

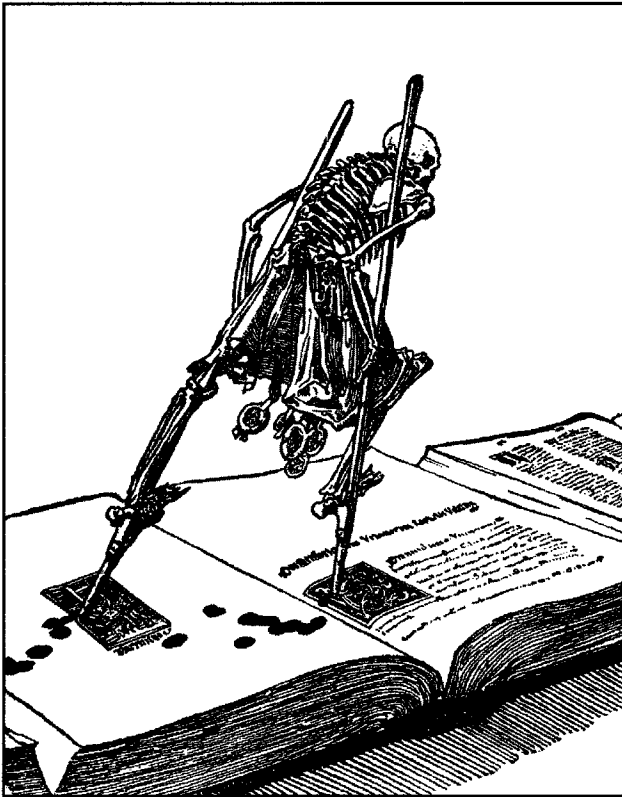
THE LOG THAT FEELS

#13

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They say time seems to pass more quickly when you get older. That's certainly true for me. Perhaps the reason is that I have so much to do.

The newest project I'm involved with is a play, an abridged production of **Shakespeare's** *Romeo and Juliet*. I play Capulet, Juliet's father: a figure of authority and anger.

This is my first experience with theatre (I don't count the two plays I was in during elementary school—for one thing, I don't really remember them). It's been extremely

interesting so far, very challenging. I'm fairly sure that long years of roleplaying have been a good preparation for the stage; at the same time, I'm beginning to wonder if theatrical work might not improve my roleplaying ability.

The play will be held on June 16, 17, 18, 23, 24, and 25th. I'll report on how it went in the next issue. Will I be paralyzed with stage fright? Will I become an acting junkie? Will I fall down the stairs and spit myself on my own sword? The answers to these questions and others will be revealed in our next exciting issue. ☺

A PLEA!

Can anyone help me? The Science Fiction Channel broadcasts pilot episodes of rare SF shows. Coming up this month is a show I've wanted to pick up for years: *Spectre*, a **Gene Roddenberry** pilot which was made in England and never developed. It stars Robert Culp as a psychic detective. John Hurt also appears. I consider it to be one of Roddenberry's best shows, though since I only saw it as a teenager my memory may be playing a trick on me. Still, I'd really like to get a copy and find out.

Unfortunately I can't get the Science Fiction Channel, and I don't know anybody who has it. I'd be everlastingly grateful for a copy of the program, preferably recorded at SP speed; in exchange, I'll gladly tape anything from my very extensive SF and comedy collection. Please write or call if you can help.





WONDER: THE BEGINNING

After a long time (years?) the Wonder campaign has finally begun in earnest. Already there have been a few problems: a couple of prospective players crapped out, while another is unfortunately moving out of the area. Three and a half players remain, which is really less than I would prefer. I'll probably advertise for one or two more players soon (come to think of it, *this* is pretty much an advertisement! ☺).

Here's how the main thread of the campaign began: As the scene opened the PCs were travelling with a large caravan, in the middle of a week-long trek across a large stretch of barren land. Early in the morning, they smelled a strange smell: a combination of smoke and something unidentifiable. Nonetheless the caravan continued onward.

It was mid-day when they began to notice that they were not alone on the plain. Far to the north horsemen could be seen; at first just a few, but soon more and more appeared. Spears and ragged banners gave evidence that the riders to the north might not be peacefully inclined.

The line of riders was a very long one, stretching both ahead and behind along the caravan route. Nervously, the group continued onward. It was only then that they saw the

armored line to the *south*—facing the northern army. They were caught in the middle.

Forward or back? The battle lines stretched beyond sight in both directions. The possibility of heading towards one side or the other was quickly discussed, but the caravan leaders decided to continue west in the hope of getting out from between.

The lines drew closer together. The PCs began to notice details in the riders and footmen: the northern warriors were ragged and diverse, bearing banners of many different sized and colors. The southern army was neat and

organized; one character recognized their standard as that of a large city-state to the south.

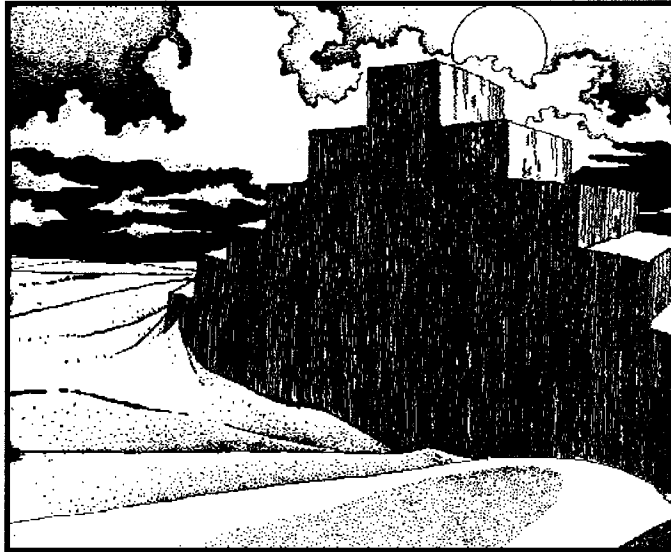
The weather became ominous. As clouds and smoke thickened the air, the two armies charged to battle.

Chaos ensued. The armies charged into and past the caravan like a tsunami into a sand castle; instantly

wreckage littered the landscape. Some of the northern berserks took to looting the broken and burning trade wagons.

One after another, the people of the caravan died. Scattered, the PCs hid or defended themselves as best they could. As the battle raged on, a cold rain began to fall.

Despite the weather, the violence of the combatants increased. Visibility was poor as night fell, but still the bloodshed continued. Hailstones began pounding the battlefield.



Late in the night, the sounds of war finally ceased. The hail became snow, and it became bitterly cold. Looking around, the scattered PCs could see nothing living.

With all their clothing soaked and freezing, and no hope of starting a fire, the PCs faced death by exposure. It was then they saw a blue light gleaming high to the northwest. In the hope of finding shelter, they began trekking their separate ways to the light.

To be continued...

THE BARBED HOOK: SACRIFICE PLAY

It was a bit difficult to decide what plot hook to write up for the topic this month; I've already written about many of my favorites in past issues, and repetition seems unwise. Likewise, I'd rather not write about any other the hundred or so plot hooks I have in my notebooks; my players generally read IR, and I'd hate to write up a good idea without using it in a game first.

So instead here's a plot hook from a game I played in, long ago. The game was run in my salad days, at Allegheny College: the place where I picked up the deep characterization roleplaying style that I still practice.

The gamemaster was an old college roommate named Geof Dale. It's possible that he mentioned that he'd derived the idea from some other source, but after so many years I can't really remember. In any case, he ran it very well. Here's the hook:

The party must reach a destination within an enclosed area—a dungeon, castle, mountain, labyrinth, etc.. Within the area is a powerful supernatural entity, who is either the immediate goal of the party or is associated with their goal (in the case of the game I was in, the party

entered a sacred mountain in search of the Earth Mother).

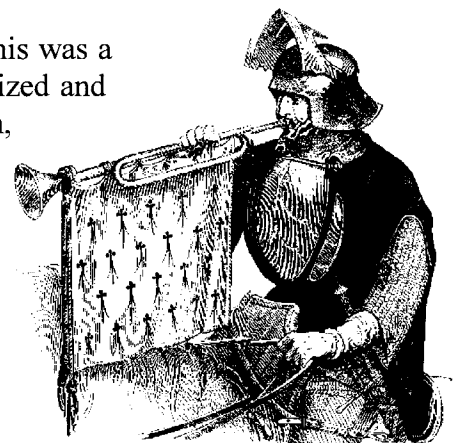
As the party progresses, however, their only way forward is blocked by a powerful supernatural guardian. They almost certainly cannot defeat it, and an attempt would surely cost many lives. The guardian demands a price for passage through the area it protects: a portion of the soul of one of them (the original game used the RuneQuest system, and the guardian demanded a point of permanent POWER).

After a while, the party encounters another, more powerful guardian. This one too has a demand: a limb. (In our case, a lizardman gave up his tail—a serious sacrifice, but less so than an arm or leg).

Of course a third and final guardian is encountered, the mightiest of them all. This one demands...a life. (As I recall, the lizardman decided that life wasn't worth living without his tail).

Beyond the third guardian is the party's goal. When they reach it, the supernatural entity within rewards those who sacrificed. The one who sacrificed POWER receives double the amount back. The one who gave up a limb gets the limb back, plus greater strength and vitality. And the one who gave up their life is brought back from the dead, with hugely increased characteristics and knowledge.

I'll admit this was a somewhat specialized and powerful situation, but it made a strong impact on all of the players. Some day, I'll probably try it myself—on people who don't read IR.



Comments #11 & #12

So much to do, so little time!

Rich Staats: (#11) A very nice analysis of Love!

Have you ever considered having love of dessert as a theme when you game with your children? ☺

* (#12) I don't think I've ever *dreamed* about GMing...in fact, the only sort of game I've ever dreamed about that I recall is SIL-style games. It's strange, since I don't do SIL-style games any more.

Altogether a very useful article, Rich, well organized and presented. You seem to be writing a lexicon of sorts for RPGs. I can't help but wonder what the next installment will be about!

Virgil Greene: (#11) One thing that might also differentiate different types of burnout is burnout with a specific *group*. After all, many of us game with the same people year after year. I suspect it's possible to get sick of the same old group playing dynamics, but still be able to be interested in gaming with new people.

* (#12) Congratulations, Virgil! That was an excellent illustration of various types of immortality. Your writing style has improved enormously over the year, and your fiction inserts are quite deft.

* The **Arthur C. Clark** book you're thinking about is The City and the Stars, in which a perfect society of immortals discovers that without the risk of death there can be no growth; an earlier version of the same book was called Against the Fall of Night. This was a substantially different work, and I'd recommend The City and the Stars as the better of the two (and as a classic of the field).

* **Nephilim** sounds interesting, though I probably won't buy it; there seems to be little point, since I haven't found a game to play in for years, and am already at my limits of GMing. Still, I can imagine that Love might exist among any life form—depending, of course, on what Love is. Ah, an insight!

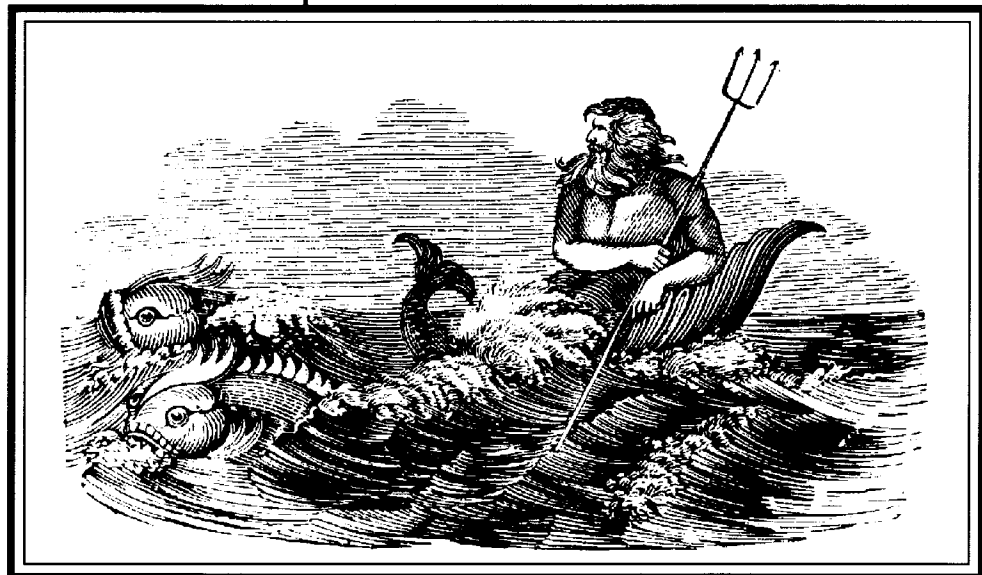
I don't really know what Love is. I doubt that anyone else, does, either. The world is amorphous, and meaning is as much where you choose to place it as anything else; I lack the faith to believe in an idealized Love that is distinct from subjective human consciousness.

That being the case, what is a good working definition of Love? Once again I dip into my undergraduate thesis, an analysis of sociologist Ernest Becker's work. He postulated that the one basic motivation of human behavior was the desire for life. We are conscious beings, and as such inevitably desire to continue our consciousness. At the same time, our intellects cannot help but perceive that death is (probably) inevitable. All human activity is therefore an attempt to escape death, and to gain more life. These attempts take many forms: association with cultural ideals, for example, which are immortal. When a Nazi threw a child in an oven, for example, he was doing good in his own mind by his standard of belief: the Nazi cultural ideal. Identifying with the Nazi archetype, he "bought" immortality of a sort for himself by making himself more like that ideal.

Love, then, can be viewed as another tool for immortality. The association with reproduction is obvious. In cases where that doesn't apply, it could be argued that an improvement of the *quality* of life is also part of the desire for immortality; we do not just desire life, we desire better lives.

Good heavens, I'm getting pedantic. Enough of that! ☺

Gil Pili: (#11) Re Factsheet 5: Oddly enough I've actually received several more requests for information as a result of their "asshole" review. I don't know why.



* It's interesting that you should mention the *Highlander* series as an example of immortality. By one definition, almost all of them aren't immortal; after all, there can only be one.

A very nice analysis of immortality, over all. It brought to mind a couple of stories: the best was the SF/mystery novel *The Mind Thing*, by **Fredric Brown**. An alien invader possesses the ability to transfer its mind to any sleeping target within a certain area—but to get out of that mind, the body must die. A rash of inexplicable suicides among animals and later among people attracts attention eventually (I highly recommend any Brown you might find, by the way).

* Regarding "Immortal": what a horrible story! It was very well written, but that's exactly the kind of story I'd rather not read. No offense intended, of course. It wouldn't have been as effective if it had been poorly written. Still, to me that was the sort of nightmare that I don't want to dream. Perhaps I project myself too strongly into what I read.



* Sure, I wouldn't mind going to ReaderCon. When and where is it?



* I'm glad you'll be looking up the works of **Cordwainer Smith**—but personally, I won't be shopping at Pandemonium any more. Not since the owner arbitrarily decided to punt the free issues of IR...he's lost my business, and I hope that many of my friends will drop his store, too. Avenue Victor Hugo is more likely to have old Smith, anyway—and of course you can order his complete collection direct from NESFA Press, or through any decent bookstore (Wordsworth is usually very fast, for example).

* Thanks for the kind words about IR!



David Dunham: Enjoyed the *Pendragon Pass* writeups, as usual. I hear you've gone ahead and created a World Wide Web page for the game. I hope you'll give the address in an upcoming issue?

* I'm pretty sure that my copy of the Star Wars RPG is the edition that *wasn't* written by Greg Costikyan, because it really stinks.

Michael Lavoie: (#11) I'm glad to give you an official (if belated) welcome to IR, Michael! I enjoyed your zine very much.

* Half your players would desert if you switched game systems? Wow. That's pretty amazing...to what would you attribute this fierce brand loyalty?

* When I reviewed your article on Love recently, I realized that there's one aspect of Love that no one really discussed: the horror of it. Of course I only thought of that because of *Romeo and Juliet*.

* I'd guess that the LARP group your friends are in is LIONE RAMPANT. *The Wild Hunt* had a contributor who was a member, but he only did one or two issues. I'd heard that the group was much like NERO (blech!), but without the petty personal politics.



* (#12) An impressive second issue! The print quality was excellent—I wouldn't have guessed that it was ink jet.

* The warrior who was made into an immortal sword is oddly similar to one of my old PCs—a sword who was made into an immortal warrior halfling. The sword was magical, intelligent, and fated to slay a powerful evil wizard. Though the wizard was unable to destroy the sword, he did the next best thing: he changed it into the most harmless form he could think of. As it happens, I believe the halfling still slew the wizard. For his reward, he received a Wish: to be turned back into a sword. As a bonus, he gained the power to manifest an empty but animate suit of armor that couldn't walk, but could throw...so when last the character was seen, it was travelling by manifesting its armor, throwing itself (the sword) as far as possible, and re-manifesting at the landing sight to throw again. Weird.

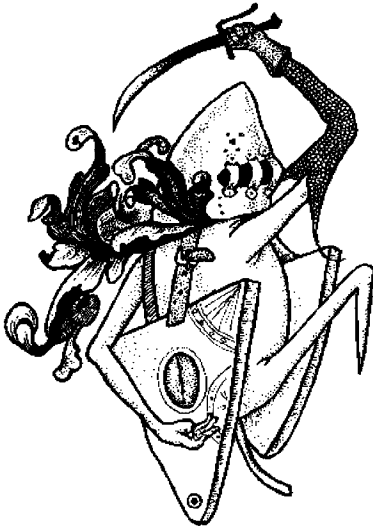
* "Arden's Victim" was a very enjoyable read: well paced, nicely plotted, and with believable dialogue. "Objectionable content"? It's disturbing that science fiction people would be that restrictive. It was really quite mild, as far as that sort of thing goes.

Something about the story did remind me of RPGs, by the way—but I'm not sure what. Perhaps it was that it was so *easy* to read, though I'm not sure what that means.

* After so many episodes of *Star Trek: Voyager*, "excerable" seems more accurate a description than before.

I can't help but despise bad writing...it's just not necessary to write crap.

* **Doug Jorenby:** "Lovers In A Dangerous Time" is a remarkably powerful and dark story, Doug. Your use of Asian cultural elements throughout your stories makes me wonder what experience you've had in that area...they're very effective. I like that the story has no science-fiction or fantasy aspects; non-genre material lends a nice sense of balance to IR, particularly when it's as well written as this.



* **George Phillies:** (#11) I'm sorry to hear that your room at Arisia wasn't up to snuff, George. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but a family double at the Boston Park Plaza costs the same as a single or regular double...and you get two bathrooms, one of which usually has a tub. Of course, you have to request them early.

I actually left out quite a few archetypes from "The GM's Hall of Shame". One day I'll do a second edition, though I might not make a video out of it.

* I'm enjoying the story very much indeed—I find well-written fantasy much easier to take than science fiction. I forget if you ever said if you had read **Barbara Hambly**? Her style is not unlike yours in The Warrior Unseen.

* (#12) You're right, I got confused! I didn't realize that the cyber-section of the story was a continuation, rather than a separate selection. Serves me right for sloppy thinking, or something.

David Hoberman: I always try to write down game quotes to do a feature like your "Quotes From the Edge", David, but they're either not as funny or too gross (but ask me sometime in person and I'll tell you one or two). Perhaps humorous quotes from campaigns should be a topic someday! ☺

* I'm impressed that your PBEM is still running, by the way. Congratulations. That's quite an accomplishment—how many months has it been?

Tara and Jenny Glover: (#11) A very amusing computer scenario! It gave me quite a chuckle. I talk to my computer too, though mostly I say "&^@%\$#&^%\$!!!".

* Goodness, Tara, are you really facing burnout? That's fast work. I didn't experience my first burnout until I was well over 20. Of course, I didn't start gaming until then, either. ☺

* I have to wonder, Jenny: after reading The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings to your son, did you then go on to The Silmarillion? For me that book has become the natural ending of the "series"—it took me a while to get warmed up to it, but now it's an integral part of Middle Earth in my mind.

* (#12) Ah, packing for a move! That's a prospect that gives me nightmares. Maybe you don't have as many books as I do...I know I wouldn't even try to pack to move. Next time it happens, I'm hiring movers. I'd ask my friends to help, but they all said "never again" after last time! ☺

* Regarding Asimov, it's true: some of his work doesn't hold up. But I was re-reading one of his collections not long ago, and I was surprised at how much I enjoyed the stories. It's odd, but somehow I expected they'd be cruder than they were, or something. Perhaps that's because he seems so feckless and disarming in his autobiography (which I recommend, by the way—a good read).

* Re the nature of immortality: I suspect it all has to do with the physics of your game world. Ah. Now *there's* a subject for discussion! The question is how immortality works, of course. Is it a preservation of the body as is, a kind of stasis? Taken too far, the result is an immovable and invulnerable statue, unable even to think. **Robert Sheckley** wrote an amusing story in which a Soviet scientist who was dying of some disease took an immortality serum. By the time the serum took effect, he was in a coma. Unfortunately the serum also affected the disease organisms, so he was an immortal and indestructible coma-vegetable for all eternity. Rather than waste time

taking care of him, the authorities simply buried him...

☺

Curtis Taylor: (#11) Thanks for the reviews. I guess I'll have to read Lords of Terror. Oddly enough, I found *two* shrink-wrapped copies buried in a pile of books during housecleaning recently!

* The "GM's Hall of Shame" piece became the basis of the GMHOS video, with minor changes. However, I re-did the layout for IR.

* The SoloQuest was great; I look forward to the next installment. You know, every time I read those, I get the urge to write a SoloQuest for characters who die in a SoloQuest...maybe someday.

* (#12) I'm surprised (though glad) to hear that Oliver Jovanovic is back on RQ4. I wonder if we'll be listed as playtesters? Probably not.

* To tell you the truth, I have included love interests for PCs in some of my past games...but mostly as comic relief.

* Why was the IR FAQsheet missing from #11? It's simple: I forgot! ☺

Chris Aylott: By now the store should be open, I guess. I hope it's jammed full with customers. I really have to make a trek out there, and see how it looks...how many hours is it from Boston?

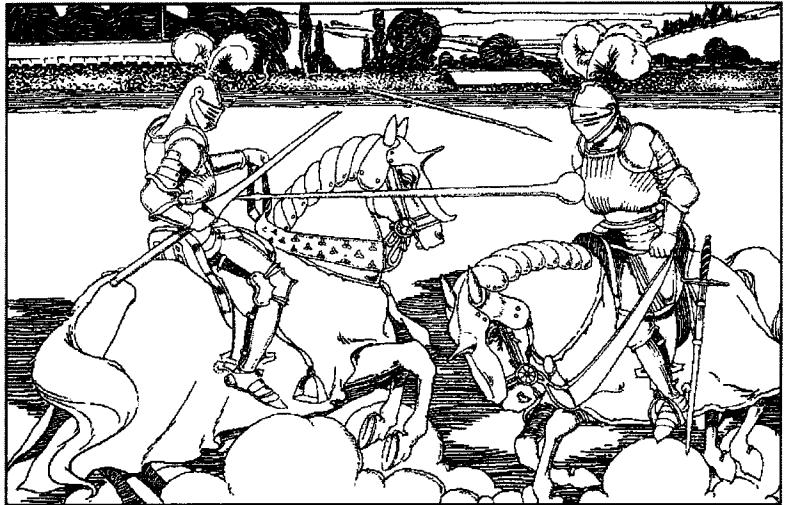
Perhaps I should see if we can get a number of IR contributors together to carpool over. We could make a day of it, see the store and the other sights of Easthampton (say—does Easthampton *have* any other sights? ☺).

* Of course I agree with you about Factsheet 5. They certainly have their problems! The recent incident with Seth Friedman only points up how poorly they do their so-called "definitive" job.

Dale Meier: You've kept up the quality on "Tales" well. A full-length novel is a major challenge—I'll be very interested to see how you handle it. Personally I have yet to try anything longer than a 5,000 word story. Just chicken, I guess.

* I like the Pendragon writeup very much. It reads very well, and the drama is maintained—which is not easy to do in game writeups.

Speaking of Pendragon, remind me to send you a story about a Pendragon game that's being run here at my house. It's funny as hell, but not quite right for IR. ☺



* Ah, ranting on the Net. It's funny, but I have remarkably little patience for such things now, though I used to read them for fun. I find that I drop newsgroups that have a high flame ratio. I think I actually did read one post by this Drac person, and never bothered to read the newsgroup in question again. A recent article (somewhere) notes that experienced users are giving up USENET in disgust at increasing flamewars, spamming, and munchkinism...I wonder if that will happen in the RPG field?

Scott Shafer: Welcome to Interregnum, Scott! Glad to have you aboard. *Screaming Jackass* is certainly a horse of a different color. ☺ And visually, the layout is striking; a nice change from the somewhat similar styles of many of our zines (though I'm mostly to blame for that, since I DTP several IR zines regularly).

* Did you enjoy Credo? I suppose you must be more qualified to appreciate its finer points than I am. It bored the ^&@%# out of me at RQ Con 2.

* GenCon sounds cool, though I think I might have a problem being so near to TSR corporate people...I suppose I could just stay out of their way. The trails of slime and the smell of sulphur would give them away. ☺

* You're not the only one who wishes for the ultimate science fiction RPG...and your wish list is a lot like my own (not that I'll ever have the time to run an SF game, mind you).

Mark Sabalauskas: So, am I right in guessing that you maybe don't approve of immortality in a roleplaying campaign, Mark? ☺



* Your article on humor in RPGs sounded good to me. But you left out one important source of humor: a disruptive, wisecracking kibitzer (i.e. me, in your Pendragon game ☺).

* Cliches make potentially embarrassing subjects like Love easier to deal with in a game, yes. But do we want easier games? Is an easier game a better one? Maybe it is. I've certainly used the cliches of comic love in my games. But close study of *Romeo and Juliet* (with Lois' help) has turned up an unusual side to Love: the terror of it. Love can make people lose control, placing their destinies outside of their own hands.

Of course, most roleplayers cannot or will not portray love (or any strong emotion) to the hilt. That's the point where gaming as art becomes an issue, I think. The convincing use of love in a campaign is probably not something that can be sold as a module. Only the personal abilities of the GM and players can make love work in a game.

The day may come when emotions are routinely handled in some sort of computer-run virtual reality game. But personally, I'd be afraid to allow commercial interests that much access to my psyche.

Elizabeth McCoy: I like the dual-probability track plotline—I hope we'll hear more about it in future issues! One possible problem: since the party goal is apparently to "correct" matters back to the original timeline, if you succeed you'll be back in the same dead-end game situation that inspired the changeover in the first place. Does it affect you to know that your character goal would possibly end the universe (and the game?).

* Personally, I wouldn't view a braintaped resurrectee as *me*. Similar memory pattern, but a copy is not the original—I should know. The only thing I'd accept would be the original electrical impulses from my own brain, transferred into the new body. Heck, I sometimes wonder if we "die" when we sleep, and are "rebooted" from our hardwired ROM when we wake! Fortunately I'm an inveterate dreamer, and so have a reassuring memory of sleep activity.

It reminds me of a bit in one of the old *Star Trek* books, when McCoy (what a coincidence) wonders if transporters can also beam souls (if souls exist)—and if they can't, does that mean he died the first time he was transported? Come to think of it, "Rogue Moon" by Algis Budrys was also an outstanding treatment of that theme.

* Beyond Rejection is by Justin Leiber, the son of SF great **Fritz Leiber**. It's part of a trilogy about a man who's been restored in the body of a woman. Pretty good stuff, but unfortunately out of print—I haven't even been able to find the third book of the series.

* Cutter is copyrighted? Of course he is! That shows the perils of assuming that downloaded art has been vetted for copyright. To tell you the truth, I never recognized the picture at all—I mean, I didn't recognize that there was a face there, much less that it was a known character. It's a weird pic...and now I'll have to delete it. My apologies to the artist, whoever they are.

NEXT ISSUE

Something *wonderful*. Okay, I admit it—I have no idea! Take care, and write when you get work!
☺ —>Pete

