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Welcome to the Camel!

What do you do when the latest issue of your zine has fallen way behind schedule and you're struggling to write all the articles yourself?

Well in my case you screw the whole thing and settle down to write a quick mini-zine that might be photocopyable at work to save money.

So what is the problem with **camel** 14? Well it boils down to three essential problems. Firstly there is the money element of the equation, I have not been handling my finances as admirably as I might of and as a result I have been going from very rich to very poor very quickly. The large print runs of **camel** require about £100 of hard cash and I simply do not have that at the moment. Secondly, the articles I set out to write for Issue 14, well, some of them suck ass (in South Park parlance). The ideas sounded great but they have not really translated to paper in the way I hoped they would. Compounding this my files are empty of other peoples articles which could be used to fill the breach. Thirdly, my work has been quite high-pressured over the last couple of months (well since March actually), this means there has been less goofing off time available and when I have come home I have wanted more to sleep than write zines.

Those being the problems what are the solutions? Well the first edition of the Tetsubo Characters book is coming along great so I will be finishing that and printing it before return to **camel** 14. I do have a couple of reviews done and I have a scenario drafted but it still has not been playtested due to a lack of players. The second City article has also been 50% done and these will form the basis of the number 14. I may also try and solicit some articles about the collapse of *Visions*. I should also review some of the retro products I have bought recently.

In the meantime the articles that haven't worked out and a few topical bits and pieces will be thrown in this newsletter and sent out to all you faithful subs (particularly to those of you who paid money). I will also get a big batch printed in the Bristol Student's Union and send them out to other mags to be included when they are released. I will also include an *Imazine* issue with this newsletter to prevent me falling behind too badly.

Other Projects

Well you know that I always have more going on than I can cope with so here are a few other plans and bits and pieces.

I am devising a new PBM/RPG game that can be played by a number of friends who have

left the city but still pop by every now and then, and the Bristol

c a m e l
#2

Games Society members if they are interested. This idea has been prompted by a PBM I have been playing recently called *Inferno*. *Inferno* is run by a company called Undying King Games (www.ukg.co.uk) and while it has now come to an end one of the players described how the game was founded at the Oxford University Roleplaying Society and was "translated" into a PBM played both inside and outside Oxford. The idea was an intriguing one because a year long game would not only keep people in touch with one another but would also keep new students in touch with the Games Society and therefore susceptible to recruitment into my own games, cunning eh?

I had two choices: one was to run a game using White Wolf's *Dark Ages* set in Jerusalem and the Holy Land or a sci-fi game set in a newly rediscovered part of the Traveller Imperium universe. After discussion with a friend we decided that the "Gothic" reputation of *Dark Ages* might put people off and that a sci-fi game would be a nice change. We also came up with the cheese-tastic name "Supreme Elite". The system is going to be *Traveller* modified and simplified via *Fudge* while the setting will more or less be a bastardised version of the Spinward Marches.

If you want to join in information can be obtained by writing to me or via the web by going to www.bits.bris.ac.uk/rrees/SupremeElite. At the moment I am writing a booklet that describes creating your character and submitting your turns.

In addition to this I have also started a new chapter in my excessively long-running *Mage* campaign. This one has a working title of *Generation Next* (another awful pun and one I rather suspect I stole by osmosis rather than created) and is set in London campaign environment. It covers the period from the appearance of a new City Pattern Spider (apologies to John Spashett who I stole this idea off) to an apocalyptic climax that will hopefully span the globe and finish the whole campaign.

I would also like to re-run a Shadowrun campaign that I found on the Web but re-set it in the *Trinity* universe. I do not feel I gave *Trinity* a decent run for its money when it first

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appeared on the scene and I would like to decide whether it is shit or not at some point.

Down here in the West Country's only Real City we have also been talking about doing a *Changeling* campaign. The game is an interesting one with a seriously head-fucking metaphysical content and I've wanted to do something in it for a while. The trouble is finding an angle into it. I now think (again by stealing others ideas) that I have one. The idea is to do a campaign that is divided into three sections: the first will be set in the Winter of the 1930's. The location is Hollywood and the story revolves around gangsters, filmstars and the obligatory "Mystery Stranger". The second part revolves around a Woodstock-a-like music festival in California and has an Easy Rider theme to it. The year is 1969, when the Sidhe return to the Earth. The story is very sketchy at the moment but essentially is about a group of Commoner Fae bikers who encounter a Sidhe and get caught up in the world of the Noble Fae. Oh and the Mysterious Stranger has his identity revealed (but is he a goodie or a baddie?) as you might expect. The final bit is set during the Commoner's war and is set in New York during the decisive battle the players might be playing their characters from 1969 but are more likely to be playing Commoners on one side of the conflict or another.

The idea is still rough but if it materialises into anything more concrete I'll devote some **carnel** pages to it.

Then there is my website (at www.bits.bris.ac.uk/rrees) I'm getting a bit tired of my current job and I am wondering how I can move over to doing a bit of Internet development work while still earning a ridiculous salary. Now unfortunately your average Web Site designer does not get enough to support my stupidly extravagant lifestyle so I need something more complicated. The start though is to get a kick arse site together and if you have ever looked at my site you know it is incapable of kicking sand in the face of a five year old let alone providing an advert for someone claiming a huge salary. Therefore at some point I would like to overhaul the whole thing and get some neat stuff going.

Anyway, this is sounding like a diary of wishes rather than a list of future projects so onto other issues.

Music

I know I said I would no longer talk about music in **carnel** but then this is Camel is it not? Therefore I feel fully justified in mentioning three vital bands for your enlightenment. You are likely to have heard of

Mogwai as they are indie favourites who gained a lot of critical appreciation for their debut album "Young Team". Their follow up "Come on die young" is far superior being a collection of mellow rock songs that are for the most part instrumental and for the most part and words spoken or sung are sampled from television and video. One track for example is set over a piece of American football commentary. Music expressing life or music for livin' I do not think I know and I do not think I care. It is a great album and the little bits and pieces that appear on various magazine compilations are fine too.

I saw **Bellatrix** live as part of a post-birthday celebration (they cancelled their first date in the city) and they were superb. An Icelandic band their music is an odd but extremely pop mixture of folk, jazz and rock. Their unswerving dedication to providing catchy pop lyrics and a driving and unforgiving dancey bassline guarantee them a future career in this country as the successors of the *Sugarcubes*, a comparison that does neither band any credit however.

Finally, I missed the UK tour of **God Speed You Black Emperor** a Canadian band who plough a similar groove to Mogwai. Which is a shame as their "Slow Riot for New Zero Kanada" EP is absolutely fantastic. The recorded "lyrics" make another appearance (this time in the form of an interview with an American libertarian/survivalist) but the band combine powerful guitar based rock with an impressively emotive string section. They sound very different and I would definitely recommend that you try at least one of their releases if not an album.

Arab Strap are also really good but their new single has only been played on the radio so far and has yet to be released so I'll save them for next time.

We don't need no stinkin' heroes

Or at least, we do not need any more stinking superhero games surely? While I'll concede that no published game system has yet to really capture the nuances of a whole comic universe (much credit to TSR's *Marvel SuperHeroes* for doing a good job though) surely the notoriously flawed White Wolf *Storytelling* system is not up to the job.

Some asked me whether I knew about *Aberrant*, I told him bluntly that I thought it was unlikely to interest me. He then proceeded to tell me that all I needed to know was the Mega-Strength ability. Well certainly that told me a lot about both the individual and the game. Certainly with roleplayers the creation

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of a new "Golden Age" superhero background seems to have been met with indifference and what about that old "with power comes responsibility" schtick. I have already written a bit about how White Wolf create games that can be aggressively sold, but can their creative department be happy knowing that the roleplayer on the street cares more about the new powers in the book than in the background?

For those not in the know, *Aberrant* is set in the same world/timeline as the *Trinity* series only 2-300 years before (round about our 1960's though the actually background seems vague enough to be somewhere between the 1940's to the 1990's). The world is filled with mysterious beings for whom a brain mutation brings strange powers, the only trouble is the powerful the mutation the more god-like and inhuman the being becomes. Cue wars between the human "good" guys and the inhuman "bad" guys. I imagine you are thinking that this is a bit like a lot of the previous White Wolf games and I think I agree with you.

Unless someone is willing to give me *Aberrant* for free I doubt there will be any reviews of it in **camel**.

Greyhawk returns!

I am actually a big fan of *Greyhawk*. I cannot remember who originally created the world though I suspect it might have been the mighty G'ygyakkgaxxx himself. While I am not a fan of the "great man" himself I did think that Carl Sargent's take on the world of Greyhawk in the form of the *Ashes* series where Iuz the Evil threatened to take over the world like a shorter version of Sauron was superb. It was certainly the first commercial product I read that really took a ridiculously over the top fantasy world with every kind of crass AD&D absurdity in it and fused it with a realistic medieval environment to come out with something really special and different. Personal highlights are *Iuz the Evil* and *The Marklands* and both are worth searching out in the second-hand stalls if you can find them.

Therefore I am glad to hear that Wizard's of the Coast have made Greyhawk the "official" AD&D setting, leaving the *Forgotten Realms* still supported but a "secondary" environment (whatever that means).

Sargent's world was likely to give you hundreds of sweating labourers rushing to complete a line of defenses under the guidance of a vampire wizard while their militia opponents tried to zig zag closer to the defenses with a Spade of Digging. The mixture of low and high fantasy was at times

incongruous but overall highly enjoyable, almost enough in fact to bring me back to the D&D universe. Well what luck! WotC also announced that AD&D Third Edition will also be out! Fortunate for me I can be back in Greyhawk for only £100 or thereabouts, hurrah!

Let us see how the new writers deal with the Greyhawk universe before we all celebrate though. Certainly fans of *Ravenloft*, *Dark Sun*, and *Planescape* are all underwhelmed by the changes as they have all been binned for the time being. I have always felt that *Dark Sun* was an over-looked gem but that *Ravenloft* had too much of a committee feel to it with no overall scheme to its ideas. I know *Planescape* has some fanatical adherents but apart from the artwork the whole just did not gel with me. I think you have to be a real AD&D afficiando to appreciate the Planes.

I've finally read a Tolkein novel!¹

You may have noticed my reference to Sauron in the last piece. My pride knew no bounds in August when I finally finished *Lord of the Rings Part III*. I have always found *LotR* a tough read but I finally realised that what I found difficult were the Hobbits and the whole second book! I like the rest of it, particularly the bits with only humans in it.

I read the book to try and confirm for myself what I had always felt about Tolkein's orcs. I do, though, feel a certain amount of satisfaction that perhaps I might now fit in with the roleplaying fraternity; well if I can learn to love *Star Trek*, and *Babylon 5* (after the first series) as well.

Article Notes

Okay just a few comments on some of the articles that are included in this issue of Camel. They are essentially some of the "worst of" articles, not in the sense that they are bad, just in the sense that they were taking up more time and effort than they were genuinely contributing something to the zine. I felt a need to write about *Festen* and *Notting Hill* as they both managed to make me think after seeing them. You may have noticed that I have not included a *Phantom Menace* review here.

"*Is America ready for Democracy?*" should be a brilliant article. I started it when I first heard about Byrd's death and realised a country without tolerance is a country that is not democratic. The pistol whipping and murder of Matthew Shephard equally outraged me but somehow I got bogged down in trying to explain what democracy is rather than why America is not ready for it.

¹ That isn't the Hobbit

Review: Visions

Okay, so you're expecting me to say that it is a load of crap and indeed in many ways it is total crap. I could spend this review taking the time to point out the failings of its approach to producing an RPG based magazine or go through every article with a fine-tooth comb quoting the worst sections to make the authors look like idiots. I could also collect every verbatim repetition of a press release banality or the gushing praise given to commercial products that are pieces of shite but might still want to buy advertising space at some point. Or perhaps I could collect together the editor's over-blown sentiment of how important *Visions* is going to be (was).

What we would be gained by doing that though? *Visions* is (was) an attempt to produce a commercial RPG magazine and therefore is (was) doomed to fate of mediocrity and blandishment. Everyone knows that attempting to please everyone all the time leads to a magazine without any direction or critical bite. It is simply a glossy newsletter for game manufacturers.

So given that; I will instead focus on the things I liked, you can take it for granted that the remainder of the magazine was unreadable rubbish.

Well given that positive attitude there isn't a great deal to discuss. Both of the RPG scenarios (a Shakespearean-themed Mage game in the first issue, and Ars Magica style game covering the first invasion of the Mongols in Central Europe) were interesting ideas. They then let those ideas down with pedestrian presentation, lacklustre NPC's and a feeling that they had been written to fit a trend rather than because they were any good. Sure "Shakespeare in Love" was good but that is no reason to start writing Elizabethan scenarios.

The first issue managed to have a couple of other things of interest. Ken Walton's review of the *Star Trek: The Next Generation* RPG was interesting and gave a nice little contrast to Paul Mason's review in *Imagine*. Phil Master's is a professional RPG hack and his article on bringing the Spaghetti Western to Discworld was polished, proficient and as conventional and boring as Pratchett himself. Indeed such is Master's dedication to Discworld that he even makes sure that the humour is as funny as the original "The Dwarf with No Name" indeed! Ho ho ho! Stop it your killing me!

I wonder why professional writers inflict such "white bread" writing on their readers. Do they think we are incapable of parodying popular culture in RPG's? I think the problem is that Phil had a cheque at the end of the article to act as an incentive to finish it whereas I did not.

What happened to being positive? Well the point is that Master's article was well-written and slick and heck, if you like Pratchett you might find this funny rather than obvious. You have to give people some credit.

Oh dear, that is all I can really say about *Visions*, it was a magazine that was all it wanted to be – a glossy, bland, facile and ultimately sterile magazine that relied on a hardcore of gamers pay approximately five pounds per issue. Like a number of the other professional magazines that have appeared over the years it suffered from trying to steal readers from other's circulations rather than cultivating a niche for itself. It was a poor card game magazine that could not compete with *Inquest* or the *Duellist*. It was a poor computer game magazine that could not compete with any of the PC magazines available. It was a poor hardware magazine that could not compete with the "official" status of something like *Dragon*. It was not a good round up of gaming in general because each subject had too little space. Its book reviews were worse than Amazon's due to its apparent reluctance to point out the flaws in the product in favour of emphasising its better aspects. While this may have pleased the advertisers in the short run; looking to the long term sees that undercutting your critical creditability is not a good idea if you want to keep the respect of the readership.

In *Visions* meagre two issues there is nothing that makes me want to see another UK professional magazine – long live the likes of *Warpstone*.

Review: Notting Hill/Festen

Well you know that, just like the review of Visions Magazine, I want to tell you that Notting Hill was awful. The trouble is that it is not awful and to say otherwise would simply be prejudice.

Of course this is a mainstream film which tries to “touch base” with everyone in the audience. This means the film often varies from being very funny to more than a little simple-minded. When it is funny though it is very funny and often in a way that makes you laugh out loud. As an example at one point the film’s protagonist gets mistaken for a journalist and is forced to interview a junket of movie stars without having seen the movie they star in. What makes it funny is not the simple ludicrousness of the situation but the way that the hapless interviewer becomes more confident about asking questions after each interview without actually getting any better at guessing what the movie is about. “Do you relate to your part?” he asks one, “No.,” “Why not?,” “I play a flesh eating android.”

The humour is slightly sharper when Hugh Grant plays off “flatmate” Rhys Ivans. Ivans manages to appear physically revolting throughout the film and also manages to steal the best lines. He is rather more human and convincing than the wooden Grant who trots out his now familiar bumbling English man. Not only that but as a good supporting actor he manages to squeeze some humanity out Grant as well. Together you believe they might actually have a love-hate flatmate relationship.

“Notting Hill” makes far more sense under its working title of “Starfucker” or perhaps more trendily “*fucker”. The plot is essentially simple Grant’s bookstore owner meets Julia Roberts’ Hollywood star on a press tour of the UK. They feel some mutual attraction a certain meeting of minds and later when the actress needs a place to flee the tabloids she chooses the most obscure person she knows who is, of course, Grant. After the proverbial Perfect Day they fall madly in love and are only broken apart by the paparazzi. Just like Four Weddings and a Funeral she is in America, he is in London so there’s no opportunity to resolve things so Grant stews for a few months. Roberts then returns with a thoughtful gift and the desire to make a new life for the pair of them. Grant realises that he cannot really cope as a “normal person” dealing with the insanity of celebrity life. Crushed, Roberts flees back to America.

Of course the film does not really end that way. For a moment you think it will and it is the logical conclusion of the film but an obvious Hollywood ending has been tacked on the end of the end as it were. Grant realises that he could make it work with Robert’s character and he and all the minor characters pile into a car and bomb across London to catch Robert’s before she gets to Heathrow. Frantic, funny and ultimately heart warming and revolting mush for any sensible cinema goer.

In the end though as the director summed it up, what would happen if you could the most famous woman in the world to your friend’s dinner party? And perhaps more pertinently what would happen if you could sleep with her afterwards?

Notting Hill actually manages to deal with some pretty big themes: the impossibility of romantic love, the confusion of identity and self-worth for the truly famous, the inevitability of having to take second best and male identity.

Every day is Sunday in Notting Hill, the characters seem nothing better to do than socialise and are completely stress-free (not to say that they are happy, just that none of them have problems that keep them fizzing away like a caffeine addict). It’s no wonder the characters seem to have perfect relationships, they do not seem to have anything else to do. When Robert’s turns up on Grant’s doorstep he never says something daft like “Sorry but I have to go to work.” No it is on with the coffee and out with the poetry. Grant’s character finds a “true” love but the whole thing is held up as being so impossible you cannot help but wonder whether you are meant to deduce that such an artifice cannot exist for mere mortals.

Again when Grant rejects Roberts he seems to have found some sad peace, a regretful acceptance that he can never have this woman he desires so much. In fact Grant even manages to force a little bit of acting out of his otherwise stereotypically wooden performance to convey the pathos of the moment – only to have the thing totally undermined by the Hollywood ending that follows.

Another interesting feature is that Roberts’ character (okay the character’s name is “Anna Scott” but really apart from the supporting actors most of the people in *Notting Hill* are effectively playing themselves) is the dominant, aggressive party in the relationship. Grant is more submissive and it is he, not she, who pines away during the breaks in their relationships. If nothing else this perceptive piece of role-reversal is something that lifts the film above the morass of light, romantic comedies. I found it interesting that I personally found Grant’s devotion annoying while I willingly accepted Roberts’ renewed ardour at the end of the film.

So there you go, a film that takes a commercial opportunity (the sequel) rewrites the rules while making sure every box-office pleaser is there and manages to pack enough serious content into it to appease the high brow element. As a piece of commercial film-making I cannot think of any recent flick that is able to hold a candle to it. On this basis *Notting Hill* is compelling and entertaining, while it

Review: Notting Hill/Festen

may try and pander to all tastes this means that is the best social film you can go to see with all your friends this year. This, if nothing else means that I have conceded that *Notting Hill* is a good film.

Finally it is probably the best advertisement for London I have ever seen. It somehow takes the London we are all painfully aware of and turns it into some glamorous and beautiful place full of hidden parks and beautiful suburban homes. I suspect that *Notting Hill* projects an image of London that we have not seen on-screen since the height of the Swinging Sixties and I am all for it. Endless scripts about the “seedy underbelly” of the city have left me bored. Films about grim, dark city streets are passé so roll on the glamour revival.

Festen

Festen is part of the Dogme 95 family of films that subscribe to the agenda the Dogme group refers to as the “Vow of Chastity”. This style of filmmaking is the anti-thesis of George Lucas’ “virtual filmmaking”, it demands that the camera capture everything that happens without the aid of any post-production tricks. As a result of having access to no film trickery whatsoever your plot has to be excellent and your photography very clever. Fortunately *Festen* (“The Birthday Party”) has both qualities in excess. In fact the script is so good that I’m going to take the rare step of not saying what the film is about. The reason for this being that the central twist of the story puts a lot of the rest of the film into a different light. You can watch *Festen* more than once without actually seeing the same film.

The photography is excellent, the film opens on a man walking a dirt track between two fields of golden wheat bowed in the wind. Under the sun he talks on his mobile phone setting the scene until his connection disappears. This is just the first of a set of beautiful images of which the night filming is the most ingenious and aesthetically appealing.

The cast all give good performances given difficult material and are convincing as they play out a difficult map of relationships. The story revolves around a family who owns a hotel on an estate. There are outsiders here to celebrate the birthday of the family patriarch and they are drawn into a complex conflict within and between the family and the staff that work for them. The film examines the dynamics not just of the family unit but also the tension between siblings and employers and employee. Sometimes you have to feel sorry for the visitors entering this incestuous maelstrom.

The script is raw, dark and deeply touching. Leaving the cinema you feel as if you have felt the film rather than seen it. The dialogue seems to survive the translation (the film is Danish) into sub-titles well and retaining the original language soundtrack allows the delivery to retain its feeling. Only on occasion did I feel that the translators were not actually keeping up with the action on screen.

The biggest concern I have about *Festen* is where it fits into the Dogme philosophy of film-making. *Festen* is a great film because it has a great script that is well-acted, its photography is great but is that because of the ideology that shaped the film or because the photographer is talented? In short does the philosophy add anything to the film or would *Festen*, with its story’s independence from visual gimmicks, be a good film even if it had been shot by a Hollywood team and given a lush orchestral soundtrack?

Visually the film occasionally looks a little ropery and you wish that there could be tracking shot here and there. There is nothing, apart from the necessity to do quite “in your face” shots, that really distinguishes this from a regular film.

Oddly enough aurally there is a big difference. You forget how much the soundtrack is part of the modern movie until it is taken away. The pumping bass of a chase, the strings of a love scene... it is all emotional blackmail really. Not only that but I cannot help but feel that it has stealthily become a crutch for a poor plot or poor actors. Like Churchill noting to raise the voice when the reasoning is weak a stirring piece of music can “short circuit” the logic of a scene and go straight for the emotions. Without it you actually end up paying a lot more attention to what is being said and shown on-screen. The result being that the actors are really going to have to convince you of what their character is feeling.

The thing that I felt was weakest with the *Phantom Menace* was that the character actors were quite obviously “blue screening” for most of the film, i.e. talking to thin air. The patent lack of interaction with one another ruined the few moments of the film that were not wholly reliant on special effects.

So if Dogme is about getting back to actors acting with one another and focussing the viewer on the story the film is trying to tell then I cannot help but feel that it is going to make a difference.

Finally then, *Festen* is the very best kind of arthouse movie: complicated, rich and compelling. Most of all though it does not insult the intelligence and has the courage to be emotional without sentiment.

Preview: El Paso

El Paso is probably best described as a Worldbook for Wasteland Games generic games system *STOCS Lite*. Fairly predictably *El Paso* deals with the American West during the Nineteenth Century, what is crucial though is that while there is a certain amount of historical detail in *El Paso* it is overwhelmingly based on Cowboy films and television series. It is more John Wayne than the Man with no Name.

The book opens with a historical look at the Wild West, something of a boon to the Western roleplayer this section has all the virtues of conciseness, clarity and precision. Having also read White Wolf's *Werewolf: The Wild West* it immediately struck me that these pages impart a far better idea of life in the American West of the 1800's than the does the whole of the latter book. An RPG needs more than an excellent historical summary to be playable though and that brings us to the next section that is the inevitable Rules.

El Paso uses Wasteland Games own generic RPG system *Stocs Lite* (I don't know whether there is a *STOCS Heavy*). I do own *Stocs Lite* and I cannot say that I found it either original or inspiring as a games system. It does allow the rule concepts of *El Paso* to be expressed quite concisely and elegantly though, which is something that cannot be said about all "generic" systems.

The rule "additions" for *El Paso* consist of a set of Careers (with associated skills and possessions), a skill list and a set of special rules to cover things like gambling and shootouts. The latter, being purely abstracted rules based on dice and statistics, fail to convey the experience or and flavour of their subject matter but do have the virtue of covering certain events in an impartial abstract way. I think the choice to use them and be "fair" or to wing it and try and get the "feel" of someone leaping from horse to coach with a stick of dynamite clamped between their teeth will depend on the type of gaming group playing.

The skill list is very standard (Mining, Trapping, Riding and so on) and the Careers (as the book points out with a couple of well chosen historical antecedents) serve as templates to help start and form a character rather than defining the character and their future completely.

After the rules comes a bit of a mix of material that for the most part belongs to the initial section on the background in my opinion. There is a superb list of prices that starts with average wages for a number of Frontier careers and then lists a range of goods from saddles to novels. The combination of completeness and conciseness is a winner and made me wonder why so many other companies struggle to give you a feel for wealth and expenditure in their settings. There are also sections on firearms (important as the technology altered very rapidly at the time of the Civil War changing the West dramatically), gun fighting tricks and a few notes on what "made" an American of that period in terms of his background. All these details I short but perfectly formed and it is only the lack of a decent set of maps that prevents *El Paso* being the definitive roleplaying book on the Wild West.

The final sections are the game system specific Quirks, which are similar in many ways to *GURPS*'s, and notes on running Western style games. This latter is again, short but extremely good, it summarise all the common style of Western games and offers a few pieces of advice for running each one.

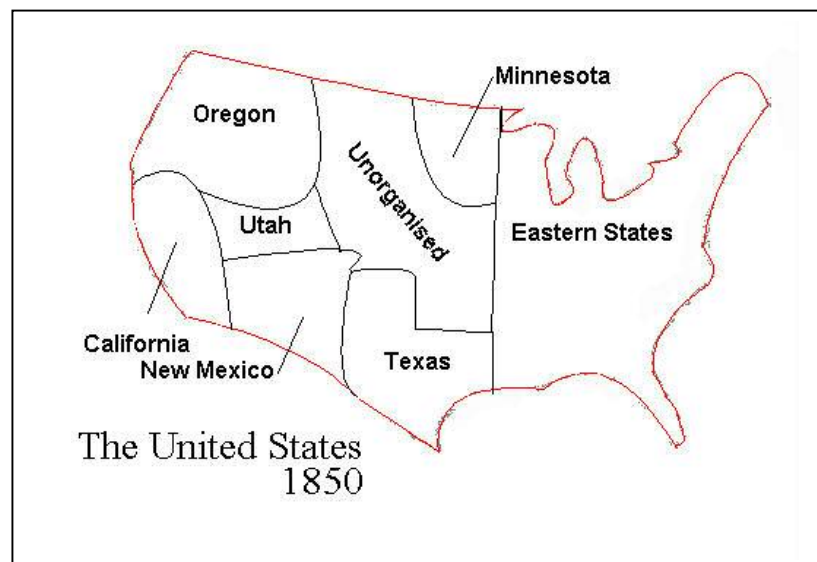
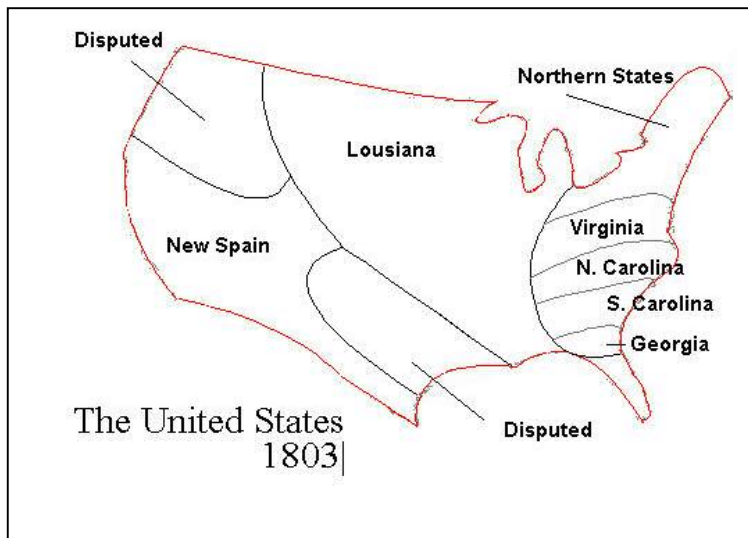
The very last thing is a little character sheet that is absolutely fine and photocopyable.

In conclusion then I find myself coming back to the same ideas, it is short but it is packed with useful information and from a personal point of view I think the sample campaigns and price list alone make the book value for money. Whether I would choose *STOCS Lite* to actually play the game in I do not know. It is testament to the practical nature of the authors though that the book is a general purpose tool rather than an overly elaborated expansion book (in contrast to the very specific *Ghost Towns* which is reviewed in **carnel** issue 14) for a given system. If the reader is a Western game GM and they do not already have some handy reference guide to the American West of the 1800's I'd say get it, similarly if you want to move into this area of roleplaying. If you're looking for an in-depth and exhaustive reference this is not it. Neither does it have any neat "mechanisms" to simplify the nuts and bolts of the

Preview: El Paso

“physical gaming”. I loved it, but if you are not sure do not waste £6 try playing a Western style game in your existing system of choice and if it works out, then buy *El Paso*.

The last thing I want to say about *El Paso* is its cinematic basis, the game is unashamedly about recreating Cowboy and Indians despite its detailed background pieces. The book itself set out three precepts for the Western move. One, that heroes are unquestionably heroic and moral; two, that Indians are always trouble and fellow need not trouble himself over dispatching a few of them to the next life; thirdly, that everything can be resolved with the gun. I would agree that these rules do describe a lot of the Cowboy films but I think it is a shame that the writers seem to take this as their focus rather than allowing a broader range of interpretation. I also think that the ideas above are perhaps offensive even if they are true to their cinematic sources. I think this book is far better than the “ground rules” above imply but I wonder why the authors do not.



James Byrd

At some point after 2:30 PM on the 7th of June 1998, outside the town of Jasper, Texas, a man called James Byrd was killed when his body hit a concrete post that simultaneously removed his right arm and decapitated him. Byrd had been chained to the rear bumper by three men, Berry, King and Brewer. His death was a particularly brutal and grotesque murder. The three murderers continued to drive their pickup truck, with the body attached, for another mile along the rough country road. Byrd's body was shattered beyond any possible recognition; he was identified by his fingerprints.

Apart from the gory nature of the crime, there seems little else to comment on, a brutal crime in a brutal world. The truth is that Byrd's death has exposed the powerful contradictions in American society and the forces that threaten to tear apart the self-proclaimed "World's greatest democracy". For Berry, King and Brewer were three white Americans who killed Byrd because he was a black American.

Generally such occasions bring with them remorse, regret and self-recrimination. Where authorities are slow to act and negligent, as with the Joseph Lawrence case, there is often anger and outcry. In Jasper however Byrd's murder has been the lit fuse for a conflict that many Americans seem to regard as both inevitable and natural. There is no room for remorse, only taking sides. This is despite the fact that the authorities were in no way negligent or reticent to act against the murderers. No mistake has triggered this anger, the hate has always been lurking under the surface.

Two weeks after his murder, Byrd's remains were interred. His funeral cortege was joined by a group of Black Panthers, armed with sub-machineguns. The Panthers had appeared to be part of history, consigned to black and white footage of race riots and protests from the Sixties. Their re-emergence into the global consciousness was a well-planned and media-aware response to the White Supremacy groups who had seized Byrd's murder as recruitment propaganda.

The handling of James Byrd's murder started to run into problems after an ill-chosen remark. As murders go Byrd's was easily solved. A monkey wrench with Berry's name on it was found at the scene. Berry's pickup was still coated with blood and the distinctive red clay of the mountain road. Berry seems to have been stricken with guilt and quickly confessed, the account in the first paragraph is based on his version of events², Berry's testimony meant King and Brewer were quickly apprehended. Jasper's sheriff, Billy Rowles, knew that the case would cause problems. In addition to raising the spectre of Jasper's own segregated and racist past, the media would be swiftly drawn to the more ghoulish aspects of the case. In a press conference where he explained he was handing the case over to the Federal authorities to prevent any accusations of mishandling the case he also ascribed the murder to drunkenness rather than animosity. When asked directly by a reporter the Sheriff fatefully claimed that the Klu Klux Klan were not present in Jasper and had never been.

It is easy to understand his intention. Jasper has not been a centre of racial tension, its community has slowly integrated. Both black and white sections of the town are Christian. Most "good citizens" of the town are concerned with other issues than race. However Rowles blanket statement was an opportunity that the Klu Klux Klan quickly seized.

² Please note that this is not to say this testimony is accurate, forensic reports found Byrd's blood on Berry's boots indicating that he had been part of the savage beating of Byrd prior to his being shackled to Berry's pickup. Berry seems to have fallen out with his companions after they made it clear they were going to kill the black man.

James Byrd

As a European it is hard to believe that after a racial murder an openly racist group can appear on national television and put themselves forward as a potential suspect. There is always controversy whenever the BNP want to broadcast and any station giving them airtime at such a sensitive time would be roundly criticised. The Klan however was allowed to deny Rowles statement and declare that it had had a “Lodge” in the region since 1966 if not since the defeat of the South in the American Civil War. Darrel Flinn, the Grand Wizard, who issued the statement also ironically commented on the “liberal media”. With the American media being notoriously conservative and hamstrung by “family values” it is strange that they can be liberal enough to broadcast the propaganda of the KKK.

After this initial outburst attention switched to another White Supremacist group called The Aryan Brotherhood, it was alleged that all three of Byrd’s murderers had joined the group while in prison, a precaution against well-organised and violent Hispanic gangs that exist within American prisons. The allegation was backed up by gang tattoos the three have, although whether those tattoos will be used as evidence is up to the hearing judge.

However both the Aryan Brotherhood and the KKK reside in an atmosphere of racial hatred that suffuses America.

“All we want is to be left alone ” said Jefferson Davis at the birth of the Confederated States of America. It this desire to be “left alone” that is the heart of America’s democratic problem and ultimately James Byrd’s death. Byrd’s killers are not isolated lunatics in an otherwise rational country. They may have entered the Aryan supremacy out of necessity, trying to survive the penal system but for the Aryan Brotherhood to exist at all there has to be a wider structure of racial hatred.

Here are a few quotes from Reverend W. N. Otwell:

On founding his commune in the forests of Texas:

It felt like Noah boarding the ark, and certainly like the Founders of America, arriving by the grace of God to perform their ministry.

We go out into the world to work but do no banquet with Satan day after day, like people out there.

On racial supremacy:

Adam was white, Noah was white. Jacob was white and Jesus was white. And God sent the white man to America to establish the true religion and American Constitution, govern the heathen and institute righteousness.

I am, acutally, an Aryan supremacist, but I don’t brag about it. Jesus didn’t brag about it, and nor do I. I’ll be courteous to them ... [but] we’re not in the same basket.

Let me say that in quoting this I find it ridiculous rubbish with no basis in fact and little logical coherency. Most racism boils down to: “they are here and taking our jobs and our women”. The amount of psuedo-intellectual justification that is tacked onto racism in America enrages me.

The quotes are telling though. “We’re not in the same basket”, “we go out into the world”. Otwell’s commune in the Texas hills is not in America by his own reckoning, by virtual of its spiritual purity, it occupies some other space quite distinct from geographic America. Not only that but the mystical land where it dwells is the same

James Byrd

place as that of the “Founders”. I do not know whether he means the Spanish, French or Indian founders but I presume he means the Plymouth Pilgrims. Anyone who is not white or who is not of the particular Protestant creed that Otwell and his ilk have created is not in the same basket. They dwell in the less ideal and more complicated America. The one denoted by geographic maps and which stretches from New York to San Francisco.

Much is made of American Isolationism but the spirit of isolationism goes much further than international relations. Communities like Otwell’s are the open face of American internal isolationism. The survivalist and religious communities that seal themselves off from the outside world seek to remove themselves from the rest of, not only the world, but also America itself. They are seeking to reject the very thing that makes their existence possible. Ultimately these communities seek to remove themselves from the realms of all human contact.

This is of course their inherent contradiction, these societies are not “in the same basket”. They define themselves in terms of others and in particular in terms of the differences (real or perceived) between themselves and the other people they live with. If the communities utterly divorce themselves from those who do not belong to their particular clique then their group becomes devoid of meaning. The godly and the ungodly, the saints and the sinners, the gods and the angels. These kinds of societies are built on the Christian binary tradition that builds out of the fundamental pillar of Judaism: black and white, good and evil, purity and sin. This is the ultimate irony of groups such as the militias and the KKK, without the blacks, liberals, homosexuals and the unclean they have no meaning. They claim that they seek to “purify” their lands but in reality they need their opponents to give them purpose. Isolationism is no solution if you do not have an ideology that can be equally self-contained.

Democracy is a strange concept that, like all good English words and idea, has had its meaning twisted and changed over the centuries. The Greek “*Democras*” simply means “small units” or “small quantities”. In the Ancient Greek system the small unit was not the modern ideal, the individual, but rather the smallest functioning unit, i.e. the village or community. Otwell’s little motor camp might have been considered a democras if it could supply most of its food and most of the inhabitants worked inside the stockade rather than out of it. The democras would put forward individuals that they considered best suited for the task of governing the nation to a council. The council then judged court cases and when necessary created plans for the whole national body to carry out.

I think all those living under the modern democracies would recognise the fundamental features of the Greek system described above. It is the subtleties that I want to discuss though. Firstly, just like racism or Judaism the system is dualistic and deals with the relationship between the two elements of the system, the democras to the council. Inherent in this system of democracy is the idea that there is a body that contains the democras and yet is not merely the sum of the individual democras. In effect when accepting democracy you are also accepting the idea of a State, linked to but distinct from the body that creates it. Neither element has more importance. Without the democras the State cannot exist and yet without the state the Democras has no meaning.

Democracy therefore means the process of passing representatives from a small body to a larger one. In contrast a Tyranny is the embodiment of State in the body of one

James Byrd

person, the Tyrant. While the Tyrant can be created by the forces of Democracy a Tyrant can never create a Democracy.

In many ways Tyranny is the anti-thesis of Democracy – not in its classic form but in its more modern guise. Democracy creates the State from its smallest elements - it builds from the bottom upwards. A Tyrant however creates the State with their own *will to power* and through this same device imposes the State upon those that make up the Nation.

But where has this argument taken us? In many ways James Byrd was the smallest constituent of the Nation, the Democras. People like Reverend Otwell are Tyrants. They are not made to create the State, they seize it and attempt to impose it upon the Democras.

The survivalist enclaves are the expression of this *will to power*, they could form a body that puts forward its representative, instead its will has been subjected to a Tyrant who has created his own State and now imposes it upon the community.

Before the American Civil War started in earnest the Confederate President Jefferson Davis said in all naivety, “All we want is to be left alone”. Although Davis was a democratically elected leader his statement is naïve because the very existence of the Confederation as a democratic body of states that do not constitute a nation implies a higher body or State than the one that had been created. That State in by the necessity of its existence then exercises its power over the community that created.

The structure of a Democracy is such that every component is affected by its creation. The Democras bring forth the State which then rules over the Democras. This is the definition of Democracy and its validity is not changed whether the Democras is armed and hidden in the Texas hills.

If America really wants to be left alone, like Davis said, if it really wants to appoint regional Tyrants like Otwell, how can it be Democracy? Is America ready for Democracy?

Byrd’s death was an act of rare and disgusting barbarism. Beyond this though it exposes the tension in the American system of government. It claims to be a democracy while its constituents seem unable or unwilling to prevent the usurpation of their own rights by charismatic and demagogic leaders whose personal pursuit of power runs counter to the very purpose of the Democratic State. Democracy is not compatible with Tyranny and the latter must be put down for former to continue.

America states that its Democras is the individual. This puts lie to Otwell’s paranoid and self-aggrandising idea that people “aren’t in the same basket”. Everyone is in the same basket when it comes to creating the State and that State must then take action against the criminals within it. America confuses (perhaps happily) personal liberties with civil rights. The right of the individual to appoint their representative requires acquiescence to the decisions of the State thus created.

The American Right with their accusations of a Jewish and United Nations conspiracy to destroy their Nation try to cover up the fact that fundamentally they do not agree with Democracy and are attempting to usurp it with their own Tyranny.

And all this without the big words? You cannot be a democracy and “Be left alone” no one can be “left alone”. Look at James Byrd he was not left alone.

Hi Robert

So, to Carnel 13. The first thing I must comment on is where you're moaning about not being able to do headings properly in Word. I find this boggling. Up to issue 33 I did imagine in Word, and didn't experience any difficulty with headings. You could do absolutely anything in Word, in terms of headings, that you could do with Microsoft Publisher. If you are unable to lay out the zine in Word I would definitely counsel against using Publisher, as it would be an almighty headache for you, and a bloody awful layout would probably result for us, the readers. Moreover, your comment about Adobe Acrobat is bizarre. Acrobat is not a layout tool. It's a file format.

If you are really desperate, I'd be happy to send you a Word template specially designed for Carnel. It would introduce such innovations as proper page numbers (what's your excuse for handwriting?) and titles. I would keep stuff like the letterspaced 'carnel' at the bottom of the page, as that's one of the few nice pieces of design you do use.

Your editorial dilemma is a useful piece of self-analysis, which if you reread at a distance of time you may find unexpected truth in. For example, you confess to being embarrassed about showing your zine to non-roleplaying friends. Why? Think about this some more. To be honest, unless your non-roleplaying friends are very unusual, I don't see that you sticking in a few token reviews of art exhibitions is going to change their opinion very much.

Not that I'm against reviews of art exhibitions. I did enjoy the one you wrote. It's just that putting it in to try to garner 'cred' from non-roleplayers is about the most pathetic reason for inclusion I can think of.

What you are missing in the editorial agonising is that there are two relatively distinct roles a zine can play: one is to cover a subject or subjects. The other is autobiographical. The latter resembles the enormous number of self-satisfied ego-columns that now seem to infest the UK press (satirised by Private Eye in their 'Polly Filla' column). As it happens, I much prefer zines to those columns, and I've read many personal zines in the past. But many of your readers, you will have to accept, get Carnel because of what it is, not because of who you are. If you want to turn Carnel into a pure personal zine, then that's fine, but you'll have to accept that the only people who want to read the zine are those who are interested in learning about you. It is the ultimate in vanity publishing.

As I said last time, though, I'm not at all against personal content. It gives a zine character. But the pure personal extreme can be ultimately as barren as the pure impersonal extreme.

Passing the reviews (which were interesting, but not provocative) we come to Rob Alexander's magic article. Strange having so many annotations. It was very generous of you to mention Magehunter again, especially as you must have realised that all that mage hunting stuff was ripped off from the movie Warlock, the main inspiration for the plotline.

I guess I've played in enough magic-rare worlds that this seems a natural approach to me. A game with a D&D level of magic has an unpleasant tendency to lead to power escalation, which so often ends up boring.

Rob's article is also a little too much from the point of view of the referee for my tastes. He correctly identifies the dilemma you face between giving the players spell lists and knowledge (and making magic mundane), and keeping things mysterious (and giving the referee too much work/power). What he misses is another solution which is to choose the second option, but to empower the player. This was an idea that Dave Morris proposed a long while ago. Obviously it requires that the referee trust the mage player, but it certainly can be done. In its simplest form, the mage has the ability to hijack the game reality from the referee for limited periods.

Nice to read more about the Aphex Twin after I'd just read the NME feature on him. I've had odd Aphex Twin tracks for years, but never got round to buying an album.

Letters

I don't think your analysis of the post-GW imazine is quite true. There had been reviews in imazine before, and there still are, so that's not a difference. The news and gossip (which prior to GW was mainly 'hobby' gossip) was actually started by Matt Williams in issue 13. A glance at the way he did it made it clear that he saw it as something of a Private Eye approach. I took this on board. My comment in issue 16 about being the 'slave next to the Roman general' was targeted at those in the industry who read the zine. I felt that at the time the zine might be able to have some slight effect, and I also felt that the industry needed to be satirised. I don't feel that now, but this is more a function of the change in the industry than any change of heart on my part. If I seem harsh on James Wallis in imazine, then perhaps it's because he's the only part of the UK games industry that seems to me to have the potential of doing something really valuable.

I do dare to deny it: I didn't lose interest in what imazine had become, and I enjoyed putting those issues together as much (or more so) than I do now. Look at the 'Talking to Tarim' letters page layout in issue 16 and you can see someone enjoying putting out a zine, experimenting with layouts, experimenting with different ways of presenting letters. As I got more toys and was finally able to DTP the whole zine (issue 20) I was learning a tremendous amount and enjoying it. The zine stopped at issue 20 because of an emotional trauma in my personal life that made it no longer possible for me to continue doing the zine. This was not a function of the content of the zine. If there was any part of the zine that did contribute, it was the bookkeeping of subscriptions, and all the crap involved in selling to shops and stuff.

On Terry Pratchett: I read his first book, but never felt sufficiently motivated to read anything else, so I can't really get excited about him one way or the other. In other words, he's not really much of a target. Maybe Moorcock feels the same way?

The Orc Culture article was weird, which is probably a good thing. It was a bit of an 'ecology of Orckind', though. Give me Dragon Warriors goblins any day...

And the SLA Industries campaign idea was a very good piece, which significantly upped my evaluation of that game (I don't own a copy).

I hope in your series on cities you are not going to limit yourself to tedious demographics, but are going to explore how you use a city in a role-playing game.

My Chinese game has been set in a town (a Chinese town corresponds to what at the time would have been a major metropolis in Europe), and it's interesting for me to realise just how much the town is a part of the character of the game.

I was sort of disappointed that you didn't mention any of the 'classic' fantasy cities, of which Fritz Leiber's Lankhmar is one of the most important.

Do the authors of 'A Man and his Moose' understand what the word 'surfeit' means? or are they just perverse? Can't say I enjoy their reviews much. They smack too much of American TV film 'reviewers'.

Unfortunately you get to meet a lot of backpackers in Japan, and this may underlie my jaundiced attitude to 'The Fig Tree'.

Curious that you managed to pick up DW1 and Pendragon 1st Ed together, since I reviewed them together in imazine. I remember being surprised when I gave DW the thumbs up (I hadn't actually met Dave then).

If you want a standard reference term for imazine, I would suggest vol 1 to cover the first 12 issues, The Matt Williams interlude to cover issue 13, vol 2 to cover the UK A4 issues, and vol 3 to cover the Japan A4 issues. Personally I don't want a standard reference term for imazine. Maybe I should go back to the original (issue 1-5) idea of changing the title every issue?

And finally, thanks for reminding me that I have an as-yet-unread Graham Greene anthology. Now that I've finished my Masters coursework I can finally start reading stuff freely again.

Letters

By the way, I know you have a habit of just spewing correspondents' letters on to the page of the zine as is, but feel free to chop bits out of this letter. I won't be offended. Honestly.

Paul Mason

Right, a few factoids – Acrobat is formatting program, not a file format. Acrobat Files are output in Portable Document Format. I've been looking into it during the break between issues. Overall I think getting Acrobat or one of the other PDF distillers might be a good idea if I ever want to send stuff to the States easily. Other than that I'm probably better off battering on in Word. I hope this issue is a bit more up to scratch. I'm actually going to try and do the whole thing in Word rather than pasting up by hand (the origin of the handwriting).

I checked up on the surfeit thing and it did actually prompt a debate about whether it meant an excess of something or a lack of it. Overall the impression I got was that, together, they have no clue what it means.

How dare you accuse me of writing an “ecology of the orc” article! You will destroy all my credibility with “real” roleplayers. Really the article boils down to the fact that, like Mulder, I want to believe and if something does not make sense that I find it hard to accept. If something is believable then your fantasy world is a joy to “live” in with inter-related cause and effect revealing itself like the layers of an onion. See later in the column for more thoughts on orcs.

On the subject of Imazine, well I think that I have to accept that you probably know best, it's your zine after all. It is probably more important to think about what Imazine is now rather than what it might have been.

As for the personal articles, well I ditched most of Issue 14's "personal" or "straight" articles into this pamphlet as they were not really working out. Perhaps it is best to see how the next bunch work out.

Issue 13 is the best one yet. Will let you have some comments on it soon.

John Foody

You little tease you...

I have read Carnel #13 and it was of passable quality. My articles seemed to work, although you should note that it was I, not Robert Clark, who would burn Shadis and the demons that cut it. Your articles were generally quite good

It becomes increasingly clear that you and I live in parallel universes - your references to time in the field of abstract things beings dead (i.e. no longer fashionable) I find exceptional bizarre, as if the rightness and reality of things changed with the views of a society, and as if any society larger than a single individual could be said to have homogenous views.

I also feel that your attack on Mr Pratchett was unwarranted in its ferocity. Lack of talent is no fault of his own, and nor is he to blame for the fact that many people like his work. Nor are those people to blame, even if they someone manage to like things in a way that is sinful. In fact, I would have it that there is no moral value issue here at all, even if there is one.

As an aside, I used to be a Pratchett fan but now find his writing to be rather bland. Essentially, he has maybe ten jokes and three morals, which are rearranged so as to appear in each book.

Rob Alexander

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If Pratchett's lack of talent is not his own fault then whose is it? Mr. and Mrs. Pratchett's? Even if lack of talent is not an issue here inflicting that abyss of talent on the public repeatedly and without mercy is definitely something that is his fault.

What really fucks me off about Pratchett is that he holds up a smug and complacent mirror to Middle England in which they can see their foibles and failings as something they can take pride in and which makes them better than everyone else. Now whether it is the author who is annoying me which his lack of critical objectivity or his readers who are lapping up such ego-massaging I do not know. The whole thing makes me sick.

Sorry about the name re-arrangement, could you just pass it off as a charming foible on my part? I will correct it when the issue gets re-printed though.

Personally I do think that "righteousness" does get re-defined as societies change and develop – I would say that is why we do not burn witches anymore or sacrifice children to the sun.

As for homogenous views I think that society has a lot of homogenous views (Dictionary definition of homogenous here). If you go into a shop, you would expect to pay for goods you want to take from the shop. You would also be a bit surprised if the shopkeeper broke into your house and took your purchases back. There are whole swathes of commonly held beliefs, it might be possible to define a society as being a group of people who share a common view of the world.

Thanks for issue 13, which was another enjoyable few hours reading. A couple of points.

Firstly, I do not particularly appreciate being called a "dipshit", especially on such little evidence. I am terribly sorry that I have not yet evolved far enough to be worthy of Paul Mason's attention or civility. The fact was that my argument on understanding (or not) twelfth century Chinese culture follows a respected academic tradition, and my reference to "daft" was to myself (though certainly by implication to others).

Secondly, both that point and my comments in support of Rob Alexander were in response to your request for my views on Carnel. Since you had very kindly sent me the zine, I think it was the least that I could do. To paraphrase Paul Mason, in his own magazine imagine that was sent with Carnel, I dont keep time or alter my views with regard to how old-fashioned the likes of Paul Mason take them to be.

Thirdly, there was a Paul Mason on the Balrog Banter editorial team, and so the question was not as stupid as Paul Mason's reply implied.

Lastly, I have a few comments on the issue, and I can only once again apologise to Paul Mason for their ignorant, illogical dipshit-ness.

I agree with your point about "Watchers of the Sacred Flame". The only beef I had with the scenario was when I bought the WFRP scenario Doomstones volume 1, and found it to be exactly the same as "Watchers" but with WFRP stats and without the floorplans etc. I felt rather cheated by GW (Flame Publications actually) to say the least.

I do have a number of points about your Warhammer goblinoids, but to state them all would probably be an article in itself. However, here are a few. I think the WFRP ogre has the potential to be a much more useful creature than the stereotypical goblin-leader that you seem to prefer, and probably would have done so had GW not stopped WFRP. However, the WH40K Ogryn, coupled with the smattering of information in WFRP/WFB, is easily developed - and there is a pretty good article on ogres in the WFRP Archive.

I dont recall any AD&D orc that I ever met complying with your nomad description - they all lived in cave complexes, but that could be because of the dipshit games in which I played. The high birth rate is balanced by a high death rate (poor healthcare, limited resources). The whole problem of a chaotic/evil communal grouping is problematic for any evil race, not just

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orcs, and the tribal system tempers this. The fact that a tribe is evil and anyone is willing to kill family etc does not mean they will. I think that game theory is relevant here, and that any individual orc must clearly weigh the consequences of a murder in terms of risks, gains and losses. I thought that the Salvatore Dark Elf novels at least tried to tackle this problem in a reasonably consistent way, for example.

I would not dispute your feminist view, although I would stress that you are referring to averages. On average, a male orc is more vicious than a female, but any two individuals a PC might meet are not averages - so the female could be more vicious. It is also my opinion that such feminine characteristics are social rather than genetic, and thus a case could be argued for more vicious females. I think that the place of the social (nurture) is under-played in WFRP when comparing evil with neutral cultures; humans are just as vicious as orcs in many ways. Humans let their own kind starve in Old World cities, fight each other because they are different races/nationalities (Empire/Marienberg, Empire/Brettonia etc), and would kill the young of any orcs they find without compunction.

In WFRP, I think that orcs are a perfect example of the Marxist false consciousness. Really, they should side with humans against Chaos; that is where their genuine interest lies if they have any chance of retaining racial and cultural independence from the effects of Chaos.

Orcs must have some level of artisan, as they appear to have a(n albeit rudimentary) division of labour. There are clearly warriors, priests, chiefs, herders at least. Also someone must cook, hunt, dress/tan hides etc. I think what is under discussion is the ability of these artisans, and I would limit them considerably. I do not think that orcs have the aptitude or patience to become great artisans in any field - their shamans go for crash/bang/wallop, their weaponsmiths go for quality over quantity (especially as defeated humans will be looted), their clothiers will adapt looted clothes rather than grow fibres, farm them, spin them etc.

All in all, I see orcs considerably differently. I am not sure what "the rugged individualist" means in any context, except a piece of Nozick/Tory/Right (whatever) propoganda, and I am doubly perplexed at the thought of the orc as one.

Your "Heart of a City" looks promising. From a WFRP perspective, Middenheim suffers everything from ridiculous population figures to a twenty first century sewer system. Paul Vernon's articles were good for their time, but I also have somewhere a town creator that I downloaded from the Web. I have not used it (yet), so I cannot comment on how good (or otherwise) it is.

Tim Eccles

Where to start?! I agree that politeness generally costs very little in roleplaying letter columns. However sometimes things get a little wayward, the policy now is to print everything and not apply a judgement to its content. But in the meantime, can't we all try to get along?

On the Orcs side, the "rugged individualist" is exactly a facistical idea. I think Orcs represent a lot of facistical ideas – not least the idea that might makes right. That is what I was trying to get across when I compared the GW orcs to football fans. Personally I think that that portrayal of orcs in the Warhammer universes does appeal to the kind of bully boys who quietly agree with the BNP and Combat 18. There is a lot of far-right ideology in Games Workshop and it does worry me a bit, especially with the low age-range they target. The thing is are they responding to the naturally facist tendencies of the English bourgeoisie or are they feeding their own fractured ideology. I know that after the great shake up in GW there were a lot of people who were into biking and heavy metal and what have you and both of those interests accept facist symbols and ideas. I may not be a biker but I have been a metal fan in my time and a lot of the bands reach for controversial symbols like the Iron Cross without having a strong enough cultural

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background to give it a context. At least when the Sex Pistols wore the Swastika you knew that it was a part of who they were and what they wanted to achieve.

I agree with you that I was talking about averages, after all perhaps there is the odd male orc who likes to play with children and look after them. However given the culture they are portrayed as having it is likely that the cissy girl boy would be emasculated before being thrown out of the tribe with a good kicking to boot. I think what I was trying to say is that a culture that is as violent and uncaring as the orcish one is portrayed is not sustainable. I guess the whole article was flawed by trying to put a logical framework on something that is completely illogical and driven by marketing concerns.

I noticed you mentioned looting, which is another of my bugbears with the orcs. If you look at how many clothes and tools you need in your average day-to-day life how can a lifestyle such as is purported for the orcs be supported on the basis of looting? When the handle falls of your saucepan what do you do? Nip over the hill and steal one from the humans who spend their lives making saucepans in case they ever get looted? Well in that case could you get some onions as well?

I refuse to believe that all the boots that orcs wear have been taken from human owners. The idea is farcical – either the orcs have an artisan culture, no matter how rudimentary, or they are a primitive culture that is essentially hunter-gatherer. An analogue might be Brazilian rainforest tribes, essentially they are a primitive culture interspersed with stolen or provided technology such as televisions or shotguns. I do think you have to choose between one or the other.

Tolkien's orcs at least had the decency to be supplied with armour and weapons from Mordor as well as having an evil overlord to handle the logistics. The current situation for WFRP orcs is stupid and unbelievable and the minute you have a halfway intelligent player the suspension of disbelief becomes a big issue.

I think the best way to think about this is what if a non-roleplaying friend entered the game (a girlfriend or spouse is a good example (apologies to all non-married heterosexual female readers (but who are you?))). Without the protective veil of accumulated bullshit we accept in our games the whole thing just looks incoherent. Would this novice accept the explanation that this is WFRP or D&D and that these things simply happen? I think long time gamers acquire such a litany of things they are going to accept that they forget how nonsensical their games have become. I think from an immersive roleplayer's point of view it is helpful to step back occasionally and ask whether you can really believe in this alternative world. I think if you can it makes it all the more enjoyable to play in it.

It's a bit of a cliché to say this, but the latest Carnel is probably the best yet. This may be because I'm confusing quantity with quality, or because there are more than a few article in it that interest me. Whatever it is, I'm just glad it's here!

Firstly, I was extremely surprised to see that I was credited with a review of a magazine I've never even read! I suspect it was actually Rob Alexander's, though you did mention that you'd been confusing 'Rob' and 'Robert' lately.

The article on magic certainly hit the spot. We'd recently been experiencing similar 'problems' in our WFRP campaign, especially because the party Wizard (name withheld to protect the guilty) approached every situation by scanning his spell list and crossing off the appropriate number of Magic Points. This quickly became a bore, not to mention removing the 'magic' from magic altogether. I agree that overuse of magic should have undesirable consequence, especially in WFRP where magic inextricably linked with Chaos. I just hope the forthcoming Realms of Sorcery (original release date: 1987) will go some distance to fixing this.

Letters

No comment on the music piece – my musical tastes are so ‘uncool’ that they make me seem middle-aged.

I’m beginning to understand this World of Darkness business I think, thanks in part to your solid scenario. I may (will?) get berated for saying this, but the attraction in White Wolf games seems to be its emphasis on roleplaying and moral dilemmas, rather than (or even in spite of) the settings which have so far put me off. Exactly the same reason I love WFRP, despite people’s assertions that Chaos is the be all and end all of the game, and that Chaos is evil. Chaos isn’t evil, it’s Chaos. WFRP isn’t all black-and-white, something its critics in Carnel seem to be missing.

Regarding what Paul Mason wrote about the idea of a culture game set in Britain; sounds like a great idea. Having just finished reading Bernard Cornwell’s ‘Warlord Chronicles; I have totally abandoned my earlier thought on Faerie-folk (partly to do with FT – see later), but I am in a rut as to what else I could do here. Anyone who hasn’t read Cornwell’s trilogy should do so, especially if they have an interest in Arthurian myth. You won’t be able to read any of that lame Arthur-inspired bollocks again without a smirk on your face; I know I won’t. The time period of the books would make a great game setting. There’s also a load of point no how to make magic really magical, which the author somehow manages to incorporate plot without ruining your suspension of disbelief.

Oops, digressed a bit there. I thought Paul was a bit harsh about Tim Eccles comment, to the point that I suspect Tim hits a nerve. I don’t agree with Tim mind you, but being the all-round nice guy that I am (supposedly), I think Paul was wrong to attack Tim personally. Attack his views if you wish but personal slights cause bad feeling and only make things worse.

I’ll ignore your comments on Terry Pratchett. Each to his own, eh? Actually one of Pratchett’s strengths is his observation of English culture, something which many claim we lack. Self-deprecation is part and parcel of this.

I must thank you for putting your thoughts on Orcs into print. I found them most interesting. Your initial comments on exactly what makes green skins interesting to gamers was a little wide of the mark; as a WFB greenskin general myself, it isn’t the violence alone that makes them appealing (Dark Elves make a much better choice for the wannabe sadist), but the combination of robust, almost laddish culture and the maniacal humour involved. You are not the first person to compare greenskins to football fans either (according to certain anonymous ex-GW staffers).

In trying to understand greenskin culture it has been necessary for me to go right back to the origins of the whole concept. In all essence they are a fusion of Barbarian invader (the greenskin destruction of the Ancient Dwarven Empire is a clear analogy to the Roman Empire’s fall to the ‘barbarian’ hordes) and the original goblins and sundry spirits of folklore. In other words, a juvenile culture given to excesses of violence, cruelty and with a twisted sense of humour. This is a gross generalisation I know, but it’s important to understand the fundamentals before trying to write something as complex as a sourcebook, which I foolishly think I might be able to do.

One thing I thought your notes clearly brought to the fore was that there are so many vagaries and contradiction in the source material. This is why it’s essential to understand the core concept before trying to put it into some semblance of order. In fact, you probably described the Waaargh much more eloquently than I ever could (“why use ten words, when you could use a hundred?” – me). I wouldn’t go around calling it ‘life-force’ though – rather reminds me of that other green fellow, the one that lived in a swamp...

And onto SLA. Our roleplaying group recently took a break from WFRP, spending four weeks attempting to play SLA. It went badly, being little more than a dungeonbash with guns at best. I since dismiss the system because of this, though if the plot had been anything like the one in your article, I’d never even considered giving up. Proof once again that unless the mechanics are completely unworkable, it’s the plot which makes or breaks a game. Your thought

Letters

reminded me of the old Judge Dredd scenarios in White Dwarf. This is a good thing, in case there's any doubt.

I look forward to your continuation of the city article. I'm currently working on something for TGT, and as ever I'm willing to read other's thought to improve my work.

The only thing I feel was lacking was a few more letters. Don't go the way of Warpstone on this. If you strive to be like Imazine (which I've picked up on at least once), then try for it in the letters page.

Robert Clark

Thanks for the letter. That's one closer to Imazine... Obviously a letter column is controlled by two factors. If you want to start "conversations" in the letter columns you have to publish frequently. On the other hand, unless you want to make them up, the letters you receive controls how long the column's going to be. Keep them coming and I'll keep on printing them. Oh and I'll try to do something about the frequency too.

Well on the subject of Pratchett – since you had to bring it up again – I could not agree less with you on him being observer of English culture. Pratchett does not write about politics, money, nationalism, consumerism or class identity; he writes about wet afternoon sports days. All the characters in his books are comfortably off financially, are enamoured of the status quo and crave or attempt to preserve their respectability. They are icons of the inept and the self-oppressed. Apart from this see my other comments earlier in the column.

Your point about the Dark Elves versus the Orcs amused me. I think the anti-intellectualism of the Orcs (a form of self-loathing for the player) is a key attractor. I think the Dark Elves attempt to contextualise their violence and justify their actions makes them unappealing for someone who is looking for an outlet for violence. Orcs do not think, they are base, impulsive and primal. Me Tarzan, You Jane. Any culture more complex than this and the appeal of the violent impulse goes away.

The Lifeforce was stolen from the playwright and writer George Bernard Shaw. He used it to try and conceptualise the drive to procreate and form stable family units. It has been used elsewhere as well. It just hit a chord because for Shaw people are naturally just like Orcs: cruel and selfish. Our community extends only to those we share the Lifeforce, the need to reproduce, with. It seemed to fit the subject matter.

I thought it was interesting that you do not seem to think that Tolkein had any part in the creation of the Warhammer Orcs. They have been changed over the years I'd agree. Surely he must have had some influence though.

I also do not understand the connection you imply between a barbaric culture and a juvenile one. I also think that the analogy between real world "barbarians" and the WFRP orcs is a bit misguided. The Visigoths and their contemporaries end up bringing the Roman Empire to an end almost by accident. Their motives were quite complex, WFRP orcs on the other hand seem to lack that complexity. Their motive for attempting to destroy human civilisation seems to be simply "because it's there".

I think that the article now needs to be followed up by another on the psychological archetypes that humanoids represent. Perhaps in the "real" **camel** 14 perhaps?

Thank you all for your comments and sorry about the delay bringing them to paper. Please keep your letters coming in, even if you find the discussion a bit boring they still have a real influence on the zine.

Robert