



Issue #19 already? The third year of Interregnum begins...

A SHADOW ON THE LAND

It's not a requirement, but most Interregnum contributors are also on the Internet; in fact, I think that only one regular *doesn't* have access to email. That's fine by me; as one of the few people in the world who still refuses to get a credit card, I can identify with those who refuse to do what everyone else does.

Nonetheless, the net has become part of the daily life of many of us. Which is why the recent enactment of the Communications Decency Act by the US Congress is a real concern—not just to net-users, but to everyone.

For those who haven't kept up with the issue, the Telecommunications Bill recently passed by Congress and signed by the President included a section which makes the transmission of "indecent" materials punishable by a fine of up to \$250,000 and up to two *years* in jail. This is particularly disturbing because the definition of "indecent" is potentially extremely broad, going well into speech normally protected by the First Amendment. Any over-zealous prosecutor anywhere in the US may bring charges against any net author, anywhere; all that's necessary is for that prosecutor to decide that the material in question is inappropriate for children. Incidentally, any mention *whatsoever* of abortion is also punishable by the same sanctions.

In effect, the First Amendment has been suspended for speech on the Net. That includes private email, newsgroup postings, and sites on the World Wide Web—and access providers are themselves liable for what their customers write.

This is madness, of course. To judge and punish private speech according to a standard of what is safe for children is more than draconian. Such a law only demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of what the Net is on the part of Congress and the judiciary.

What does all this mean for Interregnum? Not much, in one way; our web site and email are not patently offensive. We've joined the Blue Ribbon Campaign for Free Speech on the net (check out the link on our home page, if you haven't already), but that isn't itself punishable. And the First Amendment still applies to the magazine itself.

But there *is* valid reason for concern, even for US citizens who aren't on the net. For one thing, *any* precedent which allows the suspension of the First Amendment in any area is a potential threat to all our rights; once the process has begun, who knows where it will stop?

But the danger is more personal than that. We're all roleplayers; we practice a hobby that isn't particularly popular or well-understood by the vast majority of the population, one that isn't backed up by influential commercial interests or a powerful lobby in Washington. I've never seen a survey on this point (and doubt that there has ever been one), but I suspect that insofar as the non-roleplaying public is aware of gaming at all, it is as an "occult" pastime connected with murders and suicide. Only last week I saw yet another sensationalistic news story connecting a murder to roleplaying. If discussion of roleplaying was to be judged inappropriate for children and banned from the net tomorrow, would anyone outside of the hobby care? Would news organizations bother to cover our protests?

All of which is to say that we gamers are yet another potential scapegoat for demagogues. Perhaps I'm playing Chicken Little—I hope I am—but crazier things have happened in the past, and it's wise to keep the lessons of history in mind.



By the way, I wouldn't want non-US subscribers to IR to feel left out. Unless your various governments get as silly as ours, I presume that you're in no danger—apart from potential collateral losses due to the chilling of speech on the Net for US citizens.

THE CARDS OF CTHULHU

For those who've been wondering why we haven't had Chaosium products to review lately, here's the story: despite the odd rumor I've heard, Chaosium is *not* dropping their RPG lines. They've slowed their RPG releases to a one-per-month schedule for a four-month period, but after that they'll be returning to the usual release schedule. Right now they're busy with **Mythos**, their new Cthulhu-based collectible card game (which is apparently selling out on pre-orders even before it hits the stores). They do plan to increase their fiction line in the future, but will continue to publish roleplaying material as before. We'll have a new shipment of material to review soon, I hope. Oh yes, and for those who are wondering: no. I haven't received any cards for review. ☺

TOPIC #20: A DREADFUL MISTAKE!

The topic for Interregnum #20 is "Mistakes". What are the worst mistakes you've made as a player and/or as a gamemaster? How did you fix them, if you did? What could you have done better? What lesson did you learn, if any?

Unlike "Horror Stories" the point of this topic is educational: your tips on dealing with problems.

While we're speaking of topics, let me make the usual plea. We have topics for two reasons: one, to provide some sort of focus for the issue, giving contributors something to kick back and forth; and two, to interest, entertain, and inform the readership. Anything would satisfy the first condition, but feedback from readers would be a huge help on the second. I put it to you, the readers of Interregnum: what would you like to see contributors discuss?

BELAY THE DELAYS

Once again this issue is later than it should be. As a result, the deadline for IR #20 has been pushed back from April 15th to April 20. The deadline for #21 will remain unchanged at June 1st.

I'm searching for ways to improve the timeliness of publication here; some contributors have helped out hugely by sending in their zines very early. I appreciate that. But more needs to be done. I've been working on ways to make production go more smoothly, but the fact is that creating Interregnum is actually *more* work now that I'm not doing the copying myself; every issue has to be collated and stapled by hand, since cheap copying services don't use machines that can add covers and staples automatically. I may take a page from The Wild Hunt and set up collation parties. If you're interested in helping out, please drop me a line! All that's involved is putting sections together in the proper order, stapling them, sealing them in envelopes, putting on the labels, and stamping them. I'd love to set up a production line to do it...

Take care, all!

—>Pete

