

# SORCERER'S APPRENTICE



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FALL '81  
ISSUE 12

## FICTION

Stormraven  
a tale of Aynber the Huntress  
by Charles de Lint

## FACT

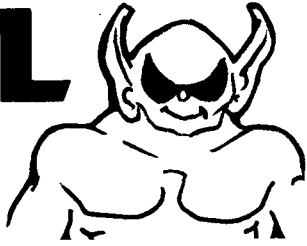
Monsters Here at Home  
by Manly Wade Wellman

## GAMING

Thief for Hire  
a T&T mini-solo adventure  
Viking Weapons and Tactics  
by Lee Duigon  
The Eldritch Connection —  
Magic Items in FRP  
by Larry DiTillio  
City Building and Citymastering  
by Paul O'Connor

PLUS OUR REGULAR FEATURES

# TROLL TALK



I lit the torch as Paul O'Connor lifted the latch of the trapdoor beside my desk. The flames guttered in the cool breeze (air conditioning; Arizona's *hot* in the summer); Paul and I exchanged nervous glances as we descended the stone stairs into Grimtooth's lair. The invitation to see that august Troll didn't mention bringing gifts, but *no one* visits Grimtooth without insuring his goodwill with a little something. The "little something" squirmed in the bag hanging at my belt as though it suspected its fate.

After accepting our present, Grimtooth sat back with a burp. "Paul," he intoned, "I understand that my *first* book of Traps is doing rather well." Paul shuddered, hearing the emphasis on the word "first". "As a matter of fact," the Troll continued, "it's doing so well that I thought you Buffalos should prepare a second book. Of course, I can't give away *all* my secrets, so Liz, I want you to let everyone know that I'll accept submissions now for the *next* assortment of Traps. You, Paul, are to be honored with the assignment of being my head lackey, uh, editor after I *field test* what your readers send me."

Therefore, people, one and all . . . consider yourself

informed! Grimtooth is looking for more deadly devices of delver destruction . . . more *Traps*. Paul O'Connor will be Grimtooth's "associate" and "editor" (which isn't quite the same thing as "associate editor"). He did such an excellent job with the first book, even laboring under the handicap of being shackled to his typewriter. Send to Grimtooth the description of your favorite, most diabolical traps; if the great Troll likes them, you'll receive a copy of the final published book and whatever fame attaches thereunto. Send your traps in as soon as possible so we can include them in the next book of Grimtooth's TRAPS!

Meanwhile, Paul is keeping himself busy with the new book review column you'll find in SA for the first time — appropriately titled "Broken Spines". The question is less whether or not a current book is "good reading" or "a dog", but whether it has something to offer the fantasy gamer—you, presumably—something in the way of background or magic or specific ideas. I think you will find the column a useful addition to SA's pages, to say nothing of the amusement you'll get from Paul's (uhm) *unique* style. But what do you expect from the man whom Grimtooth would choose as editor???

We're plotting new plots here, aside from the addition of "Broken Spines" to SA. Do you like T&T? And do you like StarWeb? Then you'll be glad to know that **WEB, the StarWeb Role-Playing Game**, is on the boards and being developed now! This will be a complete, stand-alone set of rules for fantasy/science fiction gaming, compatible with the T&T rules and with the flavor of the StarWeb universe. Furthermore, for the time period (*continued on page 42*)

## Thief for Hire

*a mini-solo adventure  
for Tunnels & Trolls  
by Robert B. Schofield*



*For 1st — 4th level warriors and rogues  
(combat adds 10 — 30) with no spell abilities.*

The delving business has not been going well for you. You've just returned from a trip where you managed to bring out only 500 gold pieces. Disheartened, you trudge into the Dead Dragon Inn.

As you sit at a table and slowly sip your ale, a man in dark robes enters the inn. He talks with the innkeeper for a few minutes, and they both turn to look at you. The dark-robed stranger walks over and seats himself opposite you.

"Would you be interested in some short-term, high paying work?" the stranger asks.

"Maybe," you reply. "Tell me more."

The stranger looks around to see if anyone is listening before he replies. "I need to obtain a certain scroll to aid me in my work, and I am willing to pay highly for it," he whispers. "This scroll is kept in the royal library at the palace. Get it for me, and I'll give you a thousand gold pieces."

To accept his offer, go to 40C. If you refuse, go to 24B.



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**D**efinition, says the hoary old truism, lies at the threshold of all discussion. What is a monster?

No better place to find out than this old Webster's *Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, thus: "A fabulous or existing animal of strange, grotesque or horrible form, often of enormous size, of a human and a brute form or several brute forms . . . Such are the minotaur, dragon, griffin and mermaid."

There could be more examples, but the compilers leave it at that. Perhaps they defer to Samuel Johnson, an earlier distinguished lexicographer, who called definitions hazardous. A comfort, anyway, to tell yourself that minotaurs, dragons, centaurs, griffins, and mermaids — imaginary or not — are long out of date, are to be referred to classical times and before. At least they're in *Arabian Nights* or Grimm's *Fairy Tales*. Not here.

America had dragons, but reassuringly

far back. Scientists call them triceratops, brontosaurus, tyrannosaurus, pterodactyl. If they did exist later, they got killed by heroes like Hercules, Bellerophon, Oedipus, Saint George. Aren't all monsters Old-Worldly, anyway? Toothy Dracula, the Werewolf of the Hartz Mountains, the Abominable Snowman up in the Himalayas? Reassuring to think as you study them and what they might do to an unwary human prey?

But think again. Monsters bob up in numerous accounts, right here on the home front. Our landscape throngs with grotesqueries. Let's fill you in.

America's discoverers didn't think they were home free. Columbus says he saw a mermaid in American waters, and surely Columbus knew what he was talking about. The adventurers who followed him to the new lands expected to find not only treasures of gold and jewels, but dragons, hydras, chimeras, unicorns, Satan in person. If

they announced no special findings of these — well, America's a big, roomy place. Maybe mammoths lasted until historic times. The historian John Bakeless thinks so. An English castaway named Ingram said he saw "elephants" in what is now Alabama. Thomas Jefferson heard about mammoths from Indians in the Rockies, and expected the Lewis and Clark expedition to find them.

But suppose we start out with dragons.

There seem to have been those on the Upper Mississippi. The Indians called it piasa or paissa. The priest-explorer Jacques Marquette, canoeing the upper Mississippi in 1673, came face to face with two dismaying 30-foot images on a bluff near present-day Alton in Illinois. Each, says Father Marquette, had "the face of a man, the horns of a deer, the beard of a tiger, and the tail of a fish", plus





spread pinions. The Indians said that these creatures soared through night skies to seize and eat men unlucky enough to be out after dark. Marquette also noticed unicorns and three-headed turtles in those latitudes.

The same riverside images were seen a few years later by another explorer priest, Louis Hennepin, who said Indians dared not look at them for fear of being spellbound. Marquette drew pictures of the images and so did later observers, notably John Banvard who in the 1840's exhibited his Panorama of the Mississippi, hundreds of feet long and trundled before audiences on a windlass. In 1856, disciples of progress quarried down the bluff and the pictures to build a penitentiary. There's bound to have been an inspiration for those pictures. If the piasa is not reported today, maybe it is just cautious. Anyway, people disappear from time to time on the Upper Mississippi. One is reminded of the behinder, that baleful denizen of the North Carolina mountains. Nobody knows what the behinder looks like. It comes up behind you to strike you dead.

The behinder may have a kinsman in the Northeastern United States: the

wendigo. Algonquin tribes believed in this, and passed their belief along to white settlers. Again, nobody can describe the thing, because to see it is to drop dead, as with Old World gorgons or cockatrices. Its tracks are easily recognizable because each has a spot of blood at its center. The wendigo has appeared, if that's the proper term, in fiction by Algernon Blackwood and August Derleth, also in a poem by Ogden Nash that, for once, is highly unfunny.

Far more visible to surviving witnesses is the Jersey Devil of the Atlantic City area, which residents of Leeds Point insist parochially is properly called the Leeds Devil.

It came into being, says a profuse literature, in 1735. There are various claims. Birthplace was perhaps Leeds Point, perhaps Burlington, perhaps Ellasville. These are all on the Jersey coast, so let's say Jersey Devil. It was born to a witch-woman, either a Mother Leeds or a Mother Shourds, and shaped up, according to a 1905 chronicler, with "a serpent-like body, cloven hoofs, the head of a horse, the wings of a bat and the forked tail of a dragon." This curiosity flew away to seize and eat young children. Nor did

it subside with the years. Joseph Bonaparte, brother of the Emperor Napoleon, met it in the Jersey woods. Commodore Stephen Decatur fired at it with a cannon and never harmed it. Well into the twentieth century it fluttered its umbrella wings over pine barrens and cedar swamps. It soured milk in dairies, lamed horses, blighted corn patches. Sometimes it was seen in company of a lovely blonde apparition, sometimes with a headless man.

It was sighted in 1930, was noticed in the *New York Times*, and Lowell Thomas's news broadcast told of platoons of hunters with packs of dogs who never found it. Charles Fort researched it, with the lack of success that seemed to charm him. Since then, observes Henry Carlton Beck's *Jersey Genesis* (1945), it dropped out of sight. Yet, during World War II military service on the Jersey coast, I heard people talk about it, with a rather affectionate nervousness. Maybe it's still there, furtive like the piasa, yet right there, and smart and mean as hell. Waiting for you.

Dragonlike too is the giant leech that, according to old Cherokees, infests streams on the Carolina-Tennessee border and is also fond of human flesh. More baleful still is something called the dakwa.

This water-demon lurks where the Laurel River joins the French Broad high in the North Carolina mountains. The Cherokees said that it infested bankside ripples, ready to snatch a hunter under water. James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee* says a dakwa also plagued a Tennessee creek once called the Dakwai and nowadays known as the Toco. One hardy warrior, swallowed alive by a dakwa, so pummelled its heart that it coughed him up — that sounds like what Longfellow says happened to Hiawatha. White settlers believed in the dakwa, but said it appeared as a lovely siren with a beautiful singing voice. Luring a wanderer to kneel on the bank, it would change to a skull-faced terror with clutching talons. It is remembered in Christian Reid's romance, *The Land of the Sky*.

Could this be a hint of alligators, filtering up from Florida or Alabama? Or of man-eating sharks along the far-away seaboard? But during the 1930's, as they tell you along the French Broad, someone swam in a deep stretch at Stackhouse, opposite the juncture with the Laurel. His friends heard him shout, saw him struggle, then helped him to land. His skin was gashed and he bled. He gasped out a

tale of something that laid hold on him, dragged him down to the bottom, almost held him there. What? He didn't dive back to learn what.

Also in the Appalachians rises the rumor of the gardinel.

This looks like a deserted cabin in the brush beside a remote trail. But its windows are eyes, its door is a mouth. Enter and you find yourself in a dank, dripping chamber like the inside of a great stomach which will digest you. Not much here of the storied welcome of mountain folk. Some will remind us of certain growths in lower Carolina reaches: the pitcher plant, the Venus flytrap. They lure insects into their maws and eat them. If pitcher plants and Venus flytraps were big enough, they'd surely eat people.

Vampires are generally reckoned to be a native scourge of Slavic Europe, as exemplified by suave Count Dracula. They are walking undead creatures, they prowl by dark for blood to replenish their veins, and they're said to be unable to cross open water, which would seem to forbid them emigration to America. Yet they seem to have come here, all the way back to colonial times.

Again to cite the invaluable Skinner, they infested a gloomy hollow near Pittsfield, Massachusetts, appropriately called Wizards Glen. There, Indian medicine men conducted midnight human sacrifices to a malevolent god called Hobomoko, and

vampires assembled from nearby caverns to drink the blood of the victims. A hunter named John Chamberlain saw such a rite in progress and, pitying a helpless Indian girl dragged to the altar, intervened. He was a good enough Puritan to have a Bible handy, and held it aloft and called on the name of God. Thunder, a lightning flash, and the blood-drinkers vanished. Does anyone from Pittsfield know if they ever came back?

In any case, vampirism continued in New England. In 1845, Horace Ray died mysteriously and was buried at Jewett City, Connecticut. Thereafter one son, then another, also faded and died, and a third grew pallid and took to his bed. Doctors could not explain why, but some student of nature's night side could — and did. In 1854, resolute neighbors opened the graves of Horace Ray's sons, dragged forth the bodies, and burned them on a great heap of logs. The surviving son recovered. All this is in a matter-of-fact news dispatch in the *Norwich Courier* of that year.

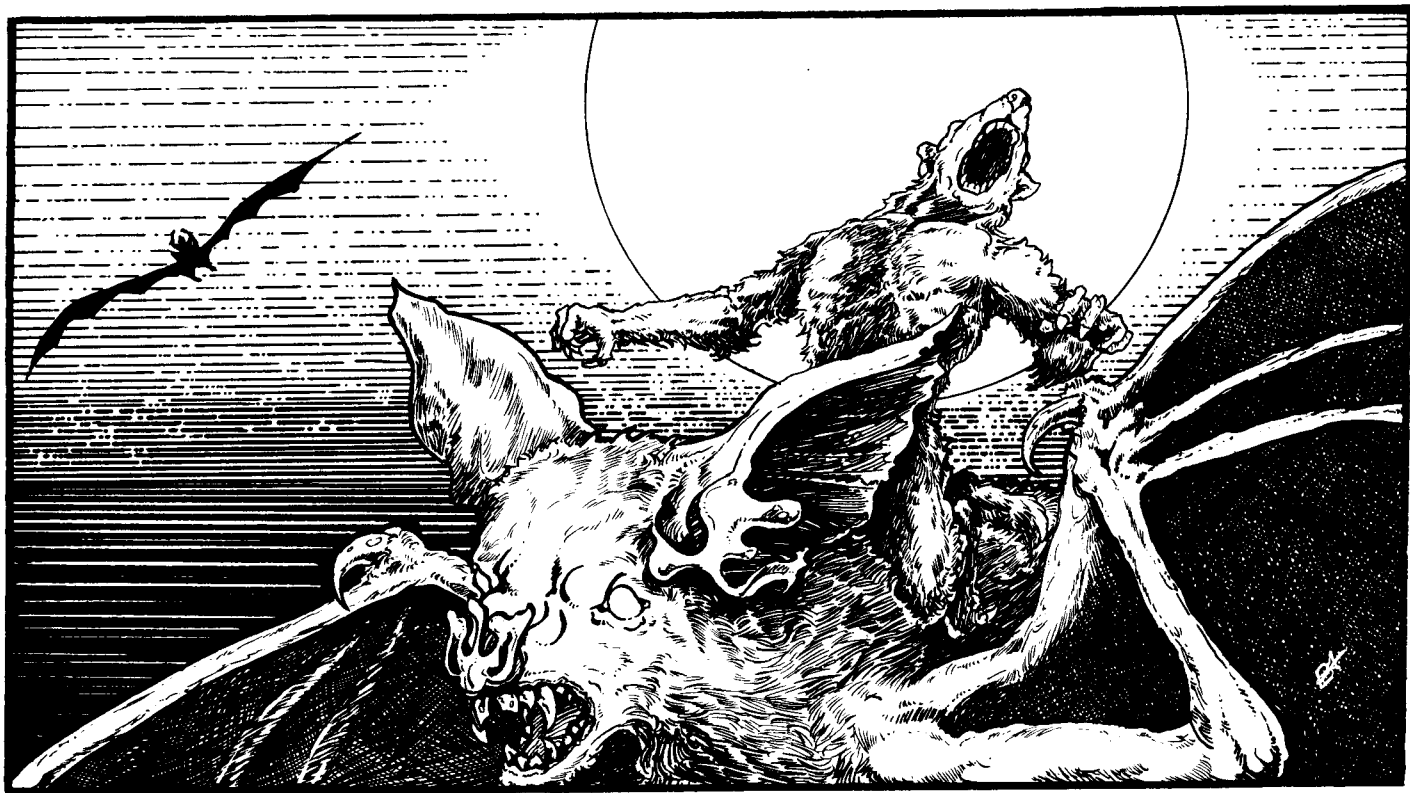
And vampires operated in H.P. Lovecraft's native Rhode Island. In 1874, William Ross of Placedale dug up his daughter's grave, cut out her heart and burned it, to keep her from visiting her old home and draining the life blood of relatives. Nor did this belief keep to New England. A dead Chicago lady was exhumed in 1875

and her body burned to save blood-drained relatives. A doctor observed this and called the attempt successful. On Green Street in Schenectady stood a house with, on its dark cellar floor, a human figure outlined in furry green mould. Neighbors insisted that a vampire was bound to its grave by a powerful spell. Lovecraft seems to have used this tale in his own story, "The Shunned House".

Pasquotank County in North Carolina has a creepier story, as published in the *Raleigh News and Observer* for June 1, 1950. Here's an interview with an old countryman named Benton who told how, when he was a boy half a century before, he got lost in the woods on a foggy night. A beautiful red-clad woman led him to her tree-thicketed house, gave him supper, and let him sleep by an open fire.

He woke to find his hostess kissing his throat, then he sank into sleep again. When he roused again it was broad daylight. He saw nothing of the lady or her house, and weakly he staggered home. His mother told him that he had been absent for three days. On his throat showed two tiny punctures. "You met the blood-witch!" she screamed.

When this story was published, it impelled the folklorist F. Roy Johnson to visit Pasquotank County in 1965. Benton lived there no more — what had become of him, nobody knew —



but belief in the “blood-witch” was common among old neighbors. Where, by the way, did Benton go? If he died, where is his grave today? Might it be a good idea to dig him up and burn him?

Vampires are reported in Louisiana, but, sagely advises a curious book called *Gumbo Ya-Ya*, if you plant French lilacs around your yard, they’ll stay away. The Louisiana werewolf — *loup-garou*, Cajuns call it — seems to have vampiric qualities.

There have been werewolves elsewhere in the United States, or else earnest witnesses are liars. Pennsylvania Dutch farmers believed in them, cordially disliked them, and cast silver bullets to shoot them. White traders at a village of the Chippewas (Hiawatha’s people) were told of an orphan boy who, cruelly neglected by his older brother and sister-in-law, became hungry enough to eat the leavings of a wolf’s prey. That did it, as it does it for eaters of wolves’ preys in Europe. He turned into a wolf and raced off into the forest. The brother and sister-in-law were sharply criticized for not doing their duty by the lad. And in old French Detroit, werewolves once abounded and were prone to carry off pretty girls, perhaps to make she-werewolves out of them. One such kidnapper, when fired at with a silver bullet, lost his tail. It was long kept as a trophy.

In recent times we have the case of Teresa Czinkota of Woodbridge, New Jersey, widely chronicled in New York newspapers of 1934. Whole dozens of her neighbors swore to a police magistrate that Mrs. Czinkota changed into a grotesque lupine shape and howled whenever the church bells rang. “Seeing is believing,” vowed one witness, stoutly if not originally,

when challenged in court. The accused lady appeared with an attorney to say that her only curious behavior was in gathering certain herbs to make medicine for her ailing husband. What those herbs might have been would be interesting information today. His Honor heard the evidence, then sapiently called in the parish priest to handle the matter. That, manifestly, is what good priests are for.

But let’s return, however nervously, to the *loup-garou* region in Louisiana. Harnett Kane, writing in 1944, reassures us by saying that the *loup-garous* “are not so plentiful as they used to be,” but as recently as 1963 you could hear about them in New Orleans and neighboring towns. Here and there, it’s said, the Cajuns will point out acquaintances who can change into wolves. Their chief haunt is Bayou Goula in the Delta country. Naughty Cajun children are threatened with invocations of this monster. Some *loup-garous*, say the Cajuns, are “them people what wants to do bad work, and changes themselves into wolves.” Other persons make the change by being bitten by a Louisiana *loup-garou*, which savors of vampirism. Once bitten by a Louisiana *loup-garou*, your shape will shift and you’ll find yourself at Bayou Goula, down there on the Delta, capering in a dance with your shaggy fellows. Caroline Durieux once drew a spirited picture of such an event, and it is included in *Gumbo Ya-Ya*.

These creatures have gigantic tame bats, about the size of ancient pterodactyls, on which they fly at night to drop down chimneys in quest of victims. “I got you now, me!” they howl beside the bed of a sleeping victim, and suit the action to the word.

Cajuns discourage such visitors by hanging flour sifters at their front doors. If you meet a *loup-garou* at night and there’s a frog handy, pick it up and throw it at him. He’ll run in terror.

Also in the Bayou Goula area, and at Batture du Diable, zombies are to be found by an unlucky night-wanderer. This is a different matter from the West Indian zombie, which is only a curse-bound corpse hiked from a graveyard to be a field drudge. The Louisiana zombi is more malevolent and, advises Harnett Kane, if you paddle through a swamp and see one staring at you from a moss-hung branch, back water at once and get away from there. Maybe this thing is nearly related to the plat-eye, which infests soggy woods and abandoned graveyards in Georgia and South Carolina. It can bring you the worst of

bad luck just by meeting you on the moonlit path. Just what a plat-eye looks like I can’t say; nor do I greatly wish to find out at first hand. Live and let plat-eyes live, I always say.

Maybe Detroit’s *Nain Rouge*, the Red Dwarf, is also of the same strain as zombi and plat-eye. When in the late seventeenth century Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac built the fort and trading post that would become Detroit, *Nain Rouge* infested there. Here, as with zombis and plat-eyes, an adequate description is hard to find. The ever-useful Skinner gathers that it was a misshapen humanoid with cold, gleaming eyes, jagged teeth exposed in a grin, and hands like big talons. Cadillac met it, thrust at it with a rapier, and from then on played in bad luck.

*Nain Rouge* destroyed a mill with a stroke of murky lightning, stole horses without leaving a hoofmark behind, and gave off a highly offensive odor. A century ago, residents of Detroit marked their doors with crosses to keep *Nain Rouge* away.

The misshapen man-form, protruding teeth and bad smell make one think of something repeatedly sighted in timberlands of the Northern States, the redoubtable sasquatch or bigfoot, American opposite number of yeti, Abominable Snowman of the Himalayas.

This is a shaggy, malodorous giant of a thing that seems to partake of both ape and man, and is repeatedly rumored from Minnesota to Oregon and in adjacent provinces of Canada. Hundreds have sworn to encountering him, sometimes melodramatically. There are records of literally thousands of footprints — big footprints, sometimes 20 inches long — and some of these have looked real to expert trailers. Three strips of movie film have been taken, purporting to show the creature plain. He is described as enormous, maybe 10 or 11 feet tall; standing erect on two legs, shaggy, brute-faced, and stinking to high heaven.

Understandably, his possible presence has attracted lots of attention. Magazines and newspapers revel in sasquatch stories. Willow Creek Township in Northern California has gone commercial, with museums, souvenir shops, and picture books. John Napier, once curator of primate collections at the Smithsonian Institution, researched for years and then published a monograph about both the sasquatch and the yeti in 1972. While skeptical, Napier shows himself ready to consider evidence and, if he finds it valid, to believe.

Here, as with all proffered specimens

**8A** Make a L3-SR on LK. If you miss it, you must fight the guards. Go to 34C. If you make it, you have reached the wall of the courtyard. Make a L2-SR on DEX. If you make this, you are over the wall. Go to 36A. If you miss it, take one die of damage directly off your CON (from falling); you must fight the guards. Go to 34C.

**8B** If you run through the third door on the left, as you were instructed, go to 38C. If you continue running down the hallway, go to 34A.

**8C** This is the palace wizard. He throws a *Death Spell #9* at you. If you survive this, the gods are amazed. They teleport you out of the palace with the scroll. Go to 36A.





in this essay, one must wade through sensationalism, delusion, and outright hoax. But what if a sasquatch is captured, caged, fetched to civilization?

Well, he (or for that matter, a dakwa or piasa or anything else we've considered) would probably lose any aura of the supernatural; he would be simply an interesting scientific specimen. Science would move in and make him commonplace — science does that thing very well. Sasquatch is described as more manlike than the known great apes like gorillas and chimpanzees and orang-utangs. He might even be a survival of *homo erectus*, something like Peking Man or *pithecanthropus*. If so, how manlike would he turn out to be?

Might he learn to speak, perhaps to read and write? Might he not be freed from captivity, might he be recruited as a defensive tackle for the Redskins or a pivot man for the Celtics? He might even get into politics, become a governor or senator or president. And he might do as well in public office as some doleful specimen of *homo sapiens*.

This grave consideration should not neglect that oft-announced wallower in offshore waters, the sea serpent.

New England was early a haunt of this curiosity. In 1817 a fine example of the species, said to be a hundred feet long, was sighted off Cape Ann, and again off Nahant. In 1851, he was evident enough to preoccupy mariners, journalists, and professors of natural history. That was when he again coiled his fearsome length in sight of shore-strolling throngs at Cape Ann, a seaside resort which seemed to be his favorite port of call. Later in the year he, or something like him, swam into view off the Maine coast and again near Plymouth where once the Pilgrim fathers had landed. He was studied at close hand, and was described by sea captains, merchants, vacationists, and by at least one Maine clergyman, whose name does not come down to us but who is called "respectable and highly intelligent". These witnesses said that the sea serpent was somewhere between eighty and a hundred feet in length, as thick through as a "double-sized" barrel, with what appeared to be fins or a mane at its neck, and sleekly brown in color. The Linnaean Society of Boston, sober and scientific, appointed a committee to collect all evidence, and coast guard cutters were ordered to

keep a watch for the curiosity.

This or similar serpents have been seen all the way up to the present, and all the way up and down both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts. It would be tedious to count up the newspaper stories. And the sea serpent appears to have freshwater cousins.

Two big ones were seen in Devil's Lake, Wisconsin, in 1892, and they had fins or flippers. They might have been similar to the Loch Ness Monster. Other serpents, as enormous as anyone would care to see without the aid of liquor, have shown up in ponds in Pennsylvania, near Gainesville, New York, and at Forked Mountain, Oregon. Also in Oregon, at Crater Lake, lived man-devouring reptiles so terrifying that, late into the nineteenth century, Indian guides could not be persuaded to approach the margin.

But all these examples only scratch the surface. We could travel on through the country, peering ahead for ever new and terrifying appearances in all these and other categories.

Yet, why peer ahead? Why not look behind, see what's there, hurrying fast to close in on you?

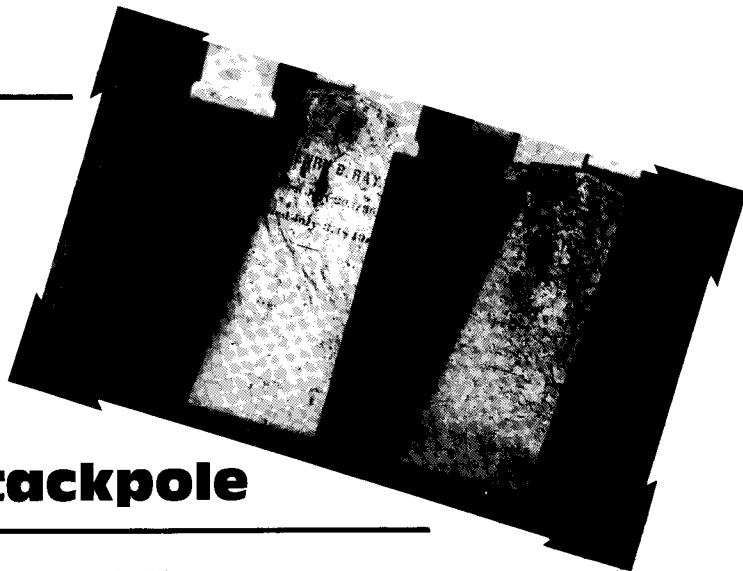
Good night, and sleep well. ■

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# Vampyre Quest

by Michael Stackpole

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The vampire incident in Jewett City, Connecticut came to my attention while I was working for COLECO in Hartford during January of 1981. I had received a letter from Manly Wade Wellman in which he mentioned the Ray body-burning — and the year it happened. Being a long-time New Englander, I knew the bodies could not have been dug up until after March — because the ground is still frozen until then. After a 45-minute search through microfilms in the local library I found a newspaper article from the *Norwich Courier* which detailed the incident.

A friend at COLECO, Tom Helmer, pointed out that Jewett City was only an hour's drive from Hartford. The idea of visiting a vampire's grave intrigued me, but my search for Horace Ray didn't begin until I had read Manly's story, "Chastel", which dealt with the current-day remnants of the Ray family. It fired me up to visit Jewett City and find out about this vampire family.

Paul Jaquays and I needed one thing to get us to Jewett City: a car. On a Saturday morning I called Stephan Peregrine (who lives in Poughkeepsie). As he got on the line I said, "Hi, Stephan, how would you like to go vampire hunting?" After extorting promises of immortality in this article and an Italian dinner in Hartford's best restaurant, Stephan and his wife Carol agreed to join us in search of Horace and family.

The next day arrived with clear sky and a slightly cold wind. The Peregrines arrived early and we quickly organized ourselves. The drive to Jewett City was pleasant, and I filled everyone in on the background. We all laughed nervously about the general feeling that we were characters in a Lovecraft tale.

Jewett City is a sleepy New England town. Only the cars and neon beer signs in the windows of taverns pull it from the 19th century. It seemed very quiet and

peaceful, until we saw the library.

Again Lovecraft's hand appeared to be meddling in our adventure. The library was a huge, brownstone monster, complete with gnarled tree in the front yard and narrow windows in the gables. It looked like a refuge from a gothic horror story. I don't think we would have minded, but just beyond it lay the cemetery we were searching for!

As we drove through the cemetery gate, I spotted a gravestone bearing the name Ray. Carol stopped the car and we piled out to discover that this marker was too recent to have anything to do with the cast of characters we were searching for. Methodically we combed the cemetery and Stephan located the stones for Henry Burton Ray, his wife, and his daughter. Only the fact that Henry and his wife seemed to share a plot-and-a-half and that their stones appeared to have weathered the same amount (despite the 13-year difference between their deaths) appeared out of the ordinary.

Search as we might, though, we could find no Horace. We consoled ourselves with the fact that Henry had died at the correct time and that he might have been one of the brothers left anonymous by the newspaper article. As the sun began to set, we fled back to Hartford.

On Monday, Paul and I related our adventure to Tom Helmer and John Ruhlman, two of our co-workers and good friends. John told us that the Connecticut Historical Society was right down the road from COLECO; I gave them a call and they said they had a very complete genealogy section, as well as census records for Connecticut. On our lunch hour-and-a-half, we all walked down to the Historical Society and began our bookwork.

At this point it would probably be a good idea to analyze the article to show what we were looking for in the records. The article, printed in 1854, said that

## Strange Superstition—Burning the Dead.

A strange and almost incredible tale of superstition has been related to us of a scene recently enacted at Jewett City. It seems that about eight years ago, a citizen of Griswold, named Horace Ray, died of consumption. Since that time, two of his children—both of them sons, we believe, and grown to man's estate—have sickened and died of the same disease, the last one dying some two years since. Not long ago, the same fatal disease seized upon another son, whereupon it was determined to exhume the bodies of the two brothers already dead, and burn them. And for what reason, do our readers imagine? *Because the dead were supposed to feed upon the living*, and that so long as the dead body in the grave remained in a state of decomposition, either wholly or in part, the surviving members of the family must continue to furnish the sustenance on which that dead body fed. Acting under the influence of this strange, and to us hither unheard of, superstition, the family and friends of the deceased, accompanied by various others, proceeded to the burial ground at Jewett City, on the 8th inst., dug up the bodies of the deceased brothers, and burned them on the spot. The scene, described to us, must have been revolting in the extreme; and the idea that it could have grown out of a belief such as we have referred to, tasks human credulity. We seem to be transported back to the darkest age of unreasoning ignorance and blind superstition, instead of living in the middle of the 19th century, and in a State calling itself enlightened and christian.

*Norwich Evening Courier*  
Saturday, May 20, 1854

Horace died "about 8 years ago". We assumed that he died somewhere between 1845 and 1854, allowing for the "about" and the general inaccuracy of reporting back then. The first child was said to have died after that. To be on the safe side, we placed the possible year of the child's death between 1847-1850. The second child died "some two years since". Since when? We assumed that it was since the first child's death, placing the second death between 1850 and 1852. If the Rays died in two-year progressions the third child would have sickened just in time for the 1854 burning.

We walked into the Historical Society and I showed a copy of the article to the librarians, both of whom were eager to help. One steered Tom to the musty genealogies, while I tackled the census films. I'd worked with such films in college and quickly located the reports from Jewett City. While the census indicated many Rays and Reas, Horace was nowhere to be found.

Despite the lack of a Horace, we gained some valuable information. The Ray family seemed to be uncommonly long-lived. One matriarch of the family lived to be 91. Gideon Ray lived to be 85; Ebenezer lived to the age of 83. Ebenezer appeared to be related to Henry B., and both had died within the time described as when Horace passed on. One librarian pointed out that Horace might have been a transient, moving to Jewett City after the 1840 census and dying before the 1850 census. She suggested we check the Barbour records at the state capital.

Tuesday found us at the Barbour records. I was hoping to find that Henry and Eb were brothers; their father being Horace. During our lunch break search we found that Ebenezer was Henry B.'s father, blowing my theory. There was no record of Ebenezer's death; we knew only that he didn't appear in the 1850 census. We constructed a partial genealogy for the Ray family covering 5 generations — and still no Horace. All hopes for an easy solution to the mystery of the Ray family lay shattered as we uncovered this information.

Then, as we left the building, I paused to check the probate records. Ebenezer's estate had been put through probate! One look at those documents could easily reveal Horace as an heir or Ebenezer's death date. The look at those records, however, had to wait for the next day.

Wednesday found Paul and me walking to the state capital. Because of the distance from work, our search was limited to a half hour. Paul worked on tracing all the scattered members of the Ray family, while I got my hands on the probate records. There was no will, and papers had been filed in February of 1847 because one of Ebenezer's sons-in-law wanted a cut of his estate. Even though there was no death date on the records we assumed old Eb was dead by the time the papers were drawn up.

Paul confirmed that Henry B. had died on 7/3/1849 at the age of 53, leaving three sons. One of them, Elisha, died on 2/1/1851 at the age of

26. Suddenly, a different picture of the body-burning began to unfold.

Ebenezer fitted the time slot for the death of the article's "Horace". His son died two years later, right in the time slot for the first child. Elisha, Henry B.'s son, died two years after that, or "since" that time, within the time slot for the second child. And Henry had two other sons who could have sickened just in time for the 1854 burning!

The new solution to the mystery of the Ray family was at odds with the newspaper article, but had a logical consistency of its own. According to my theory, Ebenezer dies of consumption (TB) in 1847, at the age of 83. This is normal, he's lived his long Ray life. Then, two years later, his son Henry dies of the same illness, but at the age of 53 — hardly the normal Ray lifespan. Two years pass and his son Elisha succumbs to consumption at the young age of 26! Then another of Henry's sons begins to grow ill.

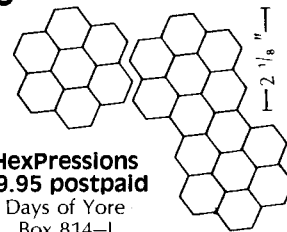
Despite the fact that the newspaper reporter had never heard of a vampire feeding upon its own kin, the motif is quite common in vampire legends from Europe. The simple mention of such an idea, coupled with the Ray family misfortune, could spur any number of people to react violently against this supernatural threat. After all, they would simply be seeking to help their living friend live, and their dead friends to rest peacefully.

Curiously, after 1854 the lifespan of the Ray family appeared to return to normal. One of Elisha's brothers lived to be 71, and later generations continue to prosper.

The differences between the newspaper article and the story indicated by our research can be easily explained. Ebenezer could have been nicknamed "Horse" or "Horace" and the person relating the story might have called him by his nickname. The mix-up between sons and grandsons is not hard to understand. If the person telling the story had said "and then his son . . .", referring to Henry's son Elisha; it could have easily made Elisha become one of Ebenezer's sons in the mind of the reporter. And early newspaper accounts are notorious for their inaccuracy.

Or perhaps Horace is still running around. The article doesn't say they burned him. Maybe he's still haunting Connecticut, his thirst as unquenchable as ever. I don't really care, I've retreated to Phoenix and I've got that nice ribbon of moving water, the Mississippi River, between me and the rest of the Ray Clan. ■

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**11A** They strip you and send you into *Naked Doom*. If you don't have that solitaire adventure, or are higher than 2nd level, they send you to *Arena of Khazan* instead (with leather armor and a broadsword only). If you don't have *Arena*, they grind you up and use you as fertilizer for the royal garden.

**11B** You throw the rope up, the grappling hook catches on the top of the wall, and you begin to climb up. Make a L1-SR on DEX. If you make it, you reach the top of the wall. If you miss, you fall; take 1d6 damage directly off your CON. Keep trying until you reach the top of the wall, or die.

Once at the top of the wall, you see a courtyard of lush grass, bordered by blooming rose bushes. Much to your dismay, you also see two palace guards. Across the courtyard you can see a lighted hallway which leads into the palace. If you want to fight the two guards, go to 38A. If you would like to crawl along the top of the wall around the courtyard and swing down into the hallway, go to 34D.

**11C** If you can climb over the courtyard wall, you will have completed your task. Make a L2-SR on DEX. If you make it, you are over the wall; go to 36A. If you miss, you fell and must take one die of damage directly off your CON. Keep trying to climb the wall until you succeed or die.



# QUERIES & QUANDARIES

*A forum for questions and answers about T&T, about the solo adventures, and about anything else in FRP you readers can come up with for us to answer (if we can!). One of the most basic philosophies of T&T is to adjust the game as you see fit to suit your own style of play — so don't misuse the answers given here. If our point of view seems reasonable, feel free to use it, but do not feel compelled to do so.*

— Michael Stackpole

**When figuring missile adds, if your Dexterity is lower than 12 would you subtract 2 for each point lower than 12?**

No, but you do lose 2 points for each DEX point less than 9 when figuring missile weapon adds.

**Should a warrior get more adventure points for killing an orc with a MR of 21 than one with a MR of 20 who uses a 10-die sword? The weapons on the player's side should be taken into account: a delver learns more about fighting a zombie with his bare hands than with an "Undead" killing sword.**

Adventure points should be handed out according to how difficult it was to kill the foe. If it was an easy kill, lower the eps. If it was a good fight, hand out more.

**Why can't you cast a *Magic Fangs* on a deluxe magic staff?**

Have you ever tried to kill an invulnerable snake? Besides, a deluxe staff is not made of wood, nor was it ever a belt.

**What is the procedure for determining if a character finds a secret door when looking for it? I've been using a L1-SR on Luck.**

Your system is fine — it's what we use. The level of the roll may go up if the door is specially hidden (behind plaster, for instance).

**When two wizards are casting spells, how would you determine who got the spell off first? I know sometimes it wouldn't matter, but what if I want to *Wink Wing* out of the range of a *TTYF*?**

The easiest way to tell who gets what spell off first is to divide the Strength cost of the spell by the level of the wizard. The lowest number gets his spell off first.

The new rules for saving rolls state that: roll level times actual roll equals adventure points awarded. This is the opposite idea of the 4th edition of T&T in which: amount to shoot for minus amount to roll equals adventure points awarded. I agree with the latter — you learn more if you lose than if you win, right?

I disagree with you. I think most people learn more by succeeding, or almost succeeding, at a task than they do when they are wrong. When you are wrong you don't always learn how to do it the correct way for the next time. When you are right, you learn what is right.

**When fighting several Monster-Rated monsters at once, do you combine their MRs and use that total, or do you roll for each one separately? For example, if you are facing 3 dogs with a MR of 10 apiece, would they get 4 dice and 15 adds (MR of 30) or 6 dice and 15 adds (2 plus 5 times 3)? I find the second method too difficult in solo dungeons.**

The former method is probably the one used by most people — and it is certainly logical. At the very least, monsters that fight as a team will manage to get in each other's way. If you split the three dogs into one-on-one battles, the two dice plus five holds true, however.

**When summoning a demon, who should be inside the pentagram: the demon or the mage?**

That is a good question, one I've been asking for a number of years. From everything I've read, you can have the demon outside or inside and the mage inside or outside, respectively. Or, the demon and the mage can be inside different pentagrams — or both can be outside pentagrams. T&T does not demand a pentagram when summoning demons, though it is possible, according to *Monsters! Monsters!* to trap a demon within a pentagram.

**If one of my characters has his attributes raised so that he may handle a larger weapon, but has not sufficient money to buy it, can he trade his old weapon in part exchange?**

Sure he can. The money he gets for it will depend upon the weapon's condition; an enchantment might even raise the price over what he originally paid for it.

**If you find a jewel or jewelled weapon, how much does it weigh?**

Jewels usually weigh less than an equivalent value of gold. As a general rule of thumb, estimate their weights as 100th of their value, e.g. a jewel with a value between 1 and 100 g.p. will weigh 1 (or sometimes 2). A jewel worth 101—200 might weigh 2. And so on. Jewelled weapons probably won't weigh much more than an unjewelled weapon of the same type.

**What is the "normal speed" for man and other creatures?**

"Normal speed" in a dungeon when the party states that is carefully looking for traps and secret doors and such isn't much above 50' per turn. Normal walking speed with only moderate vigilance is usually considered more like 50 yards (150') per turn. Flying creatures can cover perhaps 250' per turn or a little more.

**Why can't you improve your Speed with a level bonus? The length of a delver's legs isn't the only factor in running speed — what about leg strength?**

Leg strength is a function of Strength, not Speed. Speed is not easy to improve because each being has a structural maximum speed that he or she can generate, no matter how strong he or she is. Only magic can modify Speed.

**Arcane Graffiti**  
 - news, clues  
 and reviews  
 - MICHAEL STACKPOLE

News for the fantasy and gaming world — upcoming events, club announcements, the latest games and playing aids, conventions — are featured, reviewed and discussed in *Arcane Graffiti*. Personal ads and trade enquiries will be printed also, at 10¢/word (20 word minimum). Mail your news to: Michael Stackpole/Arcane Graffiti, Flying Buffalo Inc., P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, Arizona 85252.

**Blue Frog Tavern**, solo 15 for *Tunnels & Trolls*, has been released. It was written by James Wilson (the fiendish mind behind *Sword For Hire*) and features Quartz, another rock demon and relation to Six Pack. The artwork was done by Paul Jaquays, and the cover is his finest piece of color work on any game product. The interior illustrations are superior as well. It sells for \$4.95.

Since the last issue of SA, *Flying Buffalo* has initiated a whole crop of new projects. To satisfy your curiosity I'll tell you about them — but *don't* order them until you see them advertised. These projects are still in the works and will not be released for a minimum of 3 months from the time you read this.

Solo 16, **Mistywood**, is still in the works. Written by Roy Cram, it is an outdoor adventure full of magic, with an interesting random encounter system to make fleeing from Duke Bronzo's men even more of an adventure than it already is. Michael Kucharski, who had some excellent work in the last issue of SA, has illustrated this solo. Barring any major disasters, *Mistywood* should hit the stores in late November.

We also have a new board game and two new role-playing games in the works. The board game is called **Berserker!** and is based upon the books by Fred Saberhagen. The Berserker character gets one huge Berserker dreadnought with which to fight through the human fleet and destroy Earth. The human gets to choose a combination of C-plus guns, cruisers, and ram ships with which to defend his home planet. While basically designed as a two-player tactical game, the rules do include methods for setting up multi-player

and campaign games.

**Mercenaries, Spies and Private Eyes** is a role-playing game which spans the early gunpowder age on up through the age of simple laser weaponry. With *MSPE*, a GM can create adventures which range from Sherlock Holmes to Indiana Jones to James Bond, or from Futrelle's *The Thinking Machine* to Forsythe's *The Dogs of War*.

**WEB** [The StarWeb Role-Playing Game] is designed to function in the universe encompassed by *Flying Buffalo's* play-by-mail space game, *StarWeb*®. The game will include a large number of gene-engineered races, a vast selection of high-technology weapons, a simple yet complete ship construction system, and an interesting planet generation system. The key to *WEB* is that the game is oriented from the viewpoint of a character — which eliminates the problem of having to create an entire universe to run just one or two characters through adventures.

Both *MSPE* and *WEB* will be compatible with *Tunnels & Trolls*. With a little imagination, players should be able to combine all three systems into "Tunnels & Thompsons" or "Swords & Supernovas" games if they wish. The solo adventures already designed for T&T will function for *MSPE* or *WEB* characters; the solos for these two games — and some are already being designed! — will function for each of the other games.

Grimtooth appeared within the *Flying Buffalo* offices several weeks ago, and gently convinced us to work on the second volume of *TRAPS*. The screams still echo within my ears . . .

*Gamescience* has re-released **Star Patrol**. The game has been boxed and

includes a double-sided hex map, a large sheet of ship diagrams, cut-apart full-color playing pieces (like *Cardboard Heroes* though of not nearly the quality in art), a rulebook, and a complete set of dice. The game rules outline everything from a very complete weapons system and alien race modifiers for characters to a random scenario generator and a world for adventures. It looks very interesting.

*Fantasy Games Unlimited* has not slowed in their production of games and game aids. From Stefan Jones comes **The Outworlds**, a starsector atlas for *Space Opera* which is a collection of descriptions of the planets found in this starsector. World names like "Goshlookout" and other such gems scattered throughout the project recommend it. Not to be overlooked is the large amount of work that has gone into the project, making it a very complete and useful aid for *Space Opera*. I highly recommend this.

**Wild West** is the new role-playing game of the month from FGU. This game is well-organized and includes a Role Playing Probability Chart that is a new and interesting innovation for determining the likelihood of success when attempting any given task. I suspect this feature will find its way into several other games in the near future . . . *Wild West* even goes as far as having characteristics for horses, as well as complete and interesting chunks of information drawn from the past to add color to this game. If you're looking for a *Wild West* game, get this one!

Rumor also has it that FGU is planning to produce two magazines. One will deal specifically with *Space Opera*, and the other will be devoted to role-playing in general. I don't know what either magazine will be called, but I fully expect them to be of as high a quality as all of the other FGU projects.

**Archive Miniatures & Game Systems** (1015 Howard Ave., San Mateo, CA 94401) has entered the RPG field with **Star Rovers**. This is, as the title suggests, a future time role-playing game. The weapons and combat system is extensive, but the combination of dot-matrix printing and typesetting is distracting in the extreme. The rules booklet is bound with a plastic binder that allows for the inclusion of additional material. The box set also includes dice, a time-line chart, two quick reference sheets; the ship diagram and galactic bar diagram also included are suitable for play with miniatures.

**Sword Lords** is a massive fantasy board game. The initial scenarios allow you to wage massive battles

across the three very colorful maps that are provided. The rules allow for expansion into elements of role-playing as players become more familiar with the game. *Sword Lords* encourages players to create quests for their heroes who have survived earlier battles. The game counters are on good durable stock; unfortunately, they must be cut apart, so the strength of the stock becomes a hindrance.

I haven't had a chance to play either game. While they both show a great deal of work, I hesitate to heartily recommend them in case they contain hidden problems. If anyone has looked at these games in depth, a letter of comment would be most welcome.

Due to space considerations in the last issue of SA, I was unable to mention the products given to me by *Gamelords Ltd.* (18616 Grosbeak Terrace, Gaithersburg, MD 20879). **Thieves Guild IV** has been released and continues the fine *Thieves Guild* series of products designed to provide play for those sneaky characters who feel more at home in a city stealing than in a dungeon slaying.

And for those who don't have a city, the **Free City of Haven** was produced. Hailed as the most complete FRP city extant, it is quite worthy of the praise. (Now if only there weren't so many thieves hanging around . . .)

The first annual Prince of Thieves competition was run at several conventions this summer, and the scenarios used have been gathered together in **Prince of Thieves**. These are the actual scenarios run at Origins, Gencon East and Gencon XIV and will prove a suitable challenge for all characters that attempt them. All the *Gamelords* products are well-thought-out and are well worth the money asked for them. Check them out.

**Hero Games** (1811 Broadway St., Concord, CA 94520) has released two aids for *Champions*, the superhero role-playing system. The first is called **Enemies** and is a collection of superfoes. Each enemy is attributed, illustrated, and accompanied by a short history. This is an excellently put together product. The lead-in teaser for the next product, found on the last page of *Enemies*, was a clever idea . . .

The second aid is the first scenario for *Champions*, called **The Island of Dr. Destroyer**. The cover provides a map of the island and the book is well organized. Several of the enemies described in the book above are presented as working for the Doctor; this much overlap is perhaps not a good idea. The booklet also provides

some very sensible ideas for modifying the scenario to fit your heroes. All in all, it looks like Hero Games is an up-and-coming company that likes to produce quality products.

**GDW** has turned out several new products. **Fifth Frontier Wars** is a board game that appears to be a marriage between *Traveller* and *Imperium*, detailing the battles for the Spinward Marches. The game map is beautiful and the rules operate on two different levels. The rules describe how to play the boardgame, and also detail how the role-playing aspects and a *Traveller* campaign can be integrated into *Fifth Frontier Wars*. This is an interesting innovation and looks to be fun.

*Traveller* itself has been re-packaged into the **Deluxe Edition Traveller**. This new boxed set includes the three original rulebooks (which have been rewritten and organized), an Introduction to *Traveller*, an introductory scenario (*The Imperial Fringe*), and a map of the Spinward Marches. Best of all, the box is huge and can hold all of your *Traveller* booklets.

Of course GDW released three new books to go into the giant box. Double Adventure 3: **The Argon Gambit / Death Station** both require only the basic *Traveller* set to play. Supplement 8, **Library Data A—M**, includes everything you've always wanted to know about the Imperium but didn't have a library card to find out about. Supplement 9, **Fighting Ships**, is a work that describes the ships of the Imperial Fleet. The fine illustrations by Paul Jaquays really make the booklet worth having.

**Metagaming** has released Metagame 1, **The Air Eaters Strike Back**. This game is a sequel to *Invasion of the Air Eaters* and is set in the future when men have forgotten the Air Eaters and have undertaken the conquest of space. The game is described as having moderate complexity, a playing time of 3—6 hours, and is designed for two players. If you enjoyed the first game, you'll love this one.

**Task Force Games** has sent us more products. **Starfire III** is a campaign system for *Starfire* which looks very complete and well-organized. It is a welcome addition to the *Starfire* system and a must for every *Starfire* fan.

**Heroes of Olympus** allows for board-, role-, or solitaire-playing of games. You can play the heroes that are sailing upon the Argo, or create heroes of your own and attempt to build their legends. The scenarios are designed to be played with a GM,

though they also adapt to two-player or solo play. The game looks interesting and well worth its price.

**Judges Guild** has been prolific in the number of the products they have released. For those who play *Traveller*, they have produced **Doom of the Singing Star**, an adventure aboard an interstellar cruise liner and four mapping aids; **Glimmerdrift Reaches Guidebook**, **Crucis Margin Guidebook**, **Fifty Starbases**, and **Navigators Starcharts**. You should look at each of these products before buying them, to see if they are right for your campaign.

**The Nightmare Maze of Jigresh** is a scenario designed for play with *EPT*. For *AD&D* there are **Portals of Irontooth**, **Dragon's Hall**, and **Lara's Tower**. Since I don't play either of these two systems, I cannot recommend or comment on these projects other than to suggest you look at them first before you buy them.

Lastly there is **Ravenscrag**, a product billed as a Universal Fantasy supplement. This is utter nonsense. Including Power and Luck as attributes and then relying upon armor class and hit points for monsters does not a universal fantasy supplement make. The maps for the game are excellent, but the amount of adaptation needed to make the game playable for any system other than *AD&D* makes the product not as valuable as it might have been. Only get this if you can afford to buy for maps alone, or if you are willing to make the effort to adapt it.

## CONVENTIONS

(To publicize your convention in this magazine, send us a flyer or progress report. We assume no responsibility for the accuracy of the following listings. A ■ beside a listing means Flying Buffalo plans to attend.)

□ October 23 — 25. **MapleCon 4.** *Sf and comic book convention.* Skyline Hotel, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada. Info: P.O. Box 3156, Station D., Ottawa, Ontario K1P 6H7, Canada.

■ October 30 — Nov. 1. **Volcon II.** *The Central Washington Games Convention.* Yakima Valley Community College, Yakima, WA. Info: VolConASB, Yakima Valley Comm. College, P.O. Box 1647, Yakima, WA 98907.

□ October 30 — Nov. 1. **7th World Fantasy Convention.** Claremont Resort Hotel, Berkeley/Oakland CA. GoHs: Peter Beagle, Alan Garner. AGoh: Brian Froud. TM: Karl Edward Wagner. Membership: \$35, limited to



750 members. Panels, presentation of 1981 World Fantasy Awards. Info: 7th World FantasyCon, c/o Dark Carnival Bookstore, 2812 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley, CA 94705.

■ November 20 — 22. **MDG WinterCon Gamefest 10.** Cobo Hall, Detroit, MI. For more information, write Metro Detroit Gamers, 2616 Kenwyck, Troy, MI 48098 and ask for the pre-registration flyer.

□ July 2 — 5, 1982. **WesterCon 35.** *Sf convention.* Adams Hotel, Phoenix AZ. GoH: Gordon R. Dickson. FGoH: Fran Skene. TM: David Gerrold. Membership: \$6 supporting, \$20 to 1/1/82. Art show, masquerade, wargaming, films, panels, more. Info: WesterCon 35, Box 11644, Phoenix AZ 85064.

## CLASSIFIED ADS

(Personal ads and trade enquiries,  
10¢/word, 20 word minimum)

**SEND US YOUR TRAPS!** Grimtooth is getting ready to put together his *second* volume of devious devices to dismay delvers. Now is your chance! Address your contributions to: *Grimtooth's TRAPS*, c/o Flying Buffalo Inc., P.O. Box 1467, Scottsdale, AZ 85252. If your trap is printed, you'll receive a free copy of the book!

**ATTENTION WARGAMERS:** The American Wargaming Association, oldest all-hobby national democratic wargaming club, with monthly offset newsletter, is still only \$8/year. AWA offers tournaments, discounts, ratings, and more. George Phillies, 1225 Island Drive #204s, Ann Arbor, MI 48105.

**ATTENTION CANADIANS:** Flying Buffalo Inc. is very much interested in increasing our distribution in your country. If you know of a store, or especially a game or toy distributor who is not carrying our products, but who ought to be, please tell us their name and address, and tell them they ought to be carrying Tunnels & Trolls. Thanks!

**WANTED:** Hairy, free-wheeling, 7'8" outdoorsman seeks understanding female companion. No smokers, druggies, religious nuts, weirdos. Live in pristine natural setting, western Saskatchewan. Omnivorous. Send photo. Enquire G. Pithecus, *Pliocene Magazine*.

**WANTED:** Mercenaries to search for and capture the lawless fiend who murdered my only son and heir. Apply to the court of Grand Duke Karl Bronzo, the Tyrant of Kasar.

# Letters



illustration by Rob Carver

*The letter which follows saddens me greatly. I was overjoyed to be able to present SA's readers with Lee Brown Coye's illustrations for Manly Wade Wellman's tale in SA#11, and his talent will be sorely missed among us all.*

Just got word today that Lee Brown Coye died over Labor Day weekend. He'd had a kidney removed last month and was doing better, though very weak. His wife wrote to say that he'd very much enjoyed seeing his new drawings in *Sorcerer's Apprentice*, so at least he had that satisfaction. After 4½ years in the hospital, it's a blessing his suffering is over — though that won't keep us from missing him.

Karl Edward Wagner  
Chapel Hill, NC

I write to thank you for my copy of *TRAPS*. I liked the presentation you used. I liked the art for my traps. My favorite trap was The Delvermatic Dicer. Danforth and Stackpole gotta be family.

I only wish you had used a different kind of paper. I can't help it if the nurse cut herself when she tried to take it from me. It was an accident and I'll tell her that when she gets out of Intensive Care.

I'll send more traps for *Grimtooth's 2* when they give me back my crayon sharpener.

Brandon Corey

This is a letter of complaint about your snail-like pace in delivering your publication to your subscribers. I have awaited my summer issue of *Sorcerer's Apprentice* all summer. I've seen it out in the bookstores — Why do the bookstores get it before your subscribers?! I am livid with anger! In the future, I would suggest that you speed up your deliveries or you may find yourselves short of more than a few subscribers! Don't take me lightly.

Dave R. Davison  
Tacoma, WA

*Although this letter was the most strongly-worded of the lot, we received several letters from people making the same complaint. It is very clear that there are some misconceptions to be cleared up.*

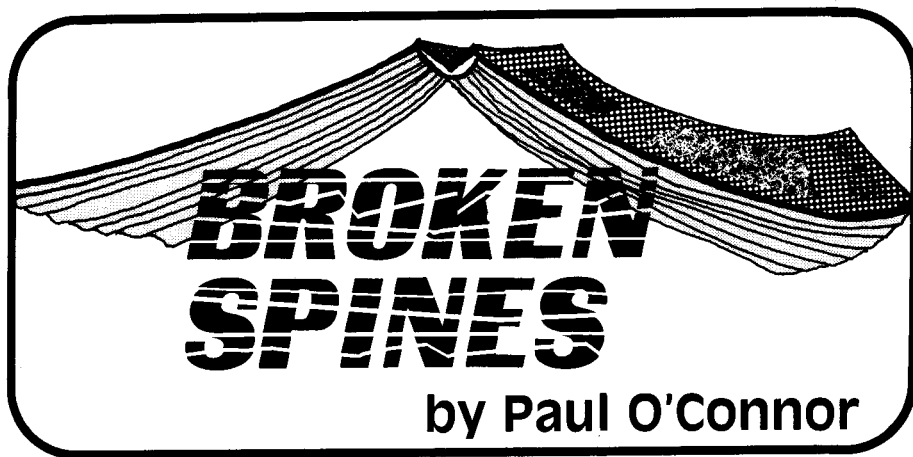
*In the first place, I take no one lightly who cares enough to write with a question, comment, or complaint; I think Mr. Davison does us wrong to assume we would. Feedback, whether negative or positive, is always encouraged.*

*The problem here seems to be a difference of opinion in just what a subscription does for a customer. Understanding the order of events when an issue is published should shed some light on *The Way Things Are*.*

*When an issue of a magazine comes back from the printers (and sometimes it goes there a little late), everyone who has pre-ordered an issue has his or her order mailed out. Stores and dealers order in bulk, so their orders are sent UPS, which guarantees delivery anywhere in the continental US in 5 working days. Single-magazine orders (i.e. subscriptions) are sent out Third Class US Postal Service, which means it takes anywhere from 2 to 3 weeks for the US Snail (uh) Mail to deliver. That's why the magazine appears in stores before it appears in your mailbox.*

*So what are you getting a subscription for? Two things. First, the subscription price is a significant price break over the cover price of the magazine. If you subscribed when we started printing, you're getting an issue for about \$1.34, regardless of cover price (which, I'm sure you've noticed, has gone up once again). And second, a subscription insures you will have a copy. Not every town has a game/hobby store where the magazine can be bought, and even if there is a store, it may not carry SA (the fools!). Beyond that, it's completely possible that a store which usually carries SA has sold out — and more are not available. SA#8 may end up something of a collector's item because we did not print as many, perhaps, as we should have. We sold out of that issue almost immediately, and quite a few people who tried to order it were just out of luck . . . there were*

(continued on page 42)



# BROKEN SPINES

by Paul O'Connor

Ugly John Carver walked up to my desk the other day with a horrible grin on his devilish face. "I've got it—" he said, "the title for your new book review column in SA: *Broken Spines!*"

I instantly fell in love with Ugly's suggestion. "Broken Spines" seemed to reflect the slightly demented attitude I wanted my column to have. Everyone I spoke to seemed to like the title, so here's the first installment of Broken Spines.

Broken Spines is the place where you can check up on what's new in the world of RPG-related fiction. In Broken Spines, I'll be reviewing new literary releases from all the major paperback publishers for their merit as role-playing source material. If a book has no value to a role-playing GM or player, then you can count on this column to tell you so. Likewise, if I come across a novel which I think will enhance your RPG experiences, then I'll let you know the book is definitely one to break the spine on. I'll try to cover as much of the material that falls in between as I can, too.

First up this time is *Samarkand*, by Graham Diamond. Diamond is probably best known for his series of *Haven* novels. *Samarkand* is fairly standard fantasy fiction, but there are a few things that make the book worthy of note.

*Samarkand* is set in an Arabian Nights version of the ancient Middle East. An old and powerful city, Samarkand, has been ruled for a century by a series of powerful emirs. Beyond the boundaries of the kingdom, hidden in mountain enclaves, live the Kazir: a band of fierce hillmen who claim Samarkand as their own. Far to the north dwell the barbarian Huns.

*Samarkand* deals with a barbarian invasion of the ancient city. Weakened by long periods of inactivity, the city falls easily to the Hun army. The scenes detailing the attack, fall, and sack of the city are particularly well done, and will prove of interest to

anyone who wishes to see how an army of the period might operate.

The novel then follows the adventures of a Princess of the city (named, for reasons I cannot fathom, Sharon) as she flees from the fall of Samarkand. She is forced to fall in with the wild Kazir, who consider her an ancient enemy. One of Sharon's companions, who reveals himself to be of Kazir blood, proves to the hillmen that the Princess is in reality a magical witch-woman, whose coming was foretold by ancient prophecies. Much to everyone's amazement, Sharon passes successfully through a series of trials designed to determine whether or not she is indeed the woman the Kazir have been waiting for. The Kazir then accept the Princess as one of their own, and launch into a joint campaign to fight the Huns.

*Samarkand* is at best a fair book, wearing thin towards the end of its 300-odd pages. While well written for the most part, we've all seen just about everything *Samarkand* has to offer in other fantasy novels. I found the plot to be overly predictable, and the characters, more often than not, to be one-dimensional. Still, the Arabian Nights setting and flavor of *Samarkand* make it somewhat interesting, despite its lack of originality. If the period interests you, then take a look at this book. If you find that you like it, you might want to pick up its sequel, *Samarkand Dawn*, which picks up where *Samarkand* leaves off, and proceeds with the same degree of success that its forebear did.

Next on the shelf is *We Are All Legends*, by Darrell Schweitzer, in an oversized Starblaze Edition that has been handsomely illustrated by Fabian. This is a collection of short stories strung together into what amounts to a novel detailing the odyssey of Sir Julian, a knight in medieval Europe. These short stories have appeared in numerous

places over the last few years (such as Andrew Offutt's *Swords Against Darkness* series, and *Void*).

Schweitzer's Julian reminds me of Michael Moorcock's doom-driven albino sorcerer, Elric. Like Elric, Julian is often unaware of the true nature of the forces he deals with. Also like Elric, Julian is perpetually gloomy and downcast. Julian seems to wander through his stories with a subconscious aim for suicide, but usually seems to escape death through no real fault of his own. Julian's adventures, however, are unlike Elric's in that they are usually of an intensely personal nature—while the fate of existence may often hang upon Julian's decisions, Schweitzer doesn't often go out of his way to tell you so.

Schweitzer has an interesting style; his Sir Julian stories are atmospheric and never uninteresting. *We Are All Legends* provides an interesting look at an unlikely knight. With a certain amount of reservation, I can recommend *We Are All Legends*, if only for the change of pace.

Finally, there is *Graymantle*, by John Morressy. This is a prequel to Morressy's 1980 *Ironbrand* novel, and takes place in the same fantasy world. *Graymantle* does much in the way of setting up plot threads for *Ironbrand*, and goes a long way towards filling in the blanks found in that novel.

*Graymantle* traces the life of King Ambescand of High City from his birth, through his kingship, and to his death. *Graymantle* is a sweeping novel covering the lives of a vast number of characters. In the whirlwind, most of the characters are never fully explored. *Graymantle* ends up reading rather like the outline of several novels, with some individual scenes fleshed out and hung on for effect.

The world of *Graymantle* is an interesting one, even though it is a bit pedestrian. It could easily have been lifted whole-hog from an FRP campaign. As such, it might provide some inspiration for GMs who are looking to set up a world. Otherwise, there isn't much to this one.

That's all for this month. May the spines you break never be poor ones.

*Samarkand* and *Samarkand Dawn*, by Graham Diamond. Playboy Press, \$2.25 each.

*We Are All Legends*, by Darrell Schweitzer. The Donning Company Publishers, \$4.95.

*Graymantle*, by John Morressy. Playboy Press, \$2.50.



illustrations by Chris Carlson

## A T&T Players' Guide by Lee Duigon

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*Across the roiling sea comes a cry to chill the blood. ODIN!!! The Dragon Ships arrive, spilling the berserk sea-raiders ashore to reap a bloody harvest. Sounds like fun, right? Well, thanks to the erudite efforts of Lee Duigon, you too can recreate the fabulous fury of the Norsemen in your own T&T games!*

---

The T&T character who gets two offensive dice for his Viking spiked shield may not know it, but if he were a real Viking, he'd be no more likely to have such a shield than he'd be to have a banjo.

Search the Icelandic sagas from cover to cover, alliterate yourself to the point of death with skaldic poetry — but nowhere will you encounter a Viking with a spiked shield.

There is, however, no dearth of violent encounters in the sagas, and much can be learned from them.

• • •  
Despite their lack of spikes, actual Viking shields were versatile gadgets in the right hands. The shields of the Viking Age came in a variety of shapes and sizes — small (like the T&T buckler) and large, thick and thin, round, square, or shaped with a tapering end to guard more of the leg (you can see

these in the Bayeaux Tapestry). Some were reinforced by a heavy metal boss in the center, and most had handles inside rather than straps, making the shield easier to discard in a pinch. On some models, the rim was reinforced with leather or metal.

Most of the shields of the period were made of wood, linden being a particular favorite. Since most of the weapons they were expected to protect their owners from were made of metal, the efficiency of these shields may at first be doubted.

To be sure, many an honest Viking's career was ended when his shield failed to stop axe, sword, or



spear; but wood was not without its advantages. One of the heroes of *Njal's Saga*, Gunnar of Hlidarend, had a favorite technique of using his wooden shield as a swordbreaker. Catching a foeman's blade in the wood, Gunnar would give the shield a sharp twist and, more often than not, either break the intruding blade or wrench it from his enemy's grasp. In fact, he pulls this trick half a dozen times during the course of the saga.

This is surely a tactic to know when faced with an armed opponent — but how to translate it into T&T terms?

First, you must determine whether your opponent's blade has pierced your shield — but has not pierced you, or split the shield in half. If you sustain no hits against your Constitution in a given combat round, assume you haven't been hit through your shield. If you're using a wooden shield against an opponent wielding a metal blade, assume the shield has been broken if, in one round, the opponent scores a number of hits greater than the number taken by the shield. Your armor, if you have any, may protect you from taking a hit on your CON, but you'll lose the shield. (If your shield is strengthened by a metal boss, however, ask the GM for a first-level saving roll on Luck. If the roll is made, you've caught the blade.)

If the shield has not been broken during a combat round, you may duplicate Gunnar's trick by using the same rule T&T provides for the swordbreaker: if your DEX and ST are both greater than your opponent's, you have a 50% chance of snapping his blade or pulling the weapon from his grasp.

Ah! But what if your opponent's Strength and Dexterity are greater than yours?

Again we take our cue from Gunnar. When an opponent caught the blade of Gunnar's halberd in his shield, Gunnar — whose ST and DEX were greater than anybody's — simply gave the halberd a hearty twist and broke the shield. Similarly, let the player with the blade have a 50% chance of splitting the shield.

Now for the sticky part. What if a blade is caught by a shield and *neither* are broken?

When Gunnar's brother, Kolskegg, was confronted with this problem, he was wont to lash out with his short sword and lop the offending spear off at the head. If a shorter weapon was being used against him, he would give the shield a tug and cut off his opponent's hand.

In this situation, the man with the

shield has the advantage. If your ST and DEX are greater than your opponent's, swing your weapon and take a free shot at his spear or his arm. If his ST and DEX are greater than yours, you must make a first level saving roll on Luck in order to get that free shot. If you fail to make the saving roll, the opponent gets another chance to break your shield. If he's unable to do that, you get another crack at his arm or spear-shaft. And so on.

Now let's add these Viking Age wooden shields to your friendly weapon shop's supply.



A standard round or square Viking shield (no boss) takes 2 hits (what, only 2? Well, remember, it's made of wood); requires a ST of 2 to wield; costs 10 g.p.; and has a weight of 40 units.

A shield reinforced with a heavy boss takes 4 hits; requires a ST of 3 to wield; costs 15 g.p.; and weighs 50 units.

Two hits seems kind of chintzy, but if your character is wearing a helmet and/or armor, he or she doesn't have to use the shield to catch all the hits.

*Example:* Ulf the Unwashed (he does a walk-on in *Njal*) carries a reinforced shield and wears a suit of mail (for a total of 13 hits — we'll make it 26 because he's a warrior). He's also carrying a short sword (3 dice). He has a ST of 16, a DEX of 14,

and a LK of 12, for a total of 6 personal combat adds.

His opponent, Einar Fishface, also wears mail (11 hits) and carries a halberd (6 dice). He has an 18 ST, 16 DEX, and 7 LK, so he has 4 combat adds.

The two do battle. Ulf rolls three dice for a total of 11, plus 6 adds = 17. Einar's 6 dice, plus adds, equal 20. The result: 3 hits against Ulf (he can take 26).

Ulf's shield will take 4 hits, so Ulf decides to take 3 on the shield and he catches the blade of the halberd. Einar's ST and DEX are greater than Ulf's, however, so he has a 50% chance of splitting the shield. The GM flips a coin and it comes up tails; the shield holds.

Now it's Ulf's turn; if he can make a first level saving roll on Luck (20 — 12 = 8), he can chop the head off the halberd. He rolls the dice, collecting double 3's (6) to earn another roll, and then 8, for a total of 14. Down comes the short sword, and Einar is disarmed.

The above, of course, are only suggestions for simulating certain aspects of Viking Age combat. Other GMs may come up with better ideas. But the point is to use the wooden shields, with all their strengths and weaknesses, as they were actually used.

Before we leave the topic of shields, it may be useful to make a note on berserk fighting.

The designers of T&T have very alertly noted that berserkers could juice themselves up by chewing on the rim of a shield (hence the extra 5 adds for that activity). So it is in the sagas, with one illuminating exception.

In *Egil's Saga*, the skald Egil Sallagrimson was once challenged to personal combat by a berserker named Holmgang-Ljot. As Ljot was chewing on his shield, Egil lashed out with a booted foot and kicked the shield up into the berserker's mouth, scattering teeth to kingdom come and giving him a nasty wound that made the rest of the battle a cakewalk.

GMs should allow players to use this tactic, provided they think of it themselves, and the berserker's opponent is standing close enough to deliver the kick. (One does not always get that close to a berserker.) If this is done, let the berserker take hits against his CON totalling one-half the kicker's ST, followed by one free attack round for the kicker.

Any berserker foolish enough to chew on his shield while an opponent is standing next to him, deserves a swift kick.

• • •  
Although the rules of T&T require players with halberds to wield them with both hands, Gunnar of Hlidarend and some other heroes of the sagas are often seen doing it one-handed, using the other hand to maneuver a shield or a sword.

*Njal* does not describe precisely how Gunnar is able to manage this feat. We must either assume superhuman strength on his part, or a halberd with the haft cut down so it's short and light enough to be used one-handed. It couldn't be too short, however, because Gunnar was fond of using the halberd to stab a foe in the belly and then toss him up and over his head, like hay from a pitchfork.

Perhaps it's best to grant Gunnar unique abilities and avoid unnecessarily complicating the T&T rules. Or permit an ultra-high level warrior to wield pole weapons with one hand.

Saga heroes come armed with an assortment of long and short swords, spears, slings, axes, hatchets, and halberds. The T&T system works perfectly well with all of them, although swords of the Viking Age had a tendency to get bent out of shape during combat. In the *Laxdaela Saga*, Kjartan has a devil of a time trying to keep his sword straight during one battle. He had to stop several times to straighten the blade with his foot. But we needn't worry about that in T&T. As the rulebook says, all the weapons in the shop are made of the finest materials.

In the sagas, spears are used for thrusting and throwing. The better heroes have a trick of catching a spear in flight and hurling it back at their opponents. GMs may permit this tactic

for a high-level warrior (at least 10th level), calling for a high-level saving roll on Dexterity. If the player fails to catch the spear, some provision should be made for a possible hand wound.

Axes are a favorite weapon in the sagas. Skarp-hedin, *Njal's* eldest son, had an axe named Troll-Wife with which he dealt out much scathe. This axe featured a cutting blade (curved) up front and a hammer-head in the rear; Skarp-hedin used both with equal facility. Gunnar sometimes carried a small axe or hatchet. Double-bladed axes, though rare, were not unknown.

Some Viking Age stalwarts eschewed the shield and fought with a weapon in either hand, often a spear and a sword. Either weapon could be used to parry blows, although this was known to backfire — a wooden axe-handle can take only so many blows from a metal sword before the head flies off.

T&T characters of especially high Strength and Dexterity should be allowed the use of two weapons simultaneously. In the case of conventional one-handed weapons (i.e. swords and spears), the character's ST and DEX should each be 1.5 times that required to wield the heaviest or trickiest of the two weapons.

Wooden-hafted weapons may parry one hit per combat round, but will break if sustaining three hits on one round or one hit in each of three rounds. Metal weapons, such as swords, will not break; but their defensive use is already accounted for in the give-and-take of ordinary combat. The main thing here is to add an element of risk to the decision to pick up extra die rolls by using an extra weapon.

If two metal weapons are used, apply the rule T&T provides for the

use of the main gauche — designate the shorter weapon to take one hit per combat round. No extra benefit should be offered for the use of two weapons of equal length; the extra offensive punch should be its own reward.

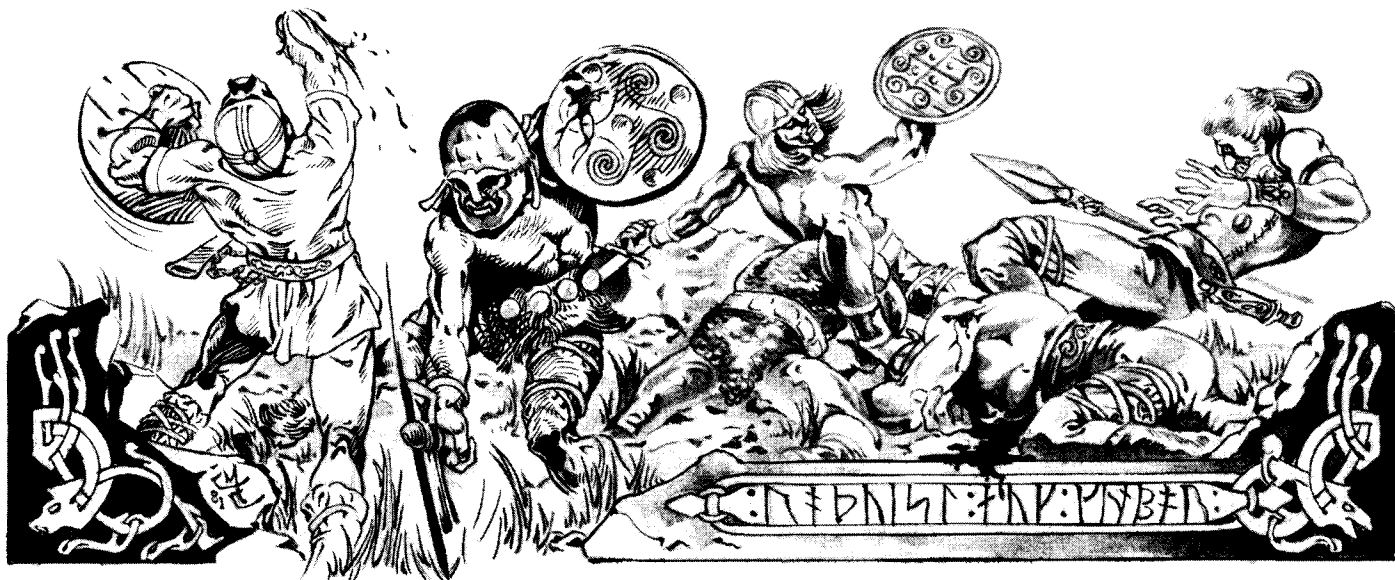
Among his other accomplishments, Gunnar of Hlidarend was a noted archer. I bring this up because the hero's bowstring snapped when his life depended on it, and his wife (a poor sport) refused to donate a few locks of her long hair to replace it. Thus, according to history, human hair may be used to string a small, relatively light bow in a pinch. GMs should permit this if there has been any prior indication that the donor's hair is long enough to serve the purpose.

• • •  
One of the factors that determine how entertaining a game of T&T will be is the imagination of the individual players. Combats between equally-matched characters can go on and on, and unless somebody can pull a new trick out of the bag, it's apt to get tedious.

T&T characters use weapons that have a basis in historical fact, and the more they know about how to use these weapons, the more options are open to them and the more interesting the game becomes.

The Icelandic sagas are filled with descriptions of combat involving many weapons available in the T&T armory. Don't be content to stand there and trade blows all night. Your weapons have many possibilities, some of which will enable you to overcome a stronger opponent (remember Ulf and Einar).

Meanwhile, don't call your character a Viking just because he has a spiked shield. ■





“A tower,” said Aynber, “and a maze within. Guardians you can put no name to — nor give a reckoning as to their numbers. Put that together with the fact that you’re not even sure that whatever you seek is there . . .”

Frowning, she leaned forward, resting her chin in the hollow of her cupped hands. Her corn-gold hair spilled about her face, hiding the small scar that ran down her left cheek. Her clear grey-green eyes stared into her half-empty alemug.

She wore trousers and a tunic of heavy cotton this evening, with calf-high boots of Tanic leather. A slightly curved sword with a guardless hilt lay across her knees. In a pouch thonged to her belt were a handful of throwing stars.

“Na, na,” she finished. “It scarce seems worth the risk.”

Harper Rhynn sighed. “Must I remind you of an unpaid debt then? Five years ago . . .”

Aynber nodded. She looked Rhynn over as she remembered. His garments were threadbare, his face lined and weary. His instrument case was weathered and battered. He’d not seemed near so down-at-the-heels that night he’d helped her escape from Haj’n’s Keep. But that was five years ago indeed. A lot could happen in five years. A lot *had* happened. Still. She could do worse than try this adventure

with Rhynn to repay the old debt. He was fair enough to look upon at least, not like the hang-about that tended to drift through Calthoren these days. Mind you, you had to look past the road-dust that grimed him now. Cut away some of those matted tangles and give the beard a trim . . .

She shook her head.

“But why me?” she asked. “If there’s sure loot in the offing, I can find you a dozen or more blades who’d jump at the chance. With a strong company . . .”

“I must have a guide within the tower.”

“Me?”

The harper nodded.

“But, Rhynn. *I’ve* never been there before. Anann knows I’ve never even heard of the place before today!”

“You have untapped depths, Huntress. Any with an inkling of deep-sight can see that. The moon shines through your eyes, blessing you.”

Aynber laughed. “Blessing me? Hardly! More ’n’ likely its an ale-glow you see in my eyes.”

Rhynn sighed. “And yet the moon is there. For that reason, and the debt, I ask your aid. I have sought entrance to this tower for many years. Three months past I dreamed a harpdream. Woven amidst the strands of its music was an augury. It showed me that only with one

of the moon-blessed as a guide can I breach the tower’s riddle. I cast about for one such and then remembered you. Would you deny me?”

“I . . .” Aynber took a sip of her ale. She looked about the inn, mentally cataloging the new faces. Her thoughts turned back and she recalled how Rhynn had tricked Haj’n into giving her her freedom. Strange harping and a cunning riddle — had Haj’n ever guessed it? But now there were new riddles and she was the one left guessing. What did she stand to lose?

“You can tell me no more?” she asked.

Rhynn shrugged. “I know little enough myself. I can scarce promise that we’ll come to no harm. But I *must* enter that tower. If not . . .”

“If not?”

“If not I must walk the roads of Woldenar until I die.”

“But . . . ah, never mind.” She raised her gaze in mock despair. “Why is it that all mages and harpers can only speak in riddles?”

“I’m not sure what you mean . . .” began Rhynn.

Aynber waved him into silence.

“No more riddles,” she said. “I didn’t expect an answer, though Anann knows there must be one.” She smiled suddenly. “But I do owe you one, Rhynn. And — if the truth were told —

# ORMRAVEN

by Charles de Lint

*Timeless wonders cease to wonder  
when you know the spell you're under...*

— Marc Bolan

I've been bored stiff these past weeks. When Thorn and I bought this inn — well, it seemed like a good idea at the time. Only Wedley and Kendra run The Darkwood well enough on their own and I'm only so much excess baggage. With Thorn attempting an honest trading venture and gone for at least another month, and Calthoren so dead you'd think it was a monk's tomb . . .”

“Then you'll come?”

“Indeed I will.”

“I'm glad,” said Rhynn softly.

Aynber lifted her ale mug. “To the moon then!” Her eyes held a gentle mockery.

Rhynn clanked his mug against hers.

“To the moon!” he agreed, though there was no mockery about him. “For it is said that only the moon may breach the walls of Stormraven with impunity.”

Aynber gave him a questioning look, then shrugged and tossed back her ale.

• • •

Deep into the northlands they fared. Rhynn took them by hidden ways — “Easy enough to find, if you know enough to look.” — until, near the end of a day in the middle of their third week of journeying, they reached the tower.

They sat their mounts on the brow

of a low hill and regarded it. Twilight hung like a mantle upon the tower. It straddled its own hill, rising tall and dark into the shadowed sky — a grey finger of rock silhouetted against a crimson sunset. High on the side facing them, the bas-relief of a raven's profile watched them with its one eye.

“It doesn't seem evil,” said Aynber. She leaned across her pommel to stroke her mare's neck. “Old, aye, and a little otherworldly — but that's no more than the mood the dusk throws over it. It's more . . . hallowed . . .”

“I did not say it was evil.”

Aynber shot Rhynn a dirty look. Her temper — never the most even — was fraying at the edges of late. It had been like this the whole of their journey north. Rhynn was as friendly as ever — oh, aye — and as full of tales and songs as might be expected by his trade, but whenever she'd questioned him more about their destination — or even discussed it — he would reply with infuriatingly cryptic evasions.

“No,” she replied. “You never did say it was evil — bless my soul! But tell me. Why have you dragged me all this way? To protect you from the wind in the trees? The sunset? And as for guiding — you've been the guide these past weeks, not I! I feel about as useful as a teatless sow trying to feed her litter.”

Rhynn eyed her steadily. “Your time for guidance will come and there may yet be danger. In what form, I cannot tell, but there will be a struggle, though the way may not necessarily be won by a skill with weapons.” He shrugged. “Aye, there will be a struggle. How else to win freedom?”

Aynber gave a snort of disgust. She shook out her reins and cantered down the slope.

“Shall we see, then?” she called back over her shoulder.

Rhynn sighed and followed at a more sedate pace. When he joined her she was standing before the tower's portal fingering the brass bindings of its huge oaken door. Her mare was ground-hitched by the simple measure of tossing her reins so that they trailed on the ground. The well-trained mare grazed peacefully unconcerned. Rhynn swung from the back of his own mount.

Aynber turned as he approached.

“Have you the key?” she asked sarcastically.

Rhynn shook his head.

Aynber stared at the broad door. It dwarfed them, standing at least twenty feet from base to top-most edge. She could see neither latch nor keyhole. How thick was it? A half foot?

“Then how . . . ?”

“Let us set up camp and eat,” said Rhynn. “Later will be soon enough.”

Aynber shrugged. "It's your tower."

They saw to their mounts first — rubbing them down with sweet grasses then letting them graze. Their own meal passed in silence. Throughout it Rhynn gazed at the tower, his face strangely alien in the light of their small fire.

Aynber watched him, feeling mixed emotions. Throughout their journey she'd been torn between frustration and wanting to leave, and a need to see this thing through. Now that they were come to the tower, she could understand some of Rhynn's feelings. There was a sense of wonder about the structure. Now having seen it — felt its presence — she was drawn to it in a way she couldn't quite define.

Rhynn rose suddenly and fetched his harp. As he drew it forth from its case, Aynber was again amazed by its beauty. Perfectly crafted, it shone and gleamed in the firelight. There were a number of jewels set into its supports — "If we find nothing else, you can have these," Rhynn had remarked one night, leaving Aynber calculating their probable worth for about an hour. But his harping always dispelled her more mercantile instincts leaving her dreamy and restless, with a bittersweet longing she couldn't place. Strange feelings would tug within her. She would find a silence within the music that was warm and pulsed with the deep air of the woods about them.

Tonight was no exception.

The music swelled, filling with mystery. It told the riddle of the tower that loomed over their campsite. Aynber was sure that amidst the harping — if she could only understand — she would *know* the answers to all her questions. She never quite did. But whereas Rhynn's cryptic replies never ceased to irritate her, the harping soothed while it wove its riddles.

**24A** Each lamp weighs 50 and is worth 100 g.p. Take as many as you want (up to 4), and return to 27C.

**24B** The stranger mumbles something under his breath. Make a L2-SR on Luck (25 — LK). If you miss it, go to 34B.

If you make it, he asks you to reconsider. This time, he offers you 1,500 g.p. If you now accept his offer, go immediately to 40C. If you still refuse, he casts a *Hellbomb Burst* at you. Go read some articles in this magazine.

Rhynn watched her as he played. When the moon rose — when he could see its horned crescent reflected in her eyes — he let his fingers fall from the strings. Silently he replaced the harp in its case, stood and shouldered it.

"It is time," he said.

Still caught in the music's dying echoes, Aynber stared at him uncomprehendingly. Then she scrambled to her feet. She buckled her sword to its shoulder harness, adjusting the hilt so that it was positioned just behind her right shoulder. Opening her pouch, she took out three throwing stars and clipped them to her belt. Satisfied that she was as ready as she could be, she joined Rhynn by the door.

"Well?" she asked.

"Remember in Calthoren," he replied, his voice intense, but low, "when I spoke of the moon? That only it could breach the tower?"

Aynber nodded.

"Feel it within you, Huntress. Let it grow. The bright wise moon. Can you feel it?"

Aynber shook her head. But she turned and looked skyward to where the silvery crescent rode the night skies. It seemed to tremble as she watched it. She felt a tingle run through her.

"Touch the door," said Rhynn.

Obediently, Aynber lifted a hand, then paused. She took a step back to regard Rhynn with suspicion. She opened her mouth, but the questioning protest died on her lips. Rhynn's eyes met hers. His gaze was frank and open. She found that, try though she might, she could not distrust him.

Breaking eye-contact, she stepped forward and touched the door with a hesitant hand. It swung open silently to reveal a large anteroom. The room was immense. Misty globes hung from a high ceiling, throwing a dim pale light that spilled out the door.

"They are dalin," said Rhynn. "Dwarf-wrought and so never-failing."

He stepped inside. Frankly curious — with her suspicions lulled if not vanished — Aynber followed him inside. The door closed behind them. Aynber whirled, right hand streaking for her blade's hilt, left to her throwing stars. She saw only the door — firmly shut. She turned to Rhynn.

"What is this place?" Her voice rang hollowly in the large room.

"Many things," replied Rhynn. "Different things, perhaps, to every being that enters." He met her gaze

openly. "I have an inner sight, Huntress, a deep-sight that can see through the glamours of this world. But in here I am blind. There is too much mystery — Middle mystery. I know the ways of the Light, understand the Dark. But the Grey Middle Kingdom — it is the moon's realm. I am lost here. But still. I need to find that . . . that which I seek. You have a different sight. There is a fey wisdom in you and the moon knows your spirit. Here you are the guide. I hope to find my freedom here."

Aynber shook her head. "Why can't you just tell me what we're — you're — looking for? Anann! I've come this far on speculation. Do you think I'd back out now?"

"If I told you," said Rhynn, "you would not believe. And that disbelief would affect your ability to guide us. Huntress, you have trusted me so far. Trust me a little longer."

"You leave me little choice. Having come this far —"

Rhynn cut her off. "Do not say that! You *do* have choice! You are the guide."

Aynber looked away from him. Across from the entrance were three doors. Save for them, the room was unadorned. She pursed her lips, looking from the doors to Rhynn.

"The left one then."

At the door, she paused, lifting an eyebrow. Rhynn motioned her forward. Shrugging, she put her palm against the dark-grained wood, scarcely surprised when it swung silently open at her touch.

They entered a long hallway, lit from above by a row of dalin set at intervals of twenty feet. The walls were bare stone, save under each dalin. There were bas-reliefs of intricately-carved ravens in various positions of flight. The floor and walls were dry; the air slightly musty, though not uncomfortably so.

"These carvings," commented Aynber, stopping to examine one more closely. "Are they dwarf wrought too, do you think? Ravens have the name of evil in the old lore, and yet . . . these seem beyond that."

"There *are* dark dwarves," replied Rhynn, "though I doubt this is their work. They would scarce take the time. And I would not call ravens evil, either. Proud, aye, but untouched by our moralities. They belong to the twilight realms — the Middle Kingdom. There are many such misunderstood beings, Huntress —



longwolves and moonhares, the grey bears of the highlands, aye, and others more magical still: the spirits of moor and hill, the tree-dwellers, stone-smiths, windriders . . .”

Aynber regarded him thoughtfully. This was the closest she'd come to a direct answer from him since they'd left Calthoren. She wondered if she should push her luck. But something else was nagging at the back of her mind now. The hallway they fared down seemed to run on forever. It curved slightly to the left so that their entranceway was lost to sight.

“There's something not quite right here,” said Aynber. “This hallway. It can't possibly be this long. You saw the size of the tower from the outside...” Her voice trailed off. She shivered suddenly.

Rhynn caught her mood, but was quicker to shake it from him. “It is part of the mystery of this place, I suppose,” he said a little uncertainly. “Yet there is a feeling of ‘rightness’ about it. As though it were indeed a crossroads . . .”

“Of what?” asked Aynber when he didn't finish. “A crossroads of what?”

“Of worlds,” replied Rhynn and he would say no more.

Aynber sighed. Well, she'd learned more in the past few minutes, it seemed, than in the whole of their ride north. The trouble was she understood her new knowledge no better than if Rhynn had never spoken. How could anyone be so damned secretive and still expect to be helped?

She sighed again and took the lead. The hallway branched a short while later. Aynber peered down the new corridor's length.

“What now?” she asked more to herself.

“You must choose.”

She shot him a sour look.

“We're liable to get completely lost and end up wandering through here for the rest of our lives if you're so keen on following my guidance. Anann! I haven't a clue which way to go.”

“Let yourself go quiet,” said Rhynn. “Inside. Fill yourself with silence and let the moon speak to you.”

“The moon! The moon! You can take your moon and shove —” She broke off, shaking her head. “Ah, what's the use. I suppose it can't hurt to try.”

She closed her eyes and tried to still the inner conversation that rambled through her mind. It seemed to be an

easy enough thing to accomplish, but the more she tried, the more totally irrelevant thoughts clambered to the surface of her mind, disturbing her concentration. She frowned and took a few deep breaths, letting the clamor run its course.

She stood enrapt for long moments. There came a time when her mind held stillness more deep than any ocean depths. A golden radiance seemed to fill her, squeezing into her every pore. She basked in its quiet wonder. When the questions arose once more, she knew an answer to at least one. Whether it came from within herself — an insight — or it was moon-born . . .

“We go on,” she said.

They passed three more branching hallways, then a crossing. At the next turnoff, Aynber stopped.

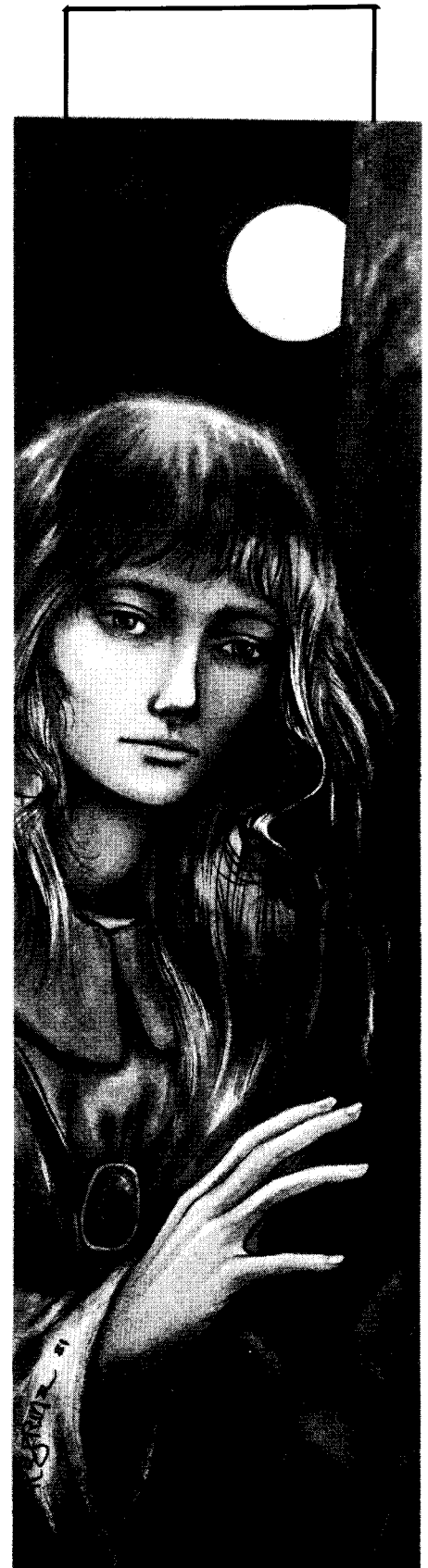
“This way,” she murmured with growing confidence. She felt now as though she had a built-in compass inside her, pointing the way.

The new hallway ended after three turnings. Before them was a large wooden door with iron hinges, though no latch. Aynber smiled. She stepped up to it, palm face-out. As the door swung open she stepped through, then stopped dead in her tracks. In the sparsely furnished room stood a tall shaggy creature.

Its body hair was long and matted in grizzled tangles. About its loins was tied a strip of leather. Yellowed fangs protruded from the corners of its mouth, pulling the lips into a hideous grin. Aynber met the creature's unblinking gaze. Though it put her in mind of the great apes of Kasque, there was a burning intelligence in these eyes that never an ape had.

She drew her blade suddenly and side-stepped, but made no other threatening gesture. The creature had reach on her, but with her blade — a sharp feint left, twist, in on the right . . . She paused, uncertain. The same sense that had guided her through the hallways was trilling a low warning. She remembered something that Rhynn had said. It would not necessarily be a struggle of weapon skill. But what then?

Lightning swift, her thoughts ran through her. The tableau held. The beast continued to watch her, shifting position slightly. Aynber struggled with her uncertainty. She felt she was being tested. But the confidence that had filled her in the halls had deserted her . . . deserted her or demanded





something other than her natural reaction to such a confrontation. She could hear Rhynn breathing behind her. Her own breath sounded a little quick. She sighed. Still uncertain, she lowered her blade.

"Lord," she said quietly. "We ask entrance."

For all her outward composure, her heart was pounding. Here dies a fool, she thought. One did not face shaggy brutes and bespeak them politely and, with her blade lowered, she was now at a disadvantage. She couldn't bring the same strength to play in an upswing.

The creature smiled, baring the full length of its fangs.

"Lady," it said, inclining its head slightly. "I bid you welcome."

Aynber stared in shock, unable to believe her ears. Rhynn smiled and let loose a long sigh.

"We seek . . . ah . . ." She looked to Rhynn for aid.

The beast motioned to the doorway behind it. "Through there."

"Ah . . . thank you."

Still shaken, she edged around the creature, making for the door. It opened under her touch and she and Rhynn filed through. As soon as the door whispered shut behind them, she whirled on Rhynn.

"What *was* that thing?"

"A guardian, I should think," replied the harper.

"Some guardian," muttered Aynber. "It let us through without batting an eye. If that's the best this place can throw against us . . ."

Rhynn touched her arm. "I do not think the guardians are necessarily against us. But again, there is some test involved. How you approach the problem depends upon . . ."

"I know, I know. How well I listen to the moon. But what do you think? Is that the trick? A non-combatant's stance . . .?"

Rhynn shrugged.

"I do not know," he replied honestly.

"Na, na. Of course you wouldn't." Her sarcasm was lost on the harper.

They went on. The corridor turned, ending at the bottom of a flight of stairs. At the top was another door. More cautiously, Aynber opened it, standing well back until the whole of the room could be viewed.

This chamber was empty of life, though well furnished. Heavy tapestries hung from the walls. There was a hearth in one corner and a number of chairs scattered throughout. A long table ran the length of the wall to their right. There were a number of flasks and goblets upon it, gleaming eerily in the dalin light. Across from them was another door.

They passed through more chambers, each untenanted, each

more richly furnished than the last. The corridors between them had wooden floors and their boots rang softly upon them. The walls were adorned with more and more bas-reliefs. The ravens were still present in them, but now a whole plethora of mythical creatures shared the stone.

Time dragged. They found room after room. Always Rhynn shook his head, indicating they must go on. Aynber would shrug, marking the riches, but not wanting to burden herself for the nonce. On the way back, she decided.

After a while the chambers began to take on a more spartan look again. Four flights of stairs and more rooms than she cared to remember later, Aynber wondered if they would ever find an end to place. A barrow stillness hung over the rooms and corridors. They sensed no other living presence. At the next door, Rhynn stopped Aynber's hand before she could touch the smooth wood.

"I sense life within," he said.

Aynber nodded. She sensed it too. Touching the door, she stepped back as it swung silently open. The revealed chamber was of bare stone: ceiling, walls, floor. In the very center stood a handsome man in a monk's habit. Blade still sheathed, Aynber moved slowly into the room, eyes on the monk.

"Greetings," she said. "We seek entrance."

The monk bowed. As he moved, his habit shimmered and fell from him. He was clad now in white leather and in his fist was a sword identical to Aynber's. He smiled strangely.

"Then find death!"

He attacked with such suddenness that Aynber had scarcely time to throw herself aside, catching the blow on her swiftly drawn blade. Her attacker drove in relentlessly and she was fighting for her life. She had no time for her own attack. She could barely defend herself from the warrior's lightning blows.

"Rhynn!" she cried out once during a rapid flurry of feints and dancing thrusts. "Rhynn!"

She caught a glimpse of the harper out of the corner of her eye before her assailant demanded the full of her attention once more. Rhynn stood ashen-faced in the doorway. He was struggling to come to her aid, but an invisible force held him helpless. So be it, then. She could count on no aid.

Her inability to lay a blow on the

warrior baffled her. Her every thrust was parried with a skill that made her feel like a rank amateur. The warrior taunted her with an arrogant smile. Aynber smiled back, her eyes cold and hard. Swivelling she engaged his blade, gripping her hilt with one hand. Her free hand unclipped a throwing star from her belt.

Up and around went the blade. The warrior stepped in to follow the movement, but she was already leaping to one side. She flung herself across the room, rolling to her feet and turning. The throwing star left her hand — cutting a bright arc across the room. It caught him square in the chest. His face blanked in surprise. His blade-arm sagged, blade-tip touching the stone floor.

“Scarcely sporting,” he murmured and fell forward, his sword clanging against the floor.

Aynber straightened slowly, drawing in large gulps of air. With her blade in her hand, she faced Rhynn. The harper’s face was still pale.

“I could not move,” he said. He drew his own blade.

Aynber nodded. She worked a kink out of her neck with her free hand, then motioned to the new door. They faced it together with drawn steel.

“Why did this one attack and the other not?” mused Aynber.

Rhynn shrugged. “Perhaps to show that things are not always what they seem.”

He looked back. Aynber followed his gaze and drew in a sharp breath. The warrior was gone. On the floor lay her throwing star . . . and the warrior’s sword. She passed the back of her hand over her brow.

“Let’s get this over with,” she said softly. “This’ll be the last door.” Her intuition was speaking within her.

She touched the wood panel and the door swung open to show another empty room — empty save for a small dais in its center. On the dais rested a plain wooden harp with bronze strings. She caught the look on Rhynn’s face.

“For this?” she asked.

Rhynn nodded, his eyes shining.

“But your own harp . . . it’s so much finer.”

Rhynn touched his harpcase. “This is not my harp. Just as Woldenar — this world — is not my world. That is my harp. For thirty years I have been trapped in these violent lands, seeking my way homeward. But I am a Harper . . . to spell my passage I must have my

own harp.”

“But how did it get here? How did you get here?”

“I was cast here in the backwash of a great spelling on my own world. It . . .” He shrugged. “The reasons for that spelling would mean nothing to you and would take a lifetime to tell — for it was a thing of many lifetimes that the spelling sprung from. Suffice that I was trapped here and must needs adjust myself to this world until the chance to return home might come my way.”

“And the harp?”

“I could only hope,” replied Rhynn. “This tower stands on many worlds, Huntress. It is a crossroads . . . a gateway. With my desire strong enough, the harp could be here. But only one such as you could gain me access to the tower itself. It is a testing ground, you see. It belongs to the Middle Kingdom. My way is the way of the Tuathan, the Fair Gods. They have no strength in this place — I have no right to be here unless accompanied by one of the Middle Kingdom’s moon-blessed.”

Aynber shook her head. “You’re still not making any sense. I tell you, I’m not blessed — by the moon or otherwise.”

“Then what guided you through the maze? What stayed your hand with the one guardian, yet let you prevail against the other?”

“Myself,” replied Aynber firmly.

“To those of the twilight it is often one and the same.” Rhynn smiled. “I must take my leave, Huntress.”

He sheathed his blade, then unstrapped it from his belt and laid it aside. “I will have no need for such a weapon in my own land,” he explained. He unshouldered his harpcase, drawing out the beautiful instrument within.

Aynber frowned as she compared the two. It seemed a poor choice to make, the worn weathered harp for this bejewelled one. She regarded Rhynn and her frown grew deeper. This talk of worlds and gateways . . . The riddle was growing deeper and still there was no answer in sight.

Rhynn reshouldered the empty case. He took up the old harp from the dais and, sitting on the edge, began to play. With the first chords, an amber light came creeping about him, pale and gossamer. Aynber stepped back, unsure of herself.

“You survived the testing,” said Rhynn across the sound of his harping.

“You have the right to claim your freedom.”

Freedom? Freedom from what? She was free. Only . . . Her eyes misted as the harping grew deeper. It pulled and tugged within her, then left her in a pool of silence. Within, she was wrapped in a quiet so still it left her breathless. She blinked and the room shimmered about her. When the shimmer was gone, she was in a strange place of silence and grey-amber mists. Before her . . . She shook her head.

A huge raven, its feathers streaked with grey, the tips golden, was before her. In its eyes an amber storm raged. Its beak seemed to curve into a smile.

“You . . .” she began.

The word fell like a pebble into the silence, tiny ripples of sound widening around it. The raven’s smile grew broader.

“I?” it asked with humor.

Aynber rubbed her eyes. “Are you real? *Can* you be real?”

“I am named Rootwing,” said the raven, “and I am as real as you.”

Aynber digested that. The bird had put a strange emphasis on its words so that she was unsure of what it meant.

“It was not a grand testing,” continued the raven, “I’ll admit to that. And yet . . . if you *saw* the dangers and bypassed them, I can scarcely complain that your testing was too easy. Now what would you have? Your freedom? Or do you seek passage?”

“Freedom from what?”

The feathered shoulders moved in a shrug. “Reality. Illusion. Who can say?”

**27A** The guards burst into the library. They yell to the blue-clad man, “He is a thief! Kill him!” The man stands up. Go to 8C.

**27B** Make a Charisma saving roll at your own level. If you make it, he gives you the scroll; go to 36C. If you miss it, he shouts, “Peon! Do not interrupt me!” Go to 8C.

**27C** The hallway has five doors on the left wall and three on the right wall. There is plush red carpeting on the floor, and golden oil lamps hang on the walls.

If you want to steal some oil lamps, go to 24A. If you want to go to the third door on the left, as you were told to do, go to 38C. If you want to continue down the hall, go to 34A.

“And the passage?”

The raven’s smile grew mocking. “Why, to the other worlds. Where else?”

“I . . .” Aynber paused. Her mind was broiling with questions, but her insight told her that this moment — however strange and unreal it might seem — would still not last long. She must make a decision and make it soon. But what? She scarcely understood what was going on. All the riddling seemed to lead to this moment and here was she not knowing which way to turn. This was something that Rhynn was better equipped to —

The answer came rushing into her mind.

“Passage,” she said firmly. “For the harper.”

“So be it,” said the raven. Its voice held a tone of slight disappointment. “That was fairly spoken, I suppose. For had you not offered your companion the passage, he would have drifted all his years through the grey spaces between the worlds. With your generosity you have saved him, but lost your own chance. Where now *your* freedom?”

As the raven spoke, her eyes misted once more. For a moment her vision cleared. She saw the harp chamber once more. Rhynn was gone, though his jewelled harp and sword remained.

Then the room faded and she felt herself falling.

The sensation lasted for brief seconds that appeared to drag into hours. Her head spun and her eyes closed. When she felt something solid form underfoot, her legs buckled under her and she stumbled to lie in . . . grass?

She opened her eyes to find herself outside the tower. It was mid-day and the sun was high and bright overhead. On the grass beside her were Rhynn’s harp and sword. And Rhynn? He was bound homeward now.

She thought she heard a sound then — an echo within her mind like the ringing of a harp. She smiled as she recognized the tune for one that Rhynn had composed on their first night out of Calthoren. He had called it ‘the Harper Thanks the Lady’.

You’re welcome, Rhynn,” she said softly.

The tune played on for a few more bars, then faded and disappeared.

Aynber sighed. She felt a shiver of loss run through her, but . . . The grass under her felt good. There were shoots of clover and thyme growing underfoot as well and their scent filled the air with a sweet, heady fragrance. The sky was a brilliant blue that could only make her smile.

• • •

Aynber twisted in the saddle, her mare restless under her. She steadied it with the firm pressure of her knees. Rhynn’s mount tugged lightly at the reins wrapped about her pommel and nickered.

Behind stood the Tower of Storm-raven, grey and slender in the afternoon light. Aynber regarded the raven’s profile and smiled a little. Dealing with faery was always chancy, for those denizens of the Middle Kingdom were capricious and willful — proud and given to strange quirks. And this raven . . .

“You’re wrong, stonebird,” she said, her voice ringing in the still air. “I never lost my freedom. It’s just that I’ve finally understood the riddle and so discovered it. Illusion . . . reality . . . the truth lies inside me. In the silences — *and* the confusions. Rhynn’s harping tried to tell me, aye, and the moon as well, I suppose. So I’ve no need for your ‘freedom’ when my own’s been inside me all along.”

Her smile broadened. She patted the pouch that hung at her belt — stuffed full of the gems she’d pried from Rhynn’s harp.

“Aye!” she added. “And I’ve these as well!”

Laughing, she shook out her reins and rode southward. ■



# City Building & Citymastering

Paul O'Connor

Fantasy role playing games are, by their very nature, among the most versatile and imaginative games a person can play. Using FRP rules, it is possible to undertake journeys through alien dimensions, engage in an aerial clash of mounted war dragons, fight out a massive battle between ships at sea, or attempt to escape from Hell itself. Yet despite the free-form nature of the genre, many FRP gamers still needlessly restrict their experiences to conventional dungeon runs.

There's certainly nothing wrong with dungeon delving, but a person who spends all of his or her time wandering around in tunnels is missing out on a whole world of possible adventures. Every fantasy gamer or Game Master owes it to him or herself to try coming up out of the dungeons at least once, if only to try something different.

A city is a good place to begin moving out of the dungeons, as it can provide a comfortable link with game play that has already taken place. The characters that have been running through your dungeon came from somewhere—why not make your city their home? You might want to set your city near your dungeon, to better explain why everyone who enters your dungeon seems to come from the same place.

The most important thing to remember when setting out to design a city is not to let sheer size overwhelm you. While a city *might* be a vast place comprising hundreds of structures and thousands of inhabitants, chances are that your players' characters will only deal with a little bit of it at a time—at least at first. You needn't detail every single building and citizen of your city before beginning play. Such a task would be a truly thankless one. You'd spend the rest of your natural life working on the city, and no one would ever get the chance to see it—worthwhile, perhaps, as a twisted end in and

of itself, but a bit impractical.

To start developing your city, work up a general idea of the sort of settlement you want to design. Is a sprawling metropolis to your taste? or would you feel more comfortable with a small village? Decide where you want to locate your city—steaming jungle or parched desert, rugged coastline or mountaintop perch?

After you've roughed out the details of climate and approximate size, sketch a map of the place. Concentrate on blocking out the city as a whole, rather than paying attention to individual details. Indicate such things as the city's defenses and major quarters (e.g. these are the walls that surround the city, with gates here and here; these are the beggars' quarters; this is where the royal palace is; here's the marketplace; this is where the sea-front businesses are located, etc.). It shouldn't take more than a couple of hours to block out a city this way—though you'll probably end up with a rather messy map.

Your next task is to get your players involved. It is important that your players' characters come to care for the city as much as you do. The city should feel like home to these characters, a place where they can rest from the continual hazards of dungeon delving . . . unless they go looking for trouble (as most characters do). If characters treat your city as a dungeon without a roof, spending their time there trying to knock over everything in sight, then it isn't going to work very well. Character interaction is the lifeblood of a city.

Walk the players around the city, until they get to know it as well as you do (which shouldn't be difficult—at this point you probably won't know much about the city anyway). Unless you feel especially confident, don't try running anything in the way of an actual city adventure immediately—just get the characters familiar with the turf. Perhaps

the best way to accomplish this is to simply throw your map on the table and explain it to the players.

The object of this exercise is to find out what parts of the city interest your players. Determining this important information before your first actual city game will save you a lot of grief later. The importance of talking to your players cannot be overemphasized. Before you run off and detail all seven levels of the local gemsmiths' guild, complete with one hundred and one fully-statted non-player characters, make sure your characters are interested in adventuring there.

After you've found out what interests your players, sit down and consider a few scenarios set in the general areas that apply. If your characters want to wander around the marketplace, then draw up a rough map of that area as you envision it—a farmer's crops here, a spice merchant's booth there, a one-armed goblin with three heads juggling squids over there. You can make this quite detailed if you wish, but don't waste too much time on details that aren't likely to *directly* affect game play. You can always pencil specific details onto the map as you go along.

Next, write up a few scenarios for the area you've detailed. Try to think of what might happen to someone who visits this part of the city. A character wandering through the marketplace might find himself hustled by merchants, victimized by a pickpocket, or unjustly accused of being a thief. Generate a few NPCs representative of the area to throw at the characters—a couple of merchants, a few average citizens, a thug or two and maybe a few city guardsmen would be appropriate for a marketplace.

When it comes to actually running a city trip, be flexible. Try to allow for your players' desires. Let the characters take a hand in directing the action—*never* try to force characters into doing something they don't want to, simply because you've got nothing developed for the path they're taking. Often, a city trip will split off into a completely unexpected direction—usually quite different from the one planned. If this happens, flow with it! Try to adjudicate whatever situations arise to the best of your ability. *There's nothing wrong with making up an adventure as you go along.* Be sure to note down anything you develop during these game sessions for future reference—pretty soon you'll have built a sizeable file on how your city works.

Exercise common sense in your



rulings. If a character walks up to the gates of the Overlord's palace and starts mowing down the guards, then he should expect some sort of retaliation. On the other hand, if a character gets caught stealing an apple off a cart, it shouldn't be grounds for instant execution—unless your city has a *very* strict law against stealing apples. If you run into trouble judging a character's actions, use a real-life city you know as an example. Evaluate your own chance of accomplishing a similar deed in a comparable section of a real city. Fantasy is rooted in reality—using a link between the two for your benefit shouldn't be difficult.

Whenever possible, strive to enlist the imaginations of your players in developing your city. If a character is wandering through a section of town about which you know little or nothing, ask the player to describe what he or she feels should be there. Carefully curtail what the player develops so as to maintain the internal consistency and balance of your city, but try to incorporate as many of his or her suggestions as possible—it will make the player feel more a part of the city. Don't take this to mean that you should grant any wish on request—if a character says he sees a wizard standing on the streetcorner handing out bags of gold to anyone passing by, then overrule him. Conversely, if a character says he sees a "Help Wanted" poster tacked to a tavern wall, offering a position as a bodyguard for a local merchant, then let him or her take the ball and run with it. Some of the very best city adventures are the products of such joint efforts.

After you've run a couple of adventures, your city will start to take on a life of its own. You'll find you're having less trouble determining what different sections of the city look like—and you might want to re-draw your original city map, taking care to include such things as buildings the characters have visited, street names they've thought out, and locations of personal residences the players may have established. Don't hesitate to throw out under-developed sections of the city that no longer fit in with the whole—if your town has turned out to be violently anti-magic, then throw out the space you set aside for the local chapter house of the wizard's guild.

After you've developed a knack for running city adventures, you might want to toy with setting up some larger, long-range scenarios that involve the whole city, rather than just one small part of it. Perhaps a close

NPC friend in the city has been murdered or kidnapped and it's up to the characters to track down the culprit. Maybe the Overlord has decided to tax the city . . . again. What if the thieves' guild has decided it's time for the characters to pay their dues on that dungeon loot they've got lying around? The possibilities are infinite. These sort of scenarios work well when sprung on characters who have become comfortable with the city, when just exploring for exploration's sake no longer interests them. You'll find that after characters have been in the city for a while, they'll begin to develop patterns that will help you create scenarios for them. Perhaps the characters frequent a particular tavern each night, or routinely follow a particular street when going to market in the morning. These areas can be detailed by GM and players, and used as a starting point for scenarios. Countless adventures have begun in my own city of Iron Bell with the characters simply sitting in a back booth of Valerion's Wet Whistle: a bloody messenger will stagger into the tavern with a dagger in his back and a parchment clutched in his hand; or a conversation about a shipment of gems

arriving at the docks will be overheard, and then it's off to the races . . .

Once you've introduced your players to a city, you'll begin to explore facets of your FRP universe that you probably never knew existed. Eventually the dungeon loot is going to run out, and the characters will be faced with the prospect of paying for food and rent. Some characters will try to get an honest job. Others will take to the street in search of an easy mark. Still others might get sucked in by get-rich-quick schemes. Some characters might even return to your old dungeon in search of more treasure—you'll be surprised how fresh your dungeon will seem after just a couple of weeks of city adventuring.

If you start small and work your way up, I think you'll find the job of city construction and administration will test your gamemastering talent to the utmost. Most of the time you'll be winging it, without much in the way of established material to rely on. While citymastering may prove difficult at first, I think you'll find your playing enjoyment will increase greatly for the effort. You'll end up being a better GM and player for the experience, despite having long since gone completely mad. ■

## PROCONSUL

### A COMPUTER STIMULATION GAME

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*Tell them you saw it in SA*

# The Eldritch Connection

## Magic Items in FRP Gaming

Larry DiTillio



illustrated by Royal Knab

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*Hearken well, Game Masters! If your players carry enough magic to fill Houdini's foot-locker twice over—if your most sinister machinations are bug-bombed by device-laden dummies—then you've got a problem! Overwhelming magic is unbalancing your games. The answer to your problem is a coherent theory of magic design, courtesy of the Maven of Darksmoke himself.*

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**M**agic! Such a small word, and yet what wonderment it conjures in the spirit of fantasy gamers. Gold and gems may be fine treasures indeed, but items of magic most thrill the conquering heroes and heroines of FRP. By the same token, magic items are the most often abused elements in gaming. The source of this abuse is simple: too little thought on the part of the creator. This results in poorly balanced games, frustrated GMs, and players who reach impossibly high levels without *truly* advancing in the basic skills of play.

There is no simple solution to "abused" magic. An item which is perfectly acceptable in one person's world may become monstrous in another's. FRP thrives on a diversity of play styles; different campaigns have different needs, especially in terms of items of arcane power. Nevertheless, it is possible to lay down some general guidelines for magic item design which may help when you sit down at the ole drawing board. I am about to do just that — but before delving into the meat of the dragon, allow me one swift side trip.

If magic is an abused commodity in FRP gaming, the word *campaign* is even more abused. All too many players consider *every* game they play in as a campaign. Still others feel that so long as the same GM runs the game, they are in a campaign. Both notions should be dispelled — that's what this side-trip is all about.

A series of isolated dungeons with no active world around them is *not* a campaign. A true campaign has a definite milieu, one that is constantly active and constantly affects play, whether that play takes place underground, aboveground, or in another plane of existence. Characters in a true campaign function within a specific set of laws, customs, mores, religions, biases, economics, etc., and all of these factors form the character's role in the game. The maker of the milieu is the Game Master — and the more imaginative, daring, and creative the GM is, the better the campaign.

What does all this have to do with magic item design? Very much. The GM who runs a false campaign has no need of a theory of magic design,

because his gaming has no consistency. In contrast, the true campaign game is a marvel of interrelated facts, rumors, and activity; by its very consistency of spirit, such a campaign requires magic that fits. As the GM of a true campaign, I would not be satisfied with anything less. Therefore I am biased and you, the reader, should recognize that this bias affects what follows. Now, having stated the ever-popular, "Where is this bozo coming from?", I shall press on.

### The Magickal Checklist

No matter what game system you prefer, the following essential considerations deal superficially with the design of magic items for your play. Consider them carefully, add your own game experience, and then use the checklist when you need to.

- 1) How much of an "edge" does the item give its possessor?
- 2) How often and how easily can the item be employed?
- 3) If the item gives specific adds/plusses etc., are these cumulative with natural adds/plusses? *and* are they

cumulative with *other* items of magic?

4) Is the item limited to a specific character type? (Most — but not all — FRP games have specific types.)

5) How can the item be destroyed?

6) How “apparent” is the item as “Magical”?

7) What *can't* the item do?

8) Is the item *legendary*?

9) How does the item fit into the specific scenario in which it is found?

10) How does the item fit into your *world*?

11) How many such items are likely to exist?

12) Is any minimum attribute (e.g. at least 15 IQ) necessary to use the item?

13) Are there any “side-effects” to the item?

14) Does the item supplant any particular character function?

15) Is the item colorful/fun?

16) Is the item *playable* by both the player and the GM?

Now, not all items need be rigorously checked against this list. A potion will seldom be legendary, and magical armor will *generally* work in a fairly consistent manner. Nonetheless,

**34A** You turn a corner and run into two more guards. Each wears leather armor and carries a broadsword; each has a CON of 4d6 and adds of 1 die + 2.

If you kill them, go to 36B.

**34B** The stranger casts a *Seek Ye* spell on you. You will not be paid for this adventure. He takes you by the shoulders and pushes you out of the inn to his horse, where he gives you leather armor, a broadsword, and a fifty-foot rope with a grapple. He then leads you to the wall behind the palace and says, “The library is over this wall, and through the courtyard, down the west hallway, at the third door on your left. The scroll is tied with a purple ribbon, and is sitting on the table. Now go.”

Go to 11B.

**34C** The guards are wearing leather armor and carrying broadswords. Each has a CON of 4d6 and combat adds of 1 die + 2. If you kill them, go to 11C.

**34D** Make a third level saving roll on Luck (30 — LK). If you make it, you swing down into the hallway unnoticed. Go to 27C.

If you miss it, someone behind you shouts “Halt!” just as you drop from the wall into the hallway entrance. If you stop and turn around, go to 40A. If you make a run for it, go to 8B. If you were forced to go on this adventure, you automatically run for it and go to 8B.

by taking these sixteen factors into consideration for most items, you stand a better chance of stifling any possible abuse of the eldritch goodies you hand out. Most of these considerations are directed toward one end: *limitation*. This is the key element in good design of magic items. Nearly all *gross* items of magic work that way because they are *not* limited. With that very important thought in mind, here's some elaboration on the checklist.

### The Magical Checklist — Elaborated

**1) The “edge”.** Most magic items will shift the odds of a game in favor of those who possess them. Magic weapons will make a party more formidable in combat; healing potions and devices will enable them to sustain more damage; protection items will give them an advantage over certain creatures; detection items will allow them to move more quickly and with more assurance; and so on. There is nothing wrong with this; in fact, FRP games are designed for it. The average party facing the average scenario would swiftly be cut to ribbons without some advantages.

However, when shifting odds in any manner, a GM must exercise great caution. There is a definite difference between a weapon that makes a character tough and a weapon that makes a character outrageous. In like manner, there are forms of healing which merely aid and others which virtually negate any threat of death. I once went on a run at DunDraCon in which one of the characters possessed a sword that healed damage simply by being held. Naturally, this sword made the character unkillable in a fight (since the sword constantly healed him as he wielded it). What was worse, it also kept the entire party at full hit points, because after each melee we all blithely passed the thing around. The “edge” provided was simply too great.

In considering the “edge” a good GM also considers how that edge will grow as the possessor of the item advances *and* what that edge might mean in *future* scenarios. For the first part of this consideration, let's return to weaponry. A Battle Axe with 30 adds + 3/ + 15% (respectively, *T&T*, *AD&D*, and *RQ*) may seem like a respectable edge for a 1st Level/Beginning character. Consider that same axe, however, when the character has advanced a few levels/steps. Greater adds/better chance to hit/additional training *combined* with the weapon allow that character to

function as an adventurer of considerably *greater* level. This totally unbalances a scenario in which the combat opposition is geared for the median-level character.

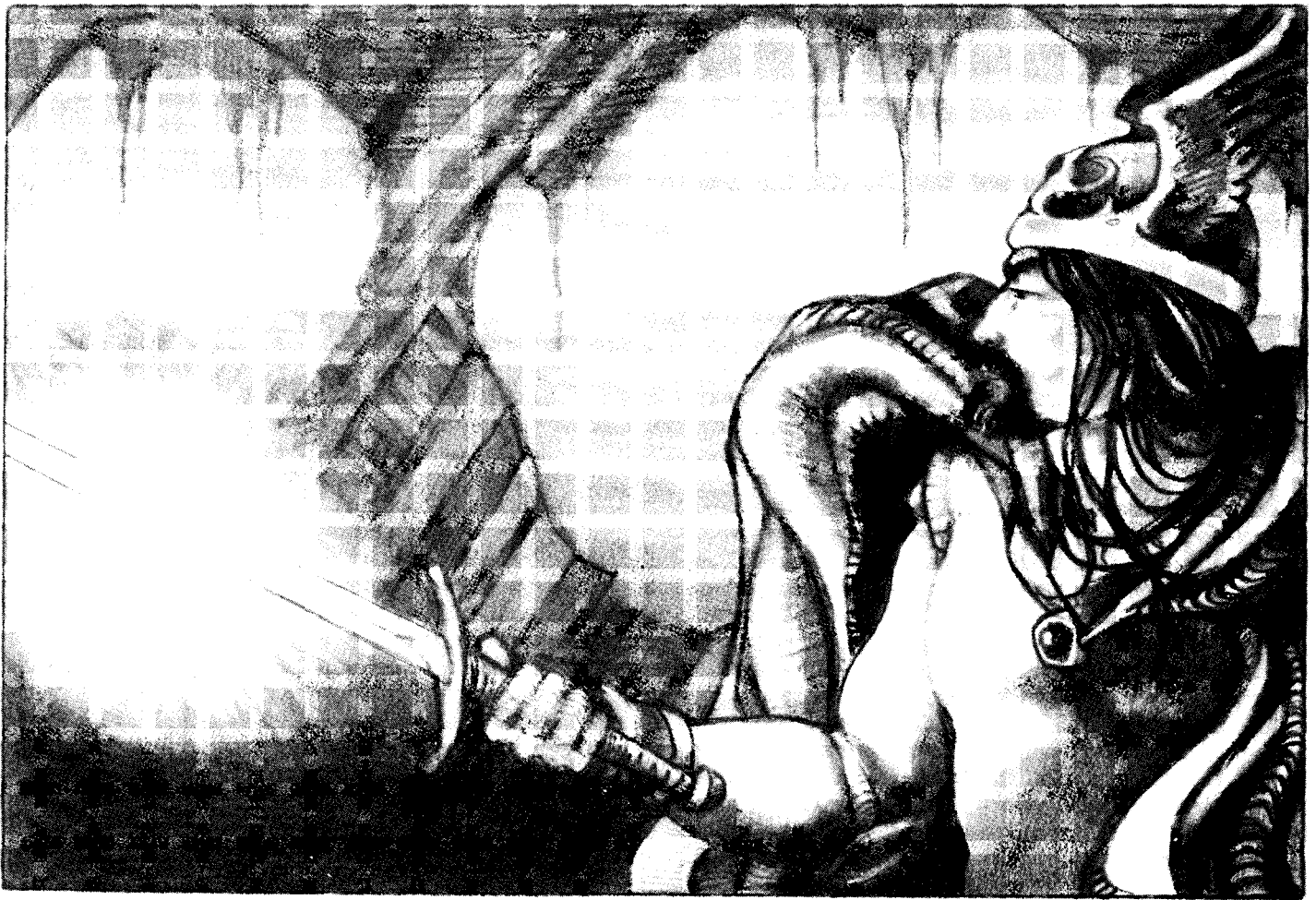
In a less combat-related example, consider an “Amulet of Protection from Undead”. Not too gross an item when the scenario has only a few zombies, skeletons, and ghouls around — but what does it do when a player enters a scenario in which negotiation with a powerful Vampire Lord should form a good part of the role-playing? The “edge” suddenly has far greater effect. This could be alleviated by limiting *which* undead the amulet controls, which leads us down the checklist to . . .

**2) How Often, How Easy?** Too much magic in FRP works too often and too effortlessly. Wands take on the aspect of phasers, secret doors become meaningless, foes that should be a challenge are blown down like bowling pins hit with nuclear bowling balls and there's more light than Con Edison generates in ten years.

Detection devices are easily the most-abused items in this category. How often have you heard this: “My sword is out and it detects all undead, traps, secret doors, and major demons within 100 feet!” Argh! At the very least, the range of these detects should be cut down fairly close (say 5 — 10') and they shouldn't all work automatically (or simultaneously). The idea behind magic is not to replace the good player's caution (or make up for the lack of it in the bad player); it should only make it a little easier for the good player to exercise caution. Moreover, there should be some limit to how many undead, traps, and so forth an item can detect in a given time period. Why build clever traps if every one of them can be detected *every* time?

For a rationale, look at the magic mechanics in most FRP games. Things like *Arduin's* Mana, Lowering of Power in *Runequest*, and *lowering of Strength in T&T*, the various “spell-point” systems and *D&D's* Vancian “I shot my wad” rules *all* indicate that the amount of magical energy that can be released is limited and at some point no more energy is available. If you accept the limitations on the “weave-it-out-of-the-air” sorcery which characters practice, you can accept that at some point an item will run out of energy and can no longer perform its function.

When designing your items, look at them as “containers” of magical energy, as opposed to generators of



that energy. The way Spirit Crystals work in *Runequest* (a set amount of power for use) and the Charges in various *D&D* items are examples of this kind of thinking in the system-designer's mind. The same sort of thinking should be part of all magic items that you design as an independent GM.

Of course, an argument against the "container" theory could stem from the functioning of armor/weapons and protection devices. If you think about it, however, you'll realize that even these "constant" items must function only sporadically — their magical energy is only released when *needed*. In fact, it is quite possible for a piece of magic armor or a magic weapon to lose some of its potency or even fail to function entirely *if* the GM so ordains. (Even Moorcock's soul-hungry Storm-bringer occasionally had its fill!)

That reference brings me to yet another concept/rationale, namely limitation for the sake of *story*. I see FRP gaming as a sort of living literature. Items which provide too much power hurt the story aspect of FRP by taking the responsibility out of the hands of

the participants. If you read through some of the various works of fantasy literature (or even consider fantasy movies), you'll note one very interesting point. Magic *may* pull the protagonist's butt out of the fire on occasion — but generally that magic will only work for a very limited time.

Michael Moorcock's "Eternal Champion" stories are prime examples of this. Elric can wield immensely powerful magicks, yet his capabilities for doing so are always limited (sometimes by his own energy, more often by the fact that the forces he must call on are dangerous to summon more than once in a lifetime). Prince Corum in the Swords Trilogy acquires several formidable items of magic, but each disappears very swiftly as Corum's story develops. The reason behind this rapid turn-over is of course a literary one: too much magic defuses the hero *as a hero*. If Arioch jumped to help Elric every time, we could not take Elric's challenges seriously; hence, there would be no story. Granting the difference between literature and FRP gaming, we still need heroes and heroines whose challenges are *real*. The same principle applies:

unlimited magic nullifies challenge.

Now that you know *why*, here are some suggestions on *how*. You could simply apply a power/charge system to *every* item of magic (and that's a reasonable idea), but there are other ways to go as well. One such way is complex *activation* procedures. In other words, the player must figure out how to make a prize work. I'm not talking about a simple command word, but something like "the amulet must be held between the thumb and middle finger of the left hand and breathed upon three times". Or, "a drop of the wielder's blood must be applied to the tip of the wand". Such procedures make players experiment more, often with hysterical results. For example, I once designed a secret door which opened only when a drop of blood was touched to a specific section of a bas relief. This was the only door in the adventure which opened in this manner, but the players kept pricking their fingers every time a similar relief came in view, hoping to discover another such door.

In the instance where a command word is the activating force, a GM

should *hide* the word as inventively as possible, or even leave it off the item altogether. Command words can be invisible, written in magic, or written in a specific language. (I prefer specific languages, for it encourages players to enhance their linguistic abilities as well as foiling “Read Magic” spells or devices.)

In cases where the command word is left off the item, players must rely on various knowledge spells, or visit sages, or ask NPC mages about the item, and so forth. All of these things foster deeper role-playing. When the item in question is found in the hands of a foe, I generally have the foe say the command word; with luck, the players will remember it, if and when they obtain the item.

I eschew command words like “Heal”, “Fire”, and “Kill!”, preferring commands like “Bratheer”, “Calmaro” and other “foreign-sounding” words. Consequently, my players often mispronounce the words and the magic remains inert. Poems or special phrases also make better commands for items than one bland word. They take longer to get out and can easily be garbled — and they add

more dimension to play. A mage that says, “By the Dark Beggar’s Eye / Let mine enemies fry!” is more colorful than one who merely screams, “Fireball!” In addition, by way of justice, when a character dies and his “comrades” rush for his magical paraphernalia, they often foul up the necessary incantation because they haven’t been listening when the player used it. Of course, the GM must insist that players speak the incantation each time they use an item (which I do).

Another benefit of complex activating procedures is that they can negate the “instant” strike capacity of many a powerful item. Take for example the “drop of blood on the tip of the wand” ploy. This ensures some time both to strike with the wand and to repeat a strike. In cases of very potent items I often set up an activating procedure that may take several combat rounds. I am also fond of “delayed” magic, where an item works once and then takes some time to recharge itself for another use.

The key factor in “How often/how easy” is to keep magic items *lively* by limiting their use, and adding some dimension to role-playing by being very specific in how the item works. The GM can be very inventive in this category; his or her players will always be guessing and experimenting which is what magic should provide when items are found. Weigh that against saying, “You found a wand that says ‘Cure’ on it” or “You put on the ring and it makes you invisible” and you’ll understand the benefit of asking “How often/How easy”.

**3) Adds/plusses.** This is a fairly self-explanatory category that nevertheless is too often overlooked. A character’s natural bonuses should weigh in some measure in how effective he or she is with some magic item. But to how great an effect? I know of one elvish character in a *D&D* world who, due to dexterity plus his magic bow plus his elvish plusses plus a magic quiver full of magic arrows, winds up at roughly plus 10 when firing an arrow. Given the character’s level, the result is simple: he *never* misses. If you go back to checklist category 1, you’ll see that the edge here is simply too great.

So what’s the answer? *Impose a limit* early in the campaign as to how effective a character can be with magic weapons (which is about the only kind of items this category refers to). In *AD&D* I award a maximum bonus-to-hit of +5 except in special circumstances. In *T&T* I count a weapon

with heavy adds as the *only* adds the player gets. Such admittedly arbitrary limits keep characters formidable but not invincible. Where magic coupled with magic is concerned, the same type of limit should be clear in your mind; too much protection is the same as too much firepower.

The category of adds/plusses also takes in a reverse area: *cursed* items. I love a good cursed item and early on I set up one rigid rule on such things for myself: a curse should foul up the player *despite* his or her natural abilities. I formulated this rule to deal with a situation where a dwarf with very high strength ran afoul of a cursed sword. The player looked up his bonuses and found the sword a minor “inconvenience”: he merely went from +3 to hit to +1 (the sword was -2). He even wanted to count the sword as magical for purposes of things only hit by magic weapons. He was not quite as pleased when I told him that a curse was a curse, and no matter how mighty he had been, he was now -2 to hit, *period*.

**4) Specific Character Types.** A good way to limit magic items is to make them usable by only certain types of characters. Once again, this cannot apply to *Runequest* — however, it is possible to create Cult-Aligned items or items usable only by RuneLords, Shamans, or Rune Priests. I strongly favor allowing only mage-types to use very strong magic and priest-types to use Deity magic, but this is a stylistic point. I also believe that not enough magic has been allotted only for the roguish among us. A good FRP party is one in which each member can contribute in equal yet diverse ways. “Specialized” magic items make this possible.

**5) Destruction.** Every GM has created some sort of eldritch gewgaw that became a vast pain-in-the-brain. If a method of destruction is assigned to an item beforehand (complete with any appropriate saves for the item), a lot of arguments between GM and player are avoided once the item is in play. (The designation *indestructible* should be reserved for only the most precious of arcana.)

I have seen players seriously consider sacrificing themselves in favor of a beloved magic item, so it is vital that the GM know he has *fairly* trashed such a bauble, should that time come. Destruction of an item should be tied to its make-up and power; as a general rule, *most* magic doo-dads should have a better chance of resisting destruction than ordinary items of their ilk. I recommend making up cards for most

**36A** You are standing in front of the dark-robed stranger. He takes the scroll from you, thanks you, and gives you the gold pieces you agreed upon. If you completed this adventure under a geas, he does not pay you.

Take 1000 adventure points for successfully completing this mission. You are done.

**36B** Before dying, the last guard managed to pull a lever on the wall which dropped a steel gate across the hallway, preventing you from going further into the palace.

If you have not yet killed the guards in the courtyard, you will now have to fight them. There are two of them just like the ones you just defeated. If you kill them or have already killed them, you now enter the third door on the left as you were told. Go to 38C.

**36C** If you have already killed the guards in the courtyard, go to 11C. If you ran from the guards after having been seen by them, go to 27A.

Otherwise, you walk back into the hall and sneak back to the courtyard. If you attack the guards, go to 34C. If you try to creep around to the back wall and climb over unnoticed, go to 8A. If you make a mad dash for the wall, hoping to take the guards by surprise and get over before they catch you, go to 38B.



magic items you create, with such designations on the cards. Methods of destruction of an item can also be very vital to scenario development. (That silly ring of invisibility that Bilbo Baggins snared spawned quite a scenario, don't you think?)

6) *How apparent?* A very simple explanation for this category would be: "Oh a ring, *Detect Magic!* Oh a wand-shaped object! Point it! Hey, a rug on the floor — *Fly Baby!*" The "traditional" appearance of most magic items leaves little doubt in players' minds that an item is worth taking. Now, it is *not* fair to use very obscure verbal descriptions to throw players off — after all, their characters are *looking* at the item in question. However, it's perfectly fair to describe a very simple item as "an old piece of rope", "a tattered jerkin", "an earthenware jug", "a quill pen", and so forth. Assuming no tell-tale glow emanates from any of these items, players may very well pass them by.

Magic — particularly lower-order magic — need not be presented with flash. Once your players discover this fact about your items, they will begin to examine things more closely, which spices up the level of challenge for *you*. Characters will also start lugging around more and more useless dross and wasting magic detection spells.

On the other side of the gold coin, an item which *looks* magical can lure players into a trap or a careless action. Very unique items should have a very *special* look. This look can be used in various rumors, legends, and stories to assure the party that they will *recognize* the Great Orb or the Wand of Sakitoome if and when they come upon it. Moreover, this *look* enables the GM to do some clever counterfeiting when such is desired.

As a small test of your creative powers regarding "apparency", imagine a party coming upon a normal human character who is in reality a master assassin. The circumstances of the encounter dictate that the assassin will probably be searched; the assassin's goal is to infiltrate the party and get within range of a certain victim. Your test is to come up with an arsenal for the assassin that will not be readily revealed in a search of his person, yet which you can describe fairly to the players.

7) *What it can't do?* Although there are GMs who think of themselves as gods, no GM can really cover *every* possibility in a game. Players are clever and creative in their own ways and can always hand the GM an



unexpected surprise. That's part of the fun of FRP, too. But that's why it is crucial when designing magic items to have some idea of what they *cannot* do. Suppose you have just given away a pair of slippers that will enable the wearer to walk on water. In a later game, the owner is faced with a pit full of acid. Can he walk safely across the pit with the slippers? He can, if by "water" you meant *any* liquid. Otherwise, he'll sink like a stone! Of course, there is another consideration: will the acid destroy the slippers and/or his feet, even if he can walk across it? You can see that even a fairly simple item can cause arguments when the designer fails to fully consider its abilities.

The consideration of what an item cannot do is even more vital in very powerful or complex items, such as devices which stop time, change shape, or alter reality. It's impossible to account for everything a player might try to do with an item, but with some thought you can cover most reasonable situations. When you design your item, put yourself in the player's position. Come up with different uses for the item, then see if (as a GM) you

would allow such "offbeat" uses. If you wouldn't, then you know what to say the item cannot do.

**8) Legend.** An FRP campaign without legends is like a dragon without scales; magic items are definitely candidates for the stuff of legends. If an item in your game is legendary, you must consider several points.

First, how well-known is the legend — and who knows it? An item of elvish origin would probably be more familiar to elves than it would be to humans or dwarves. An item forged by gods/goddesses/devils will probably be known to all who worship those entities and perhaps to the general populace as well. Some items will be legendary only to specific sects, cults, or circles, while others will be "forgotten" legends known only to certain characters or to some esoteric oracle.

The type of legend you choose for an item can provide clues to its possible whereabouts, and to its capabilities and possible baneful aspects (an item of evil repute, for example). Moreover, if an item is legendary, it stands to reason that the item *may* be recognized by certain people, or in certain places. A character who acquires the Aegis of Zeus should expect worshippers of Zeus to recognize it. This may be to the character's benefit — or it may make a target of him.

Where legendary items are concerned, it is not a bad idea to create them without actually placing them anywhere in your map and keys. You can throw in pieces of the legend in the general course of the campaign, "seeding" the milieu for possible future quests. Players can use these legends in negotiations as well (e.g. "We know where to find the All-Seeing Nose-Flute and if you'll heal our comrade we'll go get it for you").

You should avoid items that are merely dubbed legendary but have no actual legend to them. Obviously it takes more work to create a legend — but in FRP gaming the GM's work makes for the best game.

Finally, just because a goodie is legendary doesn't mean you should go hog-wild on its powers. The same approach should be used with any item. Indeed, it is quite fair (and utterly fiendish) to have an item's actual power distorted by the legends around it. In other words, the All-Seeing Nose-Flute may not really be *all-seeing*.

#### **9) Fitting an item to the scenario.**

To some extent FRP has advanced far beyond the room-treasure-monster/

guardian phase, and this is a turn for the better. Magic items in a good scenario will not be placed by random dice rolls but by careful thought on the setting in which they will be found. A tomb of some long-dead magician may have some eldritch yummys simply "lying" around, but a working Fane of an Evil God complete with worshippers and Priests probably won't. By the same token, the magic in that Evil Fane should be of a primarily evil nature. Finding a Holy Sword in such a place is most unlikely — unless the Sword is being "protected" from the hands of do-gooders.

Usually magic items belong in the hands of the denizens of a particular place. A fortress manned by Lizard-Folk will have weapons, wands, and devices which are only usable by the Lizards and possibly not by anyone else. Too many scenarios seem to hang out magic like laundry; items are situated *only* so they can be found by adventurers, without logic as to why they are where they are. This abuse is doubly exemplified by NPCs who carry items they never use when confronted by a party.

Fitting items to their setting is very simple if you exercise a little common sense. An underwater setting will probably yield potions of water breathing, magic tridents, arcane nets, braziers to control water elementals, and so forth. Mine shafts are likely to contain lighting devices, excavation implements, and helmets that enable the wearer to breathe noxious gases. By placing items in context, the players can use their own intelligence when they use the items. This is not to say that sporadic "Left-Field" items may never appear — but the key is once again to have a general idea of *why* and *how* they got there.

#### **10) Fitting the item to the campaign.**

If your entire world is ruled by Chaos, then nothing has to be a part of the order of things. However, since most FRP worlds are *ordered* creations, magic items should be a part of that order. If Green signifies Good and Red is Evil, then most of your items should reflect that color scheme. Keep your symbology consistent at all times, especially where magic is concerned. And stick to the "feel" of your world. If halflings have particular skill in crafting and the use of musical instruments, then give them bonuses in dealing with magical items of this sort. On those occasions when an item is of "alien" origin, the logic of your world will (or should) inform the players that it is an exception.

**38A** The guards wear leather armor and carry broadswords. Each guard has a CON of 4d6, and combat adds of 1 die + 2.

If you can make a L1-SR on LK, you can take them by surprise and do full damage to one of them the first round. If you kill them, you get 200 experience points. If you don't kill them within 5 combat rounds, reinforcements (1 to 6 additional guards, similarly equipped) will come running from the palace.

Once you have killed the guards, you may walk down the hallway. Go to 27C.

**38B** Make a L2-SR on LK. If you miss it, you must fight the guards. Go to 34C. If you make it, you are at the base of the courtyard wall.

To climb the wall, make a L2-SR on DEX. If you make it over the wall, go to 36A. If you miss the saving roll, you fall. Take one die of damage directly off your CON. The guards attack; go to 34C.

**38C** You have found the library, and the scroll with the purple ribbon lies on the table before you. You have also found a man in flowing blue robes, sitting at the table. He looks up at you and says, "May I help you?"

If you attack this man, go to 8C. If you demand that he give you the scroll, go to 27B. Or, make a third level saving roll on IQ (30 — IQ); if you make it, go to 40B. If you miss, go to 27B.

11) *How many?* This essential category is largely a matter of subjective thought. There is too much of everything in most of the places my characters have visited. Magic weaponry in particular seems to grow out of the walls, as do Bags of Holding, devices which detect secret doors or traps, amulets of protection, and eldritch armor.

It is in the nature of FRP gaming to have magic run rife — but there is a point when the abundance of magic items becomes ridiculous. My concept of “how many” is simple — the more there are, the less valuable and wondrous a specific item will be. If everyone in a party of second-level characters bears magic weapons after one or two adventures, there are too many enchanted arms around.

You may have a campaign in which many magic items are truly needed — but think about it first, in depth. A Bag of Holding is not all that powerful, but if several party members have them, your vast treasure hoards will be carted off like grapes from a vineyard and your players need never worry about being too encumbered to make their escape. If an item does not do a massive amount of damage, or grant the wielder some outrageous destructive or protective power, then it can be duplicated over and over as a low-level treasure.

When items function to negate certain facets of the game (finding hidden treasure, dealing with the absence of light, carrying away treasure) then the participation of the players is also negated. A little bit of this is all right; a lot hurts. Try to keep even comparatively weak magic rare. You'll find that your players will value it more and use it more wisely.

12) *Minimum attribute.* This is another way to limit the power of an item while providing a wider chance of its “distribution”. Complex magic items should require a fairly high degree of intelligence to be used correctly. Other items might necessitate a fairly high charisma (e.g. an item that contains some inner “spirit” that must be “negotiated” with), a good deal of wisdom (e.g. a priestly tome), or exceptional strength (e.g. a powerful bow). The Power attribute is a good limiter in *Runequest*; a *T&T* GM might require a large amount of Luck to figure out the workings of an item.

Minimum attributes can also completely confound a party. If they have learned that a “thingie” will generate a bolt of compacted Bleu Cheese Dressing when the word “Toss” is spoken, they probably won't be able to figure out why it doesn't

work when Fat Ralph the Mage tries it. (However, *you* know that Fat Ralph is too ugly to call up the spirit of the master chef/mage in the wand!) Keep some sort of rationale in mind when you set up a minimum attribute for use of an item — and keep to yourself the fact that a minimum is required. If the party doesn't figure out that Gorgeous Georgia will succeed where Fat Ralph failed, *tough*.

13) *Side-effects.* This is definitely an under-used area for magic limitation. A well thought out side effect can keep even the most potent of items in sufficient check. Consider Bilbo Baggins and his precious ring. Take away the “addiction” effect of the ring with the chance to become a creature of dire evil, and you spoil its challenge.

Side-effects can also promote some wonderful fun. A healing device which works by having a character drink the blood of a creature becomes delightfully nutty if the healed character then takes on some characteristics of the creature who donated the blood. A wand of shape-changing which backfires on a roll of 6 on 1d6 can cause wonderful consternation in the mage who had planned to turn a demon into a fruitbat. For more serious consequences, consider a shield that leeches life energy in order to provide protection; or armor which incinerates

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a character who commits a cowardly act while wearing it. The possibilities are virtually limitless in this area; side-effects should be considered even for the most casual of magic items. However, GMs should beware of the pitfalls of destroying playability altogether.

#### 14) *Supplanting of character function.*

This is a very subtle point, but one worth a phrase or two in any theory of magic item design. What makes a player character a favorite to the player is often the skill that character can employ in specific areas. A thief or rogue who has phenomenal success in finding traps or opening locks, an elf who consistently uses his talent for finding secret or hidden things, or a priest whose power is the bane of Undead, revels in the use of these skills. When a magic item supplants these kinds of skills, the character in question loses a part of what makes him or her special to the party. This is not to say that a thief wouldn't want a Necktie of Trap Detecting, only that the item supplants his natural abilities in that area. (The same applies to a game like *Runequest* which has no character types but *does* allow training



in all sorts of skills. The difference is that the item directly supplants the *skill*.)

Further supplanting of character function is evidenced in items which allow a character to read magic or languages, cast spells (even if that character is not a user of magic), climb walls, etc. This is indeed a subtle point; you as GM must decide when an item goes too far in overriding what the characters should be doing. If no one is playing a thief in your world, you may want to design a device that picks locks — but if your rogues are legendary for their nimble fingers, keep that device out (or limit it).

15) *Color/Fun.* Every piece of magic should be colorful in some fashion. This color can be in the form of how the magic is activated, how it discharges, how the item looks, whatever.

Describe things with some panache. "A well-crafted broadsword with a blade of bluish metal, an oddly-cut emerald in its hilt bearing a set of triangular symbols that are nothing like you have ever seen." It may only be a broadsword that adds one die to the attack roll (*T&T*), but when you splash it with color a player values it more.

Giving an item the power of speech always makes it more fun, even though the item does very little else. For example, there is a certain sassy amulet in my campaign that always speaks up at the wrong time and considers itself the greatest amulet in the world. It isn't, as the players discovered, but they had plenty of fun separating the amulet's boasts from its actual function.

Where fun is concerned, too many magic items come off too seriously. It's a Wand of Utter Devastation! A Ring of Mighty Shielding! A Cloak of Savage Power! *Da DOOOOOM!* For the sake of fun, think atypically. Polymorphing is usually fun, particularly if the thing changed into is a little bit weird (self-polymorphing devices). I created a Tiara that turns the user into a *whale*, provided he or she is in a sufficient amount of water — because the opportunity to experience the might and grace of such a creature would be fun for me as a player.

I also have a kettle which cooks up gourmet meals, sticks that turn into winged daggers upon the proper incantation, mirrors that reflect the "true" self, and potions that make the oddest sort of creatures fall in love with the imbiber. There is more to magic items than damage and healing; my suggestion is to go for the sheer joy of it. When all the theories have been spouted and all the arguments presented, one factor of FRP still reigns supreme: if it ain't fun, why play?

16) *Playability.* This category encompasses every other category on the checklist; it is easily the most important of the lot. What makes an item playable for a player rests on the answer to a single question: Can the player use the item and still advance in the basic skills of role-playing? *or* does the player rely solely on the power of the item to survive?

A major reason why too many players never get beyond the hack-and-slash school is that GM's have made

**40A** The guards are chuckling. One of them says, "What have we here? A bumbling fool trying to break into the palace? Throw down your weapon and surrender!"

If you throw down your weapon and surrender, go to 11A. If you want to attack the guards, go to 38A. If you want to turn and run, go to 8B.

**40B** Thinking quickly, you tell him that the king sent you to get the scroll with the purple ribbon. Make a L1-SR on LK to see if he believes this lie. If he does, he hands you the scroll. Go to 36C.

If you miss the saving roll, he calls you a liar. Go to 8C.

**40C** The stranger says, "Good! Meet me behind the palace wall in one hour." He stands up and leaves the inn. You may take any equipment you have with you on this adventure.

You meet your new employer behind the palace wall; he has brought a fifty-foot rope with a grappling hook. If you don't have one with you, he gives it to you.

"The library is over this wall, and through the courtyard, then down the west hallway, to the third door on the left," he tells you. "The scroll is on the table. It's the only one tied with a purple ribbon. Now go. Good luck." Go to 11B.

kill-em-and-grab the easiest solution. When dragons can be slain with a single stroke and Deities and Devils faced with almost casual contempt, you cannot expect players to try and role-play their way out of things. If you give them the power, they will use it and they will be fully justified in doing so. Look around at your next FRP convention and see if the level of play matches the level of character. In many cases it won't, and too-powerful magic is one of the causes.

Where playability for the GM is concerned, the essential factor is how much the item affects his or her entire campaign. Such playability is more of a factor in open-world games than in closed worlds. The closed-worlder is much more aware of playability, as he or she provides all the elements. The open-worlder *must* deal with items acquired elsewhere, and that's when the abuses I've discussed become readily apparent. After seeing things like the "never-miss" blowgun, the sword Orckist (+20 vs. orcs; +15 vs. goblins, hobgoblins, and kobolds; and +10 vs. everything else!), and various devices that provided 100% protection against virtually everything, I was

tempted to strangle a few addle-pated GMs. Oddly enough, in my brushes with these devices, I encountered a very interesting phenomenon: even the *players* felt they were too much ("Yeah, well my GM runs a real Monty Haul world").

For an item to be playable by a GM, it must work within the challenge of the game. This means not only does it give the player an "edge", but it also tests the GM's own inventiveness in meeting that edge. Also, if the GM defines a magic item *completely*, he or she staves off arguments about its function. By following the checklist, you can insure that your items are playable, not only in your world but in universes created by others as well.

### Conclusion

So much for my musings, theories, and opinions on magic-item design in FRP. I sincerely hope this dissertation aids you in creating new and better items of eldritch power for your game world.

Before I leave you to your own devices, I have a final suggestion on this topic: *never* be a slave to what you read about FRP. Be it my checklist or various lists of items that appear in

game systems and game magazines, *you* call the shots for your own world. This warning extends especially to the vast horde of game "modules" currently available to FRP players. There is nothing wrong with using a module as part of an overall campaign. Modules save you work, give you breathing space between your own adventures — and many are quite well-designed (many are also garbage-squared, *mais c'est la jeu!*).

Nevertheless, a module represents the viewpoint of its designer and his or her view of arcane power may not jibe with yours, so tread carefully. Don't let players con you with arguments like, "Well, it says in the rules that the Helm of Slime gives you the ability to see through concrete." If you want the Helm to have that power, okay; if you don't, then don't be afraid to *throw it out!* The true magic in FRP is the wealth of imagination and the joy *you* bring to the people who play with you. Without it, role-playing is just pencils, dice, and paper. With it, there are thousands of worlds waiting to be explored, all of them with something *special* to give. ■

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(Letters . . . . .continued from page 16)  
none left to send to individuals or stores.

The problem of sending the subscriptions Third Class is being worked on — we're in the throes of the USPS red-tape factory which (one hopes) will allow us to mail SA magazine rate, which is Second Class. This is supposed to be handled just slightly less efficiently than First Class . . . so make of that what you will.

Theoretically you should receive your issue about the same time the stores receive their copies of SA. But even then you won't receive it before the stores. That isn't what the subscriptions are for and abrasive letters can't change that. Even nationally distributed magazines like Omni show up on the newsstands before subscribers receive their copies.

I suspect that many of the letters received were mailed because the writer was concerned that his or her issue was lost in the mails or that FBInc had lost the subscription order somehow. Without trying to preach, patience is still a virtue. If you see SA on the stands, wait about two weeks — or until a friend has received his issue — before writing to ask if an error has been made. There will always be some problems; one of them might involve you — so a question is justified. But don't jump the gun and be sure that you aren't complaining about something that is not relevant to the question, or unchangeable.

(EDITORIAL . . .continued from page 2)  
between the flintlocks of T&T and the laser guns of WEB, there will be the .44 magnums of **Mercenaries, Spies, and Private Eyes**, being designed by Michael Stackpole. This, too, will be compatible with T&T (and WEB, for that matter), and will provide for scenarios ranging from Mike Hammer to Sherlock Holmes, from James Bond to Indiana Jones.

We've got more coming, even if you aren't a role-player, too. The boardgame **Berserker!**, based on Fred Saberhagen's well-known series of Berserker tales, is past the playtesting stage; you should see it before too many more months have passed.

Better than that, (depending on your point of view), is **Nuclear Escalation**, the companion game and expansion set to the very popular *Nuclear War Card Game*. *Nuclear Escalation* stands completely on its own, using rules similar to the rules of *Nuclear War*, and *Nuclear Escalation's* deck can also be shuffled into a *Nuclear War* deck for a bigger, better, more devastating game of *Nuclear War* than you had before! All the cards in *Nuclear Escalation* are brand new, including such gems as Spy cards (who steal

secrets and carry Satchel Charges), Cruise missiles (that circle the board until their owner decides to drop what's being carried), Killer Satellites, and Submarines! The artwork is still being completed for these, but the playtesters are telling us it's as much fun (and more!) than *Nuclear War*.

We'll try to keep you up-to-date as work advances. None of these projects is ready for sale, and if you write with an order for them, Grimtooth will bite your arm off (in other words, watch this space and Arcane Graffiti and don't send money!). We'll let you know when they're ready.

Larry DiTillio has become the newest member of our staff. In addition to becoming a Contributing Editor for SA, Larry has joined Paul O'Connor and Mike Stackpole on our design team to form the Three Stooges of the Gaming Industry. Or so they say . . .

And finally, since editorial space is limited, I'll direct anyone with questions about subscriptions to the letter column in this issue . . . it's a much more appropriate forum for that than here, anyway. On that enigmatic note I'll bid ye adieu and wish ye good gaming til next issue. ■

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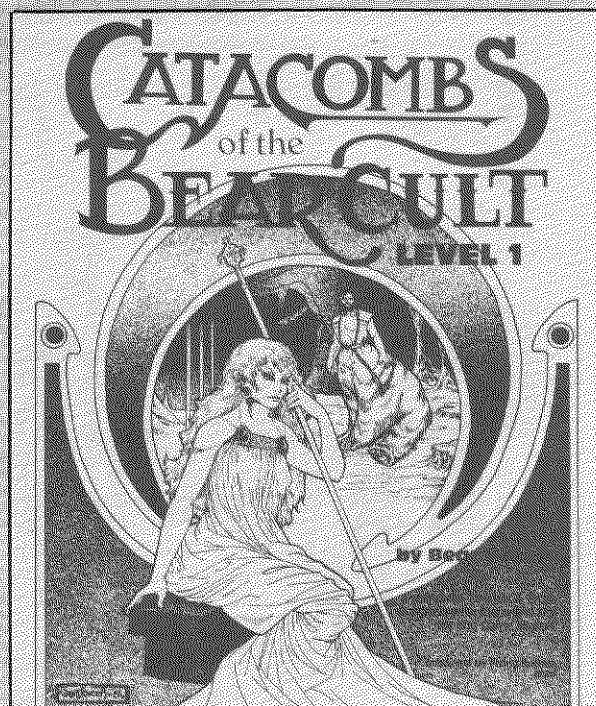
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