



RACK & RUNE #1 (A Very Amateur Production) © 1991 by Peter Maranci

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Preamble: If through lack of knowledge of custom or propriety I chance to offend, please keep in mind that I do so unwittingly. On the other hand, who cares? Still, if it happens, I'd appreciate it if you'd drop me a line and let me know. It may take time, but I'll get better at this.



To the Hunt, greetings! Since this is my first zine, I'll keep it short. Let me start by introducing myself. I have lived and worked in the Boston area for the past three+ years, and have both run and played in many RPG campaigns for the past eight years. I've had some experience with local live role-playing organizations as well. My system of preference is RuneQuest (III, though I enjoy II also); however, I try to keep an open mind, and have played in many widely varying systems.

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My first exposure to gaming was anti-climactic, to say the least. A high school AD&D campaign, it was noted for a character death rate of 3 per player per session--any time we were not actually playing was spent rolling up the next hapless PC. The one exception was the gamemaster's best friend; his character (I quote) "can't be harmed by any force in the Multiverse. It's kind of a curse." The character rarely if ever associated with the other PCs, his chief activity consisting of "zapping" each new character into the footsteps of their predecessor PC as they died. Apparently his powers, as well as his defenses, were infinite. Though the concept of roleplaying was interesting to me, the vicarious excitement of serial deaths soon palled. Having left the game, I would never have played again, had I not been introduced to a new and fascinating type of roleplaying in college.



DISCLAIMER: IN THE NEXT FOUR PARAGRAPHS I MAY SEEM TO BE RAMBLING ON ABOUT AN OLD GAME. ACTUALLY, I AM. However, the style of gaming described is the more enjoyable and exciting game experience I've ever had, and was fundamentally different from any roleplaying I've seen or heard of since. I'd like to hear about any similar games, since what's I've seen elsewhere is far closer to the wargaming roots of RPGs, as opposed the roleplaying "theatrical" RPG tradition.

A NEW KIND OF GAME --> The game in question was called Drachenvald, and it was unique in that it was sheetless. There were no character sheets, statistics, or game mechanics of any kind as far as the players were concerned. They had the same information about their characters that the characters had about themselves: they knew that they were strong, or skilled in knife fighting, and other such information, but could evaluate their skills only in comparison to other people of the game world. When there was a question of failure or success, we rolled percentile dice and were informed of the result. The gamemaster, Bill Moodey, designed each character during an intensive series of discussions with every player; these discussions took place over a period of at least two months. In each case, the character was discussed as if (s)he was a character in a fantasy novel; from meeting to meeting, as GM and player interacted, the character would develop and change. All of this happened before play began! The players had basic information about the world, their characters, and (where appropriate) the other PCs. With such detailed long-term planning, and with the removal of game mechanics from the players' province, the emotions and motivations of the characters became far keener and more real than any of us had experienced before. It was not long before each of us could instinctively react, think, and feel in character, as simply as putting on a coat. Needless, to say, this level of involvement can cause a dangerous loss of perspective; fortunately, the players involved were all mature enough to cope (for the most part). I must say that feeling the internal conflicts of my own character was an engrossing and fascinating experience.



The plot was also unusual; it featured virtually no combat. Though at times it was an option, in most cases the situation was such that violence would have been a poor or fatal choice. Rather, we PCs struggled to learn more about our world, avoid the enemies that pursued us and hope to correct an ancient wrong--the betrayal and murder of the ancient and noble House of Drachenvald, of which one PC was the last (hidden) member. The scarcity of combat made those that did happen far more exciting, too; we had much more to lose, since if a character died, the player would be out of the game. Incidentally, the gamemaster originally planned to hold the game in a conference room lit only by candlelight, and to ask players to come in some sort of costume; furthermore, the game was to be broken into a period of forty-five minutes of playing time, and then a fifteen minute break. During play, PCs would be required to speak only in character. Even game-related talk that was not in character would have to be written down, and passed as a note to the GM. While these ideas were eventually dropped as being too impractical, the use of notes during the game was very high. It really seemed to work.

Looking back, I can see that it would be impossible to convey the richness and excitement of that campaign. The entire game was focused; almost every PC action was intertwined in the key theme of the Drachenvald restoration, which ultimately turned out to be a minor event in a far more serious struggle. Perhaps the key element was structure. The game had a beginning, middle, and end; though the characters had a large degree of self-control, events in the world around them shaped their actions, and forced a certain logic and pacing on our actions. We knew the game world intimately, talked about



the game constantly, and played as often as possible--sometimes as often as five days a week (it could only happen in college). The game lasted two years, and though the House of Drachenvald was eventually restored, the PCs ultimately failed; our home plane was engulfed by Chaos, and moved on to become layer #667 of the Abyss. By then, however, we knew that there were worse fates...

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THE ALLEGHENY GROUP -->During the Drachenvald campaign, it felt as though we were living in a great (in the old sense) fantasy novel, while still retaining freedom of action. As a result of that experience, the Allegheny style of roleplay was born, so called since it was created at Allegheny College. Many games in that style followed; and though not all were sheetless, and the subject matter ranged from horror to science fiction to the indescribable (or just plain silly), all shared a strong sense of being the character. The effort needed was much greater for all involved than with the usual kind of RPG, but the rewards were without doubt worth it. Since that time I have run three campaigns in that style, and have generally met with enthusiastic response; I'll admit, however, that I would like to play in such a game again. If anyone out there is doing that kind of game, I'd be very interested in hearing about it. I'm sure that there are some intensive roleplaying campaigns out there.



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DEATH OF RQIII? -->In a recent letter from the Chaosium, they revealed that they have handed all decision-making power over RuneQuest III to Avalon Hill. The fox guarding the chickens after he's already eaten a few...can anyone think of a better metaphor for this? It doesn't make any sense to me. The last few RQIII products have been unbelievably bad. Why?



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SPACED GAMER -->Does anyone know what happened to The Space Gamer? The two issues by the new publishers were good, but that was months ago, and they aren't responding to letters. Belly up again, I suppose. Is the complete absence of non-affiliated pro- or semi-prozines in today's market indicative or a malaise in the hobby in general? Will people still be gaming fifty years from now?



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PHILOSOPHY CORNER --> I've spent a lot of time discussing (& arguing & debating) the question of freedom vs. control in RP campaigns. I've tried giving the players total freedom of action; the results varied, but it was not uncommon that they would simply find some way to live comfortably and just sit. Boring! On the other hand, I know from my own experience that a game over-controlled by the gamemaster is worse than no game at all. Obviously, a delicate balance is needed. Here's my question: Is what the players need freedom of action, or the appearance of freedom of action? To what extent can the GM manipulate "fairly"?

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I CONFESS: I suppose that I had better confess my great sin now. About a year ago, I realized that with a statistical lifespan of seventy-odd years (barring cryogenics), there was no way that I could play in all the different game backgrounds I'd like to try. Why, then, (I reasoned) take so long with each campaign? Most RPG campaigns are never-ending stories, lasting many years before ending, if ever; some (such as Drachenvald, above) are like novels, lasting a year or two and then coming to a natural end. Why not create a campaign based on the structure of a short story? It would need to be more tightly plotted, and the characters would have to start in a pressure situation to keep them moving, but there's really no reason that a satisfying campaign couldn't be structured to begin and end in six to twenty sessions. Since the commitment in time from the players would be less, a gamemaster could really let his imagination run wild, and take chances he might otherwise not try. I therefore made up a flyer (reproduced at right, I hope) [*on the next page in this new version*] and put copies in appropriate places.

The response was pretty good; it wasn't long before I had about twenty people interested. I'd decided to send out a newsletter, listing names and phone numbers along with prospective games. As I was about to begin, however, there was a death in my family. By the time things had cleared up, the list of names and phone numbers was nowhere to be found.

When I finally did find it (yesterday), well--it's been a year, after all. Somehow I don't think these people will be too happy to hear from me (I hope that none of them were in the Pack). What do you think: venial, or mortal? Has anyone tried this sort of thing before? I still think that it's a good idea, but I just don't have the time to keep it going.



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Sorry I can't comment on the contents of the previous issue, but since the last issue I saw was printed about two years ago there doesn't seem to be much point. I'll comment next time. --->PM, 3/6/91



ROLEPLAYERS!

C a M B

Have you ever had an idea for a role-playing background or plot you'd like to run or play in, but simply haven't had the time? If so, **ROLE-PLAYING SHORTSTORIES** may be what you're looking for.

SHORTSTORIES are to standard role-playing campaigns as short stories are to novels or series; shorter and more tightly focused, offering greater opportunity for variety and experimentation.



A **SHORTSTORY** is a short role-playing scenario, create by a gamemaster, which begins, runs for several sessions, and then ends. And that's it! Essentially, it's an experimental role-playing module that is self-contained, with characters generated to play in that particular adventure only. While it is possible that a particular **SHORTSTORY** could lead to a longer campaign, that would be solely up to the gamemaster and players.

No long-term commitment is required to participate. A **SHORTSTORY** lasts from 2 - 6 sessions, and is complete within itself. Playing in one in no way obligates you to play in another; the idea is that players may pick and choose what particular scenario they would like to be a part of, if any. It is possible that more than one scenario will be run at a time, however.

A **SHORTSTORY** may be set in any game system the gamemaster desires. However, the emphasis is on role-playing, rather than mechanics; since we encourage novices to play (a **SHORTSTORY** is an ideal way to sample different kinds of role-playing), we ask that gamemasters not focus overmuch on mechanical complexities ("a new thousand hit point system!"). A **SHORTSTORY** can be set in any role-playing situation imaginable; the only requirement is that it be different and interesting. We hope that games will use the **SHORTSTORIES** forum as a place to try out concepts that might not be practical in a longer, more time-consuming situation. No hack & slash or power gaming, please!

HOW IT WORKS:

A gamemaster decides to create a short-running role-playing scenario involving an interesting new plot and/or world background. After setting the basic length, number of players, and a short description of the adventure, the information is made available to all **SHORTSTORIES** players. Those who are interested then contact the gamemaster directly.

We hope that **SHORTSTORIES** will make it possible for players to enjoy aspects of role-playing they could not otherwise experience.

An open suggestion file of ideas for **SHORTSTORIES** may also be made available. Here are a few possibilities:

A game set in a formless void, where no two creatures are of the same race

or

The characters are slaves in the American South of the 1800's, trying to escape with their families via the Underground Railroad

or

Superhero cowboys must fight off an invasion of insane magic-using alien horrors from space...

or

The characters are killed at the start of play, and must find their murderers as ghosts...

or

Modern characters discover a device that allows the use of magic within its field, and a sinister conspiracy to suppress that device...

or

How about roleplaying in ancient Rome? Or in Neolithic times? Or in a world based on a book by your favorite author, or TV show, or whatever? Anything is possible--it's up to you.

