

RACK & RUNE



RACK & RUNE #12: The Fool On the Hill

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It seems as if an age has passed since R&R #11. In a sense, perhaps it has. I for one am glad that the election is over; and very glad that George Bush will soon be one with History.



FOOL ON THE HILL

I was recently asked to serve as Loremaster for a team of PCs in a production of the IFGS game Piper On the Hill. I hadn't played in many months, and to say that I am very out of shape would be charitable; still, the idea of leading a team of PCs was too interesting to pass up. I accepted.

For those not familiar with the term, a Loremaster is little more than an assigned team leader, quite different from the role portrayed in Niven's Dream Park novels. Though I was in theory supposed to put a team of PCs together, I actually was assigned three PCs that I didn't know. This was fortunate, as there was no way I could have found enough players to fill out a six-PC

team on my own.

My team consisted of the following:

Zanzibar, a 4th level Mage (yours truly)

Penance, a 3rd-level Cleric (Lois Folstein)

Lawgren, a 2nd-level Cleric (Virgil Greene)

Xavier, a 1st-level Cleric

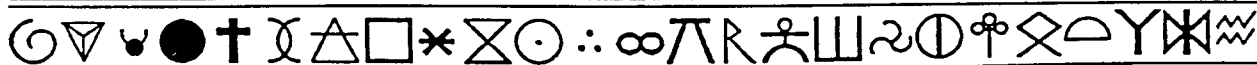
Ender, a 1st-level Ranger

Lucien, a 1st-level Thief

The last three were newcomers from Maine. Fortunately they were all quite accomplished, and handled their roles very well indeed. As I warned them at the time, I can't remember their real names. Very nice guys, though. But with three 1st-level characters, the team was seriously underpowered. The adventure was designed for 17 combined levels of characters, and we only had twelve.

We arrived late at the course, (of course). Fortunately the GMs were still setting things up. While we waited, we experienced the usual police harassment. The game is played in the Blue Hills reservation, south of Boston; it's basically just off of route 93. Cars are parked along a forty-foot long stretch of dead-end road, right next to the highway; the graphic on the next page should show the details, I think.

In any case, it's an area that the State Police like to sit next to in their cruisers,



ready to speed down onto the highway to intercept hapless speeders. On seeing bizarrely costumed figures with strange weapon-like objects, however, the average trooper apparently dreams of cracking a Satan-worshipping cult murder mystery...

"Scrizzzttt — What are you people doing here?"

He was huge, bald as an egg, with no neck and skin as white as a corpse: Jabba the Hut in a blue uniform. His deadpan voice echoed weirdly out of the speaker of his police cruiser, as he stayed locked safely inside. If necessary, there was his gun — but not yet...

"Live roleplaying!" we shouted back, putting down our weapons, "IFGS! We have a permit!"

"Scrizzzttt — what?"

He wasn't amused. There were a lot of us, more than he had bullets; maybe he'd have to call in backup? That would look bad...

After a few more moments of this, one of the game producers approached his vehicle.

Explanations were explained, and then repeated; eventually, Jabba revved up his car in disgust and went off to harass some unfortunate motorist.

The game began. We were asked to find a way to banish a noisy ghost; a reward of gold was promised for success.

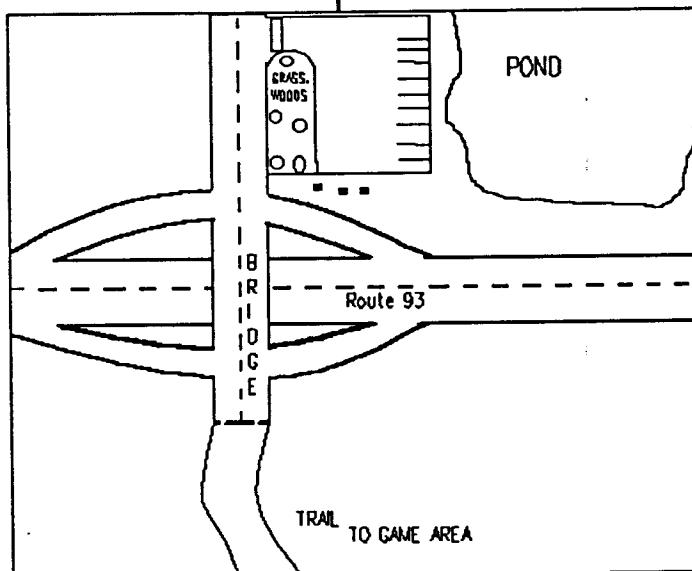
We agreed.

I'll stop here and say that since there's at least a chance that some TWH readers will play this game, I won't give away vital details. I've changed a few names to protect the innocent (that's you) 8^>}. Suffice it to say that the game is not unlike many other IFGS course games: a plea for help, several encounters, combat, riddles, a final ultimate confrontation, and an epilogue in which mysteries are solved and loose ends are tied...then treasure is divided and off to the post-game pizza party...

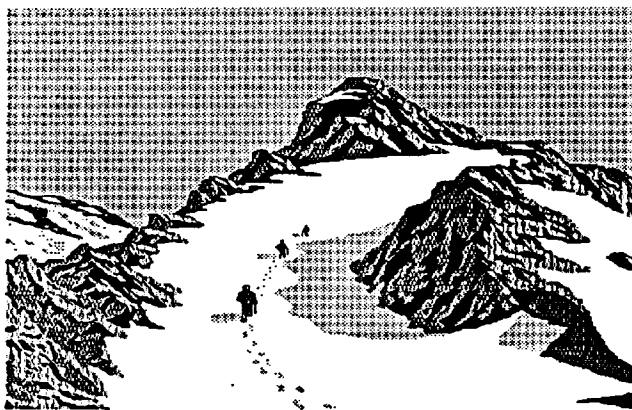
A few high points: During the first battle, my heart started pounding like a rabbit — corny but true. I doubted that I was having a heart attack, but it was a scary feeling none the less. Obviously I survived.

At one encounter we PCs had to ask a riddle of an NPC, or do something else clever; as Loremaster, I really should have been ready for such a situation. Since I wasn't, I did something else: I taught the NPC how to count

in binary on his fingers (I figured that such mathematical oddities were one of the things mages studied at the Ivory Tower). Fortunately the NPC worked with computers in real life (though I didn't know it at the time), knew what I was talking about — and was pleased enough to give me an



extra reward. One of the guys from Maine asked a pretty reliable riddle too, which helped.



At another point, we were talking to another NPC; she was stalling for time, temporizing furiously. I grew impatient, and as we spoke I shocked and surprised everyone by suddenly striking out with my Electrified staff. Fortunately she did turn out to deserve it (sort of). Oh, I should explain that Electrify is a spell for Magic-users — perhaps the single most useful spell in the IFGS. For the cost of a single point it endows the mage's weapon with a deadly magical charge — six points of damage, which can be discharged with a strike to an enemy's weapon or body. Even if the enemy parries, the damage is done. Armor does not protect against this damage. The usual effect is to disable at least one of the enemy's arms, after which the mage runs away and leaves the maimed NPC to the fighters of the group. Needless to say, I have a particularly long staff for this very purpose!

Surprise played a large part in another encounter, too. We were at a locked doorway, with several large but not-large-enough-to-pass-through holes on the other side; a neutral-to-hostile NPC waited on the other side. As our thief tried to pick the lock, the NPC playfully jabbed his sword

through the holes, trying to distract him; he may have succeeded, as the thief did indeed fail, breaking the circuit. A second later, the thief reached through the hole in the opposite direction, and slapped a piece of duct tape on the NPC's shoulder. This represented something called a 'kill dagger', a special weapon used by thieves; successfully placed on an enemy, it paralyzes them for 15 minutes. All of us were flabbergasted, the NPC most of all. He fled the scene, leaving us free to work another way through the door.

The estimable Mr. Butler was there (hi, Bob!), playing an NPC role — the son of an Innkeeper. Coincidentally the Innkeeper was played by the woman who had played my NPC wife and Bob's NPC mother in the previous game. I almost asked where the father of the family was, but decided not to confuse the new players. 8^>}



Toward the end of the game, I was faced with a difficult choice. Zanzibar being a coward, I had carefully hoarded my spell points: now all that remained were four, just exactly enough to cast a Phase Out spell that would allow me to survive the adventure (abandoning my friends in the process). The situation in general looked

bad for the party; we were flat out of healing, despite the fact that four of the six PCs could heal. We'd used all the healing magic in the game, some of our own magic that we'd brought in, and all our spell points except for my four and two of Penance's

. All of us were injured, some seriously.

So when a final group attacked us, I made like a faucet...and ran...

In the dark, inside my black cloak, nobody could see me. I was forty feet down the path in seconds; from behind I heard the sounds of combat. My teammates were trying to hold the marauders off. Huddled on the side of the trail, I could just make out the form of Penance. She was the last who was able to heal at all, and had wisely avoided combat — if she was knocked out, she'd stay out.

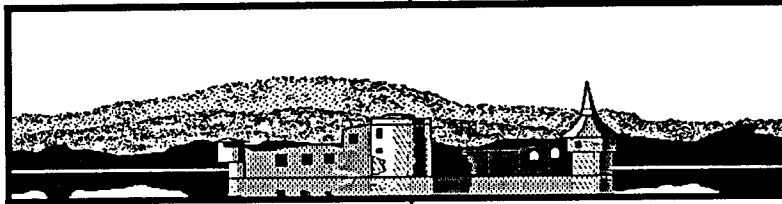
I listened to the combat for a second more. Phase Out is an easy spell — one of the easiest. All it takes is a white flag, and the words 'Phase Out!', spoken loudly...and the others had told me to Phase Out if I needed to. They knew we were doomed.

I didn't wait long, of course. Quickly shrugging off my pack, I dropped it to the side of the road; then I took off my cloak and threw it over the hidden cleric. And charged back into battle...jeez, I was stupid! 8^>)

We survived, but just barely.

It was freezing. The game had been fun — and a success, I'd say, with one of the largest turnouts of any game in the area. And I was slightly surprised at how

effective I'd been as a leader. Still, I wanted to go home. With the setting of the sun, the temperature had dropped to the low 20s. Though my cloak was warm, no costume is warm enough to keep out a chill like that for long!



The game had run quite late; it had begun at about 11 AM, and didn't fin-

ish until about 7:30 PM, well after sundown. The last several encounters were played in the light of several flashlights. Part of the reason we went so late was that three teams had been run through the adventure, each starting about half an hour after the previous one. We were the first to start. One very nice point: we were allowed to keep the actual physical treasures we found, including rings, scrolls, gems, jewelry, and a sword! Pretty high-quality stuff, too. The game producers showed real dedication, creating three swords to give away (one for each team)...that was pretty impressive. And everyone got a nice keepsake. Of course that's not commonly done, but I for one would like to see more games like that...

When at last we finished, we walked down to the cars to wait for the others. As we were waiting two State Police cars pulled up, and two State Troopers got out. But these weren't Jabbas; oh no. These were Storm Troopers, young, arrogant, and looking for trouble. They aimed the searchlights of their cruiser into our eyes, barking out questions like the SS. Who were we? What did we think we were doing? Who was in charge? they asked. I had visions of the entire group being hauled off to prison. Who's car was that, they finally asked,

pointing to one of the cars. The owner came forward. One trooper stood back (ready to fire, though he didn't draw his gun), while the other went up to him with a truncheon ready. They spoke quietly for several minutes, and then the cop took the car owner's license and registration. After checking the numbers with his partner, he gave them back and said a few more things to the car owner, and drove off; I couldn't hear what he said, but the car owner was very angry and shaken. It seems that someone had phoned in a report to the police that a man had been seen with a screaming woman in a car in the area; the car owner was a likely suspect. The fact that the car in the report had been a small yellow Sunbird, and the car of the IFGS member was a large blue four-door was apparently beside the point.

Remembering the trouble we'd had with parking next to the trail, I'd parked in the small parking lot next to the pond on the other side of the highway. Now I regretted that; it was a fifteen-minute walk to the car, and a cold walk it was. I was the only one to have parked there. Virgil Greene walked along with me (he lives near me, and I was giving him a ride).

I walked over the grass in the dark, got in the car, and drove toward the exit.

Suddenly my heart sank: there was a foot-thick iron bar gate across the only entrance/exit to the lot, and it was padlocked closed. There was no way through, and there was nobody around to help; even the other IFGS members were back with the other cars (not that they could help me much). I was trapped, in the cold and dark, many miles from home.

It's a terrible feeling to be trapped!

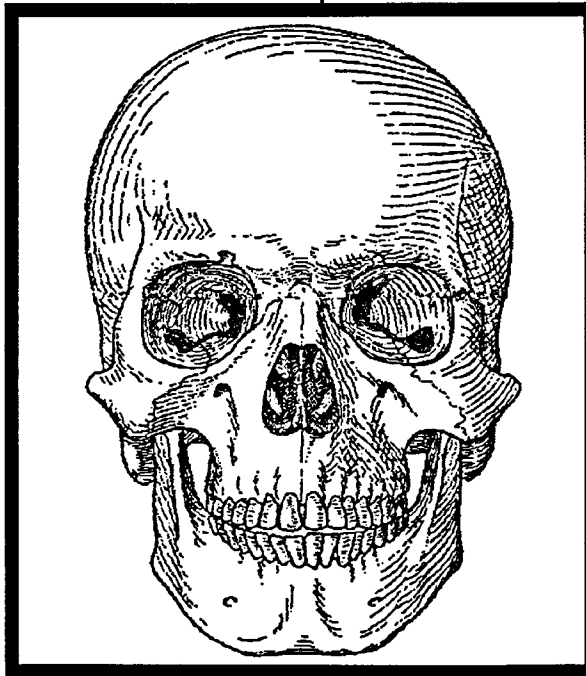
Escape From the Lot

Desperation made me angry; anger made me stupid. I drove at high speed along the curb of the lot. It was a high sharp curb, of solid grey granite — none of your rounded cement curbs here! At the end of the lot there looked to be an old driveway — as I got closer, I saw huge boulders in the way, blocking it off completely. Damn!

I swung the car straight for the curb. Eight inches of granite, thirty feet of woods and grass, and another granite curb stood between me and the road. I gunned the motor.

CRASH! We hit the curb, but didn't get over it. The car seemed undamaged, but it

didn't look like this was going to work. Then I had a thought, and asked Virgil to step out for a moment. Backing up, I tried again.

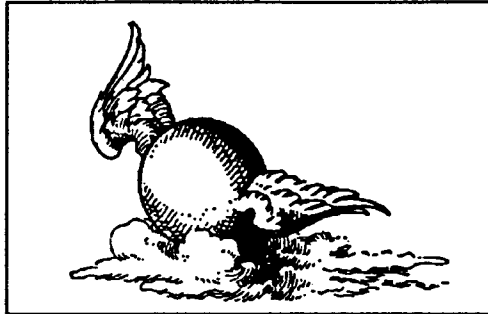


Closer...closer...and UP! No contact between car and curb — so much, so good. I stopped on the grass, and Virgil got in. Driving up to the edge of the road, I stopped and looked from side to side. Cars in the far distance, but there was still time enough to make it. No police cars in sight. Time to move!

This curb was bad, though. Worse than the other one. It complemented a slight bank, making it a fairly notable drop — more than a foot, I'd say. Still, we were committed. Again I gunned the motor, desperation driving me more than anything else. We neared the bank...cars were within sight...we were *t i p p i n g f o r -* ward...SSSSCCRRRAAAPPEEE! We were riding on the undercarriage. The tires were making virtually no contact at all. **NO!** I floored the pedal, the car lurched forward, and we were free, skittering onto the pavement. Zooming back to the game site, I was too shaken and angry to go the post-game party.

All the way home a scraping noise came from the underside grew louder and louder. I had visions of thousands of dollars worth of repairs...fortunately it turned out to be a stick caught in the undercarriage. But it was a hell of an experience. Fun in retrospect, but pretty scary at the time...

that really depends on how the *campaign* ended — which could be an entire topic by itself (and probably has, come to think of it).



I suppose you could divide retired PCs into two groups: those that are played, and those that aren't. If they aren't, well, the players generally can make up whatever fantasy they like; it really doesn't matter.

The other category, characters which are played again, has more possibilities. In the Drachenvald campaign, the characters 'retired', if you will, at the end of a long battle in which they successfully defeated an insidious and demonic plot. My character retired as the Emperor of Germany. Six months later, the GM continued the game, or rather began a separate campaign based on one of the loose threads of the previous ending; we played the same characters, questing into the Abyss to save our home plane from domination. At the end of that segment we failed, and most of the characters died (along with their home plane). My character was one of the very few who survived, taking refuge on a plane of scientific magic and studying wizardry; he'd learned the secret of the Gods in his travels, allowing him to perform miraculous effects (though too late to save his homeland). For laughs, the GM and I worked out his subsequent history over dinner one night. Using the secret of the Gods, he eventually became a god; finally, when the Universe ended, he was one of those who became the seed of a new Universe (*a la* James Blish's The Triumph of Time). That pretty much ended things for him.

Hmm. On rereading the above, it does

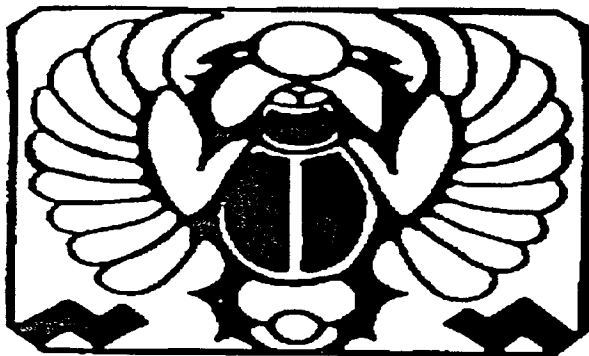
Comments #176

Swanson: Glad to hear that your Mac is fixed — I hope.

Regarding character retirement, I guess

sound like a Monty Haul experience. You'll just have to take my word that it wasn't.

I've often run into another situation regarding retired characters. More than once I've seen players who have chosen to play a character from an old game. This isn't necessarily bad; some of them can play the role fairly well. But they rarely break any new ground. It's more common for the player of such an 'undead' character to become obnoxious, insisting on trying to make the game world fit his character's needs — trying to recreate the roleplaying magic which caused him/her to obsess with the character in the first place. A futile quest. It can also be very irritating to a gamemaster. I don't believe I've ever been guilty of that particular roleplaying sin (though there are others). 8^>}



Blacow: Again, best wishes for your health.

Re Callers, my experience is limited — I was fortunate in not encountering the phenomenon until I moved to Boston. New to the area, I hooked up with a group that called themselves the G.O.D.S. — actually, they assumed that name after I left the group, so I don't know what the acronym stands for. In their ads they claimed to be active in experimental, cutting-edge role-

playing ideas.

That wasn't the case, of course. The focus was primarily on cutting-edge experimental thousand-hit-point need-a-small-VAX-to-run-the-bloody-thing RPG systems created by the members. Actual roleplaying was frowned upon. I recall that at one point there was serious debate on whether we should require that people raise their hands and be recognized by the Caller or GM in order to speak. I protested vigorously against this. Not long after, I received a call from one of the members, informing me that there had been a meeting of the other members — and as they felt that I was unpleasant, I should no longer bother to show up.

I'm still bothered by the fact that I was nice about that.

Re Humakti geasa: Under RQ3, the geasa are not very restrictive. Each is associated with a specific gift, and some of the geasa (I assume that's the correct plural) are effectively insignificant. It is possible to renounce the use of all weapons but natural weapons, missile weapons, and swords and gain a +35% bonus to your Sword Attack skill.

As I've said before, my conception of Dragonewt PCs is as entirely roleplaying roles. Virtually all 'balance' for such a character must be accomplished on the player's initiative, through pure roleplaying. Self-restraint is key. It's not for powergamers of any sort; in other words, people should play Dragonewts for fun, not profit. And it can be a lot of fun.

Re Plot Hooks: Er, um. Do we really need to stir up all that again?

Re NESFA, I seem to recall hearing recently that APA: NESFA was re-starting. I assume you're not connected with it? Have you seen it?

Derryberry: Pretty impressive 'zine yourself, Dana — for one thing, I didn't think you could catch up on comments so easily. 8^>}

I know that you've been doing at least some IFGS stuff — are you planning to write any of it up? It would be interesting to get your viewpoint along with Dana Erlandsen's on the same game — if only to check the differences. 8^>}

About Nightlife, I do agree that the majority of the problem was not the fault of the system. It's a truism that a good GM can make any system fun, and that a bad GM can ruin any game (Actually I'm not so sure that's true, but I'll leave that for another ish...). Whatever.

I've heard a bit about Vampire, including the rather interesting mention that it incorporates live roleplaying. However, since I've also heard that you need five books to play the game, and I'm not that enamored of the setting anyway, I'm holding off buying it — probably permanently. I just don't like Horror games — except for Call of Cthulhu, and that's because I love chewing scenery ("What—what is it—behind the door—it's—HIS FACE!!!" 8^>}). And as a Dunsany fan, the Dreamland blows my mind. However, there's little of horror in that.

I usually don't like negative settings — be they Cyberpunk, dark future, post-Holocaust, or Horror. Which is ironic, as my Nereyon campaign is itself rather dark...

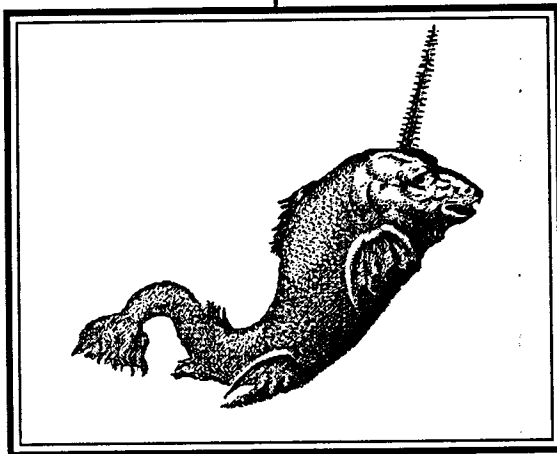
Re Flirting: I actually did a great job as the flirtatious NPC Princess, if I say so myself. The other players had been sent out of the room for the duration of the encounter, but crawled back in, hiding behind the seats (the game was being played in a small auditorium). Their choked laughter soon gave them away, however.

Dunham: I hate to say it, but in retrospect I sort of agree with you — accepting a Sorcery spell is not sufficient reason for a Shaman to be sanctioned by his God. In this case there were other issues involved as well...but I'd better not go into that (Hi, Virgil!). 8^>}

I was aware of the few RQ3 cases of mixed Rune Magic and Sorcery, but seem to remember that Sorcery and Spirit Magic are never mixed in any writeup — this was the basis for my ruling.

I read the old Griffin Mountain, and own the new Griffin Island — and must admit that I preferred the first. Glorantha really added a unique element to the package.

You're "not a fan of the sort of game (I) portray"? Jeez. Seems like everybody's been saying that (except for my players). Should I ask what sort of game you think it is? Maybe I'm just not portraying my games correctly. On the other hand... 8^>} Actually, I don't quite follow what you mean about "secrets...(requiring)...such a start to a campaign"...but in the case of the body-switched four, the campaign's been put on hold after two sessions, due to



incredible difficulties getting all the players together at once. I generally refuse to run without all players present, at least in the beginning. The campaign may be restarted later, with a few extra people. In the meantime, I've started an online SIG Rune-Quest game on the local Argus BBS. I'm using Glorantha as a background, RQ3 skills and spells, and an Amber Diceless-like method of skill resolution. Explaining Glorantha to gamers for the first time can be a long process...8^>}

Re an RQ build system, see "Philosophy Corner", thisish. I do agree with you about simplicity. From what I hear, a lot of RQ4 playtesters are recommending lots of layers of optional rules — sounds like a good idea to me. I've never used the RQ3 Fatigue system as written for example, though I don't like the various alternatives I've heard proposed. On the other hand, I don't understand all the complaints I've heard about RQ3 Sorcery. It lacks flavor, true; still, as a system it seems well enough balanced. Not perfect, but tolerable. A friend of mine once worked out a truly brilliant magic system, using runic 'sentences', which would be perfect for RQ4 Sorcery. I'll have to see if he's willing to polish it up with me and send it in...though by then we may be looking at RQ5.

Loved the PenDragon Pass writeup. More, more!

Erlandsen: Having played in at

least two IFGS games, Dana, I don't think you qualify as an unbeliever anymore — though I sympathize with the desire, which I sometimes share. 8^>}

Great writeup of the game. You avoided the dangers of ruining the plot for potential players adroitly. Was that hard to do? My roommate NPCed in the recent game — and knows very little of the plot, as he only got the writeups for 3 encounters. Was your game similarly run on a need-to-know basis?

I'm sure Madison costuming will improve with time. I recall when my costume was a blanket, draped around me and pinned together — now I'm quite resplendent. 8^>}

Loved the bogus 'Wrath' story. I suggested it as a tactic to my team members, but the GM nixed it. Oh well!

I think my team played the role of the third team in your game: the runts. I compensated by pointing out to the GMs how underpowered we were (I'm obviously not one of the "macho" gamers). Don't know if it helped, though at least one encounter had only half as many opponents as were planned. I thought this was due to my reminders, but later found out it was because half the NPCs had been delayed at an encounter with another team! Since we barely survived, I'm not complaining...8^>}

A few IFGS points:

The game always starts late.



The weather never cooperates...completely.

There are never enough NPCs.

Everyone always forgets something — a flashlight, food, a weapon — something.

Sure wish I could 8^>}!



Jorenby: Nice subheaders! 8^>}

I have to admit that I don't play computer games anymore — not even arcade games. It's been a long time since the pathetic guy who begged for help with Hack in R&R #1! On the other hand, I should watch what I say — I'll probably find myself hooked on computer RPGs in a month...

Speaking of which, there was a rather heated debate on the subject of computer RPGs on the Argus BBS a few months ago. A newcomer had come into the RPG SIG, and was looking for some roleplaying games — but it turned out she meant computer roleplaying games. Whew, did the fur fly! I reluctantly weighed (gently) in on the side of those who said computer RPGs didn't belong in the RPG SIG — that the two genres were too different from each other. I mean, how much roleplaying can

you do with a program?

Re and S&P Code: I love violence — but only if it's not real. For example, in **RoboCop** I could tell that the arm-blasting scene and the ED-209 “You have five seconds to drop the gun” scene were cut (the latter by thirty seconds of ED shooting the corpse and the table), and bitterly resented it. That was comic-book, funny violence, and its removal hurt the timing of the film. It's when the violence is real, or *seems* real, that I have a problem. I absolutely cannot stand slasher films.

I also find violence towards females much more upsetting. Sexist of me, eh?

Like you, I often wonder about those who read TWH but don't contribute. Some are in the business; others I've heard from. But what about all the others? Who are they? Are they simply figments of Mark's imagination? Beats me! 8^>}

About the “Campaign Genesis” piece: it may eventually see the light of day. For those who don't know, I wrote a fairly long general article about campaign creation several years ago. I sent a query to a roleplaying magazine editor, and was turned down, sight unseen. Edited it, sent it in anyway three months later, received an ‘edit and re-submit’ reply. Did so, received another revision request, revised again, and received a ‘nearly there but but do one more major rewrite’ response. I agreed, and then found that I couldn't look at the stupid article again without getting the shakes! I still can't look at it, but there are a lot more game magazines out there; maybe one of them will be interested in one of the already-written versions of my article.

Phillies: Jeez! You ruined it!

Now that I know the end of Pickering, what's the point in going on? 8^>}

If the heroes will not solve their home-world problems within the scope of Pickering, am I correct in deducing that another story is in the pipeline?

Sorry to hear that you can't find any good campaigns. I hate to admit it, but I don't even know where Worcester is — is it far from Boston/Cambridge? You should be able to find a decent game there, I'd think...though maybe not. Bog knows I had trouble.

Butler: I'm looking forward to your writeup of Piper, son. You know, we really thought we'd found the answer — and that it was all your fault. 8^>} Hope you recover from your cold soon.

I'll refrain from laughing about the size of your 'zine...NOT! 8^>}

Of course, your 'zine in thisish will probably top 30 pages...filling me with shame. Do you ever get dirty looks when you walk by postal carriers?

You know, after this many issues I bet *everything* has been covered in TWH. I'm aware of that every time I start writing. Maybe we should all pack up and go home? NO! WAIT! The IFGS — I bet that wasn't written about until recently...and Amber, and Dangerous Journeys (Gak!), and...forget it. I'll *never* finish writing about this stuff!

Say Bob — have you ever considered writing an IFGS game?

Collier: Your idea of campaign structure — “a basic problem or theme...that will cause great change” is quite similar to my own. I always worry about the “Save the World” syndrome though. Have you had this problem?

Re Milwaukee By Night, just reading about it made my blood boil! To think that people can write and sell this stuff....brrr.

Re “The Horror...The Horror...”, shall I name you a corporation that's friendly? No problem. A few years ago I wrote to all the RPG companies I could find, asking for their writer's guidelines and publishing needs. Many failed to respond at all. Others sent a standard page with the usual format requirements. One, Avalon Hill, replied with one of the most annoying letters I've ever seen: basically, they said something like (and I'm paraphrasing from memory here ‘our trained game designers are better writers than you could ever be, so we don't look at games from freelancers. But if you want to pay us huge \$\$\$\$\$, we'll act as a vanity press for you...maybe. If your game doesn't suck completely.’ (I trust that this attitude does not prevail under the estimable Mr. Rolston! 8^>})).

However, I did get one response that was great. It was polite — no, it was actually very friendly — and very heartening to me as a writer. It was from — perhaps you guessed it — Chaosium! I really respected them for that. And one of these days I'll submit something to them, too. 8^>}

I agree with you totally about Marvel, though I should be careful what I say: I have a friend who works there. To me, Marvel and IBM and T&R all occupy the same plaque in the Hall of Heartless Corporate Monsters. Or at least reside in the same wing. 8^>} By the way, as a retailer, I assume you've heard the rumors that Marvel is planning on opening its own line of comic stores, carrying Marvel comics only?

The difference between sleaze and evil is probably a semantic one. To me, there's not that much difference. Needless to say, I'm not saying that *everyone* who works for T&R is evil! After all, I work at a law firm. And I'm sure there must be some

T\$R products that...aren't bad...(you have no idea how much it hurt me to say that. My reputation is ruined! 8^>}). All I'm saying is that from what I've read and heard, T\$R has generally been pretty damn ruthless in business — and while I don't dispute that a corporation has the right to make a profit, I do think that there is such a thing as decency and honor, even in business. Frankly, I think many of T\$R's decisions in the past have been harmful to the entire hobby, and thus to itself.

Overall, I thought I'd made it clear that I was passing on rumors and gossip. Apparently I didn't succeed; I'll try to be more clear in the future. As for unfair generalizations, I've heard that before. I make judgements based on what I know, and write them up as entertainingly as I can. Don't take everything I say *too* seriously.

If the cover was yours, it's gorgeous. A hot seller, too. Of the five copies of TWH #176 I brought to **Excalibur Hobbies** (a local game store), three have already been sold — while four copies of poor old #175 remain. And I think they all sold out at **Games People Play**, leaving behind a number of older issues... Guess kids these days don't appreciate fine embossing! 8^>}

Marsh: If I wait until I actually respond to your letter we'll both be dead of old age, so I'll respond here — hope you don't mind.

I don't know Gary Gyax. I've never met him. I doubt he'd want to meet me. I can only judge him on the basis of those of his articles and editorials that I've read. My opinions are shared by many others — that doesn't necessarily justify them, but it shows that the conclusions I've reached are not necessarily unreasonable. As for the other folk at T\$R, I don't know them —

I've heard that the corporate people weren't gamers, though that may no longer be true. I don't know the specific people you mentioned, perhaps because I haven't taken a long look at a T\$R product for years. The same way that I won't look seriously at electronics from Emerson, or computers from IBM...I have too much history with them.

Philosophy Corner

Build Systems: About Face!

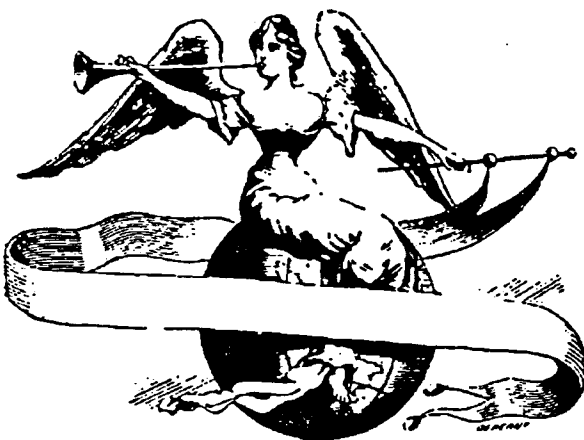
I've written about the importance of character build systems recently, I know. But a recent experience with GURPS has made me question that belief. I came up with what I thought was a pretty good character concept, with many pleasing and consistent elements — something I regard as vital for a satisfying campaign. When it came to actually designing the character, however, I learned the true meaning of the phrase "strait-jacket". It was like committing brutal surgery without anesthesia, or perhaps more accurately it was like editing a good 200-page novel down to a 3-page short story fragment. Ouch! I was throwing away lots of good material — important material — just to fit into the accounts and balances of the system. Yet the overall effect was to *strengthen* the character, in strict game terms. All the elegant and useless stuff had to go, along with major plot elements, to meet the cruel equations.

I'd had similar problems with GURPS before, but never to such an extent.

With that in mind, I'm no longer so sure that build systems are a good idea. Random rolling is of questionable worth, too. Perhaps the best way is the way I use for my own serious campaigns: the players describe their essential character conception, we bounce back and forth for a few weeks, and I determine the statistics without overmuch regard for 'balance'. On the other hand, a RuneQuest GM I know has a good alternate system he used while we were playtesting RQ4: he gave us 64 points to design our characters, and then after we were finished gave us ten more points to spend on things to round the characters out — subject to his approval.

Or maybe there is no best way?

NAAAH! 8^>}



Nextish:

A whole lot of stuff I had to cut — now that I'm laser-printing, I have to fit the whole thing on one 1.44 disk. Nereyon, *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, and a review or two, probably a writeup of Arisia...speaking of which, I look forward

to seeing some of you there. Look me up — I'll have a hotel room. Have a good holiday season, all! —>PM



Copyrights: Many copyrighted products are mentioned in Rack & Rune. No challenge is intended to any copyright. Okay?

Collophon

Rack & Rune #12:
Fool On the Hill was generated in ASCII form using PC-Write 2.5. It was formatted for desk top publication using Publish-It 2.0. It includes clip art generated with the Windows 3.0 Paintbrush utility, as well as clip art downloaded from several BBSes. It was printed on an Epson LQ-570 dot-matrix printer. NOT!

Thank you, mysterious RuneQuest benefactor! Readers — now you too can be a mysterious benefactor. Just send me stuff! 8^>}

