

THE LOG THAT FEELS

#1

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Hello!

I suppose I had better begin with a quick self-introduction.

I've been living in the Greater Boston area for the past seven years. I'm 30 years old (as of a few weeks ago), work in a law firm downtown doing things I'd rather not think about, and frequently wrestle with the idea of law school. I shoot the occasional amateur video, voraciously read science fiction, fantasy, and old pulp detective novels, and have one of the largest collections of such books that I've ever seen (most of it in boxes due to the space restrictions of my apartment).

I've been writing oversized zines for The Wild Hunt APA for about three years. I write science fiction and fantasy short stories on rare occasions.

My first roleplaying experience was in junior high, with perhaps the ultimate killer GM; I didn't resume gaming until my first year of college in Pennsylvania. There I met an outstanding bunch of gamers who introduced me to deep-characterization roleplaying and the **RuneQuest** RPG system. I've been gaming and

GMing ever since, though in strict point of fact I haven't done much *playing* for more than a year; I GM once a week, though. Most of the time I run sheetless games set in worlds of my own creation, though every so often I get involved in **RuneQuest's** world of *Glorantha*.

Let me see...what else? Oh yes. I'm an InterNet addict, and I have a red beard and wear glasses (just to explain my 8^>} icon). Any other questions? Drop me a line.

Bar Wars

The first version of the following article was written over five years ago; I was struck by an idea, and had to write it up. At the time, however, I had no computer. I ended up working on it on an old PC in an empty room at work during lunch.

It received positive responses from my friends, and so I sent it in to a then-major (and now more major) commercial roleplaying magazine. The editor responded quickly: he liked it, but wanted me to remove all the short humorous links between sections and re-submit it. I privately thought that the humor was one of the better things about the piece (many friends agreed), but nonetheless rewrote the piece as required. Removing the humor made it necessary



to create new linking sections, as well as a new introduction and conclusion. It turned out to be quite a job! Given the limited amount of time and computer access I had at the time, it took months before the rewrite was done. But eventually I did finish, and sent it back to the editor for approval.

His response came quickly. He found some of the remaining writing in the main body of the work humorous, and wanted it removed: also, there were a few sections that he wanted extensively rewritten. He'd very much like to see it after those changes had been made.

Once again I set to work, and this time the job turned out to be even more extensive than before. It was months of steady work before I could send it back to the editor.

He liked it very much, he assured me. Just one more thing, and we'd almost certainly have a sale. Would I be willing to completely rewrite the piece, changing it from a general "how-to" guide to a list of specific mini-scenarios? And write several new sections, to boot?

Suddenly I discovered a curious thing: I was unable to look at the damn thing, much less rewrite it again. Month upon month of my lunch hours had been spent rewriting the article to the specifications of this humorless ass—and for what? The money was negligible, even compared to my modest salary. I certainly wouldn't gain fame from publication; even the most popular game magazine reaches only the tiniest fraction of the population. And the pride of having been professionally published was starting to seem

very pointless indeed.

I dropped the article in a drawer and forgot about it. A few friends have seen it since, but I never published it, even when I started writing a regular zine—perhaps I subconsciously wanted to save it for a special case. In any case I'm pleased that I can present, for the first time in any publication:

GETTING IT TOGETHER: **The Cure for the Bar Wars Blues**



The majority of Gamemasters are handicapping themselves.

It may seem hard to believe, but most GMs neglect one crucial role-playing design element before the campaign even begins: the PC party Genesis story.

The PC Genesis story explains how and why the PCs are together at the start of a roleplaying campaign. It may be created by the GM before play begins, or may consist of the first session or sessions of the new campaign. In any case, it serves to bind the characters together as a group, reducing the chance of party disintegration when differing characters desire to go their separate ways. It can also serve as a powerful roleplaying

enhancement tool for the GMs use: by providing the characters with deeper and more meaningful personal histories, they will have stronger ties to the campaign-world... and that adds to everyone's enjoyment of the game.

Time and again, throughout the campaign,



elements of the Genesis story may be evoked. Old enemies, friends, and mysteries can resurface, with great impact. If desired the Genesis story may act as a superstructure for the entire campaign; occasional PC interaction with early friends, enemies, and mysteries can provide pivotal points at which the characters may assess their progress from their roots.

A fine example of the Genesis story may be found in the legend of Robin Hood. His noble birth, honorable father, conflict with Norman tax-collectors and eventual outlawry are the foundation of his character; they give his legend meaning. So, too, does his first meeting with Little John. Had Robin Hood and John Little been characters in a modern roleplaying game, they would not have had their famous battle on the log-bridge. Instead they would have met, along with all the other Merry Men, at a local bar and decided to form their band for no reason at all!

Genesis Stories may be divided into four basic types. These are:

1) A common background. The characters know each other before play begins. They don't have to like each other, but it would help.

2) A mutual acquaintance. Someone somehow brings the group together, either intentionally or not. They could be a friend, enemy, or business person.

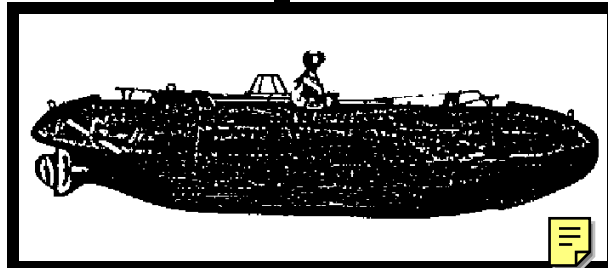
3) A shared oddity. An unusual quality that the characters possess brings them naturally together.

4) Sheer happenstance. An Act of God, natural disaster, or other bizarre and random event forces the characters to stick together—at least for a while.

Often more than one theme is used in a single campaign, and in many cases the

categories overlap. The following list is by no means complete; it is intended only as an example of some basic starting scenarios. The gamemaster should change, combine, add to, and otherwise customize the examples to fit his or her world. In almost every case, the scenario described may be used in any campaign background with only minor alterations.

* * *



1) The Old Home Town

One way to establish a reasonable link between characters at the beginning of a game is to simply have them all come from the same town or village. As playmates since infancy, they would share common memories of childhood, and would know one another's quirks and foibles from experience ("Sure, Fuzzy's weird, but remember how he bit the schoolteacher who was hitting squint-eyed Janet?"). The home town could serve as a natural focus for the campaign, providing rest, community contacts, and a greater sense of identity to the characters. A threat to the home town would be a natural way for the characters to begin their adventuring lives, and if the party becomes well-known and powerful ("the Protectors of Greentree Village"), foes might threaten the village for any number of reasons.

A drawback to this particular beginning scenario is that characters from the same village might well be rather restricted in type. In sharing the same culture and general background, the group would lose the ethnic/racial/social diversity that can make the gaming experience a three-dimensional one. This drawback may be circumvented, of course; it is possible, for example, that some childhood friends moved away from the village at a young age (or were kidnapped, or lost), and were taken to a far-off

city (or desert, or forest, or planetoid). Only recently have they found their way back to the town and friends they remember from so long ago!

There is, finally, one other advantage to the home town start: barring tragedies, you can always go home again.



2) The Party That Slays Together . . .

One interesting campaign beginning could go the Home Town route one better for togetherness: all the characters are part of the same family. The possibilities are endless— aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, brothers, sisters, mothers fathers, sons, daughters—even in-laws. After all, if you can't trust your own flesh and blood, who can you trust? An adventuring family would soon acquire a reputation for oddness ("those crazy Stonebenders!"), and might well be the source of some local legends. Generations of adventurers bringing home treasure would give the family great wealth that might well lead to political and economic prominence. Older characters might "retire" to run the family holdings and businesses, adding a political element to the campaign. The family could offer great support to its active members, including free training, funding, and perhaps even a little "special" help, in the form of unusual items of salvage from previous expeditions. Feuds, friendships, debts and

obligations: all would take on a multi-generational quality. If, on the other hand, the gamemaster would prefer not to have to deal with a large family, the characters could be orphaned siblings, or even identical quintuplets!

Many of the drawbacks of the Home Town scenario apply to the Family option as well. Furthermore, one should keep in mind that most homicides take place between members of the same family ("Mom always liked you best!" (thwack)).

3) The Enemy of My Enemy—Is My Friend!

An excellent reason for a group to form is for mutual protection and revenge. Even if the player characters are completely unrelated— even if they've never met each other before—when they discover that they share a common enemy, it is likely that they will find it desirable to stick together for safety's sake. One campaign theme might have the characters trying to discover why some powerful figure has taken a dislike to them. The Enemy, of course, should be powerful, enigmatic, and patient; he/she/it/they might make some plot against the characters, suffer a defeat (or perhaps win a non-total victory), and not return for months, thus providing a continuing challenge over the years. The Enemy should be carefully created by the gamemaster, of course. Why does he/she/it/they hate the player characters? What is his standing in the community, and how will he prefer to attack? Is his area of power physical, religious, political, social, criminal, etc.? A party used to fighting fierce fanged creatures deep underground would find themselves at quite a disadvantage against a cunning noble with the ear of the King. In any case, the Enemy should not be easily or quickly defeated. The Common Enemy theme is a powerful one, and is an element in several later examples. Here is a simple one:

The characters are approached and hired as agents/ couriers/travel agents for a powerful and

mysterious figure. They are told that the mission will be short, and not too dangerous. The pay is high enough to be irresistible, but not so high as to arouse suspicion. What the characters do not know is that they are being sent into a trap—that they are mere decoys for another group. They are meant to die, but they survive (it would be ridiculous to kill player characters before play begins—but killing some NPCs would impress them). Now the party knows that their former employer is involved in an illegal activity, and furthermore they have strong reasons to desire revenge. Realizing this, it is only natural for the employer to try and eliminate the group as a threat—permanently. If the party ever does manage to destroy the Enemy, perhaps he has relatives—or superiors in a secret society that wishes to take over the world...

4) A Friend In Need

Another classic theme useful to create a sense of group identity among the player characters is that of the common friend. After all, one of the more common ways that real-world people meet each other is through mutual acquaintances. As with the common enemy, the common friend is a theme capable of a number of different uses and permutations; a basic example follows.

Each of the player characters-to-be knows a particular individual by one means or another. To some, he/she may be an old friend of the family. To others, he/she is perhaps a business contact, or a trainer, or a religious official, or a fence. Eventually, in the time-honored tradition of friends everywhere, the friend decides to perform a little matchmaking. Perhaps he has word of some profitable task that his various friends might be interested in performing, and would like to have his friends owe him a favor. Perhaps he

himself is in need of a bodyguard for some reason, and wants to pass a few coins on to the player characters at the same time. In any case, he gets the party together as a working group for the first time.

Taken by itself, this beginning is rather dull. It gets the job done and introduces a major NPC, but does not establish an interesting plot line to be carried on throughout the campaign. On the other hand, this scenario does offer a reasonable way for characters of greatly differing backgrounds to meet and work together; the only requirement is that the characters have to know the NPC friend and be in the general area at the start of the campaign. Of course, some player characters may refuse the initial offer; in that case, it is up to the gamemaster to entice, persuade, or otherwise trick them into joining the campaign. Note that there is no need for the characters to know each other before the friend puts them together. Nor need the individual be a friend; he may simply be someone who needs a service, and hires the adventurers individually, then forms them into a group.

5) Resting In Peace?

The characters have reason to mourn, for they have received word that an old and valued friend has died after a sudden illness. They are invited to attend the funeral; after the ceremony, the will shall be read. The deceased was rather wealthy, and without any close relatives; it is likely that he has left, at the least, some memento of past good times—though hopefully the characters will not be motivated by greed (solely). In any case, all come to the funeral. Some player characters may meet

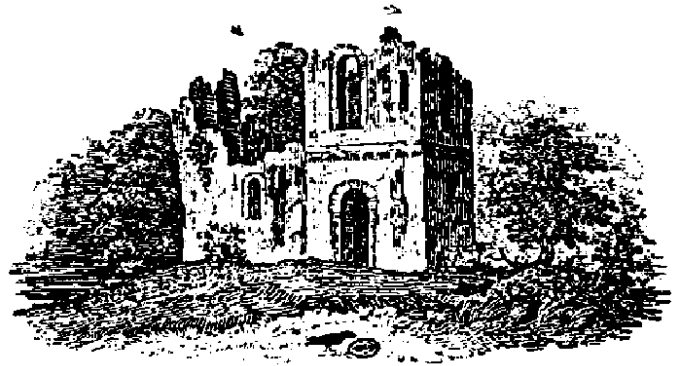


at the funeral for the first time, while others may have been introduced previously. Upon arriving at the house, they are met by the Executor of the estate—a stranger who claims to have been an old friend of the deceased (though the deceased had never mentioned him). Accommodations are available at the local Inn. At the ceremony, the casket is kept closed. Before the coffin can be lowered into the grave, however, there is a disturbance in the crowd—a veiled young woman apparently suffers a nervous breakdown, screaming “He isn’t dead—he’s not in there!”. Lunging forward, she opens the coffin lid part-way before anyone can stop her. Though the lid is slammed down almost immediately by the Executor, the player characters are in such a position as to have seen the contents—and they have seen enough to know, or at least suspect, that the body inside is not that of their old friend. The sobbing, hysterical girl is quickly taken away by two large men in formal wear, at the signal of the Executor. Covering the sounds of the girl’s cries as she is borne away by the thugs, he smoothly asks that the guests forgive the girl, who was “...overcome by the loss we all share. Let us not spoil the dignity of this, our friend’s final farewell!”.

At the will reading the next day, the player characters are shocked to hear that they have inherited the equivalent of \$20 in cash. This cannot help but raise their suspicions—their old friend had always loved to personalize his gifts, sometimes spending days to choose the perfect birthday present. The bulk of the estate, including the house, has been left to a stranger “...for his many kindnesses and that he may continue his Good Works.”

Who knows what mystery lies beneath these strange happenings! Is the friend really dead? If so, where is the body? Perhaps he has been kidnapped by some cult of undead, or is faking his death for business reasons. Who was that girl, and where is she now? How did she know the truth about the coffin? The Executor

may have powerful influence in the city government—he will not look kindly on threats or unproved slander. Can it be that there is something of value hidden in the old friend’s house—is he being tortured, the house being searched? The possibilities are limitless, and any player character worth his salt should find the urge to snoop irresistible.



6) A House Divided (Joint Custody)

The characters are confused, for each has recently received a strange communication. The Lord Banifir Mufti has recently passed away, and has bequeathed an unnamed “object of value” to each of the characters. They are requested to journey to a nearby city to receive their inheritance. A sum of money has been included with the message, sufficient to cover all traveling expenses. A special coach has been chartered to bring the inheritors to the Lord’s manor.

Only one thing is wrong. The characters have never met Lord Mufti—in fact, they’ve never even heard of him, though they can discover through inquiry that he is a reclusive and eccentric noble/philanthropist. Still, the possibility of wealth should prove hard to turn down.

Upon arriving at Mufti Manor, the characters are lavishly received. The Executor (a respected professional shyster) hands each player character a small, oddly-shaped metal plate. Each is a part

of a single inscribed document: put together, they form the deed to a large estate in an interesting (gamemaster-selected) area, including tower, manor house, and perhaps, servants. The will stipulates that the deed-pieces are not transferable; upon the owner's death, they revert to the group possession of all surviving members. The deed has legal force only when completely assembled. Unfortunately, one inheritor is still missing. His piece is held by the Executor, who does not know what has happened to the last inheritor, but will not release any information about that individual. The will stipulates that each inheritor has another twenty-four hours to pick up his/her bequest.

The next morning the Executor announces that the inheritor (a cloaked man who bore the letter of invitation as proof of identity) picked up the deed-piece during the night, and left again without comment. Shortly thereafter, an assassination attempt is made upon the characters. . .

7) Innocent Bystanders

To make use of this beginning, it is helpful if the game world possess some kind of group transportation (coach, subway, or jet) which the characters would use. In an Act of God (?), there is a terrible accident, and the characters are stranded together, far from the beaten path. The character must work together to make their way back to civilization. Though a form of transportation works best for this scenario, any apparently random, isolating accident works quite well—particularly if there is some question as to whether it is really an accident. The dislocation may take place through the actions of a god, or may be the result of some arcane experiment with ancient

knowledge. It may even be so mundane an event as a shipwreck. Perhaps the characters are actually transported to a different world entirely! In any case, the new location should be dangerous, and the characters should realize that there is some way back home, giving them an inducement to stay together. Once the characters have been working as a group for a while, it should be only natural for them to continue—if they work well together, that is.

8) When Gods Play Chess

Through some strange means (magical or scientific) the characters have each been implanted with an uncontrollable impulse to return to a certain desolate spot at a precise time (after all of them have reached adulthood). Upon reaching that spot at midnight, they are surprised to see all the other player characters, arriving simultaneously —and still more surprised by a

flash of bright light that scorches each of them without burning. At that moment they discover that they are in mental contact with each other—they can hear each other's thoughts! Though they have never met before, they quickly find that their parents (of those that knew their



parents) did.

The characters are all the products of a strange experiment by some unknown god/alien/scientist/whatever. In addition to being mindlinked, they may discover that they experience crippling pain when separated by a certain distance; they may also find that they are exceedingly valued, for one result of the experiment is that their bodies are endowed with a powerful virtue.

In a magic-based world, any body part from

a player character serves as a triple strength material component for purposes of enchantment: for example, a player character's eye, when used to make a crystal ball, would make one three times as powerful/effective as a normal crystal ball, etc. Enchanters would, of course, be extremely interested in this information—and in the characters.

In a science-based world, the character's blood has the power to make those into whom it is transfused 2-12 years younger. Inducement indeed to stick together, and keep moving!



9) Bread Upon the Waters

A group of merchant investors contacts the players. They wish to reap some of the great dividends available to a freelance salvage/protection/investigation group; therefore, they are offering to bankroll the formation of a new corporation by the characters. They will provide limited funds and equipment, and in exchange the characters will return 50% of all their earnings. A contract should be drawn up, and carefully enforced. Occasional duty guarding caravans might be required, and some special missions might be offered at bonus rates. Of course, should the merchants fall out among themselves, the characters could find

themselves in the middle of a very nasty trade war...and if mere possession of the contract gives the holder authority over the adventurers, a merry chase might be led by thieves. Consult local laws for further details.

10) Squeeze Play

Each of the characters has a strangely-shaped birthmark in the middle of his forehead. Though they may not know each other to begin with, others may point out the strange similarity of the marks. What do they mean? The mystery of the marks would be a good first investigation-adventure—and as always, if the group works well together they should stay together. As for the marks, perhaps a race of ancient beings has encoded ancient powerful secrets in the genetic codes of the characters' ancestors for record-keeping purposes. Who might be interested in that information? On the other hand, perhaps the marks were actually caused by an unusual pair of birthing-forceps (forceps sometimes do cause birthmarks on the head—Gorbachov is an obvious example). How long will it take the characters to discover that they were all delivered by the same travelling doctor? What is that doctor doing now?

11) The Company



For whatever appropriate reason (boredom, escape, apathy, what have you), each character has been sent by a relative or teacher to apprentice themselves to a prestigious adventuring Company in a far-off land. Each has a letter of introduction, for their sponsors each know a member of the band personally, and have done them favors in the past. Upon arriving, the players are quickly accepted and sworn in as apprentices in the Company; for some reason, there seem to be no old apprentices at present. The characters are instructed to care for the house and lands, and to perform basic apprentice-type tasks. The Company members seem to be good people, and treat the player

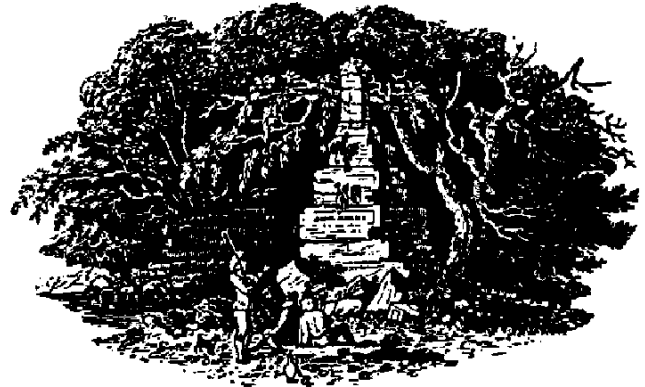
characters well. After a few weeks, however, they depart to complete a small salvaging operation, leaving the characters behind. Though the round trip was supposed to take only a few days, after more than a week there is still no sign of the Company. The characters' natural concern should become still greater when they discover that tax time is fast approaching, and that heavy taxes are due on the Company House. Unfortunately, as apprentices the player characters were never told how to enter the Company treasury. . . . Furthermore, they may later discover that the old apprentices were dismissed for committing an unknown crime. Now the old apprentices view the house and possessions of the Company as theirs—and in their eyes the player characters are unwelcome interlopers. The desire of the old apprentices to re-possess the house is understandable, for the value of the Company name and reputation alone is great. Combined with the other assets of the Company (library, treasury, house, and much more), the worth is incalculable. However, in addition to facing the hostile and unethical old apprentices (who now call themselves by the Company name), the player characters may well have to deal with all the old business of the Company, including debts, contracts, protection, etc. With all that to deal with, how can the party possibly find the time to look for the old Company members, or improve their own abilities to a point where they can take the old members' places without looking ridiculous?

* * *

It's easy to design a starting scenario that simultaneously works to keep the player characters together, and that provides a strong theme throughout the campaign. Such continuing plot elements give players a stronger feeling for their character's place in the world, resulting in better characterization and roleplay.

To create and run a successful role-playing

campaign requires imagination, quick thinking, and hard work. A little forethought and planning at the right time and place can make the gamemaster's task a lot easier.



RuneQuest In Ruins?

HOT OFF THE PRESSES:

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the turmoil that has overtaken my favorite published roleplaying system.

RuneQuest has been undergoing difficulties for the last seven or eight years, at least. When Avalon Hill obtained the publishing rights to the system from the prestigious Chaosium game company (perhaps in 1986?), many were disappointed by the lackluster support given the new RuneQuest 3 edition. Very little supplementary material was released by Avalon Hill, a sure-fire recipe for failure; after all, who's going to buy a system that's not even supported by its own publisher?

This was quite a disappointment to me. I'd been a strong fan of the system for years, and one of my personal goals had always been to write and have published a supplement for RQ. Though the system seemed to be going nowhere, I still introduced friends to RQ. Often they became enthusiastic fans of the game themselves. Understandably. RuneQuest was the first of the skill-based roleplaying systems, and is still one of the best ever produced. In addition, the world of Glorantha which came with the system was one

of the best-detailed and most enjoyable game settings available, offering unexcelled scope for deep and fun roleplaying.

Thus I was most pleased when interest in RuneQuest showed strong signs of reviving. And I was delighted to be a playtester for RuneQuest 4!

Grass-roots support for the system has been growing at an astounding pace. The InterNet is a hotbed of activity; two electronic mailing lists, the **RuneQuest Daily Digest** and the **RuneQuest 4 Playtest Discussion List** generate enormous amounts of intelligent and interesting text every day. In fact, I doubt that any roleplaying system in the world—even AD&D!—has generated as much intellectual discussion as RQ.

Though the initial playtest version of RuneQuest 4 had many flaws, the new version, RuneQuest: Adventures in Glorantha seemed definitely on the right track. Many problems from the previous playtest edition had been corrected, along with some minor problems from RuneQuest 3. The enthusiasm of the participants in the InterNet discussion groups made it seem likely that there would be a plethora of new RQ material; though Avalon Hill was apparently only interested in publishing a few supplements every year, more would surely be available from other sources, and on the Net.

And then just a few days ago Greg Stafford, the creator of Glorantha and President of Chaosium, refused permission to have the manuscript published.

I don't know all the details of what happened, unfortunately. For no reason that I can discover, my subscription to the RuneQuest 4 Playtest Discussion List where all this was being discussed was suddenly cancelled just as the refusal was announced. Frustrating!

However, the situation does disturb me. I've become more and more inclined to run my own worlds as time has gone by; only a few weeks ago I ran a one-shot scenario without dice or a

system of any kind (I'll write up that experience in a later issue). I don't **need** RuneQuest 4. But I do have a strong sentimental attachment to it. Granted, the new version wasn't perfect. It was overly complex, and in some areas the writing was a bit awkward. Still it was clearly superior to most of the new roleplaying material on the market today.

I don't know what Greg Stafford's reasoning was. I'm too much of an iconoclast to take *anyone's* word as written in stone, but I do respect Greg's judgement. I assume we'll hear some more details from him soon (if I ever get re-subscribed to the discussion list, that is). And I'm not ready to fly off the handle about this—some people are understandably quite upset about this unexpected development, having spent years working on the project. I suspect that there has been a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication involved. Still, this sort of ruckus is the last thing RuneQuest or Glorantha needs. I'll report on further details as they develop.

NEXT ISSUE:

Book reviews, CD-ROM reviews, possibly some fiction...and of course more roleplaying material.

—>Pete

Colophon:

Interregnum #1 was partly written using **PC-Write** 2.5, an old but venerable editor. It was formatted for desktop publication using **Publish-It 4.0 for Windows**.

Secret message? But I can't think of anything funny to say!

