


THE LOG THAT FITS

#3

© Peter Maranci May 1994

81 Washington St., #2
Malden, MA 02148 

home: (617) 397-7958
InterNet: maranci@max.tiac.net

Chaos has firmly asserted itself in my world as my computer has once again taken the Big Dive. Will it start today? Will it stay up? Will it make those awful noises again? I don't know. I just hope the CMOS doesn't die again, whatever *that* is. ☹

I'd be less annoyed if I hadn't recently taken the stupid thing into the shop and left it there for a week. The technicians performed every test in the book, only to come up empty. It's hard to refute animism when the machine stalled on boot-up every time in the days preceding my service call, and then booted up dozens of times without a hiccup at the shop. There's probably a perfectly simple explanation. Please, someone, call and tell me what it is! ☺

In any case, I have no way of knowing whether or not I'll be able to get this issue out on time. In fact, I don't even know if the computer will start again once I turn it off. I am not happy with this situation. Serves me right for not paying \$\$\$ for a national name-brand system, I guess.

THE JUNGLE


I've never enjoyed any game run by the **Society for Interactive Literature**. For those who aren't familiar with such games, the concept is simple: Groups of forty or more players interact (usually over a weekend) in a huge game with pre-written characters. Though the games are technically live-action

roleplaying, they involve no physical combat. Instead, any conflict that cannot be resolved by talking is handled with some sort of simple mechanic such as rock-paper-scissors or various card games.



Too often such games are nothing more than a forum for pointless widget-hunting and in-group egoboosting; the worst elements of politics as seen in those gaming organizations I've been involved with. Petty personalities run amok, and who you know matters much more than what you do.*

But the *concept* of the SIL-type game still fascinates me. I've dreamed about it a number of

*That's not to say that there has never been a decent SIL/ILF game. But I've never been in one. ☺ 

times (the most recent occurrence being noted in my comment to **George Phillis** thisish), and so have some others I've spoken to. The potential is there; it's in the practice that things fall apart.

After a truly horrendous experience with the Foundation & Destiny SIL game (written up in a past issue of The Wild Hunt), I was bitterly disappointed. I knew that I could do a better job. Inevitably I found myself working out ideas for a better SIL-style game. The basic plot structure would be cooperative and inclusive, rather than competitive and hostile. Roleplaying would be the focus, rather than widget-hunting. Every player would be equal under the rules and in the eyes of the judges. And the game would have to be designed to make innovative use of simple props and available resources to create a different and exciting atmosphere.

The basic setting began to take shape. The game would be called *The Jungle*. It would be an original creation, but would draw strongly on the works of Rudyard Kipling: specifically, on The Jungle Books and Kim. In the heart of a deep jungle, an ancient City stands: the City of the Covenant. Within dwell Men, Spirits, Gods, and Beasts, in peace under the covenant to which all have agreed. But every hundred years the Covenant must be renewed. At the great Feast of Renewal those who bring and feed the most guests will receive the greatest luck in the next century.

The Gods (GMs) do not bring guests to the Feast; they are above matters of luck and

unluck. But there are many groups that compete to bring guests: Nobles, Traders, various Talking Animals, and several different sorts of Spirits.

There's more, of course. A river runs from the outside world through the Jungle to the City, and many things swim in that river and float on it; one room at the game site might be designated as the River. Those travelling from one place in the Jungle to another via the River must go and spend a certain amount of realtime in that room, which would be lit with green and blue lights; water sounds would be a helpful mood setter. Some PCs would be permanent River-dwellers, interacting as they might with each others and passersby (and adventuring to other areas, too).



The God of Fate would spin the Wheel of Destiny in the City. There the slain would go to discover the nature of their afterlife: as Spirit (and what sort?), reincarnation as a Beast or Man, or something stranger. In times of astronomical significance the Wheel might stop or spin backwards, causing strange changes in the participants.

The Jungle may never be produced; it's not one of my higher priorities, and in any case I've no interest in joining the various organizations that put on such games. Still, it *is* an interesting idea, and I think it could be a lot of fun (after several hundred hours of work, anyway).

If you have any ideas for *The Jungle*, please pass them along. Perhaps someday *The Jungle* will be the first Interregnum-sponsored LARP.




THE LAST GENERATION

Star Trek: The Next Generation has finally run its course. Only seven years ago I doubted that it would ever succeed; now, I'm truly sorry to see it go. Oh, it had a number of shortcomings. They never really managed to create aliens that were much more than people in rubber suits with glop on their faces. Likewise, the science doubletalk was often embarrassing and annoying. The lines were sometimes trite, the plots often preachy, moralistic, and obvious. While watching the show I would often rant about the annoying coincidence of so many plots obviously representative of the problems of 20th century Earth. "Oh yes, there was quite a ___ problem in 20th century Earth." Fill in the blank as you wish: drugs, race, religious, terrorist, environmental...apparently after the 20th century Earth became unbelievably boring. The problem wasn't really that they dealt with such issues, though; after all, to some extent they are universal. No, the annoying thing about the show was that it so often made the morals so condescendingly obvious. They dealt with the issues strictly from a present-day viewpoint, missing out almost completely on the larger view. At the same time, they'd often take the easy way out and use some sort of magic science device to avoid the crux of the problem.

I hadn't intended to excoriate the show so harshly. They did improve over time, in many ways. It was an entertaining show, apart from the dreadful and ghastly "Space-Dwelling Lucky Charms Folk Meet the Anal-Retentive Clones" episode. The special effects were pretty, though newer shows have begun to eclipse STNG. All in all, it was a good show.

But I doubt that there will ever be a science fiction series that will dominate the field in quite the same way ever again. Too many others are producing decent science fiction shows these days, and though I may be

overoptimistic I think that science fiction is here to stay on the tube. It's about time!

Star Trek and **Star Trek: The Next Generation** were the major causes of the infusion of science fiction into the mainstream. In that sense, their mission has been completed successfully. 



NOTHING BUT NET

The future of the **RuneQuest** roleplaying system remains in doubt. Negotiations are being conducted between **Avalon Hill**, the publishers of the system, and **Greg Stafford**, creator and copyright-holder. Near-absolute silence is the order of the day; no one is saying anything until some conclusion is reached. To the many active RQ fans on the InterNet, the waiting is agony.

Yet there is more high-quality RuneQuest available now than ever before, and more is coming out every day. Some of this appears in the various new RuneQuest magazines, but by far the majority of it is being published on the InterNet first.


I find it impossible not to wonder at this situation. How is it that a system which has been so poorly supported can inspire such huge quantities of material from fans?

Of course, RuneQuest players tend to be among the most scholarly and mature folk in the hobby—not to suggest that non-RQ players aren't upscale, but it's safe to say that there are damn few hack-n-slashers playing RQ. It's also true that most of the material being distributed on the Net is extremely poorly organized, mixed in with pointless rules bickering and unreadable analyses of inscrutable details and minutia. Nonetheless, amidst the dross is more gold than is being written for *any* other game system of my acquaintance.

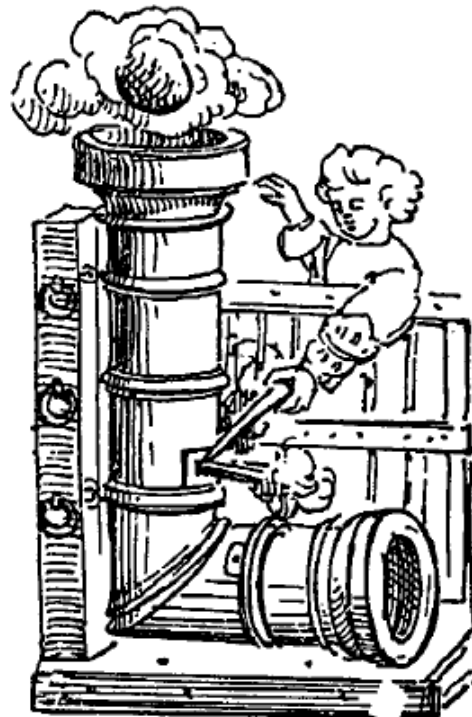
Can a game system exist solely on the InterNet, and actually flourish as a result? It seems possible. After all, the Net is a vastly superior distribution system. It reaches millions of people—I don't remember exactly how many, but certainly upwards of twenty million—all over the world. It goes right into their homes and places of business, whereas stores can only reach those who walk through their doors. From a strictly mathematical viewpoint, the Net offers access to more people—and from a roleplaying viewpoint, a better quality of people. Most Net users, being at least minimally computer-literate, are therefore likely to possess above-average intelligence. I don't have statistics to back me up, but I feel sure that the percentage of roleplayers is higher in higher-IQ groups. Also, MUDs and computer 'roleplaying' games have made roleplaying a more accessible and understandable subject for computer users.

Of course there's the issue of quality. The raw ASCII format is not very sexy; no pictures, no choice of fonts, little if any layout flexibility. These are technical shortcomings that will no doubt be repaired within a few years, though. As it stands, artwork can be scanned and emailed over the Net, as can

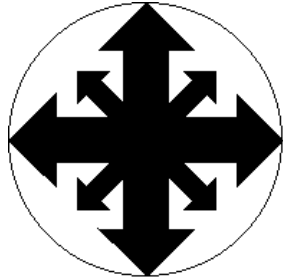
encapsulated PostScript and LaTeX. We're getting there, and in a few years it should be possible to make a better presentation via the Net than on paper.*

In correspondence **David Dunham** brought up the issue of money. Why would anyone labor to create a scenario or supplement for a game when that effort would necessarily be unpaid? There's no way to make money from publishing over the Net, except perhaps via some sort of appeal-to-the-conscience shareware approach. That may change, but I'm not sanguine about the steps that might be necessary to get there—it seems likely that massive government/corporate intervention would result, limiting everyone's access. 

On the other hand, is it necessary that something be profitable in order to be successful? Perhaps, but RQ has managed to get a lot of intelligent and talented people to spend a lot of time working for it without any hope of reward. Should RQ become an exclusively Net-based entity, that ability to inspire loyalty and fire the imagination might counterbalance the financial problems.



* what with hypertext and all.



☺ **REVIEW** ☹

The Primal Order
Chessboards: The Planes of
Possibility

Generic RPG game-world design aid

Author: Dave Howell

Publisher: Wizards of the Coast, 1993

Price: \$12.95

Format: 8.5" x 11" perfect-bound paperback, color covers, frequent b&w interior art and maps.

Length: 111 (plus several pages of ads)

Wizards of the Coast hardly needs to publish books anymore. With the phenomenal, frightening success of Magic: The Gathering the publication of anything else amounts to throwing away money. Nonetheless they've continued to put out books in their Primal Order series of metamagic/metaplane "capsystem" references.

Perhaps they (and the roleplaying hobby) would be better off if they'd publish a roleplaying game or supplement based on M:tG^{*}, instead. That might bring new players into the fold—probably not the most sophisticated players, but there's always room for improvement. Unfortunately the Primal Order series seems to be stuck in a rut.

^{*}and I've heard on the grapevine that they're doing exactly that.



Chessboards is not really a bad work. The author is clearly intelligent and literate; the technical aspects of the writing are good. The subject of planes has certainly never been covered in such detail in a roleplaying product before. There are some good and amusing ideas included. But Chessboards is not particularly a leap forward for roleplaying, because it really has no purpose.

The book consists of two intermixed elements. One is a discourse on planar construction, attributes, and travel. While the ideas are interesting and I'm not aware that they've ever before been collected in one book and published, the author doesn't *do* much with them. The discussion is too abstract as a means of presentation, too diffuse. A good reference work needs to present information in a useful form. It may seem a strange complaint coming from me, but there are no tables.



The other element in the book is extensive writeups of several planes. They're entertaining enough, I suppose, but not of such quality that GMs are likely to adopt them for their own purposes. Such detailed but useless examples seem wasteful, of my money if nothing else. It doesn't help that the included maps are of abysmal quality—and I don't mean that they're damned good. 8^>} I should mention that the other interior art is good to excellent, though there are too many artists to list here.

I've advocated diceless systems often in the past. The lack of mechanics seems to bolster roleplaying opportunities. And of course I've always strongly supported the idea that gamemasters are best off creating their own worlds. Chessboards fits in with all of these ideas. But it also shows a crying need for mechanics and die-roll tables.

No, I haven't changed my opinions. But there are two times when a GM will create a world or series of planes: when they create a setting at the start of a campaign, or on the fly during an unexpected turn in the game. In the case of gameworld construction, the GM will have a great deal of time to spend in contemplation and reflection; after all, the foundations of the world may be key to the success of the entire game. Chessboards might be useful in such a case, but any reasonably well-read science fiction/fantasy fan or experienced roleplayer would already be familiar with the concepts presented. If the GM doesn't already have the basic concept of the world, a little thought should turn up useful ideas without the need to read 111 pages. Alternatively if the GM doesn't want to spend a lot of time creating his game world, there are a huge number of games on the market that come with worlds already designed and ready for play.

For creation of planes on the fly, Chessboards is of limited use. Here the lack of tables really shows. When I have to come up with a new plane fast I'd much rather roll a few dice on a table, or even look at concise lists of options rather than read through page after pages of exposition (personally I just fish into the back of my head and pull out whatever jumps to mind, but that's not a saleable system). One could riffle through the book at random to find a quick idea, but that's not a very practical or efficient way to work.

The fiction is not bad, but not very interesting either.



The layout is the standard Primal Order style: one wide column on each page, and a smaller column with notes and text in italics scattered throughout on the margin edge. In fact, it much resembles **Doug Jorenby's** zine, with the column order on the right page reversed. But it's not as interesting, and the result is far more white space than I'd want to see in a book at this price (particularly since some of the map pages are blank on one side, as well—with a more compact layout this book would probably be only 60 pages long).



Finally, I have to wonder as to what *market* this work is aimed at. Like the other books in the Primal Order series, it would be decent consciousness-raiser for hack-n-slash gamers; I doubt that such are likely to buy or read it, though. It's not visually attractive enough (there's no gold foil on the cover ☺), and I have the impression that most hack-n-slashers rarely buy anything published by a company with a name more than three letters long.

Experienced gamers are unlikely to need this work, on the other hand. They've heard it all before (or most of it), and have no strong reason to spend \$12.95 to hear it again. Beyond that, only gamemasters would have any use for Chessboards at all. After all, players don't design planes (except in the Amber Diceless RPG). The

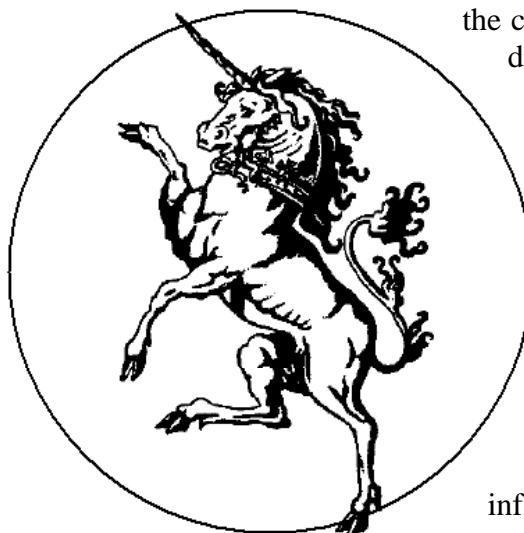
book *is* an interesting read, but there's better reading material available at a much more reasonable price.

A fraction of a fractional market...it's lucky for Wizards of the Coast that Magic: the Gathering is such a huge success. If Chessboards: The Planes of Possibility were all they had to base their business on, I could confidently predict their mildly unfortunate demise within two years.

Rating: C+

DREAMS

I've always considered myself fortunate in dreams; I have them almost every night, and even the bad ones are interesting and fun. In fact, my dreams have sometimes provided valuable insights: one I had as a young teenager was particularly memorable.




It was a "normal" dream, in which everything was as if I weren't dreaming at all; I woke up, got up, and had breakfast. My mother drove me to the doctor's office for a checkup. Afterwards I was asked to wait outside while the doctor spoke to her. Sitting near the door I could hear the diagnosis: Leukemia. I had six weeks to live.

Mind you, as far as I knew I was awake and this was real. In the dream I went home, went to bed, and lay there trying to cope with the idea of death. What I was going to do in the time I had left? When I really woke up, I was still in bed. For at least an hour I lay there awake, still believing I had leukemia. I don't know when I realized that it had all been a dream, but if trumpets and heavenly choirs had sounded at that point I wouldn't have noticed.

I can't help but think of the ancient "Is the man dreaming he is a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming it is a man?" story. Could *this* be the dream? I'm fairly sure it isn't. 8^>}

In any case, that experience has stayed with me. I've known, for a little while, what it's like to be facing death. I think that understanding has been useful to me.

Dreams have been a large part of almost all my roleplaying games, too. Sometimes they have meaning, sometimes they don't. Capturing the capricious and surreal quality of dreams is always a challenge, and always fun.

The following story came entirely from a dream. It's the only story that has ever come to me that way, complete. Perhaps that's why I like it; I have a visual image to tie it to. The closing paragraph is, of course, much influenced by H.P. Lovecraft. 

THE OLD THING

by Peter Maranci

I was walking to and fro, up and down the worlds one night when I saw an old thing, hobbling among the stars. She was as common an old thing as you'd ever want to see: wrinkled and ancient, with a big ugly black dress and kerchief dark as the sky, a few thin wisps of blue-white hair straggling out from beneath. I looked at her, and wondered what had brought such a prosaic sight to the spaces between the stars.

As always, the spheres sang all around. Nearby, a small yellow star sent a clear yellow hymn of reassurance to the tiny globes that circled it. One planet, a pretty blue-green one, pleased my eye particularly; it swarmed with life.

The planet caught the attention of the old thing, too. A gap I took for a smile suddenly cracked its wrinkled face, and one crabbed hand reached for the shining blue globe. Not quite knowing why, I reached forth from my dream and stopped the claw-like hand of the old thing just short of the sphere. The old thing couldn't see me, of course, but nonetheless was somehow aware of my presence—bewildered, it looked around, liquid brimming in its eyes. With a detached feeling of surprise I realized that the old thing was simple, its mind that of a child. Tears broke loose and sparkled in the warm yellow light, hanging before the faded cheeks like little suns.

Something throbbed in the base of my throat. The old thing had the eyes of a hurt and frightened animal. *Where had I seen such eyes before?* A strange shiver ran down my spine, and I released the hand of the old thing. She looked about for a moment, and then, with a wary gentleness that was curious to see, grasped the planet firmly and pulled it out of its orbit.

For a moment a lunatic light from some strange-colored star tinged my thoughts, and I was sure she would eat it. But no, it wouldn't happen that way now; instead she took the planet and pressed it to her withered cheek, a childlike joy in her eyes. The blue shimmered around the old thing's head, transforming it into a vision of inexplicable beauty. For a timeless moment the stars whirled around me, shining through the blue mist as I watched.

After a long while, she gently and carefully put the planet back where it had been and hobbled away, a trace of shimmering blue marking her passage. I looked at the globe, now cold, gray, and barren, and felt a cold wind blowing between the stars.

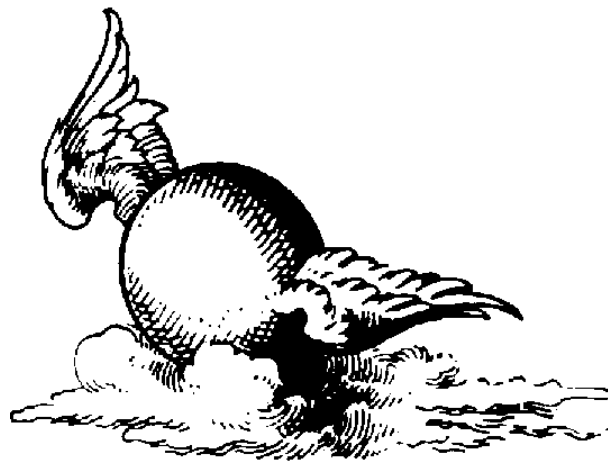
That was a long time ago, when my world was young. These days my dreams take me to darker places, places where I do not willingly

go; but even now, lying awake late at night, I sometimes think about that old thing among the stars. Perhaps she is there still.

- fin -

BE M GUEST

Rich Staats is a fine GM, a fellow RuneQuest fan, and one of the nicest guys you'd ever want to meet. He's also just received his Ph.D from MIT and will be moving to Washington DC in a few weeks—which means I won't get a chance to play in one of his games. Wouldn't you know it! However, Rich has kindly allowed me to include some material he created for an **It Came From the Late Late Show** scenario in this issue as a guest column. It's at the end of this zine. I've never played the system, but Rich's material makes it look like a lot of fun. Guess I'll have to start looking for a GM... ☹




COMMENTS #2

Doug Jorenby: Synchronicity seems to have been working when we wrote our zines for #2, Doug! Surprising that we both referred to the InterNet quote. I often read Wired, but hadn't read that issue.

✿ Your mention of tachistoscopes intrigued me—I haven't heard of those since I read **Robert Heinlein's** *Gulf*. Are they still used? How realistic was Heinlein's portrayal of them, assuming you're read that story?

☼ I laughed out loud at your account of the AD&Ders™ who were proud that their GM managed to ad lib a section of a module. It reminds me of an experience of my own: while gaming in a public area long ago I heard a bunch of AD&Ders playing in the next room; I was told that they were the “deep roleplaying” group. The gamemaster was running a T\$R module, totally unmodified—I know, because he read the entire thing aloud. Including such passages as “In the hall there are Large Red Dragons hidden behind the third, seventeenth, and twenty-third doors. The treasure is in the room behind door twenty-five, protected by a poison trap that can be disarmed by...”

The players considered themselves the greatest roleplayers in the world. ☺


Mark Sabalauskas: Glad to finally get a zine from you, Mark! Welcome to Interregnum. Guess that just goes to show that lots of begging and pleading for a zine work after all. 8^>} 

☼ The Fronelan material was great. I’m sure that many RuneQuest players will find it highly useful. I wish the spells had been available when I was playing in your campaign!

☼ For some reason your mention of the concept of Solace (for non-RQers, a sort of sorcerous/monotheist afterlife) brings the word “Solitude” to mind. Do you recall if that’s a Hrestoli concept of some sort? If not, perhaps I should work out some details and write a scenario about it.

☼ I look forward to seeing your next zine in Interregnum #4!

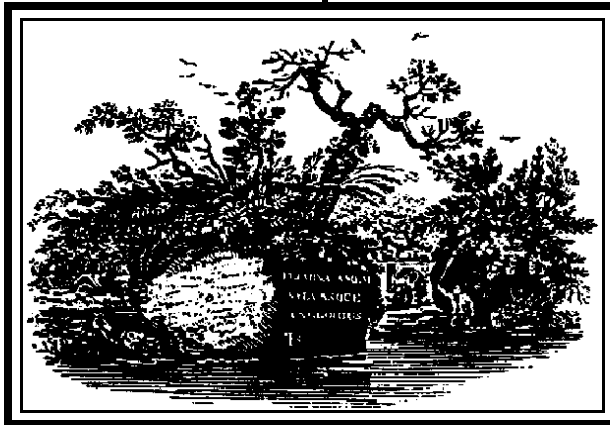
Curtis Taylor: Thanks for the Strangers In Prax errata. As soon as I dig my copy out from under the books that carpet my bedroom, I’ll look them up.

☼ Regarding the **RuneQuest** situation, I’m becoming more and more annoyed (in a mild way) with the major parties involved. The conspiracy of silence has been dragging on and on...frankly, the whole thing is starting to seem overblown. It may be heresy to say it, but this is a *game*. Too many people are getting too serious about this. 

As for the business end of it, perhaps part of the problem is that Avalon Hill doesn’t know where they want to go with RuneQuest. I don’t know if major marketing could make RuneQuest a competitor with AD&D or even GURPS; it seems dubious, at this point. With proper support RQ could be a modest success, and perhaps even grow over time. But I’m not sure that AH is interested in modest success.

Given the revelations that Chaosium was responsible (if that is the correct word) for the creation of RuneQuest III, I’m not entirely sanguine about the possibility of Chaosium taking back the license from Avalon Hill. I suspect it would be grossly neglected for other projects. In any case the rumors that Chaosium is working on a new Glorantha roleplaying game have me a bit baffled. How could such a game not infringe on their agreement with Avalon Hill?

I don’t know, and nobody is talking. If the silence lasts much longer, I suspect that quite a few people will lose interest in the whole subject. Except in APAs, of course. 8^>}




F. Bob Mosdal:

Welcome to Interregnum, F. Bob! The zine looks fine indeed. Strange that both you and Mark Sabalauskas debuted in #2 and missed #3! I hope to see you in Interregnum #4.

☼ The review of Millennium’s End v2.0 was most interesting, though slightly confusing—it took me a minute to realize that you weren’t talking about a computer game. All in all, it sounds a bit complicated. Will you actually be playing the game?

☼ Regarding Interregnum, thanks for the encouragement. At this point, I probably need it. 8^>}

Virgil Greene: Thanks for the TV reviews. It’s a pity they aren’t all on at a standard time and channel...the vagaries of Babylon 5’s scheduling locally is driving me up the wall. That’s an excellent way to destroy any show,  however good (though B5 does have noticeable flaws). Also, thanks for reminding me of *Kolchak: The Night Stalker*. One of my favorite shows, and I wish they’d bring it back.

Collie Collier: A great article, Collie. Fun and informative. I’ve made a few timelines for games in the

past, but I'm sure that any I write in the future will be influenced by your ideas.

I have to wonder, though, how many GMs these days are creating their own game worlds, much less timelines. I could be wrong, but I suspect that more games are being run in pre-published worlds than was the case years ago; after all, there are a lot more game worlds on the market.



George Phillies: The second half of Who Slays Satan was as good as the first. First-rate! You really should send this to a prozine, George. If any are interested in fantasy these days.

✿ Who Slays Satan actually inspired a very strange dream of mine recently. I dreamed I was playing in a large SIL-type game, set in a fantasy court at a time of high intrigue and suspense. The setting was more lavish than any SIL-game, though: the costumes and settings were incredibly detailed and elaborate, huge and awe-inspiring. The line between game and dream-reality blurred and vanished.

A demon had possessed a seemingly innocent courtier and was intriguing Iago-style, bringing corruption and dissent to the Court and Church. Factions struggled for power as the time of Election approached. Finally one magician-priest summoned up a trio of ogre-demons to kill the possessed courtier. "Hi, Harvey," grinned one orc-faced grey demon as he lifted his strangely twisted greatsword for the final blow, "what are you doing out of Hell?"

I thought at the time that Harvey was a strange name for a demon.

Suddenly there was a commotion, and a fanfare. A small tonsured monk came forward, holding a box. I knew that in that box was the Sacred Heart...and that while it would banish the ogre-demons, the possessing demon would be unharmed. Somehow Harvey the demon had manipulated the situation to its own ends.

The box was opening. The Heart was huge, and beating. Things became strange, reminiscent of portrayals of an acid trip on TV. Showers of sacred blood rained down over specific people, who turned their faces upward and were weirdly transformed, cleansed of sin. The ogre-demons melted and vanished. And the courtier scrambled out of sight to safety. The demon had won.

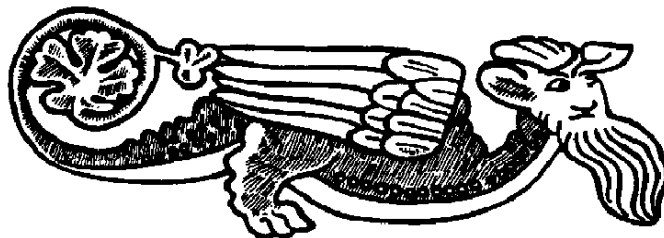
Weird, huh? I thought some of the imagery seemed somewhat Catholic, which is strange because I have very little experience with that church.



✿ Regarding the zine title: it derives from the King Log fable in the editorial page of Interregnum #1, of course. Beyond that, I'm not sure what it means; it just kind of amuses me. One interpretation might be that the zine is made of paper, which was once logs. Now it's shipped to subscribers and contributors in far-away places via airmail. Ergo, flying logs. Other interpretations are possible though. That one is just off the top of my head.

NEXT ISSUE

Text printed on white paper, at the very least. I promise. ☺



COLOPHON:

The Log That Flies #3 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30.2 brain*. Much of the text was then generated with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed at a ruinous cost at a laser printing service, on a 300 dpi laser printer.

Most of the art in *TLTF* is taken from books of copyright-free clipart published by the **Dover Publishing Co.** of Mineola, NY. Reviews of various Dover books may be printed in future issues.

The art was copied on a **Kodak 2110** high-speed duplicator.



Take care, all!

—>Pete