

*** * * * * RACK & RUNE 7: Wizard Needs Food -- Badly! * * * * ***

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Time has passed quickly, and Spring is fast approaching. Though there never seems to be enough time, there's more roleplaying going on than ever...

Addendum: There seems now to be no question that my desk top publishing program is actually a demon in disguise. Once again it waited until deadline time to die...

A WEEKEND WITH NERO

As I reported in the issue before last, arrangements had been made for me and several other International Fantasy Gaming Society members to attend a New England Roleplaying Organization weekend. Since some believe that the two organizations are in competition, this led to some apprehension—apprehension that fell short of the mark, as it turned out.

The weekend was to take place in mid March. The cost was \$45, but some friends of mine had paid my costs as part of a birthday present. Preparations were made: my roommate made an impressive suit of armor for himself with surprising ease, sewing a piece of leather-like black vinyl into a long tabard and inserting small metal studs. On his arms went vambraces of the same material, held in place with lacing. All in all, it was a very impressive costume. With black cloak and black beret, he looked quite dangerous.

For my part, I wore black boots, plain gray pants, an undertunic of white with brown-laced fastenings at wrist and throat, a gray cap-sleeved tunic trimmed with bright ribbon and belted with a dragon-impressed belt of brown leather. Over all I wore a heavy cloak of black wool, fastened with a small clasp. The undertunic, tunic, and cloak were all tailor-made for me by Dina Flockhart of "Cloak & Dagger Creations" (508) 486-4414; they looked absolutely great. I carried no weapons, as A) I had none, and B), I really didn't want to fight—I'm not good at it. My strategy was to bluff or run—did I mention that I once won a medal for the 50-yard dash? (OK, it was a bronze medal in second grade).

The adventure was to take place over the entire weekend, at a camp south of Boston; we would be sleeping in unheated log cabins. At the counsel of my friends, I bought a sleeping bag and pad on Friday, along with a woolen hat.

As soon as we came home from work on Friday, we prepared to drive to the camp: Me, my roommate Bob (not his real name), and an IFGS official, Betty (not her real name) set out on the trip. I should remark here that Bob and I were invited by afterthought; the person who was really invited to the game was Betty, who had been assiduously 'courted' by NERO. She kindly brought us along, having made arrangements and payment with the head of NERO far in advance.

When we arrived, we were stuck by the deepest cold of the year. It was bone-chilling, and the wind blew icily across a large frozen pond. Even in my cloak, I was freezing.

Finding a large central wooden building, we got into a line of costumed participants to register. It took a very long time to get to the head of the line, and seemed longer, as majority of the line was outside in the cold. As we were in line, we heard distressing news: the weekend had been overbooked, and there were

no more cabins available. We would have to find sleeping space where we could; the central tavern/registration building was open for use. But it was a log building, heated by a single fireplace...

When we got to the head of the line, a problem developed. Betty's papers were all in order, but there were no records of Bob's or my existence. Nonetheless, we kindly helped by some check-in people. They had quite a job, since there were about four hundred people there.

Betty was soon rushed off to join her retinue. The NERO people had arranged for her to be one of the 'nobility', with bodyguards, companions, many roleplaying opportunities, and (most importantly) *a warm place to sleep*—the private building for nobility, in fact. Bob and I were to be left to our own devices. While standing around the registration area, I was greeted by a familiar voice—Andrew French, the editor of the Cthulhu/HPL APA *Macabre*. A mighty NERO Earthmage was he (can you tell that I've just re-read *The Lord of the Rings*? ☺). We spoke, and as I'd coincidentally chosen to play an Earthmage, he kindly offered me the opportunity to bunk with the Earthmages—who were themselves going to be sleeping in the central tavern, having lost their cabin as well.

For the next several hours, Bob and I walked around the campsite. It was, as I've said, bitterly cold—yet many people were walking about in the dark. It was a very atmospheric situation. After a while, we went to the opening ceremonies; dramatic 'local politics' scenes were played out, one of them including Betty with her noble faction. Bob and I stood at the back, like the nobodies we were. When that was over, we got back in the car and drove back to Malden to sleep—it was just too damn cold to sleep outside. We'd come back in the morning. It was about a forty-five minute drive, by the way.

When we arrived at camp the next morning, the first thing we did was go to the 'smithy' to have Bob's longsword approved. A NERO friend of Betty's had kindly made a pair of NERO swords for Bob. After a long delay, the smiths looked at Bob's weapon. They proclaimed it unacceptable due to insufficient foam padding at the tip, though other identical weapons had been passed without question. We were told that we could purchase more open-celled foam to pad the tip with game money. There was just one problem: we didn't *have* any game money. Turns out we were supposed to be issued some when we registered, but there had been an error. We headed to Registration to see what could be done.

I should mention that up to this point, we had been pretty much ignored (with the exception of Mr. French). The 'smiths' had been quite brusque with us, offering no help or advice until asked repeatedly. In subtle ways, we were made to feel like un-persons. That morning, no one talked to us; we had no roleplaying opportunities at all. Ever been to a party where you didn't know anybody, and nobody wanted to know you?

When we got to Registration, we found it virtually deserted—there was only one person there, and there was only one person for him to talk to. Very politely, we explained our situation: by some error, we hadn't received any starting money. What should we do? Was this the right place to ask about this?

The Registration guy sneered masterfully and assured us that yes, this was the right place—and that he wasn't going to do anything about it. All the money was gone. "I'm closed. Go away!"


Let me interject here that this guy was one of that unfortunately not-so-rare breed of jerks who make you want to smash their face in. The kind who can put you down without saying a word. The kind who can make your blood boil by saying "pass the salt".

We didn't want to bother him, but we really needed the money, we told him. Was there anyone else we could talk to about this?

No. He was the one to talk to, and he wasn't going to do anything. All the money had been given out, and that was it. Tough. We were now to get lost as quickly as possible.


Wasn't there *anyone* we could talk to about this? Anyone who could help us? (Very politely).


What were we, morons? There was no money, he was in charge, he was closed. And how dared we take up his valuable time?

We left, though I don't know how we did it without saying anything to him. What a jerk! If he'd even said "Sorry", it would have made a difference; but of course, he didn't. 

It was still freezing. Bob and I got in the car and got the hell out of there. A NEROid gave Betty a ride home at the end of the weekend. She'd had the time of her life.

Later, at Betty's behest, the head of NERO allowed Bob and I a credit to another weekend adventure.


The strange thing is that the whole thing turned out to be *exactly* as I'd jokingly predicted it would be. Others had told us that NERO made a practice of courting, assimilating, and disbanding smaller live roleplaying groups, and that those who weren't part of the elite nobility were treated like dirt. Supposedly the leadership of other LARP organizations would be offered positions of 'nobility' in NERO, and would have so much fun that the other organization would be absorbed. When the other organization finally disbanded, the 'noble' former leaders would find themselves suddenly far less important. Certainly it was ominous that player characters could be killed for experience points. Established Guilds and Noble Houses made the newcomer's lot a poor one—until they could grovel their way up the pecking order. Or so we were told, beforehand, by ex-NERO members. 

I sound bitter, I know. And I am (a little. After all, it's only a game); it was a pretty bad experience. I also sound paranoid, so let me say here that I doubt that all this was a calculated plot on the part of the  NERO leadership, many of whom seem like pretty nice people. I may even try NERO again someday—after all, I have a cool costume. And the New England chapter of the IFGS still exists, and is throwing a game in a week's time; there was no real harm done there, I think. But all this has taken a bit of the bloom off of live roleplaying for me. All this stupid politicking! Table-top games offer so much more scope for imagination. Which brings me to my next topic...


FUSION: THE MIX OF LIVE-ACTION & TABLE GAMES

As I have mentioned earlier, the concept of live roleplaying really appeals to me. Yet in NERO and the SIL/ILF, the practice has been more of an aggravation than anything else (though this hasn't occurred in the local IFGS chapter yet). I've come to appreciate the greater freedom of imagination of table-top games. At the same time, live games can have *such* a dramatic impact on players...

On reflection, I realize that it is perfectly feasible to mix these two forms of roleplaying—in fact, they are mixed all the time. Long before I had even heard of live gaming, I used a strange trick.

 The game was my first serious campaign: it was called Disque, and was sheetless. The setting of the game was largely based on the Niven story "Transfer of Power", which Niven had written as a tribute to Lord Dunsany (one of the greatest early writers of fantasy). Among the players was a good friend of mine, creator of the sheetless deep roleplaying style unique in my experience: Bill Moody. He played an exiled arrogant young Prince from a country at the edge of the world; a master of poetry, swordsmanship, and chess among other things.

Not by coincidence, Bill was one of the best chess players at the school—though not rated, he could beat our one rated player at least one out of three times. I, on the other hand, was one of the worst

 players. In large part, this was due to the fact that I wasn't very interested in chess, and didn't enjoy losing again and again. Knowing all this, I concocted a plan to test Bill's hubris.

In this game, an evil Entity had been capturing powerful creatures and transforming them into Avatars—incarnations of Absolutes. These were powerful and dangerous enemies of the PCs. One was called Rust; another was Father Panic. Most dreaded of all was Death, for before conversion he had been a mighty Wizard who had been an enemy of a PC in a previous life. In Disque, Wizards were incredibly rare, wielding inborn powers which made them far mightier than the gods, who were more like the saints or demi-gods of other campaigns.

About half-way through the campaign, the characters were riding toward a great castle which had been taken by bandits. Though not at the peak of their powers they were very powerful, it was sure that they could defeat the bandits without difficulty. The Prince led them.

As they went down the road, they saw a strange sight ahead. On a high seat in the middle of the road was a black-cloaked figure, sitting before a small high table. As they drew closer, they saw a chess board upon the table; the chair opposite the cloaked figure was empty. Stopping before this scene, they saw a large black scythe leaning against the table; the figure's fingers were gaunt bone. From within the cloak's hood, a skull regarded them.

"We will play... for your lives." said Death.

The Prince stepped forward confidently, knowing that his skill was great.

At this point, I (the GM) actually pulled out a chessboard and began setting up the pieces. Bill was taken aback. We both knew that I was no challenge to him; that in chess, he could do with me as he would. I did not expect to be able to beat him. What I was doing, however, was not a test of his skills; it was a test of his pride. The thing was this: Death was a poor chess player, *but a VERY sore loser*. If the Prince lost, Death would be pleased and do him and the party only a small amount of harm. If the game was a draw, Death would be most pleased, and let them go on their way. But if the Prince beat Death...

Note, Death had said "We will play for your lives." . He'd said nothing about the *terms* of the match.

We began to play. My intention was to play the game quickly if possible, though the other players watched with interest; after all, it was for their lives too. I did not attempt to 'look ahead', rather making the best move according to the situation as I saw it, without pausing for thought. Surprisingly, I began to do very well, and it soon seemed that Bill was on the ropes. Later he told me that he was amazed by my skill; he was wondering if I'd somehow managed to improve my chess abilities in some miraculous way. In fact, everyone was amazed, myself included (later, many of them told me that I had a great natural ability for chess, and should study it). Nevertheless, the fluke soon ended, and before long I (Death) had been crushed.

"Checkmate?! Bollocks to this!" Death said, and sweeping up his scythe brought darkness down upon them all. When they woke, their lives were indeed gone; they were all in extreme old age, save a sorcerer who had been previously reincarnated in a child's body, and was now merely ancient. Most of the PCs could barely walk, much less carry the weapons they had planned to use... This made retaking the castle from the bandits extremely difficult.

I must admit that the above was inspired by the films of Ingmar Bergman (obviously), and a parody of such shown on the hysterical British comedy TV show "The Young Ones"—the episode was called "Nasty". The combination of live action (the chess game) and the table-top game enlivened the whole campaign. Has anyone else out there done anything similar?

THE DEVIL MADE ME DO IT: The 'Demonization' of Dungeons & Dragons

In the category of continuing trends...

Both NBC and CBS will soon be showing telemovies based on a young man who murdered his father and later claimed he was motivated by D&D. The murderer in question was also the subject of the recent anti-D&D book "Cruel Doubt", a would-be "Seduction of the Innocent" for roleplaying. The same young man was featured in the 700 Club video I mentioned a few issues ago. As I understand it, he has since recanted; he does not claim that AD&D drove him to murder, but does feel that people shouldn't play the game—did I mention that he's been born-again?

I have to wonder if the demonization of D&D is going to continue, or if these movies are merely isolated instances. Certainly the public is seeing little if any presentation of the benefits and enjoyment of roleplaying; and the majority of gamers, adolescent and awkward, do little to help (thanks are due to TSR for targeting the pre-teen market). The community of adult gamers does not seem to be able to make its views or even its existence known.

As long as this public castigation is focused on AD&D, as opposed to roleplaying in general, this might not seem to be such a bad thing. The evils of The System are many; and TSR has committed many sins against gaming over the years. Yet in the long run, what hurts AD&D will hurt all of gaming. The reason is simple: most gamers, even the good ones, start out playing AD&D. Is there anyone out there who didn't? In a sort of filter process, those who appreciate good roleplaying and intelligent, reality-connected mechanics progress to other systems.

But now that AD&D is being presented to the public as a 'cult' activity, a 'death game' (as it was called in a recent broadcast of "A Current Affair"), young people will be less likely to be allowed to play the game. Though outright censorship is not likely to happen much, I hope, children have no First Amendment rights. As the influx of new gamers dwindles, gaming itself will dwindle and die away.

What can be done? I don't know. Still, we have a pretty creative and intelligent readership here. Does anybody out there have any ideas?

NEREYON: The Sands of Time

Due to time and space restrictions, the Nereyon writeup will be foreshortened this issue.

Returning from the Great Desert, the players found the kindly old mayor of the Town they protected crucified and skinned in the square. Moving quickly, they backed off. Sending the rescued prisoners off to their home villages, the Watchers went to their home at Big Hill to consider their alternatives. Coradan, their sprightly old tutor, decided to, enter town under cover of night and scout out the situation for a few days; it would have been dangerous for the young Watchers to do so, since they could be detected as such by some magics.

Hawk the Watcher Chaos-fighter had not joined the others on the desert mission (I had already evicted his player from the game). He had left Big Hill, looking "for himself". After a few days, the players became concerned. With the help of Dara the Sensitive's keen senses, they followed Hawk's trail.



They came to a small stream. Beside the stream, they found Hawk's clothes. The clothes were completely tied and in order; it seemed that Hawk must have turned into air and left his clothes behind. Searching the clothes, the Watchers found a strange thing: a small ring made of gold. They had never seen this ring on Hawk before.

The tracks went no further. Baffled, they returned to Big Hill. When they got there, they received a shock: a friend of Bear (their other old tutor) had come with news. The new NeMarren master of the Town was slaughtering humans left and right; he had a pet sorcerer who was using Chaos to mutate human prisoners in the cellar beneath the Town Hall.

And Coradan was one of those prisoners. He had been captured...

PASSING OF A GIANT

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the passing of the Good Doctor, Isaac Asimov. His *Foundation* books were among the first science fiction I ever read, and from the first I wanted to write like him. I saw him speak once, about fourteen years ago at the University of Bridgeport; he spoke eloquently and intelligently, of many things other than science fiction. During the question and answer period, two fundamentalists jumped up to suggest that because he'd written a book on the New Testament, he was aware of the word of Jesus; why hadn't he accepted Jesus as his Lord and Savior?

Asimov replied quite reasonably that it was a matter of faith, a personal experience which he had not had.

The fanatics continued to disrupt the event, refusing to understand the eminently sensible replies which Asimov gave. They threatened him with hellfire, and accused him of being an agent of the Devil. Asimov never lost his temper, never failed to answer honestly. The fundamentalists were finally escorted out of the auditorium when the rest of the audience lost patience with their monopolization of the microphone. I and my father (who brought me to the lecture) were both very impressed by Asimov's behavior.

Strangely enough, at just about the time Asimov was dying I mentioned to my friends that he probably didn't have much time left; I should write him a letter and thank him for all he'd done for me, before it was too late.

Thank you, Isaac Asimov. You'll be missed.

COMMENTS #171

Swanson: Glad to hear about your new job. Best of luck. Does this mean that you'll have less or more time for the Hunt?


Derryberry: Another good job on the Greentech writeup. I like the 'printout' particularly. Was that actually provided in the game? I've noticed that many GMs like to provide that sort of extra detail. Wish I had time for that sort of thing...

Erlandsen: Like the Callina and Donal story very much. I've faced the same problems regarding the acquisition of new players, but it's a considerably smaller problem here in Boston—a few posters for a game of mine yielded dozens of responses. The problem is figuring out who's sane. Some of them are awfully good at hiding their problems—until it's too late. Someday I should sit down and work out the ration of insane/munchkin-like/obnoxious gamers to good roleplayers. It probably wouldn't be encouraging.

Just out of curiosity, how many players do you usually have in your games?

Harlen: You are braver than I. I tried out a science fiction writing group about a year ago. I brought one of my best pieces, a mood piece that was an attempt to evoke some of the atmosphere of Dunsany and Cordwainer Smith. The others read it... and then the bloodsport began. "Can you describe the plot in one

sentence?" one woman asked me accusingly. I admitted that I could not—that I was trying for a feeling, rather than a neat little story. "Oh, so *you* don't know what the plot is, *either!*" she said, sneering. The eventual group decision was that the piece was very well written, but that the plot was hopeless.

I didn't go back, and I haven't written fiction since. Be careful (though I suspect that you have more experience with such groups than I). 

Regarding the Armenian piece: purely by coincidence, I happen to *be* Armenian, and so was particularly interested (my Armenian family name would be Bedros Maranjian, but Turkish law mandated the changing of all names ending in "-ian", apparently). I'd like to see more of this, if your printer will cooperate. Incidentally, Mount Arrarat is *twin* peaked; all the religious portrayals of it (and there are many) show *two* peaks, one a little smaller than the other. I can get the names for the two peaks, if you wish. As you no doubt know, Arrarat is supposedly where Noah landed the Ark. Incidentally, what did you use for source material?

Jorenby: Excellent Vampire piece. Of course I'd join you in recommending the silent version of "Nosferatu" to all. Have you read Saberhagen's "Dracula" series? If not, I'd recommend them, at least the early ones. Personally, I think Anne Rice ripped off many of her ideas from him.

Not very long ago, I played in several Cyberhorror campaigns. Vampires were used as PCs in each (of course). What annoyed me about them was the incredible mundanity of the roleplaying; "Oh, yeah, I'm a bloodsucking scion of evil. Can I buy a new computer now?" The "humanity points" concept embedded in the Cyberhorror systems I've seen seems totally useless. *No* horror, *no* guilt, *no* sexuality, nothing. How boring can you get? I quit.

Phillies: Enjoyed "Pickering and the Arch of Time" a great deal. Perhaps I should include some of my own fiction in the future. Thanks for the inspiration.

Plamondon: Regarding Superman: have you read "Man of Steel, Woman of Kleenex", by Larry Niven? I think that that is the definitive Superman piece.

Um. Just how was anyone in the Dark Knight confused about the appropriate use of his powers? The only thing that seemed confused was society itself.

Wouldn't playing multiple characters detract from the characterization of each one? NPCs take considerably less development than PCs. I agree with you about the use of multi-threaded plot lines. I've found that it's possible to create a thread on the spur of the moment; these need not be of great import, but everyone has their own situation, their own story to tell (even if it's boring). It took a while to get used to having neat situations and people passed up, though. Regarding gaming aids, I certainly agree about the game log. I've never kept one, and I'm really regretting it. As for character sheets and object/place descriptions, I pretty much keep that in my head. Most useful to me has been a notebook I've kept with plot ideas of all sorts—stolen from elsewhere or dreamed up at work. Whenever my imagination fails me, the book gives me what I need.

By the way, I've got to ask: just who is that guy on the cover supposed to be? My friends all disagree...

Sapienza: Your comments on a code of conduct are very well taken. Lately I've been amazed at what I've seen on various BBSes; people seem to feel that they can say anything, no matter how offensive, without remorse or shame. One thing that I think should be an important part of the code of conduct: letting someone know that they have offended you. There's nothing more annoying than to receive no comments for months (or years) only to discover that something you said long ago has really hurt someone. Alternatively, if some jerk is being obnoxious, he should know about it...



Ricker: Yes, the demonstration locks were very popular—in part because those who successfully picked them received a gold-foil-wrapped large chocolate coin as a reward. Some children picked the same lock over and over again. the little girl who played the "Rock Elf" at the Masquerade got about 30 coins. I was amazed she was able to *move* after all that, much less dance. ☺

My suspicion is that fundamentalists would object to roleplaying games of any sort, no matter how Xian the theme. Here's an interesting question: what about *Islamic* fundamentalists? Does anyone know their position on such things? Does anyone roleplay in the Middle East, apart from U.S. servicemen?

Collier: Welcome! I've enjoyed your covers. Liked "Ki" very much—I think it's your best yet. Regarding the flunky, well, I'm just more careful. I keep my issue of TWH in a folder-jacket, if I *must* read it at work (and I must). Still, I wish you could have seen the look on her face—it was priceless.

Suggestion: Romance in roleplaying is rare because there are so few females involved. A lot of men would have a problem roleplaying romance between themselves—and when they're interacting with NPCs, it's usually not romance. It's sleaze. 8^>}

WANTED:

If anyone out there has or knows the location of any of the following, I'd be an interested buyer: Borderlands (for Runequest II), Big Rubble (ditto). Also, any issue of Wyrms Footnotes, some issues of Different Worlds, Fantasy Gamer #1. some issues of Space Gamer & Heroes magazine (specific numbers next issue). If anyone is interested, I do happen to have some extra copies of Fantasy Gamers #2 - 4.

NEXTISH:

Lots of stuff that wasn't finished for this issue, plus possibly a starting scenario for Runequest (if I get the time...) -->PM



GURPS SUPERS CHARACTER WRITEUP: TEUTON (with apologies to Jim Starlin)

500 + 100 Disad + 20 mandatory duty + 5 quirks = 625

STR 230 (275), DEX 12 (20), INT 7 (-20), HLT 10

Advantages:

Need not eat or drink (but gets hungry)	?
Immunity to poison	15
Increased Density + 1000 lbs	50
Damage Resistance 20	60
Hardened Damage Resistance 10 (1 level).....	39
Flight on surfaces of 200 lb bearing, and running in air unless pointed out	?
Instant Regeneration.....	100
Strong Will +5.....	20
Unaging	15



Disadvantages:

Weirdness Magnet.....	-15
Stupidity	(above)
Secret.....	?
Giant.....	?



Sasquatch, Bigfoot, Shnurpi Ganurpi. From time immemorial there have been legends of a giant hairy man-like being, roaming mountainous terrains far from civilization. In the early 1950's Professor H. Marlick Gunderson, under a grant from the National Inquisitor, reluctantly set forth on an expedition to the Yukon to find this creature. His plan, based on an article in the Inquisitor, was to use baited traps in likely areas. The bait: chocolate cream donuts.

Much to his surprise, he succeeded. Brought back to civilization, the creature lost its hair, learned to speak, and got a job in construction. It was the ruin of Gunderson's academic career. The Professor drank himself to death in 1969, without even an obituary in the tabloid that had been the agent of his destruction.

Teuton (as the creature came to call himself) mystified scientists for several years. Giving him up as incomprehensible, they helped him get dual US/Canadian citizenship.

Teuton's basic motivation is food, but it is not a strong motivation. He enjoys reading and television, though he does not seem to understand them very well. He is also incredibly strong and heavy, and is often not that aware of this. In the last few decades, advanced construction techniques and increased union militancy have made work hard to find for Teuton. Circus freak jobs annoy him for some reason. About ten years ago, he began wearing a costume and trying to help people—apparently someone had given him a comic book. After he accidentally saved the life of the Destructorator, he found himself able to make a meager living as a Superhero for hire. Teuton is well know as a freak mystery, and is often in the company of highly unusual individuals.

Teuton dislikes being hungry. He often talks to animals, though they do not respond. His usual combat is to pick up malefactors and tie them into neat pretzel shapes. He sometimes professes to "like" pretzels.

