CLASHARKS

Contents

Letter from the Editors

Hell-lo to all you in there, and it's another gloom-ridden psychotic evening on Radio Claws. Tonight, by popular demand, we bring you yet another 5-hour programme of impenetrable Gothic silence, followed by Auntie Jane's poular Icky Cyberspace Screams and Splats. CLAWs - the only late-night radio to come to you from the Dungeon Dimensions...

Greetings, seething hordes of CLAW!

Yet another non-biodegradable, self-exploding edition of your favourite form of scurrilous literature produced by your team of late night raveners.

(This version comes to you without the chinese laundry, as Fu Manchu gnaws his moustache in helpless rage).

Typist to clawthing; What do you really want to say in this eds letter? Clawthing/EDs replys: Nothing with any content. The usual ravings.

The Claw hierarchy wish to take this opportunity to refute, publicly and utterly, the scurrilous rumours of their masochistic tendencies. We bring 3 tournaments and CLAWMARKs out on the same weekend because the conjunction of major planets is laterally auspicious.

Today's piece of useless information. You always wondered why so many of the CLAW hierarchs wear black. Actually, it's because it is impossible to fit running a society, fanatical role-playing, obscure devious pursuits and a token attention to academic demands, into the same corporeal form. Our intelligent hierarchs have simply wandered down to the astral Topcopy and run off several copies of their physical forms. In black and white, because it's cheaper. Any CLAW hierarch you meet who is actually in colour must be the original, and is probably not doing any work at all.

The editorial team would be grateful for the services of a competent demonologist or exorcist, as the Green Level laser printer is haunted by a Random Poltergeist of Epic Splin. Failing this, we will accept tenders from deranged axe-wielding maniacs, who can probably at least rearrange the problem a little.

We thought that you should know that niggle and spon.

Yours in extremis,

The Editorial Thanggg.

Letters To The Editor

Dear Editors,

Are you often mistaken for people? I have often had this problem myself, and can understand how embarassing this is. Why I even got people trying to sell me 'life' insurance!

Yours vampirically,
Strahd.

Dear Vampiric Unperson,

The only people who ever mistake us for people are people, who don't count anyway. We certainly don't let it worry us.

Yours in astral splin,
The Editors

Dear Editors,

Lettuce to the Editors.
We don't think you're getting enough greens.

Signed,
The Editor's Mother (skilled Vegetable Lord).

Dear Green Mum,

As a matter of fact, you're wrong! We just received a lettuce from a funny green man on Mars. So there.

Yours in cabbage,
The Editors

Dear Bloody Magazine,

We here on the planet of Mars are becoming extremely disillusioned with your Earth. We receive nothing but negativity from your planet. We did some research and found that your magazine is responsible for this infringement of our collective cosmic rights, in that your magazine advises people to send their complaints (which are numerous, we can tell you) against the scruffy little publication to our beautiful planet. STOP IT, WE'VE HAD ENOUGH!

Yours very sincerely
Xavier Xolfonso III
Mars

Dear Funny Green Man,

There's a fundamental and fatal flaw in your reasoning. If you receive complaints, it can't possibly be about us. No-one would dare.
I suggest you do unspeakable things to your researchers.

Yours fascistly,
The Editors

Dear Editors,

This year we, in our wisdom, decided to have not one but three tournaments, produced at the same time as Clawmarks VII. Are we all a bunch of psychotic brain-dead zombies or what?

Just checking,
The Editors.

Dear Editors,
Yes.
Yours in psychotic brain-dead zombidom,
The Editors

Dear Black-clad Weirdos,

Six months ago I was a confused fresher. Now, I am a confused, slavering, sociopathic fresher who wears black clothes and Doc Martens. This regression is a result of your deviant society and its debauched habits. Thanks, and keep up the good work.

Signed,
Uff.

Dear Convert,

Congratulations.
However, as you are a fresher, you are of necessity a mere lowrarch, and your opinion hence does not count in the slightest.
You may take a free rank in cringing servility.

Yours from Olympus,
The Editors

Dear suspicious Communist Infiltrators,

As a subversive student society your Clawroom was naturally bugged by our officers of the Sekurity Polise. The case offisier given the job, man!, on listening to the tapes for 48 uur straight was left a gibbering wreck. Before he was taken away, going 'Ning, Niggle, Spon', he recorded no less than 1437 nasty plots, and many other crimes were discussed. We have not been able to identify the perpretators, as they used strange cover names like Malidros, Ixicarus and Mungo - but die investigation continues.
You Have Been Warned.

Yours,
Big Broer, Okult Related Krimes Division

Dear Big Broer,

We thought you should know that Ning! Ning! Niggle! Spon!, and that the subversive plot to undermine the government and sow anarchy and confusion is code named Nurgle.
See you by the blasted oak at midnight.

Yours subversively,
The Fiendish Spy-Network Bosses.

P.S. What has revolutionary anarchism got to do with the occult, anyway?

Dear Editors,

Hello.
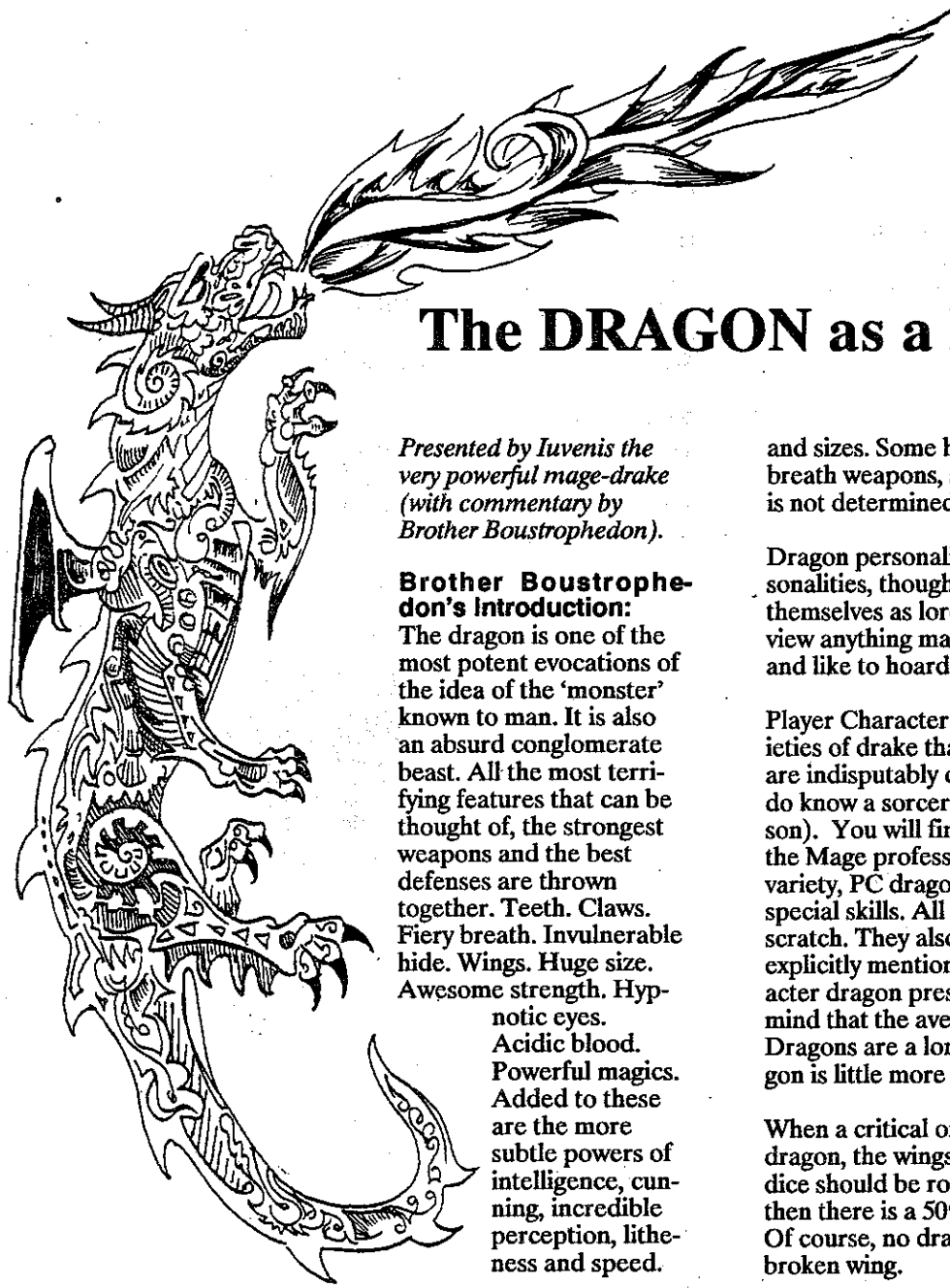Do you think Ophelia became a Lorelei?
Yours in the ponds with spirits in them,
Thomas Greene

Dear Mr Greene,
Huh??
Yours without culture,
The Editors.

The DRAGON as a Rolemaster PC

Presented by Iuvenis the very powerful mage-drake (with commentary by Brother Boustrophedon).

Brother Boustrophedon's Introduction:

The dragon is one of the most potent evocations of the idea of the 'monster' known to man. It is also an absurd conglomerate beast. All the most terrifying features that can be thought of, the strongest weapons and the best defenses are thrown together. Teeth. Claws. Fiery breath. Invulnerable hide. Wings. Huge size. Awesome strength. Hypnotic eyes. Acidic blood. Powerful magics. Added to these are the more subtle powers of intelligence, cunning, incredible perception, litheness and speed.

It is small wonder that no two people can agree on what a dragon is precisely. It is an evocation of whatever each person considers most feral, the icon of animal perfection. Long have I considered those who would roleplay a dragon the worst of powertrippers, drawn to the most overt and powerful weaponry.

But then late one night I met a strange being. He said that his name was Iuvenis, and that he was a Player Character Dragon. He insisted that even though he was 'Very Powerful', he was well-roleplayed, and that dragons deserved to be more widely played. This, then, is his story.

Iuvenis takes over:

Hello Clawmarks readers! It has occurred to me that there is a serious lack of dragons in many campaigns. Having been a dragon in a Rolemaster game for many levels, I will attempt to rectify this lack. Read on!

As can be seen by any peruser of Creatures and Treasures, Rolemaster Drakes come in many shapes and sizes. Some have wings, some not. Some have breath weapons, some not. The colour of the dragon is not determined by the type.

Dragon personalities can be as varied as human personalities, though dragons do have a tendency to view themselves as lords of creation. They also tend to view anything mammalian as a potential food source, and like to hoard treasure.

Player Character dragons can be of any class, but varieties of drake that can normally cast essence spells are indisputably creatures of the realm of essence. (I do know a sorceress drake, but she is not a nice person). You will find that most elemental drakes are of the Mage profession. Unlike the more Powerful NPC variety, PC dragons start out with no spell lists or special skills. All these must be developed from scratch. They also do not have any special ability not explicitly mentioned. If you think that the player character dragon presented here is a weakling, bear in mind that the average YOUNG drake is tenth level. Dragons are a long lived species, but a first level dragon is little more than a hatchling.

When a critical or spell specifies a random limb of a dragon, the wings are counted as well. A six sided dice should be rolled. If a critical specifies an arm, then there is a 50% chance it affects the wing instead. Of course, no dragon can fly with an immobilized or broken wing.

SKILLS

Dragons, as intelligent creatures, have few instincts. They soon realise how to walk, but must be taught to talk, use a breath weapon or fly. Certain new skills can be developed by dragons. These are in three main categories: breath weapons, physical weapons and flying.

Breath weapons

All breath weapons must be developed at the same cost as the primary weapon, or 2/6, whichever is cheaper. The stats used for bonuses are Constitution and Agility. For level bonus purposes, it is an Arms Law Combat skill.

The attack is determined on the appropriate bolt table. A dragon may develop as many breaths per day as it likes, as long as the second breath does not have more ranks than the first breath, and so on. If only five breaths have been developed, then the dragon can only breath five times a day, applying the bonuses for breaths one through to five in order, as the re-

sources of err, um, whatever it is that dragons use to breath with are depleted. One minute must elapse between breaths.

Breath control can be developed for a cost of 1/4 to do things such as light a fire (and not the tent next to it) with a fiery breath, or burn a horse but not the rider. The stats are SD and AG. This is also a Arms Law Combat skill.

Flying
Flying must be developed. The cost for this is given in RMCII under the drake's class. The stats are Quickness and Agility. With no ranks in flying, the dragon is at -25. Flying in a straight line through the air unencumbered does not require a maneuver. Taking off or landing on a flat surface is EASY, and it goes up from there. See the box for the details of encumbered flying.

The GM may subdivide flying skills into:

Aerobatic (general) flying: as detailed above.

Distance flying: the airborne version of distance running, with identical costs, stat bonuses, etc.

Speed flying: as sprinting.

Silent flying: as stalk.

Speed and distance flying are half similar. Both are 1/8 similar to aerobatic flying.

Physical Weaponry
The dragon MUST take this as the primary weapon category. The cost is as for the character class or 3/5, which ever is cheaper. These weapons cannot be used to parry with.

The physical weapons are:
Claws: as the Claw table, using the ST/ST/AG bonus

Bite: as the Bite table, using AG/AG/ST bonus

Wing Bash: as ram/butt/bash, using ST/ST/AG
This attack is often underrated. There are cases of humans being killed by swans using this attack.

Tail swat: as ram/butt/bash, using AG/AG/ST
Great for those pesky things behind you.

Horn: as horn/tusk attack, using ST/ST/AG. This one really comes into its own when flying. Diving down on someone gives it lovely bonuses.

Any physical weapon that is not developed carries the standard -25 penalty. See Creatures and Treasures for details of which attacks can be used together. Either tail bash or wing bash (but not both) can be used for the bash attack.

ADVICE TO YOUNG DRAGONS

Brother Boustrophedon waffles:

Any intelligent creature's world-view is shaped by those it associates with, and those it learns from. If you rear a dragon from the egg, it will speak your language and use your habits. But as a dragon grows older, it cannot escape what it is. The dragon's sheer power makes it very easy for the beast to feel arrogant. Dragons, historically are more greedy than ambitious. They seem more interested in comfort than power.

Any infant beast is inquisitive. Young adult dragons are adventurous. As the beast grows to great size, it begins to feel more lethargic. These old ones are the great wyrms that sleep on piles of treasure.

Iuvenis advises:
Never eat your fellow party members. Not even if they died through no fault of yours. Mammals are very touchy about this. They may also want you to wash the blood off your muzzle afterwards. Try eating the people that the party kills. You will generally find that the monsters that the party kill taste foul, so you may have to buy livestock at villages.

Oh, that's another thing. Avoid villages. Villagers tend to run away screaming, or run towards you waving pitchforks. I recommend learning such spell lists as living change or unseen ways as soon as possible. The ideal would be a magic item that would allow you to change shape.

If you are a small and very desperate dragon, you could put on a collar and chain, act dumb, and be held by a party member. Just make sure that you can undo it in a hurry.

Remember that the fifth level living change spell, change to kind, allows you to change shape into any DRAGONOID form that you have studied.

Lofty bridges is actually a very useful list for a dragon
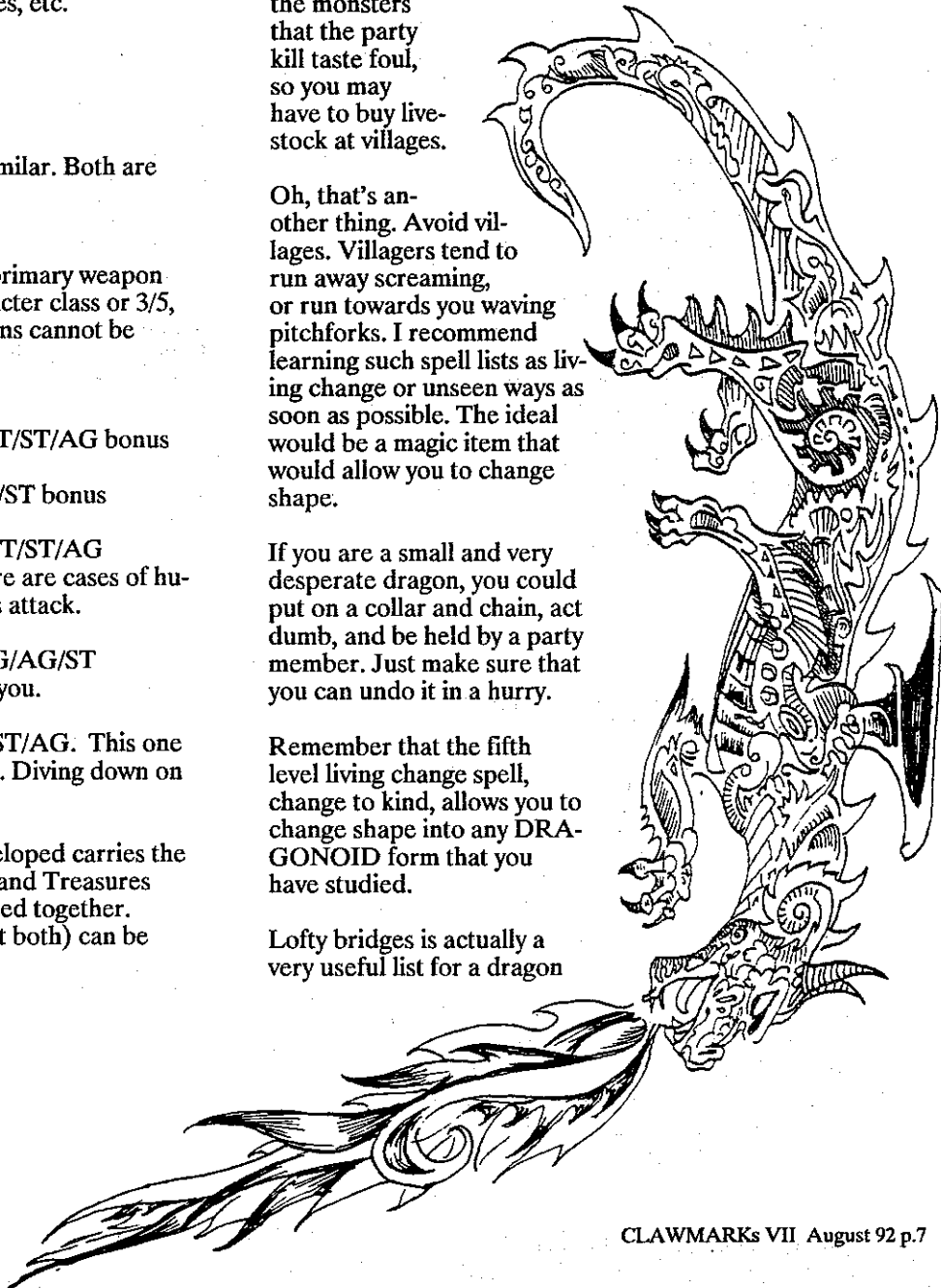
to know. It compliments the flying ability very well. Leaping is wonderful for quick takeoffs. Simply fold your wings, aim upwards and cast. At the top of the leap quickly unfold your wings and you're away! Landing can be VERY useful if a wing takes damage in the air. If you are levitating, your wings can propel you horizontally with great control, allowing you to hover.

For Fire drakes, fire lore is a must. Warm solid cast on rock or ground makes a very nice sleeping place.

Skills I would recommend to a young dragon:
Navigation for long journeys.
First Aid for Dragons as no-one else is likely to know it. This may involve breathing on the wound to cauterize it.
Foraging, i.e. Hunting medium sized game on the wing for fun and food.
Human Lore (very perplexing creatures sometimes)
Hostile Environments. As a fire-drake I tend to view anything below ten degrees centigrade as hostile. Cold drakes may find similar problems in warm climes.

Legends speak of the arcane mage-drakes, dragons of such power that they have found the secret of turning into a human being at will. In other words, they could keep up a true change all day.

Advice to humans living with dragons
A newly hatched dragon will identify the being who feeds it as its mother, not merely the first object it sees, as is sometimes believed. It is possible for a number of beings to be identified as parents, but a single one more usual. The mother is obeyed (to a large extent) while the dragon is immature.

As adult dragons are solitary and intelligent creatures, the dragon will feel the urge for independence (similar to human adolescence) when it is large enough to fend for itself. This occurs between fifth and tenth level, and may include rebellion against the parent. This is the age at which the dragon would leave its mother's territory and seek territory of its own.

Full sexual maturity is reached around tenth level.

SIZES AND WINGSPANS

I have assumed that the size of a dragon is a function of its level.

Creatures and treasures gives the levels of Greater Fire Drakes as 10 to 66, lengths as 30 to 90 foot, and wingspans as 50 to 140 foot. I have assumed that a tenth level dragon is 30 foot long and has a wingspan of 50 foot, and a 66th level dragon has a length of 90 foot and a wingspan of 140 foot. If the relationship is linear, this gives a level zero dragon (just out of the egg) as 20 long with a wingspan of 40 feet. I have assumed, for no particular reason other than that I like it, that a level zero dragon is five foot long with a wingspan of nine feet. Dragons therefor grow more quickly up to tenth level.

Below tenth level:
length = 5/2 * level + 5 feet
wingspan = 41/10 * level + 9 feet

Above tenth level:
length = 15/14 * level + 19 2/7 feet
wingspan = 11/14 * level + 42 1/7 feet

Wingspan is measured wingtip to wingtip. Length is measured from the tip of the snout to the tip of the tail. Up to the first third can be head and neck. Up to the last third can be tail.

Example dragon race:
Racial stats for Greater fire-drakes

ST	+5	*Resistance Rolls:*
QU	+0	
PR	+5	vs Essence +5
IN	-5	vs Channeling +5
EM	+10	vs Mentalism +5
CO	+0	vs Poison +50
AG	+0	vs Disease +50
SD	-20	vs Fire +50
ME	+10	vs Cold - 50
RE	+5	

Resistance vs Fire and Cold are also used on Elemental Attack Rolls.
Soul departure: 1 round, as dragons are highly magical creatures.
Stat deterioration: 0
Recovery multiplier: 0.5. Dragons tend to heal slowly, and prefer to do so while taking a long sleep.
Starting Languages: 2 One of these will normally be the tongue of dragons, Auld Wyrm. Some scholars claim that this language has no written form at all. But how then would dragons learn spells from books?
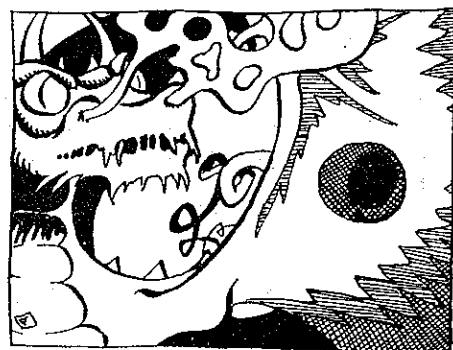*Dice type:* D10
Maximum hits: 600
Background Options: 2. Take one or both of these away if the player insists on some of the 'but all dragons can ..' abilities such as high perception or hypnotic eyes.

Level vs Armour Type Table

Level	AT
0	1
1	2
2	3
3	4
4	5
6	8
8	11
10	12
30	16
50	20

Physical Weapon Attack Size Table
(excluding tail)

Level	Attack Size
0	Medium
5	Large
10	Huge

Tail Attack Size Table

Level	Attack Size
0	Small
5	Medium
10	Large
25	Huge

Size of Crits Recieved

Level	Crit Size
0	Normal
10	Large Creature
20	Super-large Creature
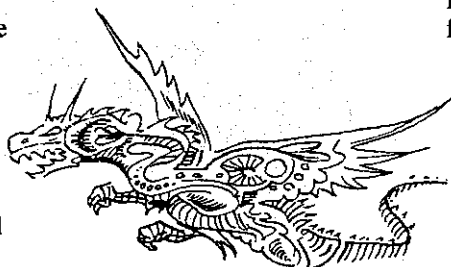
Base rate vs wingspan

I have decided to relate base rate to wingspan. It is clear from Creatures and Treasures that larger dragons fly slower. Using the assumptions that a dragon with a wingspan of 50 foot has a base rate of 210 and a dragon with a wingspan of 140 feet has a base rate of 180, I arrive at the formula:

Base rate $= 226 + 2/3 - 1/3 *$ (wingspan in feet)

Also from Creatures and treasures, at 20th level, the maximum pace drops to Fast Sprint, and at 50th level to Sprint. These are presumably achieved by diving.

Lifting Capacity of Flying Encumbered dragons

Brother Boustrophedon introduces:
There are arguments that natural laws do not allow dragons to fly at all. Some say that dragons can magically lift any weight, and the wings are just for steering. Iuvenis takes a middle course. He believes that dragons, whatever the cause, can lift a finite weight.

Airborne dragons have a weight allowance, but these work differently to ground encumbrance.

The Airborne weight allowance (AWA) is one pound for every foot of wingspan. Encumbrance is calculated in multiples of this, using the normal Encumbrance table.

Eg: Ferd the Fire Drake Fighter is Fifth level. His wingspan is therefore 29 1/2 feet. His Airborne weight allowance is therefore 29 1/2 pounds.

The encumbrance penalty for flying maneuvers is double that given for encumbered walking, as flying is intrinsically more difficult than walking (you can't fall off the earth). The multiple of the weight allowance is also used as an exhaustion point multiplier.

Eg: If Ferd carries less than 29 1/2 pounds, he has no penalties to flying. If he carries between 29 1/2 and 49 pounds, he takes a -20 penalty and uses up twice as many exhaustion points. If he carries between 49 and 78 1/2 pounds, he is at -40 to all

flying maneuvers and uses three times as many exhaustion points.

If the dragon is encumbered, a routine manoeuvre must be made to stay Airborne in circumstances that one would not normally be required. A maneuver roll of under 50 percent means that the dragon is forced to loose altitude.

Eg: Ferd's friend Dnaz the Desperate Dwarven Dervish asks Ferd to ferry him to the mouth of the cave of the Cliff-dwelling Clings in exchange for some of the loot. Dnaz, with all his gear, weighs 130 pounds. This is greater than four times Ferd's Airborne weight allowance. From the table on page 15 of Character and Campaign Law this gives him an encumbrance penalty of $2 * -30 = -60$. He is using four times the usual number of exhaustion points, and cannot Dash or Fast Sprint. His flying skill is 67. He takes off from the level (EASY) and rolls 80. $80 + 67 - 60 = 87$. This is 100% success- no problem. The canyon of the cliff of the cave of the Cliff-dwelling Clings is not far away, so he does not run out of exhaustion points at a walking (or normal flying) pace. God decides that landing at the cave mouth is HARD. Ferd rolls 87. $87 + 67 - 60 = 93$. 60% chance of success. Fred rolls above 40, and God decides that he lands with a bump. Dnaz sneaks off into the cave...

An hour later Dnaz returns carrying 20 pounds of the Clings' silverware. As he mounts up the alarm is sounded. The weight on Ferd is 150 pounds, over 5 times Ferd's weight allowance. The penalty is therefor -70. Ferd launches himself off the cliff (ROUTINE) and rolls 21. $21 + 67 - 70 = 18$. This is 80% success. Ferd wobbles skyward. However, God decides that it is HARD to fly out of the Clings' convoluted canyon. Ferd rolls 13. Oops. $13 + 67 - 70 = 10$. 5% action. Ferd banks too sharply and plummets down. He can either crashland or try to ditch Dnaz. The Clings are climbing down the cliff to capture them.
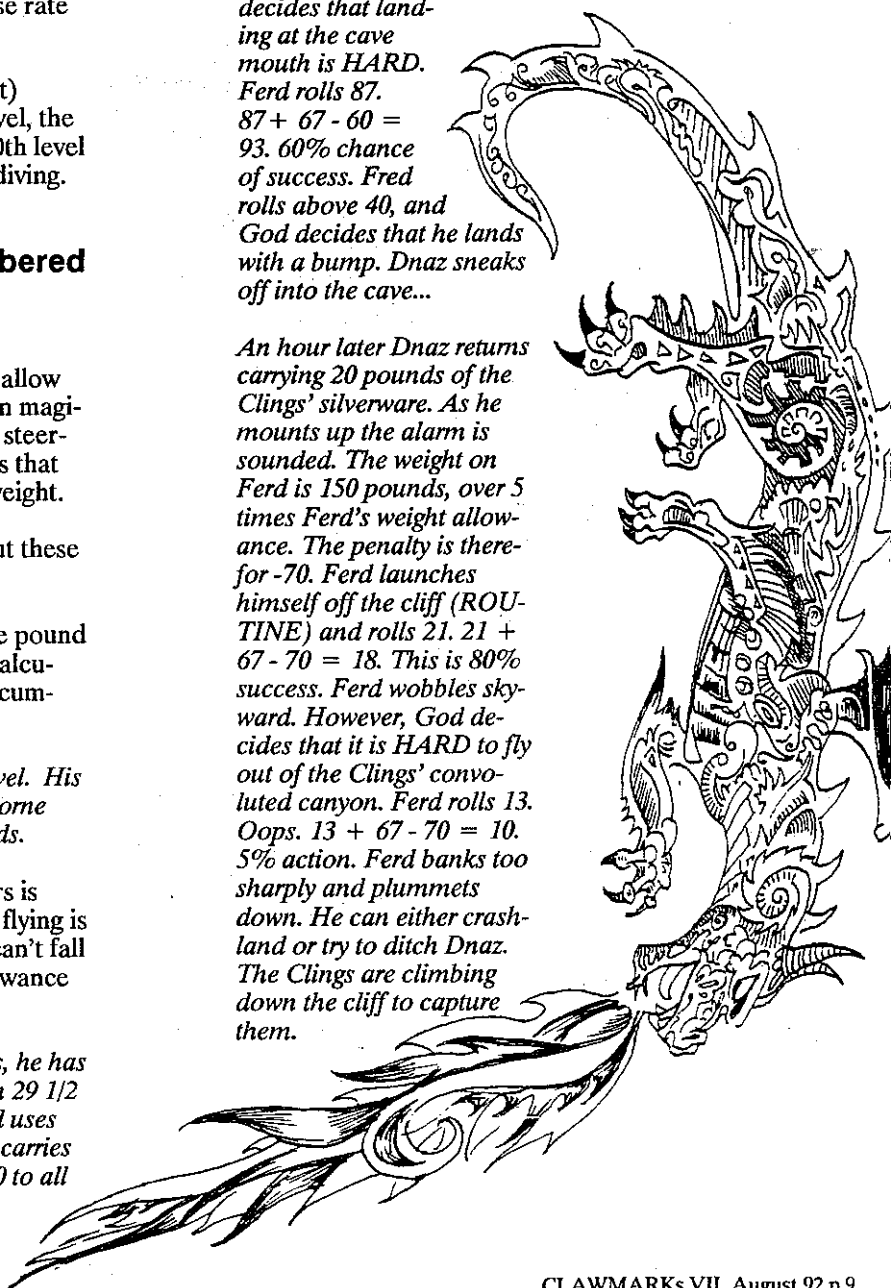
Ventura Nosewad, the Visionary, ponders...

Fantasy/Realism

Part the Fifth: Civilization, Dragonhoards, Population dynamics and Cyclical Economics

Strange and wonderous indeed are the lands of magic, the haunt of dragon and unicorn, the stage for bold quest and gallant adventure. Yet stranger still is it to contemplate the intricate rituals, cultural and economic, through which these realms operate. For no kingdom is so fey that it exists without wealth; no faerie land so magical that it is without its structures of power and politicks. My musings suggest many examples, of which one will suffice. Ponder this, and then say whether or nay things magickal are without a logic truly moderne.

Most chroniclers of faraway lands list prices for goods there. These prices are usually assumed to be fixed, but by painstaking historical research I have discovered that prices fluctuate. Now in those rare and foolish regions that use intrinsically valueless currency, such as paper, prices tend to rise and never fall, as the local money becomes worth less and less. In more rational lands, a rare substance such as gold is used. Such a coin's value cannot become infinitely debased.

My calculations show that the fluctuations of the value of such a coinage are usually cyclical. What is more surprising is that by careful cross-referencing I have found that the value of the gold piece matches closely the long term cyclical fluctuations in the dragon population. More than this, I have explained these remarkable facts.

Consider this scenario: Merchants and cities are prospering. Adventurers set forth to into distant, uncharted corners of forgotten kingdoms. A renaissance is underway. Eventually adventurers come across hoards guarded by aged dragons. The dragons are slain, and the coin spent and thus passed into circulation. Prosperity ensues, but herein are the seeds of downfall. At the height of the empires, there is a surplus of coinage, and prices thus rise. The economy falters. Coinage continues to pour in, and a depression ensues.

But a curious thing is happening. As the Civilization of man falters, the dragons that have been hiding in the remote wastelands become more bold. Growing fat, they breed and plunder. Eventually Civilization falls and there is chaos and anarchy. The dragons take all the valuables which they can persuade to fall into their cunning talons, to enrich their growing hoards.

A dark age ensues. The scattered humans are poor and ignorant, and live in fear of the great numbers of dragons. But herein are the seeds of the next Civilization. Plunder for the dragons has become scare, and they fight among themselves. Coinage has become rare outside of the dragonhoards, and so those coins still among the humans become more valuable. The remaining dragons sleep on their great piles of gold, and human heroes, casting avaricious eyes thence, dream of greater weapons and stronger armour. It is time for Civilization to rise again.

This theory is self-evidently true if the proper records are studied. It is clear that hereby much of human history is explained by my theory. Thus it is that the sage, if he be truly wise, may gain insight into the working of civilisation. That which every mage knows is verily proven—'tis the power of gold which turneth the world.

Playing the Unplayable:
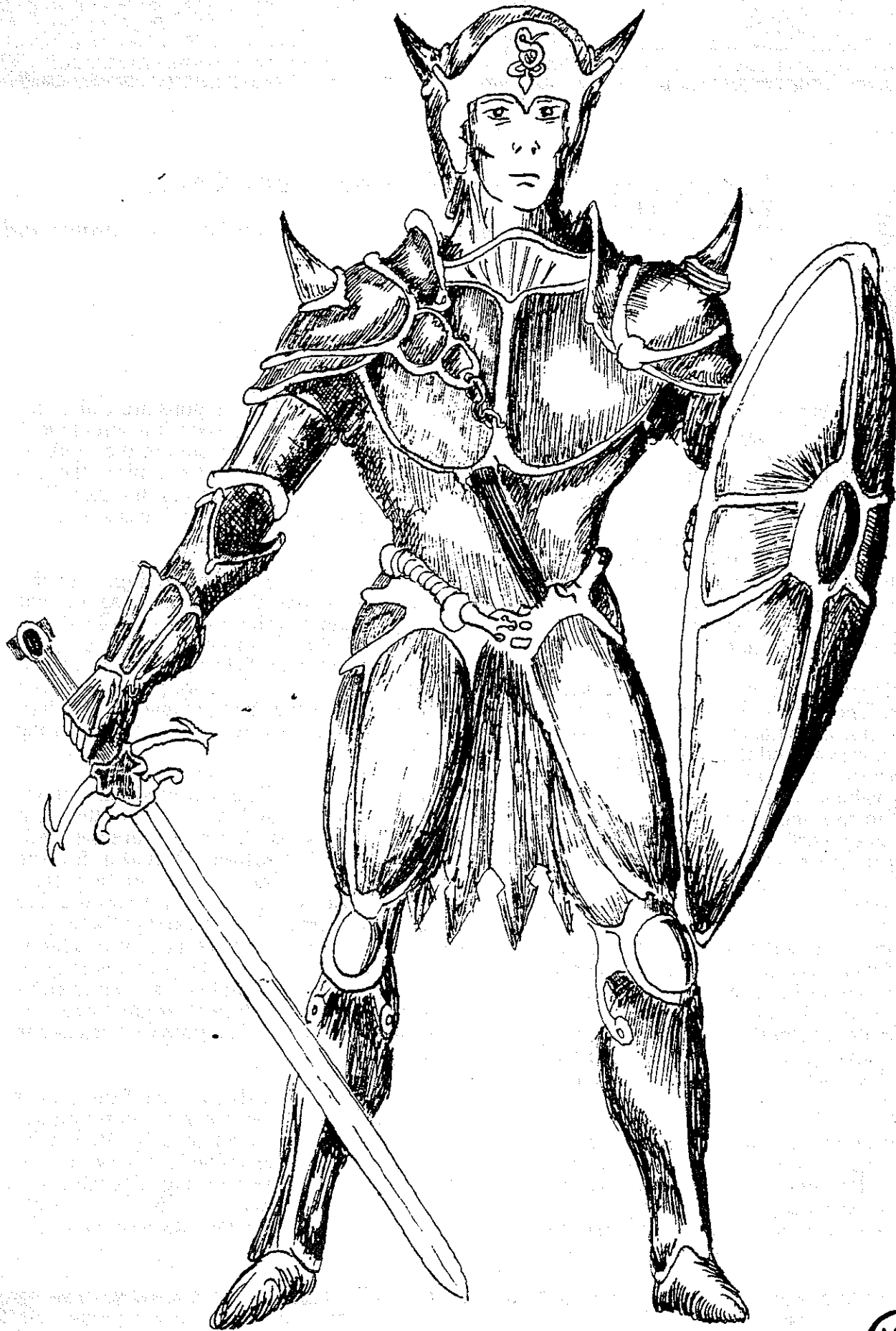
Elves of Middle-Earth

An off-the record, no-holds-barred, in-depth approach.

Let's not knock Tolkien - Elves is great. I mean, his conception of the Elven race is noble, beautiful, idealised, semi-angelic, environment-friendly - and unplayable. There's nothing real about them. He manages to give the impression that Elves not only don't die, they don't defecate either. And as for reproduction, one assumes that the Windlords are responsible for dumping Elven babies on Middle-Earth - Elves and sex?!? Here is a basic discrepancy which must inevitably crop up when one tries to resolve the heroic images of Galadriel and Legolas with the grab-the-treasure-in-between-buggering-around-in-taverns approach of many parties.

However! All is not lost. After a challenging, confusing and somewhat schizophrenic year playing an Elven lay healer/bard in Middle-Earth, I resorted, in sheer self-defense, to a few fundamental hypotheses regarding Tolkien's Elves. Herewith the Player's Guide to Playing the Unplayable.

ELVES AND BIOLOGY

The scene is a smoky tavern. A massive barbarian slams his tankard down on the table and growls:
"Eight mugs of mead! I'm off to the outhouse/back alley/Real Men's Room.." (or whatever).
His comrade, delicately sipping a sparkling wine, smiles in a superior fashion.
"I don't need to - I'm an Elf!"

Elves eat, therefore must excrete. Simple. I tend towards supposing that wood elves, who live in trees, trundle off and do it in the woods, in a back-to-nature sort of fashion. Noldor and Noble Elves tend more towards Architechture, and probably include a fairly sophisticated waterborne plumbing system in their airy marble-pillars-and-hangings sort of lifestyle.

The thing to remember is that there would be a fairly major social taboo on mentioning such earthy matters. Elves, if not fleshless, are at least high-minded. They will react to the crudities of Barbarian bathroom humour with a rather condescending distaste.

ELVES, TREES AND WOODEN FURNITURE

I have suggested already that Elves are environment-friendly. This goes without saying, really; it's an essential facet of their character, and is linked strongly to the love of beauty which is also a racial heritage. However, one runs into another problem: if Elves love trees so much, how do they ever build wooden tree-houses, Elven long-bows and the like? An Elf with an axe is an impossible concept.

My DM, cunning fiend, solved this problem in the Rolemaster context by assuming that all Elves have access to the Wood Shaping (Arcane, Companion II) list at base cost. This magical skill allows them to shape wood without cutting it - a living tree can be persuaded to give of its living wood. Elementary, my dear Galadriel. Obviously there must exist a tradition of Elven craftsmen (probably Sylvan Elves) who have learned the skill, and all artefacts are created by them. No mess, no fuss, no tree-killing.

LIVING FOR EVER

Possibly the most impossible facet of Elven character to role-play is their different sense of time. It's this, one assumes, which motivates the Rolemaster -20 to Elven Self Discipline. They have no sense of urgency, no drive to achieve now - after all, they have forever. In one campaign of my acquaintance, the party elf went so far as to refuse to try and escape from his human bandit captors - "Why bother? I'll just wait for them all to die."

It's a bit difficult to relate this to the assumptions of levels of development in a role-playing system. An elf at 30 or 40 is, basically, still a teenager. It is hardly logical to suppose that only very young elves will adventure at all - yet how do you justify the fact that a 300-year old elf is at the same level of experience as his 20-40 year old human associate?

It works if you assume this lack of drive - an elf takes hundreds of years to achieve skills a human learns in ten. The elven mentality cannot understand this urge to rush things, when the slower pace allows for so much more enjoyment and insight. An Elven ranger, for example, only feels he has respectable wood-lore skills after a few hundred years wandering around a forest.

This, however, must change in the situation of an adventuring party. Here, an elf is often strongly motivated by his particular mission - after all, the elves are perfectly capable of forming armies and seriously narking off Sauron if necessary. If he's just along for the ride, your party elf is still forced to assimilate experience at the same rate as his short-lived human counterparts.

On any adventure, an elf thus gains levels a lot faster than when doing the elven thing on his own. Personally, I would tend to insist than an elven adventurer has to return to the solitude and slow experiences of the forest in between bouts of hectic human-paced adventuring, if only to retain sanity.

THE GREAT ELVEN SEX DEBATE

This is a knotty problem. Immortality and marriage? What about kiddies? With the removal of the natural limiting factor of death, Elven society badly need some form of population control, or Middle-Earth would be over-run with them. I find it logical and consistent to assume that Elven character itself limits reproduction. An Elven couple would allow conception only when

ROLEMASTER ELVES AND SELF-DISCIPLINE

Anyone who's played a Rolemaster elf must have been irritated by the negative stat bonus on self-discipline. This quite simply makes no sense at all - Elves should in fact have a natural advantage in stalking and hiding, meditation and the like. They're high-minded and nature-friendly enough to seriously irritate humans, aren't they?

The negative modifier makes much more sense in terms of development points - a reduction becomes a reflection of the elven lack of urgency in acquiring skills. (Okay, so they take longer too, but one appreciates Rolemaster's attempt to give the race some disadvantages).

To modify development points, try the famed Bryan Thomas Absolute Stat System. Total the stat bonuses for Self-dicipline with the -20 mod, then refer the total back to the Stat Bonus chart, and work it backwards to see what stat should give that bonus. Then simply take the development points from that reduced stat. In skill bonuses, use the original stat, but the -20 should function as a +20 (one of the options suggested in the rules).

they both specifically will it so, and they would want this very, very seldom - perhaps once in their time in Middle-Earth.

Elven relationships have very little in common with human love and marriage. You cannot swear eternal devotion to someone when you will probably have to keep your word, quite literally, for eternity. Elves don't die, remember? And no relationship can stand the strain of limitless time together. Hey, some human marriages buy it even within the pitifully short human lifetime.

This doesn't stop elves from being essentially monogamous, although in a rather different sense to the human. An elven liason would last for several hundred years, but it would be intermittant. The elven couple would certainly not live together - several hundred years with any one person is a fair approximation of Purgatory. Even Galadriel is no exception - her consort Celeborn lives in a house on the opposite side of the Misty Mountains to Lorien, and only visits ocassionally.

Rather than human co-existence, Elven lovers would possibly spend a few weeks, maybe a month, together in a year. Between those, they'd be on their own - certainly not with other lovers. Elves are loners to a large extent, and I can find no justification for promiscuity among a race defined in terms of high-minded nobility.

Elven liasons would be essentially pleasant, civilised affairs, with little of tragedy or high passion in them. If you have limitless time, you can afford to enjoy a relaxed, unstrained relationship, which would eventually drift apart with no hard feelings.

ELVES AND HUMANS: ROMANTIC IMBECILITY

One of the major problems I have with both AD&D and Rolemaster is the enormous number of half-elves it assumes. As far as I'm concerned, Elves and humans will very seldom have a romantic relationship, and almost never allow it to produce children.
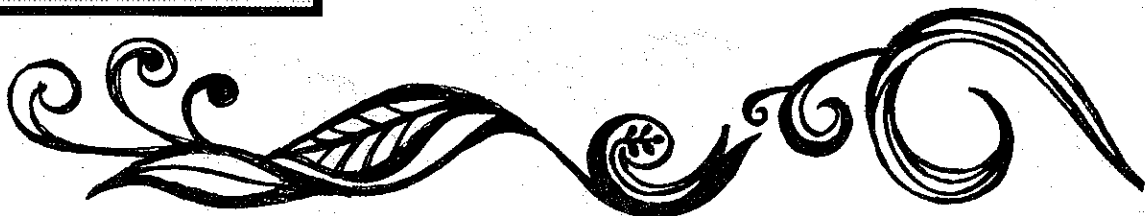
The problem is, of course, that mortals die, Elves don't. What's the point of a romantic liason which will last only a fraction of an Elven life? They only feel they can

love someone when they've known them for a few decades.

There's also the problem of intensity. Humans, with limited time for a relationship, are capable of a depth and commitment of feeling which an elf, in the natural course of things, is unlikely to show. Elves are seldom passionate over mere relationships - they can't really see the point of wasting all that energy over something which probably won't last more than a few hundred years. A human lover also demands constant contact and attention - an Elf can't take it.

There are, of course, exceptions. Nimrodel and Amroth, for example - high, tragic passion of the most theatrical order. Tolkien seems to have had something of a thing for doomed love. In the few human-Elven relationships he does allow - Luthien and Beren, Aragorn and Arwen - the choice is bitter. The Elven partner can accept 60 or so years of uncomfortable intensity, the sorrow of watching a loved one age, and the painful loss of their eventual death. Or he can make Luthien's choice - to put aside immortality and to age and die with the human lover, coming never to the West.

This is what Arwen did for Aragorn's sake, and it strikes me as being totally against normal Elven nature. In fact, the ultimate sacrifice. There's a good reason why human/Elven romances are given major coverage in Elven histories - they're quintessentially tragic, and almost unique.

Half-elves, therefore, are even less likely. You just don't get casual Elven-human one night stands and oops, a half-elf. (1) Elves don't go for it, and (2) if they do, they certainly don't allow conception. (I suspect it's also got a lot to do with good old-fashioned Elven superiority complexes - keep the noble race pure, and all that). Whatever, any half-elf you meet will be fairly well-known - his parents' tragic romance will be a part of Elven social history.

Of course, this theory adds some utter nastiness to Morgoth's little Elf-corrupting machinations down in the lab., i.e. orcs. He bred them from Elves as the ultimate insult. Can you imagine the horrific mental as well as physical coercion that allowed him to reproduce such abominations from Elven stock, which conceives only by consent...?

ELVES: THE LIFESTYLE

Opinion is divided on various points. I personally dislike intensely the idea that Elves don't sleep - I'm sure Tolkien never specified the meditation thang. Surely they need a rest from Eternity even more than mortals do?

Likewise their eating habits. Some DMs insist that Elves are vegetarian. It's a distinct possiblity, but they're sure as hell not into large-scale cultivation. A forest can support a reasonably large hunting population, but nuts and berries do not supply large amounts of protein. This seems to me to be a matter of choice - vegetarianism is eco-friendly, if nothing else. My elves vegetate. Do yours?

ELVES: THE DISAGREEMENTS

I write this article secure in the knowledge that it's going to seriously nark off a large proportion of the Elf-playing readership, who have their own very definite ideas about elves. This fails quite dismally to bother me at all. I offer a reasonably consistent rationale for playing a race that, by nature of its distance from the human, should theoretically be unplayable by a mere mortal.

The fact remains, Tolkien designed them as an abstract concept, and his conception of them is necessarily impractical and incomplete in parts. Regardless of this, and if you're happy to try and fill in the gaps, Elves remain a challenging, complex and fascinating role-playing experience.

NO PAIN - NO GAIN

Overcasting and Overextention in Rolemaster

Magic Overload Criticals A

01 - 05	This is easy, lose only 50% CO.
06 - 10	Light sweat. It worked.
11 - 15	You fall over.
16 - 20	Stunned 1 round.
21 - 35	Disoriented, stun 2 rounds.
36 - 45	Twinge, +1 hit, tired.
46 - 50	Ooof, - 10 for one hour, +3 hits. .
51 - 65	Light headache, -10 for 24 hours, +6 hits.
66	Forget spell. Damn.
67 - 75	Trembling. -20 for 1 hour, stunned 1 round.
76 - 80	Fall over, hitting head, +1 hit, stunned 2 rounds.
81 - 85	What happened? Bleeding from nose asnd ears, 2 hits per round. Stunned 2 rounds.
86 - 90	Grunt of discomfort. -2 temp CO, +5 hits.
91 - 95	Silly grin, can do no action for next hour.
96 - 99	-10 temp CO, -2 pot CO, Sick (-30) for 2 weeks.
100	Ooops! -20 temp CO, -5 pot CO. RE to 01, dribble. Sick (-40) for 4 weeks.

Magical Overload Criticals B

01 - 05	Lose 60% CO.
06 - 10	Out of breath.
11 - 15	Fall, stunned 1 round.
16 - 20	Stun, no parry, for 2 rounds.
21 - 35	Fall badly, -10 for 1 hour.
36 - 45	Ache, +2 hits, -5 for 6 hours.
46 - 50	Ouch. -10 for 12 hours, +5 hits.
51 - 65	Headache, -20 for 2 days. +10 hits.
66	Forget spell list. Sob.
67 - 75	The shakes, -30 for 6 hours. Stunend 2 rounds.
76 - 80	Bit tongue, +3 hits, 1 hit/round.
81 - 85	Serious nose bleed, 3 hits/round. Stun, no parry for 5 rounds.
86 - 90	Gasp of anguish, -5 temp Co, +10 hits.
91 - 95	Eyes glaze over, stay that way for 24 hours. Sick (-30) for 1 week.
96 - 99	Brain haemorrage. 10 hits/round.
100	Fatal brain haemorrage. Tragic.

Back to the wall, in mortal danger, need that last power point to get off the spell to save your neck? Burn con points!
Now Rolemaster spell users can gain extra power points by using their temp constitution points.

NOTES

1) Temp points used
The temporary constitution points expended depend on the character's level:
Below 10th Level: (11-Level) con points per power point
10th Level and above: 1 con point per power point

2) Magic Overload Crits
When a character overcasts, a Magic Overload Crit is rolled, the severity depending on the con point used:

Con Points Used	Magic Overload Crit
1 - 10	A
11 - 20	B
21 - 35	C
36 - 50	D
51 +	E

3) Power point multipliers don't work on these power points as the power is coming from another source.

4) This method works for any realm and any spell using class, even semi-spell users.

5) Critical effects only occur after normal spell resolution (after spell cast, not when duration ends).

6) Lost temp constitution comes back at 1 point per day bed rest, otherwise 1 point a week.

7) The "Going Out with a Bang Rule"
The spellcaster can willingly force soul destruction ie kill himself forever, for an additional level x 2 power points, to be used in a final spell. For this final spell, waive the "not more than one's level power points into any one spell" rule as you are exceeding all sane limits. Note that this spell could be used in a ritual and the caster cannot be raised by any means.

Magic Overload Criticals C

01 - 05	Lose 70% CO.
06 - 10	You need to sit down.
11 - 15	Stunned for 6 rounds.
16 - 20	Faint for 3 rounds.
21 - 35	Spend 3 rounds emptying your stomach. No parry. Green. -5 for 24 hours.
36 - 45	Discomfort, +3 hits, -10 for 12 hours.
46 - 50	Oow, -10 for 1 day, +7 hits.
51 - 65	Migraine, -30 for 1 week, +15 hits.
66	Loose all spellcasting ability for 6 months. Borrow a sword.
67 - 75	Nervous twitch, -40 for 1 day.
76 - 80	Muscle spasm, +5 hits. Sprain 3 random muscles, -30 for 1 week.
81 - 85	Burst blood vessel blinds left eye, +1 hit/round. Stunned, unable to parry, 10 rounds.
86 - 90	Howl of pain, -10 temp Co, -1 pot Co. +20 hits, -40 for 1 week.
91 - 95	Mind refuses to face reality, catatonic for 6 months.
96 - 99	Brain becomes mush.
100	Nervous system burns out. No sensations or motor functions. All you can do is think, thus you still are.

Magic Overload Criticals D

01 - 05	Lose 80% CO.
06 - 10	Stunned 3 rounds.
11 - 15	Stunned, no parry, 6 rounds.
16 - 20	Blackout 1 minute.
21 - 35	Weak and nauseous, -10 for 6 hours.
36 - 45	Pain and exhaustion, +5 hits, -10 for 1 day.
46 - 50	Argh, -15 for 2 days. +10 hits.
51 - 65	Blinding headache, -50 for 1 day, -30 for 1 week. +20 hits.
66	Never naturally regain another spell point. Get used to this table.
67 - 75	Minor stroke, tempory prarlysis for 6 hours.
76 - 80	Epilectic fit for 10 mins. Break random limb, +10 hits.
81 - 85	Cruel. Familiar dead, if no familiar, caster dead.
86 - 90	Shrieks of pain as you loose. +30 hits, 20 temp Co, 8 pot Co, -50 for a month.
91 - 95	Drooling vegetable, mental temps to 01.
96 - 99	Every nerve cell in body decides on self determination. Dead.
100	Heart bursts, instant death.

Magic Overload Criticals E

01 - 05	Phew!
06 - 10	Faint for 10 rounds.
11 - 15	Pass out for 5 mins.
16 - 20	Out cold for 3 hours.
21 - 35	Throw up, -30 for 1 day.
36 - 45	Even your hair hurts, +10 hits, -20 for 2 days.
46 - 50	Wimper, -20 for 3 days, +20 hits.
51 - 65	Agony, -70 for a week, +30 hits. (You may want to fall over).
66	Loose all spell casting ability permanently. Buy a sword.
67 - 75	Nerve damage, lose use of right arm.
76 - 80	Both eardrums burst - deafening bang.
81 - 85	Massive internal bleeding, +9 hits/round. -20 temp Co, -5 pot Co.
86 - 90	Scream in agony, -30 temp Co, -10 pot Co, +50 hits, -70 for 1 month.
91 - 95	Drooling vegetable, all mental temps to 0.
96 - 99	You forget how to breathe, die in 6 rounds.
100	Your brain explodes like an overripe pumpkin. He's dead jim.

the arch-bigot returns

Slightly stunned, the immortal tribe of innocent CLAWMARKs editors wonders what they have done to merit this. I mean, the demands on his Bigotedness's time are incredible. Worse than this, he is currently known to be inhabiting an inter-dimensional time-warp exile several planes removed from this. Yet, despite such pressures, Biggie returns, to load unsuspecting editors with unsolicited diatribes directed against our most cherished institutions. Pale and trembling, we dare do nothing other than print his efforts.
Please don't be annoyed, but his Unreasonableness really doesn't like something we all know well...
From the depths of the transdimensional vortex he unleashes:

66 REASONS WHY I HATE

...AD&D

It's not Rolemaster.
It was written by an insurance salesman.
It doesn't have Uzis.
To have a meaningful game, you have to ignore the system.
Elmore left.
You need lots of expensive dice.
They edited out demons to pander to wimpy religious twerps.
It doesn't lead you into the occult.
The art is aimed at oversexed 14 year old males.
It has elves.
It has Uzis.
The Forgotten Realms is cribbed from Tolkien.
Gary Gygax has an even bigger ego than I have.
It's silly.
It's not a role-playing system.
It's well marketed.
The chief editor wears a suit.
It has no stats for bananas.
It doesn't detail damage done by a ferret.
The players don't die enough.
The characters don't die enough, either.
It has all those stupid supplements.
It has Tasha's Uncontrollable Hideous Laughter.
It gives stats for gods.
The spell names are gibberish.
The spell effects are gibberish.
You can get experience points for standing on mice.
It's verbose, and takes far too long to say things that could easily be said in a much smaller space and with infinitely fewer words.

Clerics can't shed blood but can smash people in the face with a dirty big mace.
It's got paladins.
It's got alignment.
You can kill the dragons.
It can be understood by 10 year olds.
It's arbitrary.
It's inconsistent.
It's two dimensional.
Its non-weapon proficiencies are a kludge.
You can have lawful good thieves.
It's pretentious.
It's got anti-paladins.
3rd Edition really won't be worth it.
Everything's in hard-cover.
It has no resale value.
It uses American spelling.
It's popular.
It's got the only good magazine.
There's no perception skill.
You can't play it unmodified.
No-one wants to play in the Arch-Bigot's game.
It's better than Thudmaster(R).
It has no d7.
CLAWs is forced to write tournaments for it.
Normal people play it.
Non roleplayers have heard of it.
It gets all the attention in sermons.
They haven't cribbed enough from Tolkien.
It has halflings.
Its modules are straightforward.
It's guilty of Dragonlance novels.
High-level characters are indestructible.
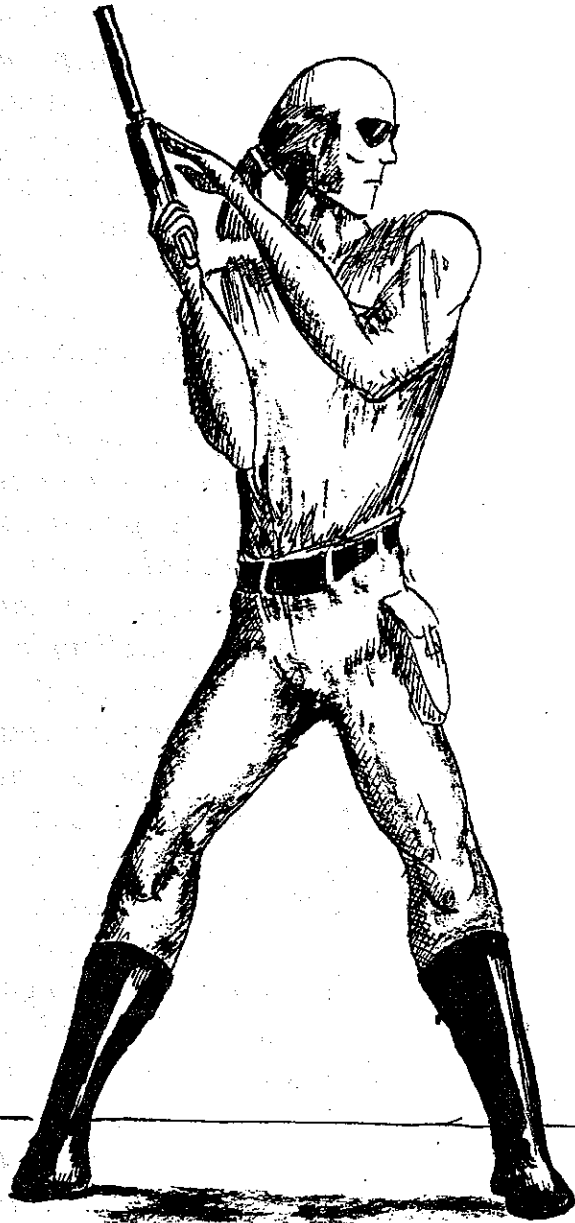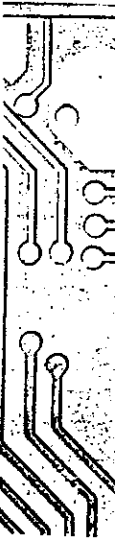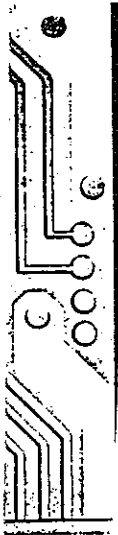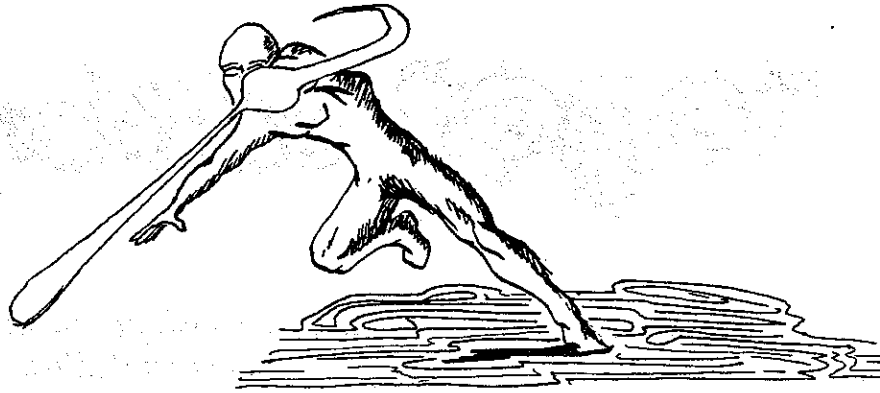Its magic items are arbitrary.
Low-level characters are pitiful.
It's got a wish spell.
It screwed up cantrips.
It has psionicists.
It's official.
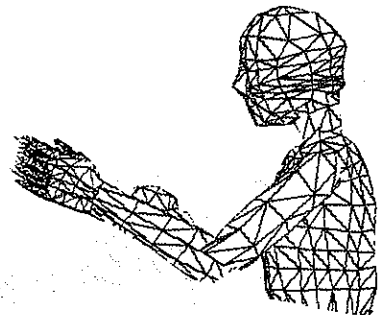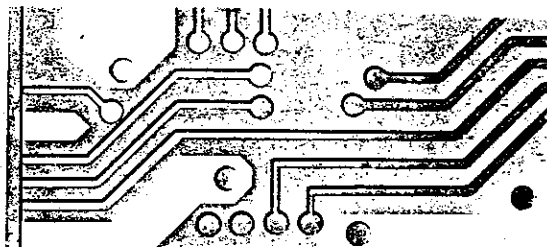
Hacking into the future:

Computers in the world of Cyberpunk

"Gibson's near-total ignorance of the present-day hacker culture enabled him to speculate about the role of computers and hackers in the future in ways hackers since have found both irritatingly naive and tremendously stimulating"

- The Hacker's Dictionary/The Jargon file entry for "Cyberpunk"

The Netjunkie character is the equivalent of a wizard in 2020. He travels unseen, and through arcane workings accomplishes tasks that no mere street tough can dream of. Sadly, many cyberpunk/space games underutilize the Net aspect, due to its complexity. Everybodies seen countless gung-ho shoot'em up movies, but few portraying the Net. Thus it is easier to emphasise the bang-bang aspect than the beep-beep in a Cyberspace game, and it is this imbalance that this article seeks to correct.

Welcome to the Net

The world of 2020 is a world of computers, computers everywhere, all interconnected via the Net. The amount of data flowing daily across the Net is staggeringly huge, and its a fact that if you've got a job, its a computer job, as practically every job uses computers to

some extent. By some estimates(already dated), 5 billion people, fully half the population of the planet use a computer and the Net every day.

Alternative computer types

In his 2020 vision campaign, devious DM Andrew has made entirely sensible changes to to the types of processor core available.

Firstly, when a new generation of silicon chips come out, the old technology is rendered obsolete and is no longer made. (Chip making is a BIG centralised industry). However there might be many units still in circulation on the streets, or going cheap from third-world warehouses. The distinction between silicon and super-silicon is irrelivant. All NEW cores will be of the latest

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The elusive mark

"Each Mark of a computer one extra unit of CPU space, and ten units of storage space. Every program is given a size. A computer may simultaneausly run programs who's cumulative size does not exceed the number of units available in the CPU"
- Cyberspace Page 125

The authors here evidently do not know or wish to shield the player from the distinctions between processing or crunching power of the CPU and memory or on-line storage of the machine. The mark of a program is supposed to be both the number of "marks" of memory it occupies and a measure of the processor power (cycles, MIPs etc) that it needs to opperate.

So a computer automatically has ten times as many marks of storage as it has

marks of CPU built in, but more storage can be added.

So what is a mark of storage?

It is supposedly 1000 pages of text. If a page of text is about one Kilobyte, then one mark is one Megabyte. However, one Mb is one minute of Hi-Fi audio, not one hour, as a mark is supposed to be.(although this depends on your compression algorithm, new standards like JPEG achieve very high compression ratios like 140:1) If a computer with 10Mb of memory has a mark one processor, then a PC with 10Mb of memory is probably a mark one computer. We should see those in a few years (unless the hard-drive counts as on-line memory, in which case we have them already. The distinction between on & off line storage depends enirely on access time)

NEW RULES: A program has both a size and a processing power needed to run it.

Both are measured in marks. These are often the same but need not be. In fact, between two equally efficient programs there is a trade-off. A larger program needs less computational power, as it will generally have more special cases and less general and complex rules and have more tables of computed results and less computing of results.

Naturally, a computer cannot store more marks of program than it has marks of storage. A CPU cannot simultaneously execute more marks of program than it's mark.

(Some will know that you can run more, they will just run SLOWER. However, most programs used in cyberspace need to repond in a fixed time (eg icebreakers, skill programs, targeting programs, any cyberspace interface program), and would fail if the processor was overloaded.
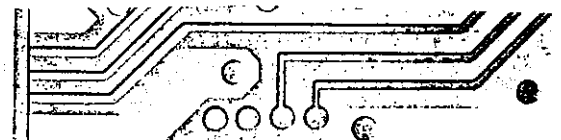
type. Secondly, Magnetobubble was never a type of CPU, only a type of memory, now little used. In Andrew's game the following types of core are out there:

Silicon - Max mark 10
Good old chips. Speeds up to the Mips range. Storage in the Mbytes

Supercon - Max mark 25
Superconducting circuits. Roughly the same size as silicon chips. Either room temperature superconducting or liquid nitrogen bathed (more reliable) Speeds in the Gips range.

Optical - Max mark 40
Optically switched laser driven holographic crystals (Yes, the prototypes do exist already.) Immune to EMP. Speeds in the Teraflop range. Breaks if dropped. Vunerable to ultrasonics.

Biological/ Orgmolec No known limit
Genetically engineered 'chickenbrain'. Grown rather than built. Needs a nutrient solution and stable temperature. No applicable speed as it is not a sequential machine. All nerve cells can fire at once. The computer is highly parallel.

Multitasking and other Operating System stuff.

"Each multitasking program allows the computer to perform one extra task"
- Cyberspace P132

Task? Do they mean run two programs at once? For the decade or so, all serious operating systems have been able to multitask programs. As many programs as memory and processor will allow. The latest version of DOS (V5.0) can, too. I would give multitasking as a built in abilty of all operating systems. Multitasking is acomplished on a single processor by changing the program that the CPU is running on every hundredth of second or so, giving the illusion of simultaneity.

Net.cult

The line of orange-clad figures shuffed down the road towards 20-pin and his droogs, the high RISC kids. As they came closer, he could make out the chanting.

"Hare Software,
Hare Software,
Software Software,
Hare Hare.

Hare Hardware,
Hare Hardware,
Hardware Hardware,
Hare Hare.

Hare Software ..."

Slender cables linked the left temple of each person to the right temple of the devotee behind him. The cables swayed rythmically as they shuffled along. Thier foreheads gleamed as orange as thier robes in the smoggy sunset.

A single long cable linked the first priest to the last, completing the circle. He had a bag, and was handing out real paper pamphlets.

20-pin took one and oggled. 1 Gigabit/second optic fibre LAN, twin counter-rotating tokens. Organically grown software. Distributed conciousness... Evolution of new thought-forms by group meditation... Higher realms... virtual telepathy by buffered packets of direct mind data... World cyber-mind... Universal souL.. Message passing distributed memory parallel processing...

"Hey lover, don't forget what you'l be giving up." Catscan purred, stroking his arm.

"Yeah", he sighed, idly setting fire to the pamplet. "Yeah, too much".

"Progswitch: Alows the Cyberdeck to pull up programs from storage into the CPU ... Ten seconds for each unit of program size switched."
- Cyberspace page 174

Huh? Current computers can shunt around memory at over 1 Mbyte a second. Anyway, starting up a new program takes about as much time as switching between already running programs. This, again is a totally meaningless program, at least for computers used

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20-pin's Gross-out

The deal was going well. 20-pin needed the money, and the suit needed someone with a brainjack to hack for him badly enough to hire a punk like 20-pin.

"Of course, we will have to maintain downward compatabilty", the suit was saying.

20-pin scratched his nose. "uh, what languages you got? C + + + + +? TurboGod?" he asked.

"That's what I was getting at, Jonathan. We use GOOP-BOL. Graphical, Object-Orientated Parallel COBOL"

20-pin cried out. He panicked. He was falling. He screamed as he sat up on his mattress, in a cold sweat,

groping for his uzi, for his drugs, for anything...

"Whassamatter??" Catscan yawned, stretching sleepily.

"I dreamed I died of terminal styleloss. That's all." He lay down. "Let's I/O".

today, and for any others that distinguish memory from processor power (A neural net might not)

NEW RULE: It takes One second (a cyberspace round) to kill or stop a program. That many marks of program are then unused. It takes one round to start a program running (provided that the computer has enough marks free). This is mainly the time needed for the user to issue the command. A program can itself run or kill other programs (A 'batch file'). This will be faster.

Come to think of it, The matrix representation and user representation programs perform many of the functions of a user interface, which is part of the Operating System as well. Many things such as modem interface, data aquisition, file and system searchers are present in some form in today's systems. The idea seems to be that there are several versions of net and user representations, so that the Console Cowboy can decide how his particular system looks. Perhaps basic versions of all of these things are sold in a 'bundle' with the deck.

Why Jack?

Why do net junkies have a computer plug surgically implanted in their skulls, instead of using normal workstations? Two reasons are Speed and Believability,

The cyberdeck generates the virtual reality matrix presentation and transmits the appropriate sensory data to the users mind.
This direct link is a much better way of experiencing a virtual reality than the primative goggles, gloves and suits of the 90's and 00's.

"Speed is life" is a truism to the net junkie. While not essential to a normal console puncher operating on the right side of the law, a hacker lives on the edge where micro-seconds can make the difference. If an alert is triggered during a system penetration, a sharp system can drop all external lines in 2 seconds, with the average system taking 45 seconds to lockout. A neural link allows the net junkie to act at the speed of thought, much faster that any keyboard puncher or mousciteer.

The other reason for jacking is the believability of the matrix presentation.
The link give all senses(sight,sound,touch, smell,taste,thermal,pain and body orientation)as real as life, hence the name virtual reality. It also shuts out the distractions of reality allowing total involvement and concentration. Would you react faster to the words "virus detected" flashed on your screen, or a huge foul-smelling tentacled horror reaching for you?
Likewise, it's more intuitive and faster to blast it with your blaster/wand than typing "remove virus {stoned}".

CyberWombat

"After each Cyberspace Combat that an armour program is used in, its' rating is lowered 1-5"
- Cyberspace page 174

Right. Then you load a new copy off the data card.

"Data aquisition will completely remove the desired information from a storage device"

Data copier is mentioned only under Cyberdecks. Seriously, why pay $ one million for a prog and not have a backup. Special programs like military icebreakers can be designed for one use only, with a small on-chip thermite charge that melts it after use. Naturally, this charge could be disarmed, but it wouldn't be easy. Other programs could be copy-protected, but this should be the exception, not the rule, with only rare and unusual(ie all the interesting ones) having this. Copy-protection in 2020 can be nasty, unleashing virii or alerting Netwatch etc. A software tech. roll should be made to bypass the protection, before a copy could be made. Failure could result in a unusable or slightly flawed and unreliable programs. Personally, I wouldn't directly link my brain into a "slightly flawed" program, but hey, its your head.

The DNI link does have some disadvantages. One is the "dump shock" disorentation experienced on exiting the net that effectively stuns the user for a number of rounds(normally 1-10).

Another is that users rapidly become psycologically addicted to the rush and feeling of freedom that the net gives - a net quote is " After 3 days without interface life becomes meaningless". A deckless net junkie will do anything to get one again. The most feared punishment for datacrime is Dejacking - selective neural damage that destroys the linkages needed to to jack in.

The most serious disadvantage of the DNI is the vunerability to black Ice. At worst console cowboy can have their computer systems trashed by grey ice, but Jackheads can die from Black Ice.

The Direct Neural Interface or "Jack" is the most advanced computer interface in common use. Using the same technology as SimStim, it over-rides the persons normal nervous system, and substitutes an artifical set of sensory inputs generated by the cyberdeck. It also blocks and redirects the nerve impulses to the body. Obviously it doesn't block the automatic ones controlling the essential life processes(but see Black Ice).
The neural block is necessary to avoid the user injuring themselves moving around in reponse to the artifical stimuli.
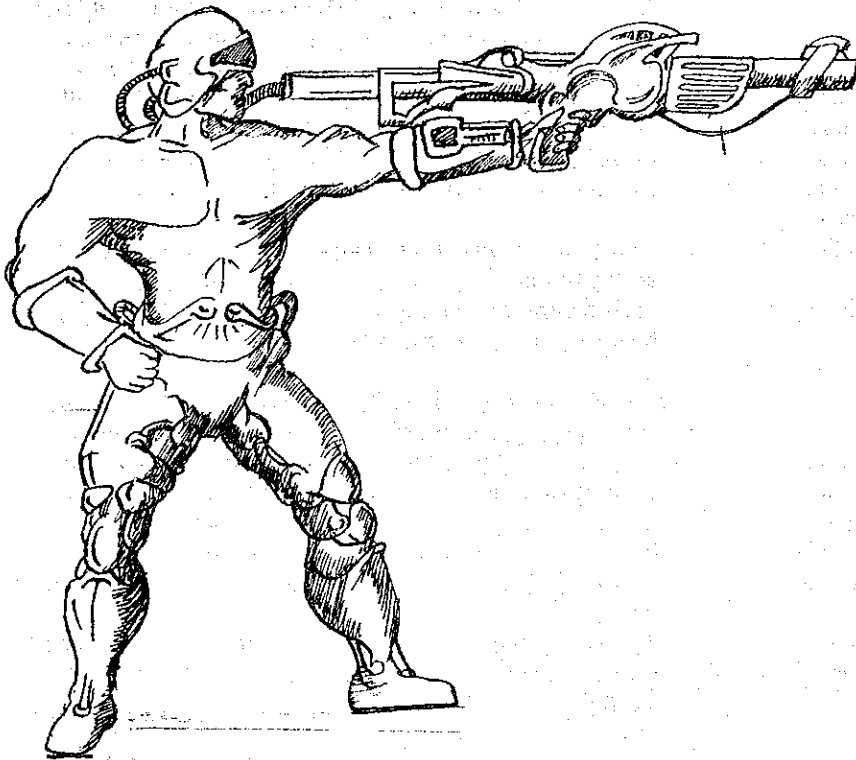
MURPHY'S LAWS OF COMBAT

1. If the enemy is in range, so are you.

2. Incoming fire has the right of way.

3. Don't look conspicuous, it draws fire.

4. There is always a way.

5. The easy way is always mined.

6. Try to look unimportant, they may be low on ammo.

7. Professionals are predictable, it's the amateurs that are dangerous.

8. The enemy invariably attacks on two occasions:
   a. when you're ready for them.
   b. when you're not ready for them.

9. Teamwork is essential, it gives them someone else to shoot at.

10. If you can't remember, then the claymore is pointed at you.

11. The enemy diversion you have been ignoring will be the main attack.

12. A "sucking chest wound" is nature's way of telling you to slow down.

13. If your attack is going well, you have walked into an ambush.

14. Never draw fire, it irritates everyone around you.

15. Anything you do can get you shot, including nothing.

16. Make it tough enough for the enemy to get in and you won't be able to get out.

17. Never share a foxhole with anyone braver than yourself.

18. If you're short of everything but the enemy, you're in a combat zone.

19. When you have secured an area, don't forget to tell the enemy.

20. Never forget that your weapon is made by the lowest bidder.

FORUM:
THE BRUTAL WORLD OF CYBERPUNK

The party are in it for the usual reasons - adventure, survival, profit. The players have chosen their characters with the usual regard for balance and a wide range of skills. An average role-playing campaign? Not really. One session ends with a body-count of 45, mainly innocent bystanders. In another, great hilarity results when a load of turbines is dropped off an aircraft into a housing area, killing hundreds. This is Cyberpunk, punk. Life is tough.

It cannot be denied that the genre of Cyberpunk, the dark and terrifyingly near future, has caught on in a big way. Players who once dreamed of the ultimate in swords and staves now pant after rotary cannons and phos grenades. Conversations in the CLAWroom are beginning to sound like conventions in a munitions factory. Tech is in, magic out. If your character dies, he does his damndest to take the city with him. So what?

WHAT THE CYBERPUNKS SEEM TO THINK

It's the way modern society could go, after all. Urbanisation, high technology, the gradual takeover of the megacorps and the escalating destruction of the Earth's natural habitats. There are a lot of people out there. Tech is doing a lot of developing at incredible speeds. 2020 could see the actual implementation of many of the concepts which currently belong in the world of the role-player. After all, virtual realities are progressing in leaps and bounds. What's the problem?

OK, so it's violent. Modern life is violent. You're simply supposing that the line between lower and upper classes becomes more definite, and that there are a lot more of the lower classes. You're either a suit or a street punk. Of course crime is going to escalate. Cyberpunk is realistic - violence is a part of modern life.

In a way, the genre of cyberpunk is a warning: playing in its dark and frenetic world is a reminder that this is the way things could go if we don't do something about it. Heavy weaponry is fun, but no-one really wants to actually live in that kind of world, do they? Characters tend to have a very low survival rate.

The world of cyberpunk is a challenge. It's fast-moving, action-packed, demanding. You have to think on your feet, which is a useful skill even in today's society. You

tend to play low-life characters, who perhaps react as you wouldn't, but then it's a more dangerous world.

There's also the psychological angle: surely it's more healthy to work out violent urges in an imaginary setting than in real life? Modern existence is frustrating in a lot of ways. I mean, beaurocracy and obstructionism are fast becoming an art form these days. The individual is often powerless against the greater forces of organised society. Giving his character HEAPIT is a lot healthier than having him OD on Ecstacy in an attempt to get away from it all.

In any event, is it fair to say that Cyberpunk is any more violent than your average medieval fantasy game? Take the body count of Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, for example: just because the piles of orcs weren't piles of humans doesn't make them any less violently dead. Future weapons may tend more towards mass destruction, but medieval methods of slaughter are just as bloodthirsty.

WHAT NON-CYBERPUNKS ARE WORRIED ABOUT.

Yes, it's realistic. Yes, the world has some chance of actually going that way. But how far is dire social warning in fact a self-fulfilling prophecy? Surely the way to avoid the dark and violent future foretold by the genre is not to immerse oneself in the mindset by which it is energised and created. To expose and publicise such a view of the future is to usher it in. As mega-violence becomes an accepted view, it escalates.

Furthermore, the view of a cyberspace future takes only a limited number of social trends and attempts to project them to their logical extremes, while ignoring other possible factors. The overall view is one of pessimism and unrelieved gloom. Why should only negative factors be exaggerated? This is hardly a balanced outlook.

Speculative fiction is all very well, but one must be aware that it is only one of an endless number of future projections. To then argue that it is "real life" has a remarkably hollow ring. Looking at the most technologically advanced societies on our planet, often the violent view may be seen as a uniquely American-urbanised view. The gun culture that is so prevalent in cyberpunk is in fact a byproduct of the American right to bear arms and is largely absent from most other societies.
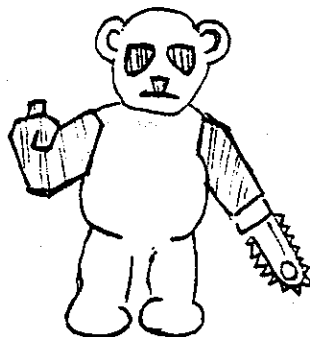
The "medieval is just as violent" arguement is also flawed on a number of grounds. The difference between beating someone to death with a mace and blowing up a city-block is that the former is far more individulistic and personal while the latter is far more clinical, losing the individual. Medieval arms also show far less of a tendency towards wholesale slaughter than do modern or futuristic weaponry.

This greater killpower raises a whole host of gaming problems, although characters often do not live long enough to experience them. More killpower means quicker and more brutal fights, and enevitably a larger bodycount. The gamemaster is left with fewer and fewer options as to what to throw at the party, inevitably resorting to larger and more deadly weapons. Characters are likewise rewarded with more and more power, creating a downward spiral of violence. Players become inured to escalating force in their endless quest for the most effective means of cremating the opponent.

Cyberpunk in many ways offers a very limited senario, and it takes a good game master to challenge a party without resorting to yet another variation on bloody massacre. While the same may be said of many game settings, the heightened levels of killpower available to any given cyber-psychotic tend to rule out possiblities of subtle play.

The other major problem with cyberspace is the general lack of limiting factors. A mage may eventually end up with the same destructive power as a TOW anti-tank missile but it takes years of practice, plenty of experience, and such mages are few and far between. Any fool,on the other hand, can and often does throw a phos granade. The limiting factors then come down to cash: this is a world where smart gun attachments and userfriendly software allow even the most fumble-fingered of weaklings to shoot straight.

One of the most tragic results of all this is the almost complete lack of role-playing of any meaningful sort. In a context where staying alive is a matter of dodging the inevitable, there is little point in designing characters with more than the most sketchy of backgrounds. They don't stay alive long enough to develop much beyond the first few startled screams. (Record low so far is 3.2 seconds). What are we in this for, anyway - role-playing, or vicarious death experiences?

Which brings one to the most fundamental problem with such a role-playing context. Characters are things to hang tech on. You can't afford get attached to them, and you therefore don't, in fact, give a damn if they die. The actions of your character are deprived of a vital form of limitation. It doesn't matter what you do, who you kill, how stupidly or unsubtly you behave, you simply roll up the next short-lived victim, replenish your ammo and leap
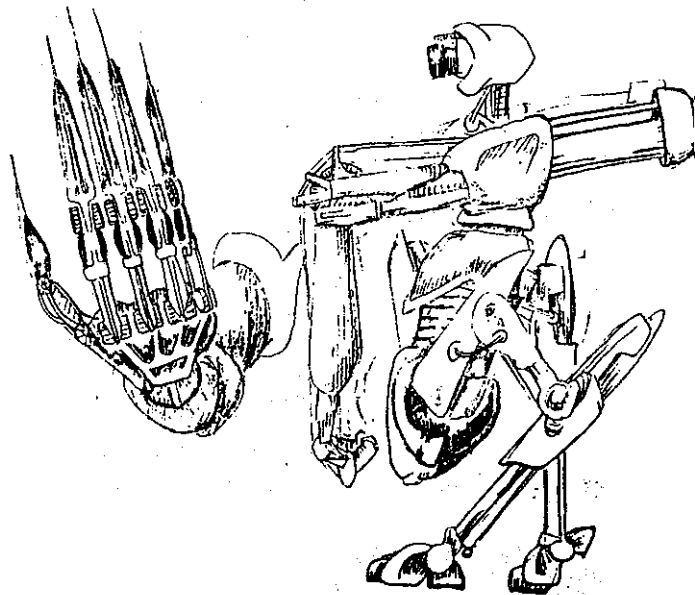
back into the fray. A well-rounded fantasy character is something you play sensibly and with restraint because you want to keep it going. A cyberpunk doesn't matter. Who cares about role-playing - let's kill things.

BEATING THE SYSTEM

Properly played, cyberpunk campaigns should be profoundly depressing. The world it sets up is brutal, cold and unattractive. To develop the callous attitude where wholesale death is amusing is not a solution: it simply perpetuates the problem.

This is not to say that meaningful role-playing is impossible in the cyberpunk setting. If you are proof both against the seductions of simply shooting it, and the depression brought about by a realistic perspective on the setting, no doubt cyberpunk role-playing would be challenging and enlightening. There is, after all, a world of exciting tech and new social implications to explore - one of the genre's strengths is supposed to be the "realism" of a near-future setting.

In the present experience of the genre, however, how much does any kind of realism come into it at all?
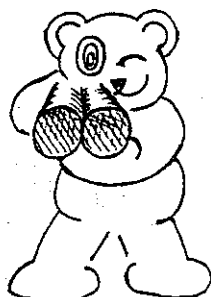
The Bard's Best Tomes

Some are addicted to drugs, some are addicted to chocolate, but only the hopelessly demented are addicted to books. There is nothing more fearsome than encountering, in a narrow and remote alley lit by the full moon, a bibliophile undergoing withdrawal symptoms. It is therefore not surprising that authors are working hard to keep them under control by constantly writing new books...
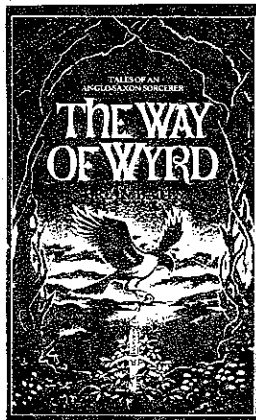
Although there are some books, of course, which do little to alleviate the craving. Terry Brooks' *The Druid of Shannara*, the second in the **Heritage of Shannara Trilogy**, may be well constructed and based on interesting ideas, but it is very similar to his previous books, both in style and in execution. The characters are very much like those of the pervious books, and the storyline is furthermore so predictable that the reading is much less enjoyable than it ought to be.

The Last Legends of Earth, on the other hand, is invigoratingly novel in concept and written in a smooth flowing style which is most pleasant to read. The volume is A. A. Attanasio's fourth and last in the so-called Radix Tetrad, although the connection between the books is so vague that it is absolutely not necessary to have read the other three to enjoy *The Last Legends of Earth*. *The Last Legends of Earth* is theoretically science fiction but written in such a way that it seems to be, not inappropriately for the title, myth and fantasy, and of very high order. Anyone who wishes to gain some brilliant new ideas shouldn't miss this, and nor should anyone else.

The same can be said of Brian Bates' *The Way of Wyrd*, which is based on a research project into Anglo-Saxon sorcery. In this riveting account the reader is introduced to the mysteries of sorcery as Wat Brand, a Christian Scribe, travels through pagan England under the guidance of the sorcerer Wulf. The ideas of life force, wyrd, and spirits are clearly described and give the reader a thoroughly new insight into sorcery and magic.

On a much less magical note, Ursula Le Guin has brought out *Tehanu*, the Fourth Book of Earthsea, which takes off where *The Farthest Shore* left off. Sadly, in all honesty I cannot say that *Tehanu* fulfilled my expectations. Many people are ecstatic about it, but I personally feel *Tehanu* to be forced in some of its basic ideas. Not that *Tehanu* is a bad book - it is a solid conclusion to Earthsea and most enjoyable to read, but considering the possible potential a Fourth Book of Earthsea represents I found *Tehanu* faintly anticlimatic.

However, *Prentice Alvin*, the third volume of O. S. Card's excellent **Tales of Alvin Maker**, can hardly be said to be an anticlimax. Unfortunately it is not the climax either, rather a smoothly ascending slope, so that, once again, we are left without conclusion, waiting for the fourth volume.
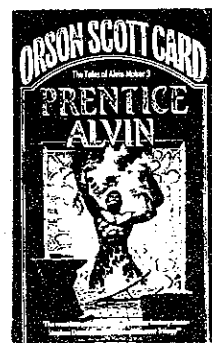
Speaking of conclusions, besides having finished the **Malloreon** with *The Seeress of Kell* (as I reported last time), David Eddings has also managed to finish the **Elenium**, with *The Sapphire Rose*. As yet I have been unable to secure a copy, so that judgement will have to be suspended...

Also getting into a long series is Melanie Rawn with *Sunrunner's Fire*, the third book in the **Dragon Prince** series. *Sunrunner's Fire* makes somewhat better reading than its prequel (*Star Scroll*; see Clawmarks VI), but it has the sad tendency of spanning long periods of time in a few
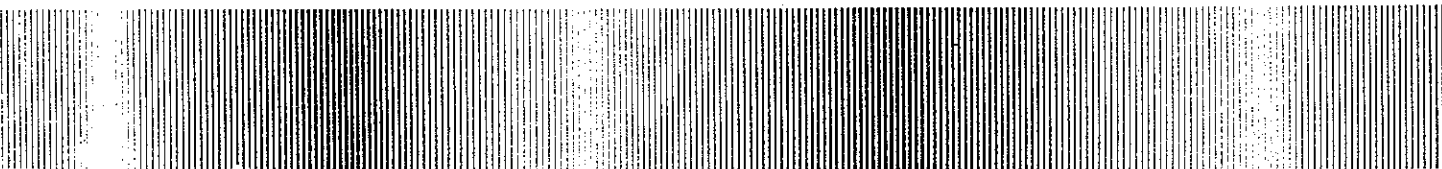
pages, which is enough for continuity but detracts from the overall value of the story.

And since I'm on long series, Anne McCaffrey has ended the Pern books with *The Renegades of Pern* and *All the Weyrs of Pern*. *The Renegades of Pern* spans the other books in a separate story, and tends to give too little focus to the several major characters. *All the Weyrs of Pern*, however, the very last of the Pern books, is a final grand accounting wherein all the major characters of the previous books work together to bring to an end forever the threat of thread. If the book is not quite as brilliant in the images it inspires as some of the previous ones, this is probably also partially due to the fact that the novelty has worn off. However, it is much better than *The Renegades of Pern*, and presents an excellent ending to the Pern saga.

From future sagas to ancient ones: Nigel Frith's *Jormundgand* is an account of certain adventures which befell the Norse god Frey and his friend Thor in their quest for the ice maiden Hron. Reminiscent in style of the Edda, *Jormundgand* is a fascinating tale to anyone interested in the Aesir and their world.

Of ancient days also tells *Search the Seven Hills*, Barbara Hambly's kidnap mystery set in Rome, 116 AD. Though not an in-depth study of Roman life the fluid storyline and believable characters give a very direct picture of Rome and the early Christians. The hero, Marcus, is an engagingly befuddled young philosopher, caught up in events far beyond his control as he searches for a kidnapped friend. Fascinating in its representation of the early Christians, and also very enjoyable in many other ways.
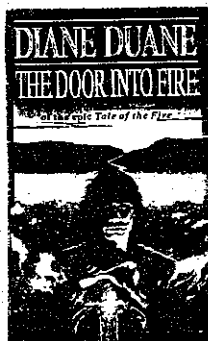
Much less enjoyable I found *The Door into Fire*, by Diane Duane, the first book in a series entitled Tale of the Five. The ideas are interesting, the style is appreciably good, but sadly, for my taste, the hero is gay. The book itself is good enough, but my imagination simply cannot properly identify with a gay hero.

Something completely different now: Tad Williams' *Tailchaser's Song*, the story of a cat on a quest. Reminiscent of *Watership Down*, *Duncton Wood*, and others, but still good reading if nothing else is around. It has been said that, judging by the book, the author knows nothing of cats. I did not notice any obvious anachronisms, and though it is a simple straightforward tale (or maybe because of that) I quite like *Tailchaser's Song*.

TAILCHASER'S SONG

TAD WILLIAMS
Bestselling author of THE DRAGONBONE CHAIR

Back on the topic of legends, Morgan Llewellyn's *On Raven's Wing* is a rendering of the legend of Cuchullainn, the Black Hound of Ulster, and the Red Branch (not to the uninformed: one of the most famous Irish legends). The only sad part about this book is that like most of similar kind it has a tendency to end in blood and despair.

Those who read *Sorcerer's Son* may be interested to know that Phyllis Eisenstein has written a sequel, *The Crystal Palace*. I found *The Crystal Palace* enjoyable reading, but slightly slow in movement, with little change over many pages. Nonetheless, it is not the worst by far.

Now last of all I come to what I would regard as the best of the books I've spoken about here, with the possible exceptions of *The Last Legends of Earth* and *The Way of Wyrd*. All those who enjoyed Patricia McKillip's near-mystical **Riddle-Master of Hed** Trilogy may be ecstatic to hear that *The Sorceress and the Cygnet*, though only a single unconnected volume of characteristic shortness, is as excellent as the **Riddle-Master** Trilogy. A devious story, strong characters, and unworldly confusion make this a truly novel novel.
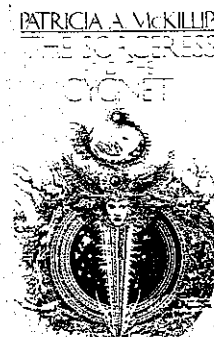
Herewith the Bard ends this tractate on tomes, and bids you remember that evermore a book is worth more than its weight in paper.

CLASSIFIED!

PERSONAL
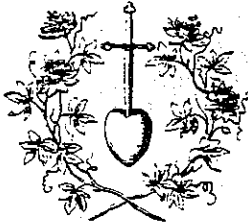
Antoinette: We can't go on meeting like this. Arthur.

BIRTHS: To Barbarossa, a Beorning: 9 puppies by Misty. Congrats from the rest of the team. (PS: Suuure, they're not yours...)

Ed Pain - I'll sharpen my pencil in your pot plant anytime, scumbag! Nick Devil - Megacity One.

Ode to Cthulhu
At first I was alone I was petrified
Kept thinking how I could survive
without you guys by my side
But I've all my life to live and not my heart to give
I will survive, I will survive
But boys I'm back, walked through the floor
I ain't the puny little person who'll take this crap no more
So now you're dead, I've got
A-HEAD
And I will SURVIVE
YEAH! GRRRR!

Ed Pain - this here automatic weapon that you sold me - now it works - now it doesn't work. ND.

We are back ... Bela Lugosi's dead.

Sylan - I'll see you in the fields ... Nemi.

C A Hausman... the coffee creamer is in my locker - top shelf. Dr T Fang.

NOTICES

WANTED: Photochromatic sunglasses for a photochromatic cat. Contact Freckles in a radiation zone near you. Also looking for portable manicure kit.

Woodie: It's all over bar the ... shouting. Vielen Dank fur the guten Zeiten. Burger Man.

FOR SALE One mini castle keep, complete with working drawbridge and black cat. Previous owner deceased. Reply to mayor (in orc-suit) of Lint, Evergood, Planet Wysiwyg.

WANTED: Other persons who have the misfortune not to have read The Lord of.the Rings to contact me with respect to formation of a support group. Tentative name: 'But-I've-read-the-Hobbit-and-besides-I-don't-feel-guilty-at-all Group'. Reply in complete confidence to Anonymous.

WANTED: One hobbit-sized pressure cooker. Apply Dexter D'Vanneth.

FOR SALE Drumming appendages and chip, to fit wrist 18cm. Second hand but in excellent condition. Contact Marian.

WANTED: Volunteers to play NPCs on a fairly ad hoc guest appearance/play by mail level. Contact Giles 689 1327.

LOST: One Dungeon Master whom we disbelieved. We'd like him back please. No-one knows why.

Apologies: To those inhabitants who were unfortunate enough to be crucified as examples to the rest of the city not to start riots (which, incidentally, I started). I cannot pretend that I would like to take your place, but you have my deepest sympathies.

NOTICE: 'Where has all the HEAPIT gone / Far, far away?'. From the TRE.

WANTED: Players for a play by fax diplomacy game. Contact Giles, fax 685 5210.

WANTED: A REAL man. He must respect short people and not be threatened by an axe-wielding, sword-slashing, bullet-slinging slightly violent (BUT curvaceous) dwarf. His table manners must be faultless, and enjoyment of the great

outdoors is essential. Reply in confidence to Tapisserie Ember, cleric of the honourable Nuada. Please include accurate painting / statuette of self.

LOST: One very large reptile resembling a dinosaur. Last seen tearing up Strand Street, then dangling on the end of a ladder hanging from a helicopter headed towards Table Mountain. Answers to the name of Tiddles.

WANTED: Constitution-class vessel for underappreciated but logical Vulcan captain. Apply Sar'lan, USS Challenger.

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT: Never, on any account, answer a distress call in space. Lose the rule book, fiddle the records, forget the pay bonuses and salvage rights. It just isn't worth it (Unless in possession of several PhDs in Parasitology, military issue heavy weapons, lethal overconfidence and/or a wish to die in an imaginative and unpleasant manner).
Courtesy of:
WO Ripley of the Nostromo
Surviving crew of the USS York

WANTED: Members for Danu Riders regiments: large motorcycle, a love for alcohol, fantasy, motorcycles, heavy calibre weapons and trees. Contact: a certain notorious Gold BMW Motorcycle.

Beware all ye vile denizens of Claremont Police Station (narcotics branch). Tadeusz will be avenged! King Arthur lives!

REST IN PEACE

RIP One troupe of chorus girls, mowed down because they danced out of step. Shame. You gotta be tough to make it in show business.

RIP Nameless. Too bad the claymore got to know you better than we did.

RIP Dylan's Cop: just to make sure.

RIP An entire adventuring party, picked off the bridge by Lord Dekenah's archers. Knocking people out can be a bad political move; holding a lord hostage can be even worse.
A list of the fallen: Ceryn Ander, elven mage
Sharlen Forest-friend, ranger
Brush, devoted cleric of Cernunnos

RIP Sharlen Forest-friend,
Restless soul, your wish was always to roam the open road and protect the woods. Now you have embarked on the last and greatest journey of all. Farewell!
Sadly missed by his father and, er, mother. We'll keep in touch.

RIP Rosmund 'The Beast' Douglas' pig. 'It was a mighty cute pig but bacon and eggs for breakfast came first.'

RIP Krait, a maddened Solo. Lasted 3.32 seconds in the Cyberspace world - death by multiple gunshot wounds.

RIP A sweet innocent green monastery lost in the mountains. The party came, they slew and they flooded out.

RIP Tadeusz. Betrayed by a customer, victim of an orchestrated arson attack. A martyr for amateur organic chemistry.

RIP All the patrons of the Petulant Frenzy. Every last one. 'nuff said.

RIP The Purple Flayer Cult: see what happens when religious fanatics seek converts outside devious night clubs?

RIP Devore's skin: Lost in a stomach All alone...

RIP Withnail the CyberDrummer and his
 drumming attachments.
"Semi-automatic heat-seeking guided missile BLOWGUN DARTS? Impossible!"

RIP One pot of mutton stew and associated bandits. Barbarossa & Co.

RIP Ceryn Ander. Fell in the course of duty. Yours was the only honourable way out. In fact, yours was the only way out.

RIP Beard. He who lives by the sword shall die by the hedge-trimmer.

RIP Booty. Sent to the knacker's solely to annoy the Rohirrim. Nice Horsie! From DVD.

RIP The Crusaders of the 10th Crusade: brutally slain by lack of genre consistency.

DIED, of explosive decompression, Acting-Captain Foobar Skeem, Chief Science Officer Alf, Chief Medical Officer Selan de Asseled, Assistant Engineer Fred Jay and two arbitrary security guards, late of the USS York. Victims of stupidity, bad luck and a terminal hallucination.

RIP Edward James 'Crazy Eddie' Leybridge-Stewart. Broke the cardinal rule: "Never, unless you're a vat grown ninja, go wondering alone in an enemy installation'. Should have stayed up the Well. Jolly poor show old boy.

RIP Devious mage Dovore, a strong individualist given to Jonahism, who survived denizens of the land and sea (but just barely) to be finally laid to rest by a fellow party-member. An adventurer of great plans and unfailing unscrupulousness, he will be missed for his ability to make life just that tiny bit more exciting and unpredictable (and downright dangerous).

RIP Rohm Dutt, last surviving founder-member of FUBAR (briefly). Docking accident. Re-entered over the US of A draped in Old Glory, courtesy of an Austrian princess.

RIP Ten Foot Pole, ten miles wide and still expanding. Vacuum sucks.

RIP One Combi engine, cruelly slain by a spanner in the warp drive while trekking through hideous and inhospitably nondeviant regions. Survived, barely, by several culture-ridden CLAW hierarchs who never want to be within a light year of PE ever again.

RIP Dexter D'Vanneth's horse Booty, together with any spadework campaigns directed at Rohirrim ranger wenches. Bad move.

RIP One tower full of fanatical bird-priest pygmy nits, 13 manic bird-man skeletons and one demented god, plus numerous leeches. Bloody jungles.

RIP The snake Mouse killed. You will be avenged. Tenebra.

RIP Ophelia - now you're one of us. Bela Lugosi's dead.

RIP Heathcliff.

RIP Castle Elsinore's rosemary bushes.

RIP Edgar Linton.

RIP Ge and Gaia (the two basil plants I planted on the first quarter of the December moon)... Return to the womb... James.

RIP The Nephilim... now the fields are burnt, and they've crossed their Rubicon!

RIP Helion Thacol.

RIP The crew of the USS Challenger. Driven into black hole by DM. They're dead, Jim...
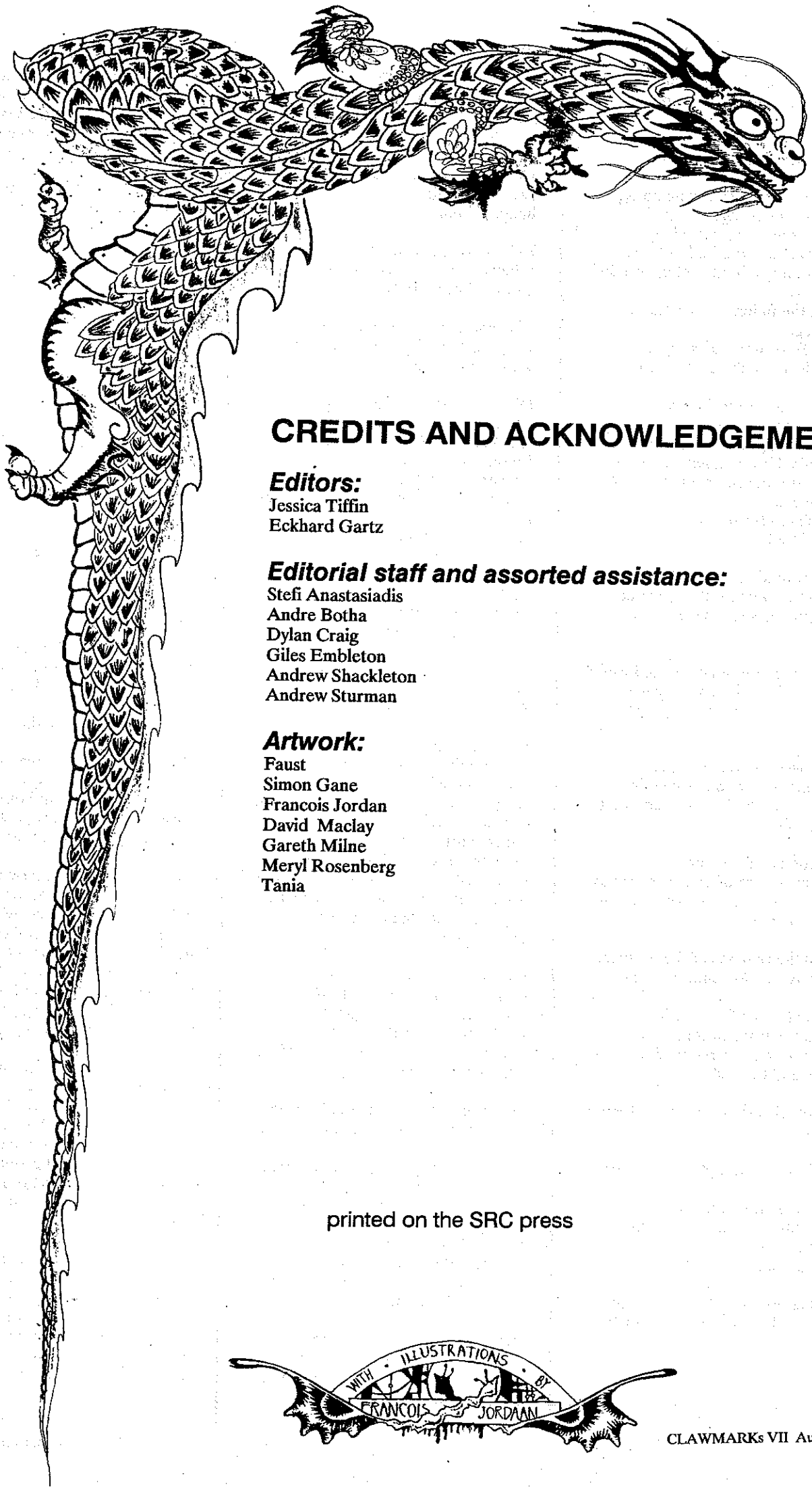
RIP Katherine Earnshaw.

RIP One ginger cat, who died painfully, poisoned by a certain King Arthur, musician; and one dog, poisoned by the aforementioned cat. Life's tough in the suburbs in 2013.

RIP Brush, devout cleric of Cernunnos, holder of the holy-horn-type-device, whose first involvement in local politics was to be his last. He will be sorely missed, especially by his player and Charity, the only love of his life (but not the rest of the adventuring party, because they're dead too).

RIP Tapisserie Ember, brave cleric of Nuada, whisked away by Entity Unknown, long before her time, outside the Yellow Diner. May her name forever be echoed throughout the world as one who would not retreat, one who would not surrender, one who would not talk with her mouth full.

RIP Gareth Milne's sanity. Just another DM to freak out at his party's strength. Party was supposed to be captured in the first round was was winning in the tenth. Maybe next week we'll be up against demigods.

CREDITS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS