

ISSUE
20

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REALMS

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POSTER
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ADVENTURE
- WEREWOLF
- HEROIC
WOMEN
- HARLECH
CASTLE
- SHADOWRUN
AUSTRALIA



THE COMPLETE DRUID'S HANDBOOK

AD&D 2nd Edition Accessory by TSR

Reviewed by Lee Sheppard.

One of the first non-fighter characters I ever played was a druid, and I remember that he spent an entire adventure fighting one giant tick after another (the random monster tables were much smaller in those days), so I was particularly interested in checking out this supplement. I am happy to say that the *Complete Druid's Handbook* does much to improve on what originally was a very limited character class.

While the druid class still has its problems, the authors of *Complete Druid* have done their best to widen the scope, power and abilities of the druid. A number of new "portraits" are introduced, removing the need for all druids to be tied to forests, as are a number of interesting and practical character kits (*guardian*, *outlaw*, *shapeshifter*, and *wanderer* among others). The druidic magic section adds a number of new spells and magical items, which finally gives the druid the ability to hold his/her own against other character classes.

In a similar vein, the authors have also tried to overcome the "solitary" nature of the druid ("I'd really like to come with you down that dungeon, but I must stay and water my trees..."), by giving suggestions on how to play a truly neutral character, how a druid might fit in with other player characters, and how to centre a full campaign around a druid character. TSR have certainly done a far better job with this aspect of the druid class than they did with either the Ranger or Paladin Handbooks, even though all three tend to suffer from the same complaint. The remaining chapters in the book cover the Druidic Order and sacred groves, which are the "safe havens" of your druid character.

Perhaps the only complaint I would have with the book is that, once again, TSR have failed to produce a roleplaying supplement that doesn't contain at least one picture that panders to hormonally driven male sexual fantasies. All in all though, I can find little else wrong with this supplement. If you like the idea of having a go at a druid character, then this wouldn't be a bad way to start.

MINDWERKS

Rifts Sourcebook Three

By Palladium Inc

Reviewed by Andrew Daniels

Somewhere in the midst of the dark forests of a post-Apocalypse Germany, deep underground lie the secret laboratories of Mindwerks. Here, the Angel of Death conducts sadistic experiments in order to create creatures with enhanced powers

through the use of M.O.M. (Mind Over Matter) technology. Here creatures are turned out whose enhancements rival the products of the Juicers, but without the drug dependencies; the fact that M.O.M. tends to make the recipient crazy is a minor inconvenience (and this from the land of Mom and apple pie).

Mindwerks, the latest sourcebook for the ever-expanding Rifts roleplaying game, details the characters, bots, and beasts of the Germany/Poland region of Rifts Europe. Once again Siembieda has assembled a marvelously imaginative collection of player and non-player character types as well as the usual assortment of megadeath-dealing machines and super spiky monsters. Alongside the detailed descriptions of the horrors of the Mindwerks labs, there is also information on the Black Forest region which includes evil Millennium Trees. The pick of the various new class of npc villains detailed are the Genesplacers, a cold-hearted alien breed who delight in breaking down and rebuilding the very genes which compose a species.

No prizes for guessing what inspired the Angel of Death whose experiments and torturing of innocents takes place in secret installations in the Germany/Poland border region. If you can get over this rather tasteless imagery then you'll find *Mindwerks* is yet another imaginative and value packed addition to Rifts.



DENVER: THE CITY OF SHADOWS

Shadowrun Campaign Set by FASA

Reviewed by Malcolm Adler

This weighty release comes as a boxed campaign set for running in the shadows, a mile a high. Welcome to the Treaty City, the Front Range Free Zone. Here the city has been split into six sectors, all governed by a different nation. They're all here, the powers of North America; the Sioux, Ute, Pueblo, UCAS, CAS and Aztlan nations. So, what happens when you mix these guys all up, well it's got to be seen to be believed. This setting is a place of confusion and danger, with the emphasis on confusion. Here, I have to give credit to the writers for being able to get across the feel of the city, its machinations and more without leaving me totally bewildered. They said Denver was confusing, and they weren't wrong. But any referee who is going to use the set will be smugly looking at the perplexed faces of his players because at least he (with his own special GM's book) knows what is truly going on.

The Denver boxed set comes with two laminated hard-card ID cards for different sectors (very nice, will have to put them in my wallet) a big map of Down Town, a smaller map of showing the sector borders, the GM's book and the Denver: City of Shadows book (public access data).

SHADOWRUN AUSTRALIA

This issue we present a variety of adventure hooks for Shadowrunning in Australia in 2055. Most of the ideas can be based in any of the major city-states and are subject only to the referee's tastes. The first set of hooks provides easily arranged methods of getting players to Australia from other published Shadowrun settings.

GETTING TO THE CITY-STATES

FROM SEATTLE

A Tir Taimgire noble has heard of the supposed outrages being perpetrated against the elven population of Australia, and also of the interference in Tir Miallae's affairs by the Canberra government. He is looking to hire runners who will be neutral in their views, but also needs the best, so he has headed to Seattle and arranged a meet.

The players will need to go to Australia and Tir Miallae to assess the real situation of the elven population. Simple enough, easy money... So it seems until, for an unknown reason, the players find themselves being followed and fired upon by a group of elves! It seems the truth is that Mr Do Good from Tir Taimgire is really a Mr Big of the growing Elven Gandana crime network and that he is more interested in feeling the waters in Australia than seeing the truth of the elven situation. He has instructed the runners to look into criminal activity that detrimentally effects the elven community (being interested in the competition). A rival faction of the Gandana, the Temple from Perth, has heard of his probing and has ordered its nationwide cells to wipe out the foreign incursion.

FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

One of England's last noble families of strength and influence is killed in a terrible accident when part of the Chunnel linking the UK to Europe is bombed in a terrorist attack. The fortune of the House of Devenish sits awaiting its claim. The executor of the estate is only eligible for his percentage if he can disperse the estate within thirty days. After searching records it would appear that there is a young Richard Devenish, a sole survivor of the family, who made his way to Australia fifteen years ago and has had no dealings with his family since. Regardless of what incident has sent Richard from his family, today he is again to be involved in their affairs. The executor is desperate for his own percentage and will hire the runners, offering them suitable remuneration if they will travel to Australia and track down Richard.

The only solid information on Richard is that he is now twenty seven. The truth is that upon his twelfth birthday he

underwent goblinisation. The family, so horrified by this change, disowned him and forced him from the estate at gun point. His travels took him to Australia (airline and immigration records will show that he landed at Greater Melbourne in 2042). Richard, now a Troll, lives as a lone salvage operator under the name of Rick Deven. He will be saddened by news of his family's death, but more annoyed at their intrusion into his new life. While he will accept the inheritance and return to his work the players will need to track him down in the Exclusion Zone, braving the dangers of the Dreamtime.

FROM GERMANY

A German Collector has come upon a special oddity that she was more than pleased to acquire for a bargain price... or so it seemed at the time. The Dreaming item is a specially carved wooden disc. It is hand painted in typical dot-art style and has a powerful astral presence.

Its previous owner was found brutally murdered after suffering an apparent breakdown. The collector is now having her own nightmares and delusions. Upon consultation with a Dreamtime shaman that was passing through Frankfurt, she has been told that her only hope to avoid the same fate of the disc's previous three owners is to return it to its resting place. In desperation she hires the runners to return the item to a cave high in the Darling Escarpment east of Perth. Payment will be upon completion (and the cessation of the nightmares) and the players have in all six days to get to Perth, find the site (with the aid of local Shamans), brave the paranormals of the Exclusion Zone and the oddities of the elven grove at Boddington before the collector meets her grisly end.

THE CITY-STATES

LOOKING FOR GUIDES

A team of foreign runners have just arrived and they need a guide (maybe a couple) for an excursion into the Exclusion Zone. The runners are completely ignorant of the ways of the Dreaming and will need constant watching. Their work? Well, they are travelling to a special place, an old sacred site, a place that is no longer active, its songline broken.

The guides are supposed to have an easy job, being able to make use of the foreign runners' contacts; the locals are young wannabes and this could be their chance of jumping into the international big league. But first they must survive the job. While it seems simple - them just keeping their eyes open for the odd lone bunyip and the like - it's not actually that straight forward. The broken songline is a Ghost Tribe home ground, it is also a meeting place for free spirits and several members of the Shamans of Djapana. What should be a quick snatch and grab of some long forgotten and now inactive talismans in a gorge becomes an ambush and battle. Do the guides, your runners, spot the signs of oncoming trouble? Do they lead their employers to victory, a lucky escape or... perhaps an early grave?

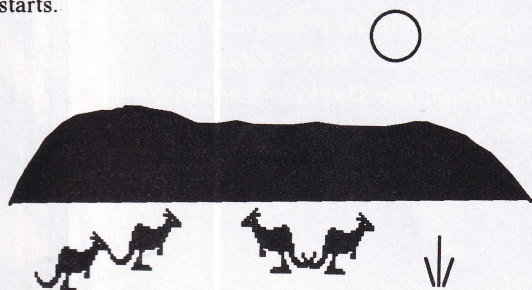
SINGING THE SONGLINE

A group of renegade young shaman are trying to sing the Austside Tower (the old, dead Australian megacorp's head office) into its own Greater Melbourne based songline. It is their goal to turn the abandoned tower into a huge Dreamzone, a place from which the Dreaming can spread throughout the city-state. Such

inexperienced callings by excitable but ignorant (and arrogant) shamans is threatening to make the tower a focus of free spirits and a place of great danger to the unknowing city-state that surrounds it.

The Austside Tower is a one hundred floor high shell. Sealed since the Austside collapse several years ago in an attempt to stop corporate skirmishing over the research and assets held within, ownership of the building has crawled through the courts at an agonisingly slow rate. Today the building is home to squatters, runners and gangs. The structure is accessed by its third floor balconies or the sewers.

A series of rituals and their legacy is what alerts several interested parties as to the goals of the shamans. The most visible sign is a massive increase in the number of paranormal "entries" into the inner city, where suddenly rampaging bunyips seem to become a regular midnight occurrence. With several megacorps, Marega, and even the city-state government getting concerned there will be no shortage of potential employers looking for an independent group to make enquiries, conduct surveillance or proceed with anonymous and apparently random dispatches of the upstarts.



THE MIG-MIGELL

Set in either of the Republic's two major research centres (the Adelaide Twin Cities or the Brisbane Plex's Gold Coast district) the players hear a rumour doing the rounds that the local corp structure is after the legendary decker group known as the Mig-Migell; the elite of Australasia's matrix cowboys. The word is that Rhythm (reputedly the best decker in the region) has found something that's even a little too hot for him to handle. He's gone into hiding and everyone is offering everybody anything to find him. The corps are looking for him, his fellow Mig-Migell boys are looking for him, even Marega is looking for him. With a dust storm gathering above the city-state and a toxic haze blowing in from the ocean it seems one hell of a battle is about to be unleashed.

Rhythm, an Aboriginal decker, has come across some just completed prototype attack and defence programs. Very lethal, very advanced (requiring the latest deck and access to a mainframe to run them); alas, the programs are still full of bugs, and the overly excited word on the street has helped push things a little over the top. Rhythm is hiding out, knowing there is at least a dozen different parties who want him slugged, while as many want to "talk" to him.

The player's Mr Johnson will contact them and ask if they are interested in an escort run. It will be an operation in which they will need to lift Rhythm from an arcology basement he is holed up in and then get him clear of the city-states. His destination is the Exclusion Zone, to a band of waiting Marega people. This will play as a great chase scenario, and also gives the players a chance to make contact with the very best decker in Australasia. ■

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BattleTech Animated Series

The BattleTech animated series premiered on syndicated television in the US on the 24th September. Made by the same company that brought us the X-Men animated series, each episode of BattleTech also includes 3 minutes of computer generated animation, reported to be some of the best ever seen in a typical Saturday morning cartoon show.

Expect a host of computer games, comics, toys and other promotional material next year. And if similar productions are any indication, you may even be able to pick up your next Black Hawk miniature with a cheeseburger, fries and coke. All joking aside, if this animated series gets more people interested in roleplaying, then we all win in the long run.

The Darkness Continues...

Originally scheduled for a GenCon release but put back whilst the all-important cash generating *Illuminati New World Order* card game is output, Steve Jackson Games' newest rpg should be in stores very soon. Called *In Nomine*, this new roleplaying game of angels and demons (oops, there's that naughty word!) is based on an original French-language game, and promises to have quite an impact on the gothic-punk genre. The preview pictures that we have seen (we have yet to get our hands on the text) are quite atmospheric, and preliminary news releases suggest that this game might really "push the limit".

Because of its unique interpretations of modern religious themes, there will be a "Mature Readers" notice on the back of the book. This mature readers tag clearly places *In Nomine* with other, similar dark-in-theme gaming systems like Chaosium's *Nephilim* and the White Wolf Storyteller series of games. I just hope that this continued interest in dark, horror-orientated games doesn't eventually end up doing more harm than good. The last thing the gaming industry needs is its own "*Seduction of the Innocent*", an enquiry which almost wiped out the comics industry in the 1950's.

...And Gets Darker!

White Wolf games have just announced the creation of **Black Dog Game Factory**, "a branch of our game studio that is dedicated to producing artistic roleplaying games and supplements for an older, more mature reader. The Black Dog imprint artistically pursues themes and issues that gaming has never been allowed to address...

the intent is not to produce books glorifying violence or exalting villains. Our enemies will be shown in a negative light, whether they be Spectres or Black Spiral Dancers. However, we feel that exploring such enemies and their ways is one method of enriching roleplaying and expanding understanding of our world setting. Understanding evil is not the same as exploring it."

It is interesting that the press release reads more like an apology than the usual hyper-excited propaganda. But you do have to admire the guts of White Wolf, that they are willing to make a stand, even if it is ill-defined: "we have the personal (and company) integrity to not depict misogynistic, racist or homophobic behaviour or violence, drug use and the like in a favourable light. Certainly, part of what White Wolf is built around is understanding the lure of darkness... but the inevitable conclusion inherent in our games is that we must accept that the darkness is a part of the world (and a part of ourselves), and maintain our own ethics and morals in the face of that."

Which are? Where is the vision here? What sort of world should we build as an alternative to the World of Darkness. The transcendent states proposed by the Storyteller games are often too poorly defined or Utopian to serve any purpose to real people. Not that the artists are entirely to blame; we, the audience usually don't want to help in the search for answers. It is a fact that the more commercially successful art has largely been that which caters to the human fascination with our dark side - Milton's *Paradise Lost* overshadows his *Paradise Regained*, and Dante's *Inferno* eclipses his *Paradiso* in the popular imagination. It may sound glib to say that darkness, despair and dreams of ultimate power sells, but its true, and the game companies know it.

Black Dog Games promises several "arty", adults only releases for 1995, including a science fiction rpg called *Hol* and adult supplements for each of the four Storyteller games - *Vampire*, *Werewolf*, *Mage & Wraith*.

New Releases

On a much lighter side, its time to think about what you'd like to stuff into your Christmas Stockings (I've always thought that Gift Vouchers from gaming shops are a great idea). Here is a selection of some of the expected releases over the coming months to help you make your choices:

FASA Corporation: *Black Thorns* scenario pack and *Invading Clans* sourcebook for BattleTech. Also for BattleTech is the 2nd

Edition of *CityTech*, the game of urban 'Mech conflict. *Divided Assets* is a Shadowrun adventure for the previously released *Denver* boxed set. For Earthdawn fans there is *Creatures of Barsaive*, chock full of bitey, spikey and slimy things to chomp on your adventurers. A softback version of the Earthdawn rule book has also been released for those with limited budgets.

R.Talsorian Games: Expect a number of sourcebooks for Castle Falkenstein in the next six to twelve months, including a Host's Guide, Steam-Age Inventions supplement and a USA sourcebook (we'll have to beat our Assistant Editor with a stick to shut him up when these come out). For Cyberpunk fans, *Chromebook III* should now be out, as well as the *Pac Rim Sourcebook*. *Mekton Z*, the re-write of the Mekton game should also be out very soon, for all of you who love Mecha (How many of you remember when Astro-Boy and Gigantor were the *only* Mecha you could think of?).

Palladium Books Inc: *Rifts World Book VI: South America* should be out now, with *World Book VII: Undersea* put back to March 95 and *Rifts Dimension Book II: Phase World* muted for January.

Chaosium: For those of you that like finding big slobbery things under your beds, Chaosium have *Cairo* ("Would you like to buy this pretty Shoggoth, Effendi?") and *London* sourcebooks for Call of Cthulhu, as well as *Strange Eons*, which presents CoC adventures set in various periods of history. The *Atlas of the Young Kingdoms* for Elric! (the northern continents) should be out now. Following on from the release of *Nephilim*, the occult rpg, comes the *Gamemaster's Veil* (you'd call it a Referee's Screen).

TSR Inc: As always, TSR have a heap of goodies ready: *The Crusades* campaign book, *In the Abyss*, a Planescape adventure (Get down, Adam - good boy!), *Caravans* - an Al-Qadim sourcebook and adventure, and the *City Sites* AD&D accessory are some of the more interesting releases scheduled for Nov-Jan. The most amazing TSR release scheduled for December is Volume 1 of the *AD&D Encyclopedia Magica*. These volumes (and note, this one only covers A to C) are reported to include EVERY magical item EVER published by TSR in any of its publications. This would seem to suggest an eventual outlay by readers of approximately \$500 for the complete set (that's not including a yearly update, of course) - one for those with more money than sense.

...see you 'round like a D100!

THAT WAS THE NEWS