

Horribly simple to learn

CHILL will leave you shivering for more

Review by Jerry Epperson

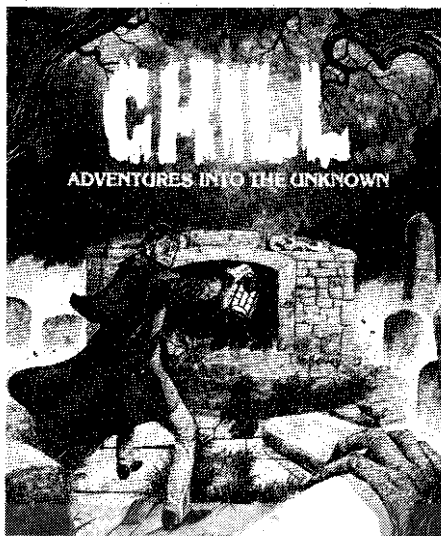
Games based upon the horror genre cater to the need in all of us to be scared out of our wits, and yet spare us the actual reality of being in a truly horrible situation. Until a few months ago, the offering of good horror games was very limited. Boardgames such as the *Vampyre*™ and *Nightmare House*™ games (from TSR, Inc.) were fun the first few times they were played, but soon were haunting only closet space, their novelty worn out. Role-playing games by their very nature tend to have good replay value, but the role-playing games previously offered either dealt with too limited a subject (as in the *Undead*™ game from Steve Jackson Games or Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu*™ games), or fell short of expectations (as did the *Stalking the Night Fantastic*™ game from Tri-Tac Inc.). But now, from the resources of Pacesetter, Ltd., the CHILL™ game has arrived to fill the void.

The CHILL game is a role-playing game of gothic and modern horror, designed through the collaborative efforts of several of Pacesetter's designers and editors. Players assume the roles of vampire chasers and ghost hunters, as members of a secret international organization that calls itself the Societas Albae Viae Eternitata (S.A.V.E.), or the Eternal Society of the White Way. The society's goal is to hunt down creatures from the "Unknown" and banish them from this plane of existence.

The adventure can begin almost as soon as the box is opened. Inside, players will find an 8-page Introductory Folder, with four pages of instruction on how to use and interpret the CHILL Action Table (which governs almost all activities in the game), and another four pages of pregenerated characters. As soon as the players understand the basic mechanics of the game, they can jump into a 16-page adventure ("Terror in Warwick House") and be playing the game within 30 minutes after tearing the plastic wrap off the box.

Experienced role-players will find that "Terror in Warwick House" is much like a guided tour of a national monument. While it portends to be a dangerous place, one gets the feeling that those who fell victim to the sinister occupants before the player characters were called to the scene were either idiots or invalids. The clues required by the characters to dispose of the evil are practically spoon-fed to the players.

But there is more and better to come. Once players have had their first taste of horror, they should take time to examine the other contents of the box. Each CHILL



game comes with a 64-page Campaign Book, a 32-page book entitled "Horrors from the Unknown," a full-color map of the world with a square-gridded battle board on the back, 140 double-sided cardboard counters, a Range Stick, three 10-sided dice, and the aforementioned introductory material. The package carries a very reasonable \$12 price tag.

The two books are used to flesh out the character creation, skills, combat, magic, and creature design systems. Players need only read the information in the Campaign Book in order to play the game. The game referee, called the "Chillmaster," or CM, will have to be familiar with both books.

Player-character generation is handled through dice rolls and simple computations. Each character is rated from 26 to 80 in eight categories: Strength, Dexterity, Agility, Willpower, Personality, Perception, Luck, and Stamina. These scores are obtained by rolling three 10-sided dice, doubling the result, and adding 20.

When a player wishes to have his character do something that cannot be assumed to succeed automatically, percentile dice are rolled and the result is compared to the appropriate attribute to see if the action is successful. This is called a "general check," which is made when an action can only succeed or fail, such as looking for a needle in a haystack: you either find the needle or you don't.

A "specific check" may be made when an action can have variable consequences. On a specific check roll, the dice roll is subtracted from the appropriate attribute score and the result is compared to a column in

the Action Table, which gives results that vary according to the degree of success or failure. For instance, a specific check for firing a pistol at a target not only determines whether you hit or miss the target, but also the amount of damage that you do if the hit succeeds. This system makes play move rapidly without sacrificing too much detail. Sometimes a particular skill or talent is substituted for a character's attribute, but all "check" situations are handled in this fashion.

A character also has some secondary traits which are derived from his attributes, such as his healing rate and base skill scores. Other traits such as height, weight, and ethnic background are determined by the player or through random means. In addition to professional and combat skills, characters can also possess limited control over what is called "the Art," which is similar to what is identified as magic in other games.

Human knowledge of the Art is composed of nine "spells," with three "disciplines" in each of three categories: Communication, Restoration, and Protection. A character can only have disciplines from one category. On the other side of the coin, creatures from the Unknown possess a darker form of the human Art called "the Evil Way." From this source is drawn all of the mystical powers that such creatures possess. Without the Evil Way, a ghost is merely a disembodied spirit and a vampire is just a pallid but strong human with an appetite for blood. With the Evil Way to power them, these creatures become deadly foes of the known world, capable of leaving terror and destruction in their wake.

The game has additional rules for expanded combat, handling poisons, disease, healing, and non-player character reactions. Also given is a listing of all "documented" manifestations of the Evil Way, and a sampler of 18 corporeal and non-corporeal creatures. Provisions are given for developing "CM specials" (referee-created monsters) so that the players will not have a reliable compendium of creature statistics to recall or refer to during play.

The map and counters are nicely produced, but the maps have no keys. (The world of S.A.V.E., "hot spots" seems to be on a scale of 1" = 700 miles near the equator.) The Range Stick could have been replaced by a square-of-the-hypotenuse formula. The lack of regulated combat maneuvering rules makes these more added garnishments than functional components.

Some of the limitations that the rules place upon characters seem unnecessary. The organization S.A.V.E. is a good base from which the CM may develop adventures, logically getting characters from one haunted house to the next. But for the rules to state that "all player characters in a CHILL adventure are S.A.V.E. envoys," or that "to date, nobody has survived for longer than 17 months after being expelled from S.A.V.E." limits not only the player actions but the scope of the CM's campaign. Etching them in stone (or on paper) serves no purpose.

I would have liked to see more done with the economic rules, which say that the characters have whatever they need and can get wherever they have to go without worrying about expense (thanks to S.A.V.E.'s limitless bank account). It detracts from the feel of the adventures when monetary and travel worries are eliminated. The bribery rules seem rather ludicrous, since they allow characters to bribe anyone into submission without batting an eye.

At the risk of seeming to contradict all of the above complaints, it must be said that these problems are not major flaws in the game's design; any CM should be able to alter them with little effort. All things considered, the CHILL game does just what it sets out to do. It doesn't stall play with unwieldy rules or sub-systems, and it allows the CM to pace the storyline and preserve the intensity of a situation thanks to the

game's elegant simplicity. As an alternative to dungeon delving, superheroing, or chasing after Cthulhu, the CHILL game is something you can really sink your teeth into.

The game has been supported by four other releases — adventures entitled *Village of Twilight* and *Highland Terror*, a monster collection entitled *Things*, and a Chillmaster's Screen packaged with a short adventure called *Castle Dracula*. The accessories are priced at \$6 each and, like the CHILL game itself, are available at many game and hobby stores. The products are also available by mail (add \$1.50 for postage and handling per order) from Pacesetter, Ltd., PO. Box 451, Delavan WI 53115.

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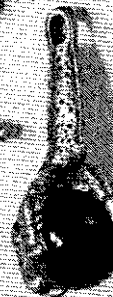
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