

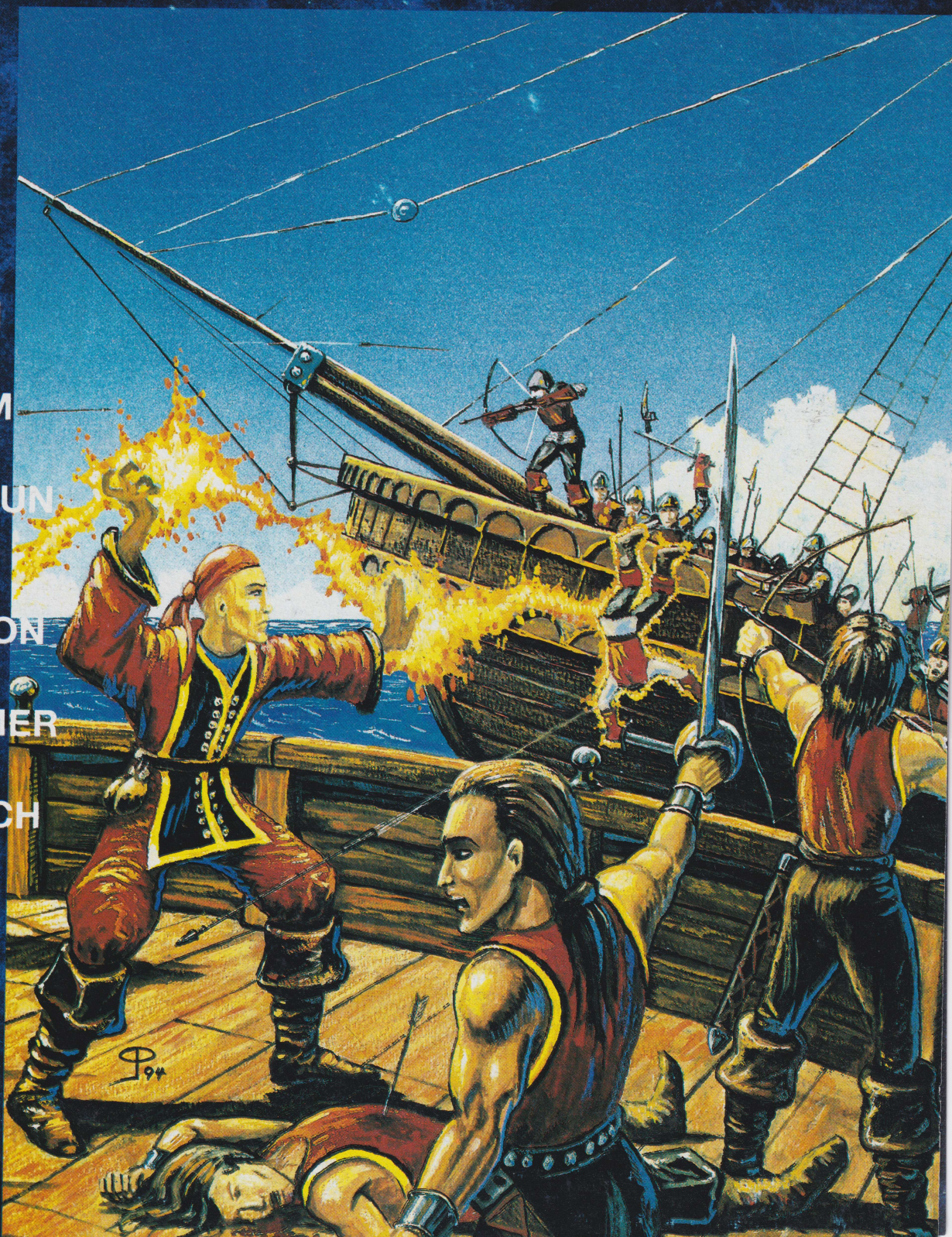
ISSUE
17

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REALMS

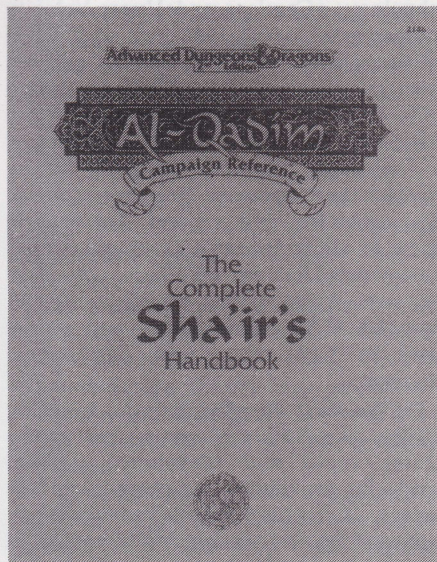
- UNAE
- ELRIC!
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- CYBER-
GENERATION
- WARHAMMER
- BATTLETECH



SHA'IR's HANDBOOK

AD&D 2nd Edition Supplement
by TSR RRP \$34.95

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard



I may be biased, but I think that the *Al-Qadim* campaign setting is one of the best things that TSR has done in a long time, and this latest release continues that tradition of excellence. **The Complete Sha'ir's Handbook** is probably a misleading title however, as this volume covers much more than the gen-summoning wizards introduced in the original *Arabian Adventures Handbook*.

Presentation is solid; while there are no colour plates (a common feature of most other TSR products), the many black-and-white illustrations are excellent, invoking just the right feeling of adventure and mystery.

At the now 'standard' length of 128 pages, the handbook is divided into four distinct sections. The first section covers the three wizard kits (Sorcerer, Elementalist, Sha'ir) that are unique to the Land Of Fate, expanding on each by covering such topics as apprentices, sorcerous duels, summoning gens and binding genies. Section two provides eight new wizard kits for those who like to play wizards with a difference. Each of the new kits (Astrologer, Mechanician, Digitalogist, Ghul Lord, Jackal, Mageweaver, Mystic Of Nog and Spellslayer) is an original concept which fits in extremely well with the overall 'Arabian Nights' feel of this campaign setting. While some of these kits may not be as practical for players as others (especially players who are not in a one DM,

one player situation), all kits would make excellent NPCs if encountered.

Section three introduces a number of new sorcerous societies, the original Arabian Adventures Handbook having only the 'Brotherhood of the One True Flame' for PCs to contend with. Each of the new societies is well described and logical in its goals, most providing excellent ideas for adventure hooks (the Red Eyes, Spellslayers and Viziers in particular). The final section provides a number of new spells and proficiencies, which vary from the average to excellent.

Two things stand out to me when I read anything written for the *Al-Qadim* setting - the overall quality of the writing, and the way the mood of the campaign setting permeates every page. You really can feel the harsh desert wind, hear the chants of the priests from the minarets, see the blue oceans lapping against rocky shores (Help! I've lapsed into the 'Thief of Baghdad'). If you like having your buckles swashed, this is for you.

The **Shaiir's Handbook** should not only interest those who use the *Al-Qadim* campaign setting, but anyone interested in playing a different type of wizard character. For those of you who are playing in the world of Zakhara, or somewhere similar, this should be considered an essential purchase. Bugger *Dark Sun*, give me more *Al-Qadim*.

FIELDS OF FIRE

Shadowrun Sourcebook
by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This latest *Shadowrun* release comes in at 110 pages of new rules, equipment and data, even briefly touching upon Australia as per the setting detailed in issues 6-9, 11 & 15 of *Realms*). **Fields of Fire** comes with a beautiful piece of cover art and is filled with typical black and white *Shadowrun* illos. It looks good, and is made warm by the expected and much welcomed *Shadowtalk*.

To summarise; the product introduces some new weapons and equipment, and is written from a mercenary's point of view. It is a sourcebook for that profession, in the same vein that Street Samurai, Deckers, Riggers and Mages have had similar works to round them out.

It is quite simply a *Survival Guide*, with an added hardware catalogue.

The book is good and its usefulness will solely depend on how much your game leans on such things as mercenaries, hot spots and combat (or equipment) heavy play. If any of these things are integral aspects of your game the book is worth a purchase, or at least a good look, otherwise view it as not necessary but still a handy reference.

An expansion for those needing a little *new* fire in the belly.

WILDSIDE

Cyberpunk Sourcebook
By R.Talsorian Games

Reviewed by Paul Mitting

Wildside focuses on the role of the Fixer in *Cyberpunk*, fixing a lack of detail in the core rules by adding extensive optional rules and ideas on what Streetdeal is as a skill, how to use it, and what it can do for your character.

The Fixer has been given a host of new roles, each with its own specialties and place on the darker side of the Street. I liked the concept of the Shoemaker best; he specialises in fake Identities and removal of unwanted ones from the Net. This section shows how the Net can and is used to keep track of people.

Other topics covered are Money and Credit, Life on the Street, Crimes, and the effects of Tech on everyday life. Age old favourites rehashed are - Drugs and Religion. I liked the Realism cult - we're all Gods who have created a seemingly real world to live in as a cure for boredom. Sound familiar?

The quality of the text in this supplement is very good, and you get true value in the various topics covered; adventure hooks leap out of every section. Where we are let down is by the art which ranges from average (the cover) to diabolical (most of the interior stuff). Game art should have narrative elements to inspire the referee - there's none of that here.

Essential reading for Fixer characters.

EARTHDAWN COMPANION

Earthdawn Sourcebook
by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

I must say I found the idea of releasing a companion so soon after the launch of the game disagreeable but FASA has, less than six months after *Earthdawn's* debut, done just that.

Firstly it is a big book, coming in at 168 pages, plus 8 pages of colour art, this at least is good value. Production is also excellent, as all *Earthdawn* products have so far been.

But, now to the contents of the book itself; it covers new ground with disciplines, talents, spells, magic items, questors, light bearers, air ship combat and devising new creatures and disciplines.

In all a lot of new information, but as one staffer here pointed out "Why wasn't it all included in the main rule book?". The only answer to that is because the rule book would have been well over 500 pages if they had. Pondering this, the most obvious thing to say in the **Companion's** defence is that it is exactly what a companion should be by definition, and on that basis it does the job well.

The **Earthdawn Companion** is a good enough product, but one that is far from being *necessary* to play the game. For those who have enjoyed *Earthdawn* and are now ready for more depth you should enjoy this release, but don't expect any surprises.

RUNNING WITH AN EDGE

Merits and Flaws in Shadowrun

by Alan Michell

Introduction

With so many good role playing games on the market today, game masters should feel free to combine elements of different systems to improve their campaigns. With this simple idea in mind, this article seeks to take the *merits* and *flaws* characteristics from **White Wolf's Storyteller** system and modify them for **FASA's Shadowrun 2nd Edition**. This list is not meant to be all inclusive, but shows what can be done with a little thought and work. I recommend that referee's should develop their own merits and flaws, and convert others from the Storyteller products.

Gaining Merits and Flaws

During character creation for Shadowrun, merits and flaws can be bought using the number of *skill* points normally available to the character. For every two points of skill one point of merits may be taken. For every point of flaws taken two skill points are gained. Merits and flaws can be taken point for point without involving skill points so long as the character has as many compensating points of flaws to balance the points of merits taken. Certain merits and flaws counteract each other and the referee should take appropriate measures to maintain internal game logic. Any merits and flaws that are added to the game are the province of the referee who should veto any of what follows if he or she feels it would adversely affect game balance and flavour.

Aptitudes

Born Decker (1pt merit): the character has a great sense for the Matrix environment and can act faster and with more precision when decking. A heightened awareness in the virtual environment makes for a better ability to execute functions from the cyberdeck. The character gains two on their Hacking Pool.

Born Rigger (1pt merit): a born rigger has a high aptitude for moving and manoeuvring vehicles at speed. The rigger instinctively knows the limitations of their vehicle and the possible weaknesses of others. The character gains two on the Control Pool.

Cool Under Fire (1pt merit): character has a special talent for keeping a cool head in combat and maintaining their concentration on the job at hand. Gains two on their Combat Pool.

General Knowledge/Trivia Buff/Know-All (2pt merit): due to education, reading and mnemonic ability the character has a wide general knowledge. This allows the character two dice in every knowledge skill, but target numbers are slightly higher (+2). If the character spends Karma building up a knowledge skill they must build from scratch as they do not have actual points in that skill.

Jack-of-all-Trades (2pt merit): the character has some knowledge of Build and Repair in any other skills that they have where appropriate; ie if the player has a Firearms skill she also has this merit's Build and Repair ability in Firearms. This allows her to Build and Repair without the +2 penalty to target numbers for not acquiring the actual Build and Repair skill. This penalty is normally inflicted on the target numbers, as part of the Skill Web, but the character knows more about his weapons/vehicles/computers than the general users, enough to give them the skill to work on the items without penalty.

Other ideas to explore and design are Merits - Daredevil, Linguist; Flaws - Illiterate, Inept, Uneducated, Unskilled.

Physical

Allergic (1-2pt flaw): the character has an allergy that can affect them, similar to racial allergies. This allergy can, however, be different and to a level determined by the player and referee. It may be that the character is allergic to soy products and requires real food not soy-substitutes thus doubling their monthly food bill. Other possibilities are sasquatch fur, ork breath, gun metal etc.

Dermal Armour (2pt merit): the character has naturally tough skin like a troll and gains a bonus of one on their body beyond the normal racial maximum. The skin does show signs of being different although not quite as lumpy as a troll's.

Low-light Eyes (1pt merit): gives a character without low-light eyes the ability to see in the dark. This merit is lost with the introduction of cybereyes.

Mute (2pt flaw): the character is unable to speak and must develop a way to communicate with their fellow runners, probably involving sign language like that used by a sasquatch. The referee must be careful to enforce this flaw at all times.

Racial Ambiguity (1pt flaw): the character is of one race but has characteristics of another race that sometimes confuse others. A human might have a tusk like an orc, pointed ears like an orc or elf, or even a horn reminiscent of a troll. Metahumans might lack some of these tell-tale signs of racial heritage. The ambiguity as to the character's race causes problems with those NPCs who have Racist Points (Shadowrun 2nd Edition, p182).

Resistance to Disease (or Poison) (2pt merit): much like the racial trait of dwarves this merit indicates a naturally tough system resistant to disease or poison. The bonus to Body rolls for disease (or poison) only is +1.

Thermographic Vision (2pt merit): this character has natural heat sensing eyesight which is lost if the character opts to use cybereyes.

Others: Merits - Huge; Flaws - Deformity, Lamé, Paraplegic (not everyone can afford cyberware, a paraplegic decker is a viable character option).

Psychological

Amnesia (3pt flaw): this flaw allows the referee to take a greater hand in development of the character's history and create surprises that can crop up later in the game. The amnesia might be caused by numerous things but suffice to say the character will have numerous problems. Cortex bomb anyone?

Phobias (1-2pt flaw): these are irrational fears of runners who have had bad experiences in the past or have built up a mental hurdle with regards to something. This phobia could relate to heights, the dark, paranormal animals, magic or something even stranger such as the number 13. The severity of the phobia is expressed in the point cost. A mild (1pt) phobia could result in the character only being able to perform actions when under the influence of the phobia with a -1 penalty to rolls, while a more severe (2pt) phobia would incur greater penalties or prohibit action entirely - frozen with fear.

Simsense Sensitivity (1pt flaw): the character has some reality perception problems and finds it hard to withdraw from the simsense state. The runner must make a Willpower (7) check to leave a simsense program, including deckers trying to jack out of the matrix.

Others: Merits - Higher Purpose; Flaws - Compulsion, Low Self Image, Nightmares, Obsession, Short Fuse, Shy, Speech Impediment.

Social

Allure/Charm (1pt merit): the character has a high sex appeal and all interaction with NPCs of the appropriate sexual gender will be more positive. All social skill rolls have a target number modified down by 2.

Poker Face (1pt merit): the character is able to completely hide emotions in stressful situations, maintaining an unreadable visage no matter what, if he so chooses. This makes the character a tough negotiator with a bonus -2 on target numbers in business deals/haggling.

Ties (2pt merit): this represents a runner's links with a certain group within general society. These ties do not work like contacts or followers, they are more tenuous connections which confer a working knowledge of the group in question. Typically the runner should have an appropriate Etiquette skill for their social ties but this is not compulsory. Suggested ties include: Corp, High Society, Judicial, Matrix, Media, Military, Police, Political, Pro Sports, Tribal, Underworld. A character with corp ties would perhaps know about corporate interactions, be able to read between the lines of the business news sheets and know something of the key personnel and structure of a particular corp. The corp might even know of the character, but they've no formal links (unless contacts are bought).

Title (1pt merit): character has or had an aristocratic title appropriate to the campaign setting. Primarily this could be used by European characters. Characters with SInS (Shadowbeat, p86) are more likely to have active titles but others may have had them in the past and still be able to use their former status to influence people.

Wanted (2pt flaw): the runner is outlawed from a particular region or nation for various crimes, or may be sought after by a particular corp for past runs against it. The character will be disadvantaged in these regions and situations, and may even encounter bounty hunters in otherwise safe territory.

Supernatural

Astral Sense (1pt merit): this merit does not bestow the ability to see astral space, but the character can sense the presence of astral observers or attackers in the immediate vicinity. Astral sense could also lead characters to detect something of a background count (Grimoire, p89) in certain places.

Charmed Existence (1pt merit): the character always gets to roll one failure dice per skill roll again. The character should rarely botch with the rule of one, and should sometimes recover from an apparent failure with a touch of luck.



Critter Ken (1pt merit): the character can sense a critter's emotional state (hostile, hungry, confused etc.) and has some chance of communicating with the critter. This is as basic as "I don't want to hurt you", and can be used to pacify or instruct the critter in a minor way.

Essence Sensitivity (1pt flaw): the runner is highly sensitive to the intrusion of technology in their system. All essence costs for cyberware are doubled, and bioware costs the character essence as if she was a mage (Shadowtech, pg5). One side effect to this flaw is the ability to sense in others their level of essence, and therefore perceive levels of cyber-enhancement not visible to the eye provided the target is within conversational distance.

Gremlins (2pt flaw): the character has a problem with equipment failures and vehicle problems as though 'gremlins' were plaguing him. Technology related rolls will be botched when complete ones, or twos or a combination of ones and twos result. Also target numbers are one point higher when dealing with tech.

Magic Resistance (1pt merit): makes the character more able to shrug off the effects of magic-use on her. The runner gains an additional Spell Defence die, and her target numbers for resistance checks versus spells are one lower no matter what the spell.

Magic Susceptibility (1pt flaw): the character is particularly affected by magic; target numbers for spell resistance checks are raised by one, and he has one less resistance die.

Unseen Ally (2pt merit): the character has a guardian angel of sorts - a free willed spirit or elemental that seeks to protect the character for motives only it probably knows (referee's discretion). This ally will serve in a similar way to a summoned spirit but it does not obey the character's orders, sometimes mistakes the character's intentions and can make things worse. It is listed as a merit because the ally will provide more beneficial aid than annoyances.

Conclusion

I recommend that referees with access to Storyteller sourcebooks (*Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage* and the upcoming *Wraith*) draw on even more merits and flaws. Some are obviously inappropriate, being designed around the perils of being a vampire or werewolf, but others can be readily integrated into a Shadowrun campaign to add role playing depth and colour. ■

NEWS

Noncon '94

"Not your conventional convention" the promo booklet tells us. Organised by Castle Enterprises, Noncon '94 is billed as Brisbane's Unconventional Roleplaying Convention and will be held at QUT Gardens Point Campus Club over the weekend of July 15th, 16th and 17th. Looking through the convention handbook the focus definitely appears to be on having FUN - something in roleplaying which is close to this writer's heart. Organisers have lined up a very special guest - Ed Greenwood of *Forgotten Realms* fame. So if you want to enjoy a great weekend's roleplaying and maybe have a chat with Ed, contact Ian or Louise on (07) 891 5673. Don't forget to tell 'em where you heard about the event!

Readers' Poll

In issue 16 we ran a Readers Poll, with over \$500 in prizes as inducement for you to send in a completed form. Initial response has been excellent, and we thank those people who have taken the time to give us their opinions. We'd just like to remind everyone else that the Poll remains open until May 31st. So get your form in and contribute to the future of Realms.

A-Team Products

Our hugely successful comic strip is about to spawn a host of spin-off products. The **A-Team Book**, a graphic novel featuring the first A-Team story as published in issues 6 to 14 plus a brand new story was scheduled for April release but has had to be put back to June because Scott suffered a short illness. For this same reason, Scott was unable to complete inking the strip in time for this issue's episode of the current storyline, so instead we've presented an excerpt from the Book (see page 48). Not available at newsagencies, you can buy your copy of this limited edition from most games specialist shops or direct from us by using the order form on page 40.

Following the graphic novel will be the **A-Team Miniatures**; a blister pack of the six A-Team characters manufactured by **Inquisition Miniatures** of Adelaide (around July). To give you a reason to paint up and use these outrageous figures, we'll be running a complete new game in issue 18 (July) of Realms! The **A-Team Bar Room Brawl Game** is a very simple and fun boardgame featuring all the knockabout mayhem you've come to expect from the world's wackiest adventuring party.

And there's the **A-Team T-shirt!** These high quality shirts feature an A3 sized image of the cover art of the Book (see ad on the back of this issue). Simply write us giving your shirt size and \$29.95 and we'll post one to you immediately.

More Realms Products

If the A-Team is not your bag, we've got other items on schedule for release this year. These include a **Scenario Special Edition** of the magazine which will feature six fully developed adventures; four fantasy, one Shadowrun and one Cyberpunk. More on that next issue. Then there's the **Unae World Book** due out in time for Christmas. Colin Taber has moved over from Assistant Editor role to concentrate his efforts on this ground-breaking project - a fantasy world detailed in Australia. The first book will focus on the Dormetian area of Unae - which is the Heletian League and it's neighbours. And we are looking at producing a colour poster sized **Unae Map**.

The 1995 schedule is also being planned out, with a book of **How To** style essays for roleplayers and referees featuring leading game designers already under way and a second Scenario Special Edition.

In addition to these moves, we're making every effort to establish a distribution in the United States so that our Stateside brothers and sisters will get to read and enjoy Realms. "Tomorrow the world," says Nick with a wicked glint in his eye!

So, these are truly exciting times for gaming in Australia, with Realms leading the way. Artists and writers wanting to take part - contact us now.

New Releases

Chaosium Inc

The big news from Chaosium is the impending appearance of their new roleplaying game **Nephilim**. Due to be unleashed at Gen Con 94 (August), the advance promotional material paints **Nephilim** as a game of deep mystery and dark magic. Realms hopes to bring you more detail next issue.

April saw Chaosium release a supplement that drools over you, and should have Cthulhu-ites gibbering and drooling in horrified excitement - **Ye Booke of Monstres**. A collection of monstrous creations and archaic misspellings inspired by the past 70 years of Cthulhu fiction. Other upcoming offerings to the unnameable and unspeakable are **The Shub-Niggurath Cycle**, a book of Cthulhu horror tales, and a brace of very useful city sourcebooks - the **Cairo Guidebook** and the **London Guidebook**.

In May players will be able to find their way around **Elric!** with the **Atlas of the Young Kingdoms**. This comprehensive guide to the world of **Elric!** includes notes for many lands and helpful adventure hints - like "Don't stand next to Elric with Stormbringer drawn" perhaps? Also for **Elric!** is **Fate of Fools** (May) scenario and **The Bronze Grimoire** (July) a book of new spells.

Palladium Books Inc

In their recent press release, Palladium books announced 1994 will be the BIGGEST year in its history. Traditionally, Palladium releases around eight new books a year, 1994 will see the release of 14 to 20 blockbuster titles.

In 1994 there are plans nine *Rifts* releases (already **Triax & The NGR** has topped 14,000 copies sold), three *Palladium Fantasy* books (**Yin Soth Jungles** in June/July is the first of these), three *Macross II* items (**Spaceships and Deck Plans Vol Two** is due late July), a Robotech release, **The Zentraedi Breakout** (May) and two new items for *Beyond the Supernatural* and *Heroes Unlimited*. Kevin, Maryann and the team are going to be very busy.

FASA Corporation

It seems FASA is out to catch the chummers at an even younger age as recently they announced the arrival of **Shadowrun Super Nintendo**. This went so well that the units sold out before even the guys and gals at FASA could have a play.

The other May releases for FASA's top-selling game of cyber-future and magic are; **Double Exposure**, an adventure in 'Seattle's cesspool of depravity and despair', sounds like nice work if you can get it; **Nosferatu** a novel by the classy team of Carl Sargent and Marc Gascoigne; and not far away is the **Denver** campaign package due in July.

The same people who have been licensed to do the **BattleTech Movie** (who are currently developing the script) have taken an option to do a feature length **Shadowrun Movie**. Watch out, chummers. Come September there will also be a **BattleTech Animated Series** (13 episodes have been contracted so far). Saban Entertainment, the producers of the X-Men series, are doing the **BattleTech** show and have the international rights so you never know we might get to see it in ANZ one day.

Other Battletech items clanking out of the Windy City and onto your tabletop are **Tukayyid**, an extended scenario pack that recreates the entire Tukayyid campaign and features a unique bidding system; **Black Thorns** a scenario pack based on the events of the novels *Main Event* and *D.R.T.*; and **Close Quarters** another novel.

By all accounts, the faith FASA placed in their fantasy game, **Earthdawn**, has been rewarded with an excellent take up rate by American gamers, and we know that Australians are playing this superbly crafted game in increasing numbers. Further products supporting the system are imminent, including **Prophecy** written by Greg Gorden, the first novel after the Chris Kubasik series (which is reviewed in this issue's *Analytical Engine*); **Denizens of Earthdawn Volume II** (July) will follow up **Volume I**'s May release looking at dwarves, obsidimen, orks and trolls.

Games Workshop Australia

Tim Wilson of GW Australia after a recent trip home to the 'old country' says he enjoyed one whole day of sunshine over there. Sounds like he is glad to be back here!