, I love fantasy role-playing, but I don't get much of a chance to do it anymore because there's just not a whole lot that can be added to the genre. There's plenty of people who are re-using old ideas, but the innovation switch has been on "OFF" for quite a while.

Well, FASA's changed all of that with *Earthdawn*. Role-playing in the land of Barsaive is a real breath of fresh air. The setting for *Earthdawn* has to be one of the most original I've seen in years. I tend to stay away from fantasy fiction nowadays because it suffers from the same problem that fantasy role-playing does. Let me tell you, *Earthdawn* is more innovative than any of the top ten best sellers in the fantasy genre last year and it's a role-playing game.

Earthdawn takes place in the world of Barsaive, a land that has seen better days. Nearly a millennia ago, terrible creatures called "Horrors" came to Barsaive to rend and destroy. The people of Barsaive had to enclose themselves in magical wards called karns to protect themselves from the Horrors, and they remained locked away for eight hundred years. Entire civilizations lived and died in labyrinthine catacombs as the Horrors had their way with the world outside. After eight centuries had passed, the world was ready to re-emerge into the sunlight, into a world that was no longer the world that was written of in the scrolls left behind by their ancestors. The great Empires of the past are no more, and the people must rebuild what once was. It's a great setting for role-playing: traditional fantasy elements with a twist of *Twilight: 2000* and *The Morrow Project*.

The game allows you to play all the traditional races (elves, dwarves, humans, etc.), but also adds the non-traditional ones such as orks and ogres

and adds some new ones in. My favorite are the dragon-like T'skrang who pilot the riverways of the world, telling the great tales of their travels. A Sam Clemens with scales sounds like a lot of fun. The character generation rules are reminiscent of level systems (they call them "spheres", but they're levels) with a bit more flexibility. The idea is to play an "adept", someone who follows a calling rather than a class. The mythology of the world is rich and complex, with "Passions" instead of "gods." The Passions remind me of the Greek pantheon with their human-like tempers and closeness to mortal men, so if that kind of flavor floats your boat, you'll be at home here.

The game system itself is unique. When I play fantasy games, I'm a big sucker for the old *Stormbringer* system, so it seemed a little heavy to me. Each time you gain a Sphere, you roll a new system of dice that gives you better numbers. While innovative, I would have appreciated a more straightforward system. However, it does allow you to roll a lot of dice which, I understand, some players are particularly fond of. The magic system is also innovative, using many different kinds of sorcery. There's thread magic (rather harmless) and blood magic (dark and dangerous) for the players to toy around with along with becoming a "questor" (holy man) and divining power from the gods. All of the adepts have their own special abilities, which gives each of the adepts a kind of "secret society" feel. One disadvantage that many of the "point-based systems" have is that any character can purchase any skill they want. Making certain skills "secret skills" available only to certain adepts is keen. The notion that your character is part of a community that passes on its secrets is not only cool, but it's also historically accurate and more "historical fantasy" games should pick up on *Earthdawn's* hint.

The supplementary material for *Earthdawn* is of superior quality. The *Denizens of Earthdawn* Volumes I-III are complete looks at the different races and their cultures. When you get finished reading about Obsidimen (way cool rock guys), you know what they think about the other races, how they get along with each other, and

everything else you need to know to play your character to the hilt. The boxed sets are also a joy. When you open up an *Earthdawn* box, you get full color maps, a measuring tool that tells you how long a ride or walk it is from point A to point B on the map, and well-laid out books filled to brim with information. The three boxed sets, *Barsaive*, *Parlainth*, and *Sky-Point* are all worth the cost, even if you don't run an *Earthdawn* campaign just to see what your fantasy RPG should be publishing.

Earthdawn has it all. Fantasy role-playing with dashes of horror (see the *Horrors* supplement), exploration and adventure. It has enough of the traditional so I feel the swirls of nostalgia inside and enough innovation to keep me on my toes when I start to take things for granted. While the system is a bit too innovative for my taste, I highly recommend *Earthdawn* to anyone who runs a fantasy campaign. It really gives the fantasy genre a long-needed (albeit friendly) kick in the pants.

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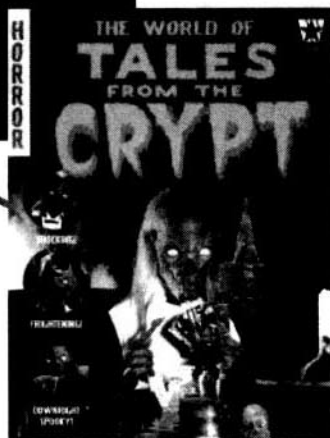
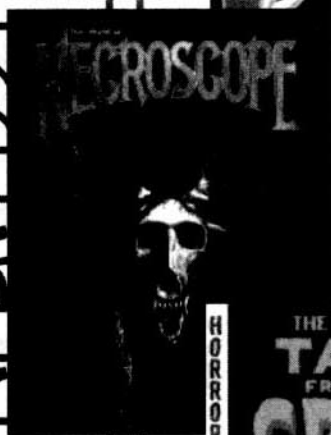
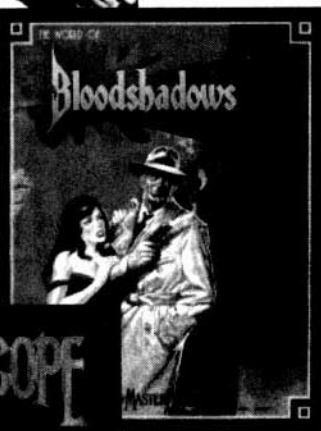
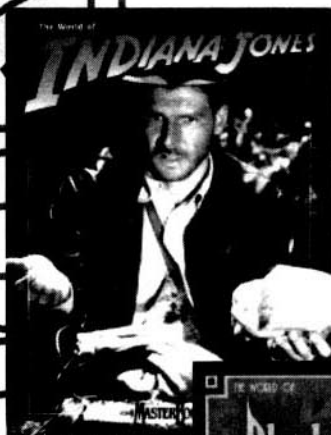
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FEATURE

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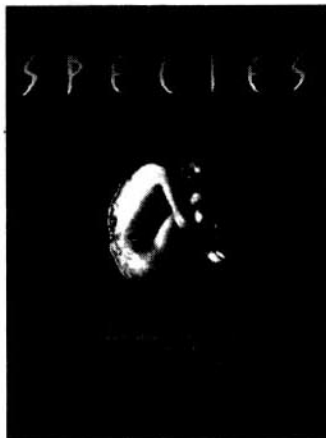
The MasterDeck

In this book, you will see references to the *MasterDeck*, cards that can be used to enhance your gameplay with this system. These are **optional**, and are not required for you to use the *MasterBook* system.

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MASTERBOOK

IN THE TRENCHES

• BY BRYAN WINTER

• LESSON TWO

• GROW YOUR SALES WITH SHRINK-WRAP

Let's say you want to buy a car. You go to the dealer and there are dozens of cars available. Unfortunately, you are only allowed to make your buying decision by reading the stickers on the cars. You may not open the doors. You may not take a test drive. You only have the advice of the salesperson to help. Would you buy a car at this dealership? Of course not!

Then isn't it amazing that you as a game retailer expect the same thing from your customers? When customers enter your store, they are shopping for entertainment. They want something that will be a fun way to spend their continually infrequent free time. That's a tall order. Only they know what their personal definitions of "fun" are. However, they are trapped. Most of your stock is hidden behind a layer of plastic!

If there was only a way for customers to "kick the tires" before they make their purchases. If only you could break that plastic wrap and let the customer look inside, so they can be their own judge. But you can't do that, because then the game is no longer wrapped, and no longer "new". Well, now you can. All you have to do is make one small purchase: a shrink-wrap machine. If you don't know what a shrink-wrap machine is, it's very simple. Basically, it is a simple apparatus that holds a large roll of shrink-wrap plastic. On one end is a long arm with a heating element along its base. The heated arm is used to seal the plastic together, and then you use a heat gun (like a hair dryer, but a bit hotter) to heat up the plastic. When it heats up, the plastic shrinks down, sealing whatever is inside. This is what is used to put the plastic wrap on your games, but the one you want is much less industrial, and much less expensive!

Once you get your shrink-wrapper, you will be amazed at how handy it is. You'll wonder how you ever did without one! Not only will you become much more educated about your products, your customers will love you for it!

As soon as you receive a shipment of new games, bust one or two open. Place one in your New Products area, so your customers can open the box and have a look inside. Don't worry about your product becoming damaged, we all know that gamers tend to be very careful about maintaining their games, and are even more careful if the game does not belong to them. The other game you opened goes behind the counter with you for a couple of days, so you have something to look through during your slow times. This will give you a chance to read up on a new product, which will make you a better, more informed retailer.

If a customer is considering a game purchase, offer to open it up for them, but be sure you mention your shrink-wrapper! Often when you offer to open a game, the customer will feel that once the wrap is off, they will be obliged to buy it. Simply say something like "Would you like me to open the game so you can get a better look at it? It's OK, we've got a shrink-wrapper so I can wrap it back up again." Now that is customer service!

Product displays become a breeze. I remember when *Games Workshop* came out with their big-box version of *Warhammer 40,000*. That was one heavy box, which is quite impressive. But it's not nearly impressive as actually looking inside! What we did was place a table near the front of the store with a stack of *Warhammer 40K* games next to it. On the table we placed the contents of one of the games, nicely arranged and visually appealing. We sold those games fast, and with very little work. In effect, we let the game sell itself! And when we were finished, we packed the display game up, put a fresh layer of shrink-wrap over it, and put it on the shelf. The customers got to pore over the contents, we had a terrific-looking display, and everyone was happy.

Sound expensive? Well, it's not. The initial cost of a good shrink-wrapper is only a couple hundred bucks, and I practically guarantee that you'll make up that overhead in no time with increased sales. You can probably find a nice selection of shrink-wrappers from the place you purchased your store fixtures from. Just be sure you get one that can handle those big boxes from *Games Workshop*!

HAZZA

IN THE TRENCHES IS A MONTHLY ARTICLE DEDICATED TO THE GAME RETAILER. EACH MONTH WE WILL PROVIDE READERS WITH METHODS TO IMPROVE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION, STORE APPEARANCE, SALES TECHNIQUES, AND PROFITS!

BRYAN WINTER IS THE DESIGNER OF THE DOOMTROOPER CARD GAME, AMONG OTHER PRODUCTS, AND HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN GAMING FOR ALMOST 20 YEARS.

BY KEN CARPENTER

CASTING CALL

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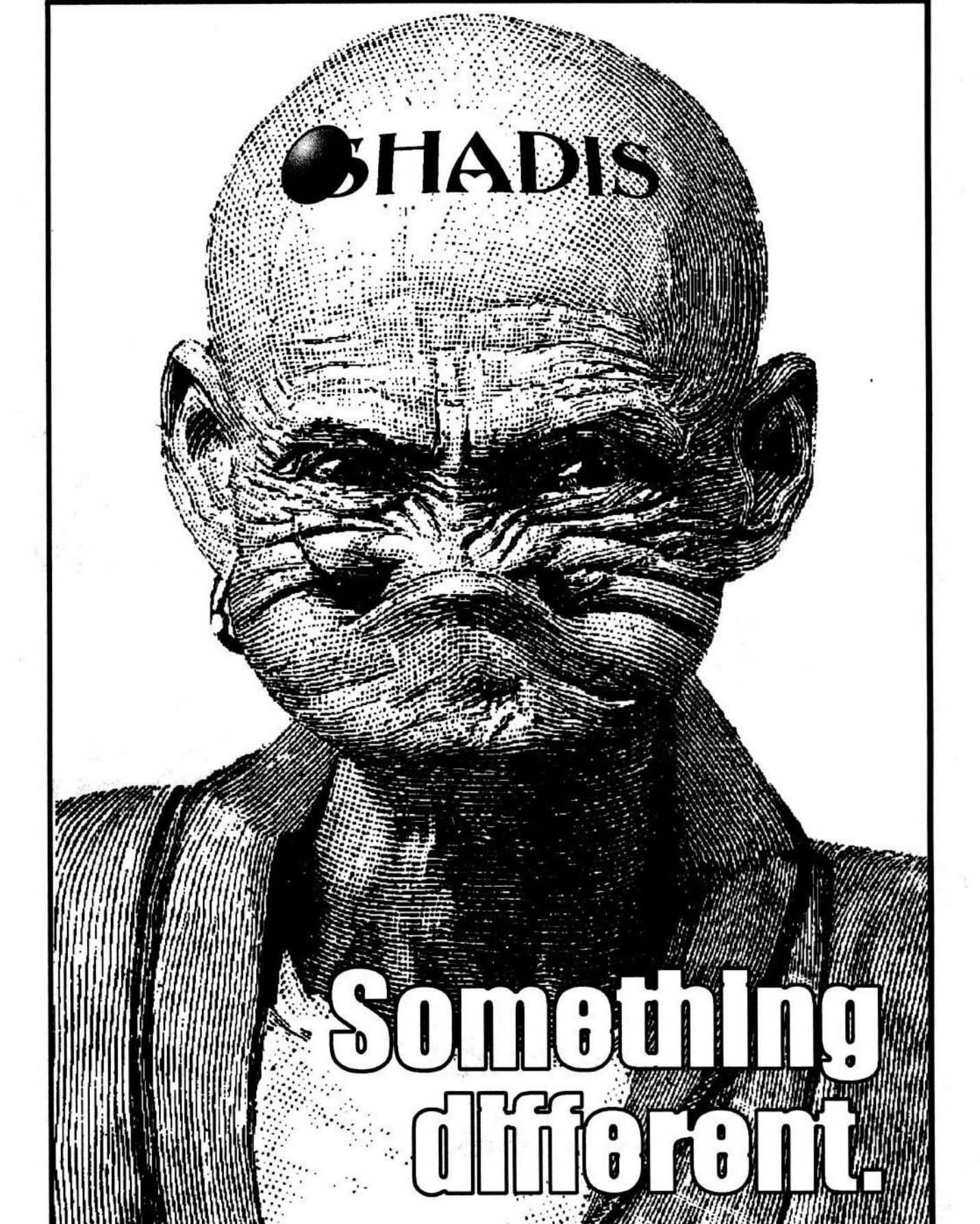


2 SHADOW ELF LORDS, 3 SHADOW ELF LABYRINTH GUARD-125" TALL YOU'RE SAYING, "A COMMAND SECTION AND SPECIAL GUARD UNIT FOR SHADOW ELVES? WHAT'RE THEY?" THEY'RE ONLY A HOT LINE OF FIGURES OUT OF G.B. HARLEQUIN'S GOT A TALENTED YOUNG SCULPTOR, KEVIN WHITE, WHO'S GOT A STYLE ALL HIS OWN. SHADOW ELF LORDS, LABYRINTH GUARD #4101, #4103 \$5.95 PER BLISTER OF THREE



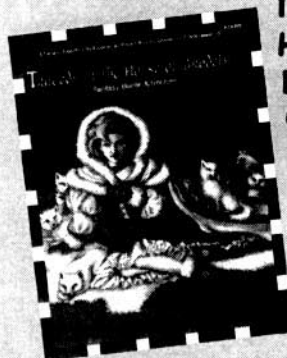
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different.**



TRAGEDY IN THE HOUSE OF BRODELN™

GENERIC FANTASY
ADVENTURE
SUPPLEMENT
•KENZER &
COMPANY
•PRICE: \$10.00
•REVIEWED BY
DIRK DEJONG

Every so often a new idea comes along in a tired old area of gaming and rejuvenates it. Kenzer & Company, makers of the Kingdoms of Kalamar fantasy RPG background, decided that it was about time somebody did that with RPG adventures. So, without further ado, let me introduce the ImageQUEST Adventure Illustrator and its

maiden adventure, *Tragedy in the House of Brodeln*.

The use of the ImageQUEST system (which uses pictures and maps to help the storyline along, in this case 16 half- or whole-page high quality B&W drawings and 8 pages of maps) and the Kalamaran background have combined to raise what would be a competent adventure that any of a half-dozen companies could have put out, to a easy to run, fun to play adventure that sticks out from the crowd. The extensive use of the Kalamaran background means that buying the Kingdoms of Kalamar, while not necessary, is recommended. In the same vein, use of the AD&D 2nd edition rules works best with the NPCs that are laid out.

If you want a good fantasy adventure, one that you can really visualize, try out this latest offering from Kenzer & Company. And let's hope they keep up the good work, giving us more of their marvelous Kingdoms.

IMMORTAL EYES: THE TOYBOX™

A SCENARIO FOR CHANGELING: THE DREAMING

•WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO™

•\$15.00

•REVIEWED BY DOUGLAS SEACAT

Immortal Eyes: The Toybox is the first supplement released for *White Wolf's Changeling* role playing game. *Toybox* is touted as the first in a trilogy of linked products. This ambitious project will provide both source material and a complete chronicle with each release. The game material is also linked to a trilogy of fantasy novels also released by White Wolf. While reading the books isn't "required" to use the game material, it is encouraged for a full understanding of the background. Whether this is an innovative approach to gaming or simply a clever marketing strategy will be left to others to decide.

As a sourcebook, *Toybox* details the "Kingdom of Pacifica" within the larger continent of "Concordia." In mortal terms, this covers San Francisco and the Bay Area, including Marin

County, Sonoma Valley, Napa Valley, the East Bay, Berkeley, Oakland, the Inland Valleys, San Jose, the Peninsula, and San Francisco itself. This is a wide stretch of territory, but the book

adequately describes the basic features of these areas. San Francisco in particular is described in detail, including an overview of its history, both mortal and fae. Separate attention is given to changeling "freeholds" (powerful enchanted areas hidden away from normal mortals).

Just as importantly, *Toybox* details a number of significant NPCs within the region, including 18 nobles and 9 commoners. These characters are described in good detail, and provided with enough depth to make them interesting and easily playable. Their interactions form the social fabric



of the setting, and are composed of a variety of intrigues, alliances, and rivalries.

The sourcebook aspect of *Toybox* is excellent, providing a rich atmosphere for a wide variety of games. Considering the large population of changelings in the Kingdom of Pacifica, there is enough room for the Storyteller to elaborate and create other NPCs as required. Indeed, my only complaint is that they could have included more characters, in particular commoners. Since the majority of changelings are commoners, the sourcebook is unbalanced, with Sidhe

COLD IRON & THE SIDHE

"COLD IRON" IS THE SUBSTANCE THAT'S SUPPOSED TO BE "THE BANE" OF THE FAERIE FOLK. THE FACT OF THE MATTER IS, WE'RE NOT PRECISELY SURE WHY COLD IRON DRIVES THEM UP A WALL. THERE'S NO EVIDENCE THAT IRON EVER CAUSED THEM PAIN, JUST DISPLEASURE. HOWEVER, NO MORTAL WOULD BE STUPID ENOUGH TO BRING IRON NEAR A SIDHE LORD OR LADY. EVER CONSIDER SPENDING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE AS A DUCK? INSULTING A MEMBER OF THE SEELIE COURT IS LIKE GETTING A THUNDERSTORM ANGRY AT YOU. IT'S JUST NOT PRUDENT AT ANY JUNCTURE.



outnumbering every other type of Kithain by a factor of 6-to-1. It would have been nice if significant members of each type of changeling had been detailed (as per most *Vampire* sourcebooks, for example). Nonetheless, there is enough here to keep Storytellers and players busy for quite some time.

Unfortunately, the chronicle is much less impressive. Despite taking up 50 pages, the three-chapter story isn't particularly detailed, well plotted, or imaginative. The story relies too heavily upon combat, which is disappointing for a game like *Changeling* which could easily focus on more interesting activities. More troublesome, the chronicle makes many references to the novel (*Toys Will Be Toys*) but does not elaborate upon them. Without having read the book, these references are worse than useless, becoming distracting and confusing. Thus, despite claims of being a complete chronicle, the story seems more a brief introduction.

Despite the disappointing chronicle, *Toybox* is worth its price as a sourcebook for the Bay Area. Particularly skilled or energetic Storytellers may be able to salvage the chronicle and use it to create something more interesting. Otherwise, it might be best to wait until the second of the *Immortal Eyes* is published, hopefully with a better story.



WE UNLEASH DOUG ON
TSR'S DARK SUN
CAMPAIGN SETTING ON
PAGE 86.

COMME IL FAUT: ALL THINGS RIGHT & PROPER

•WRITTEN BY MICHAEL A. POND SMITH ET AL.

•R. TALSORIAN GAMES, INC.

•\$17.00

•REVIEWED BY RICH WARREN

Comme il faut, French of course, refers to the art of acting proper, stylish and distinctly Victorian. As the second supplement for *R. Talsorian's Castle Falkenstein*, *Comme Il Faut* describes the lifestyles and manners of New Europa's gentlemen and ladies.

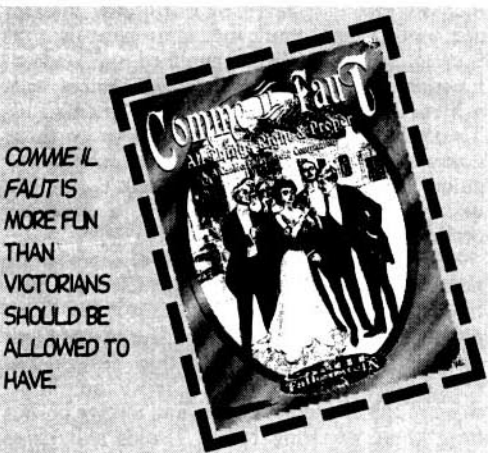
The book covers everything from assignations (the proper etiquette for illicit romantic encounters) to *zeitgeist* (an understanding of an era's ideals, dreams, hopes and beliefs). Topics include a typical Victorian day, leaving a calling card, and a hundred other tidbits that will bring any *Falkenstein* game to life.

On the rules side, *Comme Il Faut* provides a question and answer page — both for general information and for *Falkenstein* sorcery. This section also presents new skills, abilities and professions. Expanded resolution systems include everything from live action and freeform gaming, to card variants and *Hard Numbers Falkenstein*. New charts both ease game play and add details. The expanded sorcery rules discuss cantrips, wards, practical sorcerous professions and limits on the available Thaumic Energy.

The book ends with an overview of *Falkenstein* campaign archetypes, and full-page maps of important New European cities.

Many period drawings by Charles Dana Gibson are scattered throughout the book. While *R. Talsorian* printed it in a style similar to *Steam Age*, the all-blue ink looks better than *Steam's* icky brown. Overall, *Comme Il Faut* is visually pleasing and easy to use.

I cannot say that I like everything in the book, but it is essential for any serious *Falkenstein* players — or anyone interested in the Victorian era.



REVIEWS

DARK SUN™ CAMPAIGN SETTING

- TSR
- \$30
- REVIEWED BY DOUG SEACAT

Recently TSR has re-released their *Dark Sun* Campaign Setting in a slick new boxed set. The package contains everything necessary to run an AD&D game on the world of Athas, and clearly outlines extensive revisions to the previous release. The set includes: three good maps (the cloth one is particularly nice); a GM screen with many useful charts; "Mystery of the Ancients" an adventure designed for starting players; "The Way of the Psionicist" which describes the use of Psionics on Athas; "The Age of Heroes" detailing game mechanics adjustments and rules; and "The Wanderer's Chronicle" which is a complete sourcebook for the world itself.

The world of Athas is harsh and brutal, alien indeed compared to more traditional fantasy settings like *Greyhawk* or the *Forgotten Realms*. Athas has been turned into a wasteland by the use of powerful destructive magic. Many familiar AD&D creatures—such as lizard men, pixies, and gnomes—have been exterminated by evil rulers in the past. Those races that remain (such as dwarves, elves, and halflings) have been forced to evolve and adapt to the hostile environment and thus bear very little comparison to their relatives on other worlds. The unique nature of Athas includes new character races such as half-giants, thri-kreen, aarakocra, muls (half-dwarves) and pterrans (reptilian bipeds unique to Athas).

Character generation in *Dark Sun* is significantly revised beyond choice of race. Ability scores are higher on Athas than other worlds, an effect of the harsh environment. Accordingly, there have been revisions to the use of some ability scores (particularly Strength and Constitution) to maintain game-balance. More significantly, all intelligent creatures on Athas have psionics, thus making it a central part of the game instead of an option. Fortunately, "The Way of the Psionicist" prepares a GM for this, and includes extensive revisions in the way psionics are used. One significant adjustment is that psionic combat has been simplified and made to function exactly like normal AD&D combat, with a Mental THACO, and a Mental Armor Class. This helps shorten the learning curve for those unpracticed with psionics. Unfortunately, the guide is incomplete and doesn't include descriptions of all Psionic powers, a surprising omission.

Even more significant are the changes to the normal AD&D concepts of magic. Clerical magic has been significantly changed since Athas is not connected to the Outer Planes. This means Gods cannot influence Athas, and thus religion has undergone major changes. Clerics on Athas worship the Elemental Planes, and receive powers from those uncaring forces. Druids still exist, gaining power from nature itself, but are not

organized into a hierarchy. Other clerics, termed Templars, receive their magic from the extremely powerful rulers of certain cities, who are known as Sorcerer-Kings. Mages are also in for a surprise since their power no longer comes without a price. Every use of non-clerical magic on Athas is drawn from the life-force around the magic user. Too much use of this magic kills nearby life, and is known as Defiling magic. Those who are cautious are termed Preservers and must limit their use of magic to minimize harm to the environment.

As all of these changes indicate, *Dark Sun* is one of the largest departures within the AD&D line. This makes it a refreshing change for players and GMs who are burned out on the traditional fantasy games. However, it also means that *Dark Sun* is not easily integrated into the rest of the TSR universe. For instance, Athas is not a good place for the casual Planescape adventurer to visit, and should indeed be kept isolated from the other worlds. As a whole, this new revision of *Dark Sun* is to be recommended for providing all the tools needed to run a game within this unique environment. Those already familiar with *Dark Sun* will find the new boxed set valuable for the streamlined game play revisions and the updated source material, which reflects changes to the game world over the last few years, all of which will undoubtedly impact upcoming *Dark Sun* products.



IN DARK SUN, YOU
CAN PLAY THRIKREEN, HALF-
GIANTS, OR PTTERRANO IF YOU'RE
TIED OF ELVES AND DWARVES.

BIRTHRIGHT™ PRODUCT LINE

- TSR
- WRITTEN BY RICH BAKER AND COLIN MCCOMB
- PRODUCTS REVIEWED: #3100-#3108
- \$30 FOR BIRTHRIGHT BOXED SET, \$18 FOR BLOOD ENEMIES, \$9.95 FOR SWORD AND CROWN, \$6.95 EACH FOR DOMAIN SOURCEBOOKS
- REVIEWED BY J. WINTER

Birthingright brings two things to AD&D campaigning that are unique to this setting. First, the setting really requires that at least one of the player characters have a bloodline that establishes them as being among the powers of the milieu, usually a regent (land holding lord). Second, it makes politics a predominant force in the game, requiring that players become involved with the running of a realm, with all its requisite posturing, blustering, scheming, and back stabbing.

Bloodlines derive from a cataclysmic war in which the gods themselves participated. The evil god was so powerful that all the other gods gave up their immortal lives to defeat him. When they each died, their essence was scattered randomly among the many mortal survivors of the battle. The mortals who received that essence became the first of that Bloodline.

Bloodlines grant certain super powers (not to be confused with Marvel Superheroes, but sorta like that), like divine aura, enhanced senses, healing, regeneration, and many other abilities that the X-men and Power Rangers would love to have as their own.

There are some very good ideas in *Birthingright*, many of which are even implemented well. However, there is so much mundane clerical work and record keeping that the rules invoke images of players sitting about a table with accounting forms and copies of the Fiscal Year '95 tax codes.

You, as regent, must constantly be mindful of your realm's morale, the standing and strength of your various holdings (from guilds, temples, and law holdings), which wizards are tapping into your realm for its magical strength, how much it costs to maintain your realm versus your income and other expenditures — the list goes on.

While the idea is wonderful, giving the player complete control, or at least visibility, of their realm, a true lord would have a huge support staff to handle much of the mundane records and payroll — players do not.

The system for generating gold bars and Regency points provided by a realm are not terribly complex but are time consuming. The Realm descriptions are supposed to provide the starting gold bars, regency points generated, and starting army, but those little details seem to have escaped the authors more often than not, so you are left to go back and recreate them for yourself.

The realms in *Ruins of Empire* make for some pretty tough reading. That sort of background is usually pretty dull and hard to work through, so it's not a problem with the system, but having so many backgrounds in one book and expecting a

GM to have at least a slight grasp on their inner workings and interaction is a bit much to ask.

In addition to all the role-playing material, there is also a system for working out large scale battles between military units in the game. It's very simplified, but it does an adequate job of resolving conflicts.

The *Blood Enemies* book, which contains the background and stats for some of the world's great monsters, wasn't terribly useful. While it may include some additional background on the world, only armies or incredibly stupid characters would go against any of these characters. It's more of a who's-who of monsterkind.

Sword and Crown is a well organized adventure, giving players a taste of the *Birthingright* milieu. If you like *Birthingright*, you'll enjoy the adventure. Suffice it to say that there is plenty of intrigue (which is good), some mystery (which is also good), and lots of opportunity to fight in some pretty odd circumstances (which is a matter of opinion).

The Domain Sourcebooks provide more domains from the world of *Birthingright*. There is much more background provided for each of the countries in the sourcebooks, but they aren't as well organized as the original material presented in the boxed set. Each domain comes with its own collection of problems, NPC characters, and built-in intrigues. While some are terribly dull, others are quite an interesting read.

I guess the bottom line is this: *Birthingright* is a setting that you will either like or dislike, there's very little middle ground. It didn't work for me. I prefer politics to wield power subtly but with great effect. The bloodline concept is intriguing, however. Overall, I found *Birthingright* to be a great source for material, but not a great campaign setting.



FULL OF
POLITICS, BIRTHINGRIGHT
IS A REAL CHANGE OF PACE FOR
AD&D.

REVIEWS

NIGHTSPAWN™
 •PALLADIUM BOOKS™
 •\$19.95/233 PAGES
 •WRITTEN BY C.J. CARELLA
 •REVIEWED BY KEVIN JONES

Almost anyone in the gaming industry is familiar with Palladium Books' style of RPG. *Rifts* is the prime example of the high impact, high action, big guns, big muscles super-intense Palladium game. It goes all the way to "11." When I read my copy of *Nightspawn*, I expected more of the same. Well get your cameras ready folks, you're not going to be hearing this one too often:

I was wrong.

Nightspawn is an action game, but it's also much, much more. Sure, there's big guns and big muscles and high volume excitement, but there's also conspiratorial intrigue and horror and a whole mess of campaign ideas and suggestions. It's just not what I thought it was going to be, and I'm glad. Now don't get me wrong, I love the action genre as much as the next guy (I own all 3 *Die Hard* films, thank you), but I don't need a role-playing game to teach me how to run an action game. At least, that's what I thought before I read through *Nightspawn*.

The book shows a lot of forethought and is organized very well. The art is also consistently exceptional. High kudos go out to Vince Martin, Randy Post, Scott Johnson and Andy Peterson (and, of course, Brom for his beautiful cover). Also, the text is virtually free from typos, a rarity in our industry. Good work on the production staff.

Now with all the technical stuff out of the way, what's the game like?

It's great. It's a dark future setting with an "Other Side." There was a "Dark Day" in which this other side (called the Darklands) crossed over and invaded. The problem is, nobody noticed the invasion, they were too busy being occupied with the mutations going on in the streets. For some reason or another, the invasion caused some folks to mutate into the Nightspawn. These poor souls are ostracized from society, but they're the only ones who know what's really going on. Their mutated state allows them to see the invaders, but nobody will listen to them because they're the monsters. Pretty keen, eh?

The character generation system is thick with ideas. Nightspawn are humans who have mutated in some way by the Dark Day, and the charts for Nightspawn mutations are wonderful. They include: Reptile, Arachnid, Insectoid, Rodent, Snake, Stigmata, Unusual Facial Features, Unearthly Beauty, Bat, Biochemical and (I kid you not!) Equine/Bovine/Deer tables! Just making up a Nightspawn was worth the price of admission on this one, folks! For the first time in a long time, I actually had fun rolling up a character. It was great.

Everyone in the industry knows how the



BECAUSE OF UNFORSEEN LEGAL ACTION,
 NIGHTSPAWN WILL SOON BECOME NIGHTBANE.
 FOR MORE ON THIS STORY, SEE LAST ISSUE'S
 INDUSTRY NEWS.

Palladium system works, but if you don't, here's a re-hash. You've got 8 Attributes rolled on 3d6 with a chance for bonus dice if you roll well.

So, you've got big guns and muscles, conspiracy theory, horror, sorcery and political intrigue with the Palladium RPG system to back it all up. It sounds like a lot of fun because Mr. Carella and Co. had fun doing it. You can tell by reading it. Also, just about every other page has hints and tips on how to run the game that aren't just for show. Only about fifty pages are dedicated to "hard rules," the rest of it is all flavor. One of my major pet peeves with *Rifts* was that the book was the complete opposite from *Nightspawn*. I'm overjoyed that Palladium has taken a new approach with this product.

For both players of Palladium and other horror role-playing games, *Nightspawn* is truly a superior product from Mr. Carella and Mr. Siembieda and the folks out in Michigan. It takes a lot to convert me to a game with so many dice and charts, and this is one game that did one damn fine job of it.

! PALLADIUM NUMEROLOGY

NO PALLADIUM CHARACTER EVER HAD A "16" IN ANY ATTRIBUTE. IT'S TRUE. YOU ROLL 3D6 FOR YOUR ATTRIBUTES IN PALLADIUM, AND IF YOU ROLL A "16", "17", OR "18", YOU ROLL AN ADDITIONAL D6 AND ADD THE RESULT. THUS, THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A "16" IN THE PALLADIUM MEGAVERSE. JUST IN CASE YOU NEEDED TO KNOW ...

VAMPIRE: THE DARK AGES™

- WHITE WOLF GAME STUDIO™
- \$28.00/287 PAGES
- REVIEWED BY KEVIN JONES

There's a lot of good to say about *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, and only a little bit of bad. This makes me very happy. I haven't been overly impressed with a lot of White Wolf's recent releases, and that's why *V:TDA* put a smile on my face.

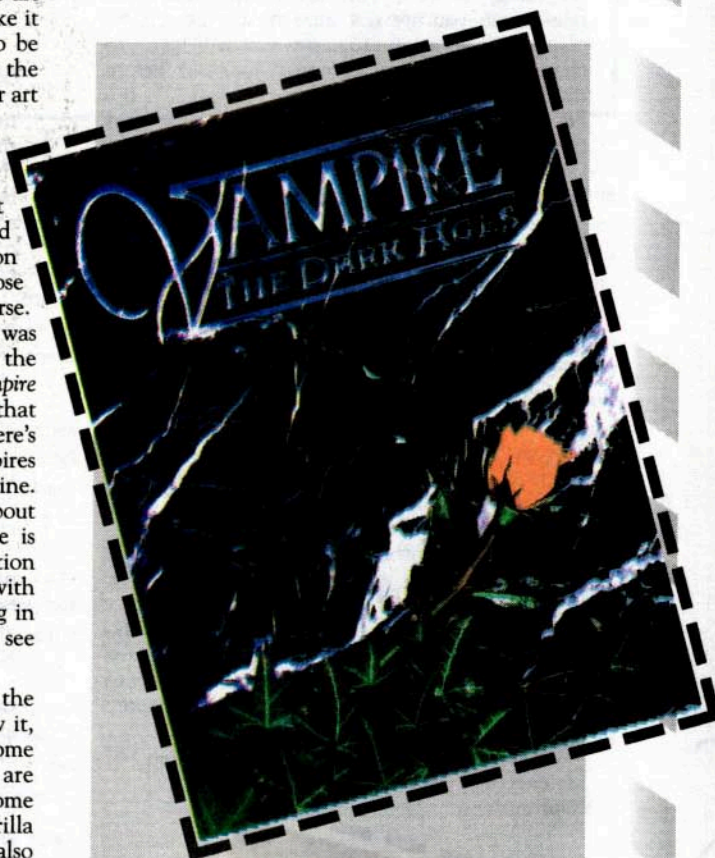
The first thing you notice is the cover. It's reminiscent of the old *Vampire* cover, but it's got a new font and it's purple. The graphics on the inside are typical White Wolf, some are excellent, far above the industry standard, while some are... well, let's just say I don't understand why the art director of the book allowed *sketches* (looks like it took the artist ten minutes for each one) to be used in the sections that described each of the Clans. This was so inconsistent with the other art that it was to the point of being distracting.

Once I got past the first glipse, I started to read. The material on the middle ages is strong, reflecting that the authors knew what they were talking about. It's a good introduction for someone who has no clue on what the middle ages was all about, and for those who *are* familiar, it's a fun refresher course. There's another aspect of the background that was a real big bonus for me, however, and that was the re-focusing on the original intent of the *Vampire* game. *V:TDA* really reinforces the fact that players of the game are playing *monsters*. There's nothing hip, cool or tragic about the vampires here, they kill to live and that's the bottom line. They don't have groupies, in fact, just about anyone who realizes that you are a vampire is going to cross themselves, run the other direction and bring back a bunch of angry peasants with torches. This is something that's been missing in White Wolf products lately, and I'm glad to see that it's back.

All the rules are basically the same. It's the Storyteller System once again, so if you know it, you can skip most of it. However, there are some differences in character generation that are intriguing. First off, the Masquerade hasn't come about just yet, so there are no Sabbat vs Camarilla plot complications running around. There's also no Giovanni, but there are the Cappadocians who (unfortunately) are just 13th century goths. Big yawn. A few of the terminologies have been refitted with names apropos to the middle ages, along with *Ars Magica* terms for the Thaumaturgy discipline. However... there's a big bad gripe I got about Generation. You start off at Generation Twelve and you aren't supposed to go any lower. In one section of the book it says, "There are exceedingly few vampires of [12th] generation, and even fewer beyond..." The Generation Background reads, "it is assumed that the conditions that support the Dark Ages' vampiric

population have prompted vampires to sire many childer." Make up your minds, guys. One of the reasons I wanted to play *Dark Ages* was to play a vampire of an older Generation, but its an easily solvable problem. Just go out and pick up *Elysium*, White Wolf's excellent sourcebook on playing older vampires, and incorporate it into *Dark Ages*.

Can I recommend *The Dark Ages*? Yes. It is a superior product from White Wolf, and a step back in the right direction for the *Vampire* line. It stands very well on its own, and any of the supplementary material most WW fans already have (like *Ars Magica* and *Elysium*) will make the game even better.



TIRED OF THE MASQUERADE? BLOW IT OFF!
BE PROUD OF YOUR HERITAGE!



OK, WE HAVE VAMPIRES IN THE DARK AGES, WHAT'S NEXT? WOULD YOU BELIEVE... WILD WEST WEREWOLF? WE ARE NOT KIDDING. LOOK FOR IT THIS SUMMER. YIPPEE-KAI-YAY.

REVIEWS

COMPUTER
ROLE-PLAYING
GAME REVIEWS
FROM THE EDGE



REVIEWS

ENTOMORPH: PLAGUE OF THE DARKFALL

- STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS, INC.
- CD-ROM (WINDOWS 95 OR 3.0)
- \$40 ON THE STREET
- REQUIREMENTS: 8MB RAM, SVGA
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

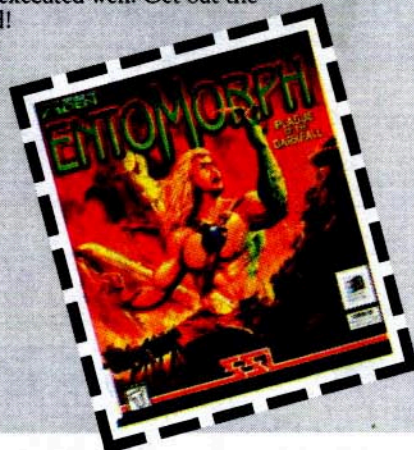
SSI's *Entomorph* is their latest venture into the fantasy roleplaying genre, and it seems to be their strongest to date. Your task is to liberate the archipelago you call home from a plague of giant insects who have recently set up shop. Disturbingly, many people appear to welcome their new insect masters. As an additional complication, people have begun displaying a propensity to slowly metamorphosis into giant bugs. Even you are not immune to this bizarre plague; as the game progresses you will begin to change. If you do not complete your task before the metamorphosis is complete, you fail. On the bright side, your combat capabilities improve as the change proceeds.

The SVGA graphics are attractive, and the bird's-eye view of the land give you plenty of room to maneuver. The game's music is all played off the CD, and it is in fact quite good. As far as game play goes, it is relatively standard fare — the usual combination of picking up objects like a pack rat and slaying monsters will be familiar to anyone who's ever played a computer RPG.

You can cast spells in the game too, which is essential as you need ranged attacks and healing magic. Spells are slung by clicking on the appropriate glyph or with a hotkey. You won't find magic missile in *Entomorph*, though; it's set in SSI's own "World of Aden" and is not an AD&D product as one might at first suspect.

The biggest problem with *Entomorph* is the combat, which is simplistic and arcade-style. Fortunately as a balance to this there are a lot of NPCs to interact with, including your sister, who is involved in the anti-bug rebellion. The game world is also large and very well detailed, down to individual flowers in the jungles you tromp through.

While this is an old formula, it is one that SSI has executed well. Get out the Raid!



SHANNARA

- LEGEND ENTERTAINMENT
- CD-ROM (DOS)
- \$40 ON THE STREET
- REQUIREMENTS: 4MB RAM, SVGA
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

Shannara fans, this one's for you. You get to play the role of Jak Ohmsford, son of Shea Ohmsford. As Jak, you get to finish your dad's work, that of ridding the land of the evil warlock Brona. Seems that Brona, though dead by your father's hand, is resting uneasily and stirring up trouble; you need to go find the Sword of Shannara to put him down for good. You manage to enlist the help of several other characters on the way, including Princess Shella.

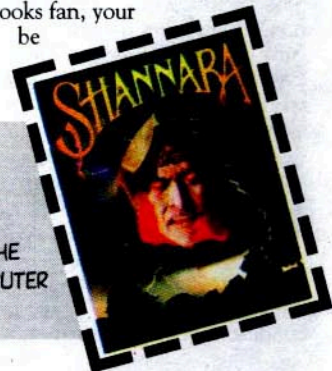
This game is a real mixed bag. I found myself immediately drawn into the story, but the gameplay was dissatisfying. You are forced to go from place to place in a very linear fashion, and the puzzles are fairly straightforward. Then again, the voice acting is simply outstanding, some of the best I have heard in a computer roleplaying game to date. You can always talk to your companions too, which can be frustrating, enlightening, and entertaining by turns.

The interface is well-designed. You can at least attempt to perform any sort of action with the objects at hand, and it only takes a few mouse clicks to do so. There's also an online journal you can use to write notes, and the computer keeps an updated log of events for you.

Shannara is in some ways more like an interactive story than an adventure game. You don't walk around in realtime as in *Daggerfall* but are instead always peering into a still image, clicking on items to pick them up or use them. A particular scene, for instance the city of Tyriss, typically has about 5 different locations for you to visit, and you are prevented from leaving the scene until you have solved the puzzle at hand.

While the gameplay is not what I'd like it to be the game does provide some excellent atmosphere. I am torn on whether to recommend *Shannara* or not. If you are a Terry Brooks fan, and have read and enjoyed the *Sword of Shannara*, then I can safely say that you'll probably enjoy the game, even with its deficiencies. If you aren't a Terry Brooks fan, your money might be better spent on another game.

A COPY OF "THE SWORD OF SHANNARA" IS INCLUDED WITH EACH COPY OF THE SHANNARA COMPUTER GAME.



CAMPAIGN CARTOGRAPHER & DUNGEON DESIGNER

- PRO FANTASY SOFTWARE
- STREET PRICE: \$70 (CAMPAIGN CARTOGRAPHER), \$25 (DUNGEON DESIGNER)
- REQUIREMENTS: 386, 4MB RAM, DOS
- REVIEWED BY MATT STAROSCIK

CAMPAIGN CARTOGRAPHER

Campaign Cartographer is designed to do one thing only — make cool maps for roleplaying. This it is quite capable of doing, but it's not for the faint of heart. The program requires a '386 PC with at least 4MB of RAM. There is no copy protection aside from a serial number, which is entered during installation.

There are a lot of templates and classy symbols included, so you can make a slick-looking map without being a professional artist. Included are towers, obelisks, cities, various sorts of vegetation, cartouches, beasts for the obligatory "here be monsters" warning, and all kinds of terrain. You will want to immediately start making a map of the game world you've been running since you were eleven years old upon seeing all this. The symbols are simple, but attractive. You can assign them different colors but nowhere in the program can you use full-color artwork. Don't spend time creating the ultimate 24-bit color mountain glyph in Adobe Photoshop because you won't be able to import it.

When you're finished, you can export your map in a number of different formats (including EPS and BMP). Printer support is well-done, providing options for laser, dot-matrix and color inkjet printers. You can even add a hex or grid overlay to your map to quantify movement in the game.

Unfortunately, actually producing the map is not as easy as one would hope. It's 1995, and there are many drawing and painting programs available for home computers. Many conventions have been developed for how to do things in these types of programs. Campaign Cartographer ignores most of them, including among others the way pull-down menus work. The interface reminded me of a drafting program I used back in high school in 1987. If you are familiar with something like Corel Draw or Adobe Illustrator, be prepared to unlearn a lot of habits when you start using Campaign Cartographer.

Installation is a lengthy procedure, but

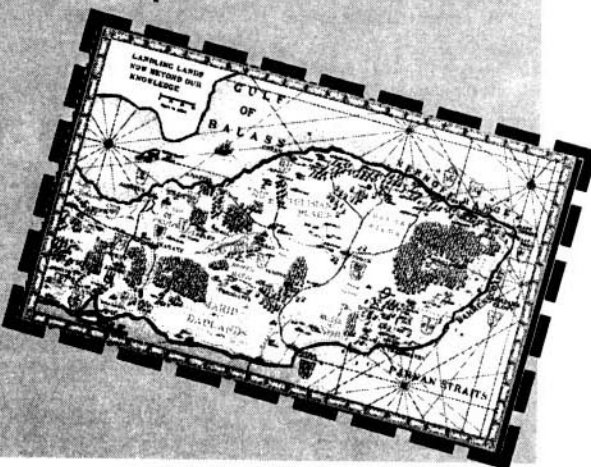
relatively painless. There are a lot of options for printers and video cards, and once you wend your way through the installation utility's questions the program runs well. The documentation is extensive, weighing in at over 100 pages. It's all clearly written and includes tutorials to get you up to speed. Documentation of this quality is always welcome, but is especially important in a program with as many interface quirks as Campaign Cartographer.

DUNGEON DESIGNER

Dungeon Designer is not a stand-alone program, but rather an add-on for Campaign Cartographer. It adds drawing tools specifically geared to the production of dungeon maps. Whatever you might want is in here, from doors and corridors to different geological formations. It also has detailed and well-written documentation, but because it's an add-on it shares Campaign Cartographer's shortcomings.

THE BOTTOM LINE

If, like myself, you are a menace with pen in hand, you will benefit from the Campaign Cartographer family of products. Be aware though that you will have to deal with a number of quirks and will have to invest a lot of time to get good results. You could do the same tasks (and much more) with a professional graphics package, but they are expensive and you wouldn't have the advantage of the large symbol library. If all you care about are maps, and are willing to invest some time, Campaign Cartographer will do the job. If you want instant gratification, you'll have to wait for another product.



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ASK INTERN JEN!



(ACTUAL JEN MAY VARY)

DEAR INTERN JEN,

I'M SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD AND I PLAY MAGIC, D AND D AND VAMPIRE AND I'M THE ONLY GIRL IN MY HIGH SCHOOL GAMING CLUB. NONE OF MY GIRLFRIENDS ARE INTERESTED IN ROLE-PLAYING SO I SPEND A LOT OF TIME WITH GUYS WHO GAME.

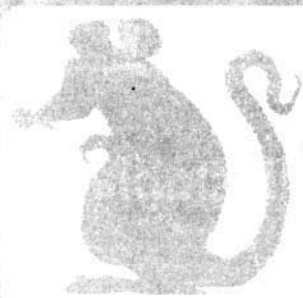
WHAT'S IT LIKE ACTUALLY WORKING AT A JOB FOR A GAME COMPANY THAT IS ALL GUYS?

SINCERELY,
NICOLE H.

WELL NICOLE, SINCE YOU'RE A VAMPIRE PLAYER, LET ME PUT THE ANSWER IN TERMS YOU CAN UNDERSTAND. TWO TERMS TO BE PRECISE: NOSFERATU AND NERF. A COUPLE OF THE AEG GUYS THINK THEY'RE TOREADORS, AND ANOTHER ONE IS TORN BETWEEN BEING A BRUJAH AND AGENT MULDER. IN THE LAST 72 HOURS, THE CARD GAME HAD TO GET TO THE PRINTERS, THE MAGAZINE WENT TO PRESS AND THE SLEEPING BAGS WERE LAID OUT UNDER THE DESKS, WHILE THEIR APARTMENTS (WITH A FRESH CHANGE OF CLOTHES) ARE IN SOME OTHER COUNTRY. THEY ARE NOSFERATU, EVERY SINGLE LAST ONE OF THEM.

THEY'RE ALSO INSANE WHICH BRINGS ME TO MY SECOND POINT: NERF. THEY DUEL THROUGH THE OFFICE WITH NERF SWORDS AND LAY IN AMBUSH FOR THE POOR UPS GUY WITH THEIR NERF GUNS (IT'S AMAZING WE GET ANY MAIL AT ALL). ALL OF THIS SHOULD NOT IMPLY THEY ARE NOT CULTURALLY INCLINED, THEY JUST KEEP ALL THEIR CULTURE IN THE BATHROOM (LIKE THE 9X12 PHOTO OF PRINCESS LEIA THAT HANGS ACROSS FROM THE JOHN AND THE HANDY BATHROOM BOOK: SINGLE-SITTING SUMMARIES OF ALL-TIME GREAT BOOKS). BUT DESPITE ALL OF THIS, IT'S STILL A BLAST TO WORK WITH THEM AND THAT'S WHY I HAVEN'T RUN AWAY SCREAMING. YET.

-INTERN JEN



FIND THAT RAT!

THE RAT RACE CONTEST IS STILL HERE... FIND THE RAT AND YOU MIGHT WIN SOMETHING COOL. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNERS OF #23'S CONTEST, WHO SPOTTED THE ELLUSIVE RODENT ON PAGE 11.

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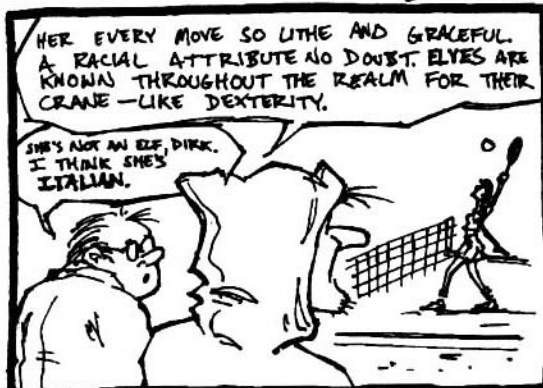
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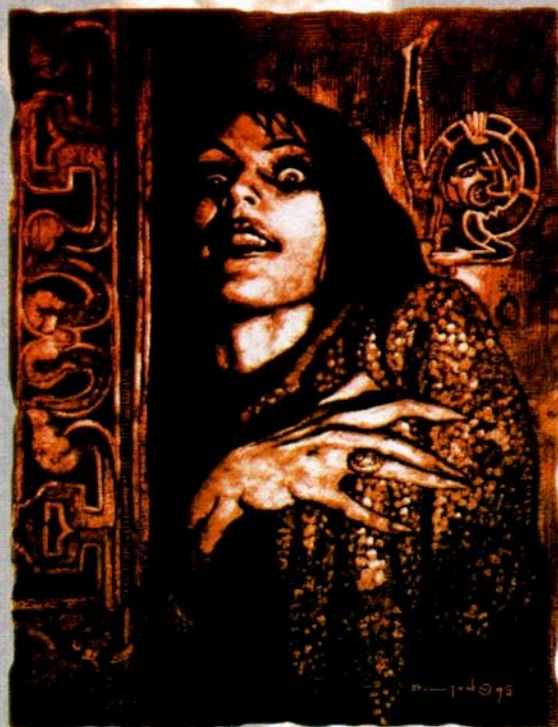
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