



# More Deadly than the Male



In gaming generally, female characters are frequently *underplayed*. (Here, and throughout the article, 'character' covers both PC and NPC; GMs should attempt to make their NPCs as alive as the PCs). Many game worlds seem to be distinctly short of women, or else they occur as barmaids, damsels in distress or harlots. In this, GMs are, perhaps, not entirely to blame. The literature on which much gaming is based frequently offers little else, falling into the same two categories: that which virtually ignores women (count the female characters in *Lord of the Rings*), or that which treats women as objects and victims (*Gor*, *Conan*, et al). There are now a few works that break this tradition, but scanning the Fantasy/SF shelves in *W.H.Smith* is still distinctly depressing. Even when the book contents are better than average, the covers are invariably covered with scantily clad

and strangely mis-proportioned females. Were ALL fantasy artists bottle-fed? Perhaps someone ought to organise anatomy classes for the poor souls, so they can learn what shape the human body actually is! (Most figure designers could do with attending, as well). The women are also invariably depicted as captives or otherwise as victims. Taking the worst example, the sadistic nature of the "Gor" covers are revolting; try thinking yourself into the role of a woman shown on one. (Gor seems to form the backbone of Smith's fantasy section. I hope this doesn't truly reflect their popularity). Rare indeed is the book cover showing a believable woman as a person with power and personality, even where such exists between the covers. The message is clear. In fantasy, only the men count. It is a genre for and about adolescent boys of all ages. Given this, it is not surprising

that gamers often seem to forget that half the population is female, or that these women have personalities, aims, and abilities, and can have an active role to play in the game.

One argument, which does need dealing with seriously, is that from those who profess a desire to run a 'realistic pseudo-medieval society' (whatever that is!), which 'naturally' prevents female characters playing an active role. Women's lives were severely restricted in the past, and to allow women characters to take on greater roles in games, they say, damages the game reality. These people seem not to realise that the very presence of magical, non-human races, and fantastic beasts, not to mention the usual pantheistic religious system, will all profoundly affect the nature of society. Any fantasy role-playing game is just that. Fantasy! This applies as much to *Chivalry & Sorcery* or *Dragon Warriors* as to *AD&D* or *Runequest*. All draw to a greater or lesser extent on mythologies, folklore etc., but any game that involves working magic is in no way a reconstruction of any period in the real past. In a gaming world, it is the internal consistency that matters, and a referee should not feel constrained to slavishly copy things that have existed.

Also, how many GMs would be equally eager to apply the restrictions such a society applies to its men? (Execution for a commoner caught riding a horse, for example? Or fines or imprisonment for not attending the Official Temple regularly enough?). A truly 'simulation-ist' approach would make adventuring a virtual impossibility. Life in a real medieval society was pretty dull, for the most part!

In my view a world which allows for active female as well as male characters invariably makes for a more satisfying, interesting game. If nothing else, it gives the GM more opportunities to create interesting and varied NPCs. Ignoring half the human (or dwarven, or elven, or even orcish) race clearly impoverishes any fantasy world, as does not using that half of the population to their full potential. A GM who only uses stereotypical females drawn from the pages of *Fritz Leiber* or *Jack Vance*, where the women are seen purely as objects, is really shortchanging her players. (If you still treat ALL your NPCs as objects or 'Monsters', have you thought of trying *Fighting Fantasy* instead?).

Let's have a look at a few types of women inhabiting reasonably conventional fantasy settings. These descriptions are intended to provide ideas for creating NPCs, as well as to help flesh out backgrounds for female PCs. The very problems for a woman in a traditional fantasy world can be used as an opportunity to create characters with a greater role-playing potential. As with any classification of this type, it is dangerous if used as a straightjacket, rather than as guidelines intended to spark ideas.

Many characters will fall into more than one category, whilst others remain totally undefinable.

### 1) The Matriarch.

This figure is common in literature, where she is usually seen as villainous. She is the leader of a large and powerful faction or family. She may be recognised as such or she may be the power behind the throne or the (male) titular leader. She is usually aged, and is always clever and scheming. She operates by manipulation and subtlety, often through her husband (if he is still alive), her children and grand-children. She is particularly effective in a campaign with a strong political or dynastic structure. (Pendragon, perhaps). Her **modus operandi** provides a way for an exceptional woman to be powerful in the most sexist society, for she operates through others. Without ever drawing a sword, or personally spilling another's blood, she is more deadly than any dragon. One of the best examples of this type is **Livia**, from **Robert Graves' "I, Claudius"**, who adds poisoning to the usual skills of such a woman. An interesting twist on the classic matriarch, which could create a scenario playing on players' innate sexism, is to have the matriarch as the 'good' character, whilst the noble warrior seeking the aid of the party against her is, in fact, the blackest of villains.

### 2) The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing.

This is the woman who appears to be the expected, helpless female. However, she is not what she seems, and if occasion demands, she becomes something totally other, whether this is the powerful warrior, or the arcane sorceress. Some members of this type may deliberately keep up a facade for some sinister reason, or simply for their own safety, whilst others may simply be happy, for the most part, to accept the mores of their society. An example of this latter type is "**Beauty**" from our own "**The Show Must Go On**" in **Adventurer #4**. **Thara**, in the same scenario, is an example of the first type (although she also has elements of the matriarch). Such characters are very well placed to take advantage of the sexist attitudes of those around them, and use those attitudes against them. A GM can use one of these to give a player an EXTREMELY nasty shock.

### 3) The Loner.

This woman lives outside society, and frequently outside the law. She prefers the lonely existence of the outcast to one where she is forced to conform to the normal female roles. Often, such a woman would find the life-style of the wolf in sheep's clothing irksome. She has no respect for the mores of the society she has left behind, and in return that society undoubtedly regards her with suspicion, and assumes that she is evil and 'un-natural'. The GM should not automatically share this prejudice. Living outside society does not automatically make someone evil. There may have been some specific incident that made her choose her life, or she may simply have been stifled by her society. Perhaps, for example, she has run away from an unwelcome marriage

arranged by her parents. Either way, she has by some means or other gained enough power not to need society. Perhaps she stole a sorcerer's spell book; or maybe she disguised herself as a man for a time in order to gain training in arms.

Despite the name I've given her, she may be found with others (both sexes), who are perhaps exiles for different reasons. An obvious structure is for her to be one of a group of bandits, or perhaps leading a rebellion against an unjust ruler. Of course, saying that she lives outside society does not stop her appearing within cities or towns. Most thieves live outside society....

### 4) Priestesses and their ilk: Women in an Acceptable Career.

Many societies, especially those where frequent wars result in a shortage of men, offer acceptable alternatives to marriage for women. Indeed, unless the society allows polygamy, such an alternative is a virtual necessity to provide something for the husbandless woman to do. For those GMs who insist on historical precedents for everything, remember that the growth of women's religious orders in the Middle Ages was largely due to this. Those women who did well in such careers could arrive at the position where they could exert power. Some Abbessess in the Middle Ages exerted considerable political power behind the scenes.

Some of these women might also become missionaries (now there's a background for a female adventurer!). In the context of a fantasy world, it is quite possible to imagine other careers being acceptable. Perhaps illusion-weaving is regarded as a 'feminine' form of magic, or sorcery in general may be regarded as acceptable. In a pantheistic world, female deities may well insist on priestesses rather than priests.

### 5) Women above social pressures or the law.

Some women may be in a social position which essentially puts them above social pressures, or even the law. Such a character might be the hereditary ruler of a state, or even simply the daughter of a high noble. She is in the position to ignore the mores of her society, yet is unlikely to be ostracised in the way the loner is because of her background and social position. Indeed, had she been low born she might well have been forced to leave society - her behaviour would be unacceptable in a commoner. Such a woman may have unusual skills or areas of knowledge. Or she could be a party's patron.

### 6) The Eccentric.

This is something of a catch-all group. This category includes women who by some means have their odd lifestyle accepted, at least to an extent. They will always be exceptional women, with strong and independent personalities. She may have some skill that makes her valuable to her community (the village wise woman, a heroine who played a major role in averting a danger to her community, etc.), or she may simply be regarded as harmless. Her position may be a little unstable, however, as she is likely

to take the blame for local disasters. Anyone who breaks the rules of society is going to be regarded with suspicion. Proving the innocence of one such could provide the basis for a scenario. Assuming, of course, that she is innocent...

Another sub-section of this group is foreign women. Locals shake their heads, and confide,

*"Everyone knows foreigners are 'peculiar', and you can only expect them to behave oddly. Mind you I wonder what she's up to... It's not natural, the way she carries on."*

Again, such a woman is going to be regarded with suspicion, especially if she comes from a very different culture (a matriarchy, perhaps?).

In general, when designing characters for a scenario, keep an open mind over the sex of a person. Gender will affect the personality of a character, as well as affecting other people's reaction to her. Using a woman rather than a man will often produce a more interesting personality or situation, with greater role playing possibilities. For example, a warrior woman will not be just a male warrior with curves; she will have a subtly different outlook. Consider her attitude to those who fulfil the traditional role expected of them (does she try to emancipate them, or merely despise them?). How do other women react to her? Frequently the other woman will be such a woman's sternest critics. What about her attitude to men (does she strive to emulate or surpass them? Or does she consider herself above them?). Does she, despite her warrior profession, care about and for children as a woman is expected to, or does she consider that she has escaped that burden?

If she lives in or comes from a reasonably conventional society, explaining how she came to be in her current position is far more likely to produce an interesting character than a man, whose path to such a profession was more straightforward. Frequently, women are skilled in the subtler arts. This subtlety can be far more effective than the 'male virtues' of brute force and ignorance. As an example, imagine a contest between Conan and Griselda (of RQ fame).

Also introducing active female characters introduces more possibilities for a variety of sub-plots, as well as giving interesting twists to standard major plots. Consider the barmaid of a roadhouse. Everyone knows she is a 'pretty young thing' who serves behind the bar and is an attractive ornament. What may not be realised is that she is running a major ring of highwaymen; from her job in the roadhouse she can learn when the richest caravans are crossing the wilds...

In my experience, as both player and GM, anything that can provide spring-boards for new and interesting scenarios is welcome.

If any male players out there are still unconvinced that the standard stereotypes are inadequate, just exercise your role-playing abilities and imagine trying to role-play a woman who is one of the stereotypes found in some of the popular books. Then go back to your game and think about the women within your world. Making them real people will add immensely to the game. Better still, find a female player or two!



# More Deadly than the Male

♀ This issue, I want to show that women of other races should have their own nature and personalities, rather than being merely pale reflections of their men-folk. At the outset, I stress that these are only suggestions; since all these races are imaginary, whether the products of collective imagination (ie myths and folk-lore), or individual creativity. Hence, any referee can, of course, do exactly what she likes with them, without being informed of their historical inaccuracy.

In considering non-human races, an important but fairly obvious point, relating to genetics, is frequently ignored; most individuals will normally prefer a member of their own species as a sexual partner, and be most attracted by members of their own species. Of course, there'll always be exceptions, resulting from odd circumstances, especially with races which are physically similar (such as humans and elves), but such affiliations will always be rare. A gnoll will find a human as unattractive as a human finds a gnoll. If this were not so, few of the races would survive for long. Also, half-breeds resulting from these unions are almost certain to be sterile (for example, mules).

♀ Female elves are frequently assumed to be at least as powerful as their male counterparts. It is quite common to see elven society giving different but equal roles to its male and female members. Indeed, some elven societies are even seen as matriarchal (Eg, the Drow). Individual elven women are frequently portrayed as having great, if ill-defined, magical powers. In folklore, elven women are primarily beautiful and dangerous (if not actually evil). Their major roles in folk tales are to bring temptation and destruction on the noble (male) heroes who encounter them. There are exceptions, but women who actually take active roles are invariably seen as evil, (does this say something about the frailty of male egos?). But this need not be so. For one thing, can humans be certain that elves share human standards of beauty? Perhaps those alluring elven women are considered plain, or downright ugly by their own people. Does this explain their desire to lure human males? Equally, how can humans be sure that they understand how elven women feel or why they act as they do? An elf is not a human and should not be played as such!

To digress slightly, a problem with elves generally, not just elven women, is that they are invariably not given an alien enough feel. They are not simply 'scaled down humans with pointed ears', but something alien and incomprehensible to humans. (The advertisements for **Dragon Warriors** claimed that the game would give them back their strange-ness, but the game itself simply waxed lyrical about vast treasure hoards, and

included an extremely silly picture). To give elves a feeling of being alien, a GM or player must try to bring across the effects of their long life. A young elf has ten centuries of life ahead of her; as such, there will be ample time for whatever she may wish to do. Humans, with their desperate attempts to complete all their wishes within a handful of decades, should be pitied, not despised. The older the elves, though, the more likely they are to withdraw from human company. They will find humans immature, obsessed with petty matters such as gold and the opposite sex, and very hurried. Most elves will try to be understanding, being aware of the short lives that humans are cursed with, but still find them brash, annoying and purile.

The longevity of elves has one major effect on the lives of females; children need only be born rarely, and even allowing for a longer pregnancy and childhood for elves, the female will have far less of their time taken up with family-raising and far more time for other activities. Elven women may welcome this interlude in their other activities, or it may interrupt an otherwise all-consuming 'Career'.

Because of the similarities between elves and humans, romantic attachments may form. However, elven society at least, is going to be aware of the great tragedy that can result from a relationship between an elf and a human. There is likely to be considerable social pressure, from both communities. However, love can be a powerful force, and there will be couples who choose to ignore the social mores and brave the troubles of a life together. The great difference in life expectancy will be a major barrier. Also, despite physical similarities, the two races are very different psychologically. Traditionally, elves are soulless, and are frequently detached in their outlook. The human partner in a relationship may begin to regard this as coldness. As he grows elderly, he may begin to suspect, whether justly or unjustly, that his still attractive wife is seeking other lovers. The elven partner, on the other hand, will have the heartbreak (assuming that she is capable of such an emotion), of watching her loved one grow old and die, whilst she remains young. She may also come to realise how shallow her human lover is. The relationship may not survive these strains for more than a few years. All this forms the background into which half-elf children are born, and the atmosphere in which they'll grow up. They are likely to be very aware of the stresses between their parents. The human parent may grow impatient with the relatively slow development of their child. ('Isn't she walking yet? *Scalina's daughter was born two months later, and is running all around the village! Is she stupid, or what?*'). Without going into details of the psychological

effects of such an atmosphere on a child, it is clear that the child could well end up somewhat disturbed, possibly leading it to grow up into a delinquent- such as an adventurer. A female child will have the problem of barrenness, which would be likely to make her unmarriageable, despite her likely good looks.

♀ One still unresolved problem concerning dwarven women is; do they or don't they? Have beards, I mean. Giving them beards would certainly explain the lack of reference to dwarven women in folk-lore or mythology. Humans just couldn't tell the difference! On the other hand, beardless dwarven women may be easier for players to relate to. However, saying that they have beards does not mean that dwarven men will lust after human women. As I stated above, humans would simply not seem attractive to dwarves. If dwarven men do prefer beardless women, then either dwarves would have died out long ago, or dwarven women would routinely shave! More likely, the dwarven ideal of beauty would include a fine growth of beard. Presumably the explanation for female dwarves being so rarely portrayed in artwork is that they don't provide suitable material for male adolescents to ogle in the way elven women do...

So much for the appearance of dwarven woman, but are there any personality traits common among them? This is perhaps a dangerous area to get into, as all characters should be first and foremost individuals. However, this is not inconsistent with outlining suggestions for general traits. For example, dwarven women may have a characteristic fondness for gems and jewelry of all kinds. They glitter and sparkle in the torchlight of their cavern homes. Also, many dwarven women may have as great a fondness for ale as their menfolk, and when they have been partaking, they have better singing voices. In fact, it is the dwarven women who carry the secrets of the dwarven ales, passing recipes from mother to daughter. Dwarven men tend to be a little patronising and possessive of their women folk. For the most part, the women are equally patronising about their men-folk, knowing that they hold the true secrets of dwarven society. Some dwarven women, however, do fight alongside (or against) their menfolk, and many of these become adventurers. Such females are of course, beyond the pale as far as most dwarven men are concerned.

♀ Turning away from truly mythological creatures, we come to those gourmets of the role-playing worlds, Hobbits. In 'The Hobbit' and 'Lord of the Rings', female Hobbits (as with all Tolkien's other women) are almost invisible. The only one drawn in any depth

or with any personality is *Lobelia Sackville-Baggins*, and she is painted in an unfavourable light. However, for all her faults, she is in the end revealed as having reserves of strength greater than many of the hobbit men.

This suggests to me two alternatives for the natures of hobbit women; they might be like their men-folk, but raised to the 'Nth' degree. That is, they are more sneaky, more skilled thieves, and above all- more hungry! If this is so, they will be regarded with awe and perhaps some jealousy by their men-folk.

On the other hand, a female hobbit may be the practical and organised one, regarding her men-folk as childish and juvenile, and may treat them with condescension. Well, somebody's got to keep male hobbits in order, haven't they... Such a woman will normally stay at home and run the household, only being foolish enough to venture outside her domain when one of her charges has got himself into some serious trouble in the domain of the humans (assuming that she slipped up by letting her men leave home). If nothing else, this view of female hobbits gives a very different motive for an adventurer.

Perhaps the most frightening image could be achieved by combining the two. Imagine the scene: The party are feeling pleased with themselves after finally capturing the hobbit thief who had been plaguing them for weeks. They are quite unaware that they have a far more deadly enemy tracking them, as the hobbit's wife/ lover/ mother seeks revenge...

Certainly, I would expect there to be more female hobbits in fantasy gaming than there actually appear to be; after all, male hobbits are small, cute and bashable (not to mention delicious when baked), and there seems no reason why female hobbits should not fulfill the same role equally well (if not better). This is what feminism should be - letting women take an equal role with their men!

♀ As a general policy, I try to treat members of all races as characters, giving them free will and therefore individuality. With the exception of summoned or certain other magical creatures, no creature is automatically evil. Of course the culture and the dominant religion of a race will mean that members of that race have a particular view of life, but there should be no such thing as a 'racial alignment', only an individual or cultural one. This leads to much more interesting and different role playing situations, as well as interesting people. I could sum up the philosophy with the phrase 'Orcs are People Too!'.

♀ Female Orcs occur nowhere (so far as I know) in Tolkien, and I have come across none elsewhere. For some reason, in AD&D, it was decreed that they be far fewer in number than their men-folk. This is quite illogical and ridiculous, especially when combined with the warlike nature of the men. With male orcs forever dying in battle, the women are likely to vastly outnumber them. To say that orcs naturally produce significantly more boy-

children than girl-children is one possible answer, but that gives other problems. For instance, orcs are often assumed to breed like rabbits (a necessity, considering the normal orc mortality rate). Any biologist will tell you that it is the number of females that is the critical factor restricting the breeding rate of a species, so to produce more little orcs you need a large number of orc women.

Irrespective of the numbers, however, they really ought to have some personality. Assuming for the moment that orcish society is patriarchal, it could well contain orcish equivalents of all the types mentioned last issue. But need orcish society always be patriarchal? Perhaps the reason female orcs are so rarely seen is because they remain at home, sending the menfolk to do the dangerous and difficult works, from which they reap the rewards. Imagine a party, having been captured by an orc band, being presented to their leader, to be confronted with a large, powerful and bejewelled orc woman.

After Orcs, it's natural to look at Half-Orcs. GMs are often very casual about introducing 'half-breed' characters into their campaigns, without necessarily thinking about where they came from. Half-orcs are usually assumed to be the result of the rape of human women by an orc, but need that necessarily be true? Love, as has been remarked on many occasions, is a very peculiar thing. Imagine a human male wounded, and found by an orcish woman. Maybe she is despised by, or an outcast from her own people for some reason, and in her loneliness decides to tend the adventurer. All right, he's no match in looks for an orcish man, but couldn't affection or even love grow between them? Of course, their lives would not be easy, as it is unlikely that either orcish or human society would accept them, and if nothing else, the difference in life expectancy would lead to eventual tragedy, as with the half-elf. He may frequently have to protect her from human adventurers who assume an orc is automatically evil, whilst she may have to protect him from the orcish equivalent. The children of such a couple, too, would have an awkward time, providing ample motivation for taking to the adventuring life. This is perhaps, especially true for the female children. In many fantasy societies the main (or only) virtue a woman can have is good looks; ugliness often equated with evil. As such, a female half-orc being tougher than a human woman, and with few prospects of finding a respectable place for herself in human society, and with a chip on her shoulder, is ideal adventurer material.

♀ Much about what I have said about Orcs also applies to Goblins, Gnolls etc. To let the women be simply pale imitations of their men-folk is wasting an opportunity. Amongst races that are naturally short lived, or in which male members regularly die in battle, the women are going to have to spend much of their time child-rearing. (I find it difficult to imagine the men of these races doing their share of the house-work, but

failure of my imagination), but they should still have personality. Remember that their interests and objectives may not be identical with their men-folk; Many may actually be quite pleased that their men-folk fail to return from battle, or may help adventurers escape because they do not enjoy eating them. "Humans are so difficult to cook- it's impossible to bring out the flavour..."

♀ If we take Grendel as the archetypal troll, then Grendel's mother is the archetypal she-troll. Anyone familiar with Beowulf will be aware that she provided the hero with a far tougher battle than did her son; AD&D players could usefully take ideas from Runequest, where the she-trolls are seen as the brains and leaders of troll society. Of course, RQ trolls are very different and more complex creatures than the D&D killing machines, but then D&D players could learn something from that, as well... If nothing else, the image of 'hen-pecked' trolls is worth thinking about! (See the cartoon film 'Gnomes')

♀ For some reason, many spirits of nature are portrayed in myth as female. For example Dryads, Naiads, Sylphs, Nymphs, Oreads, and Oceanids are all female. Much mythology shows these women as predatory. And why not? Most nature spirits are powerful and wayward, and should exude an aura of seductive menace. But this does not mean that they should be one-dimensional pin-ups! Think about their natures, motives and wishes. A human (male or female) who has been stuck in the same glade or grotto for a few thousand years would by now be certifiably insane. Perhaps the nature spirit is mad. On the other hand, perhaps the spirit has no comprehension of time; she perceives only 'now'. Past and future are meaningless terms. Like elves, nature spirits should not necessarily be human in outlook. Even their interest in human males might have some other motive than might be expected; for example, the presence of a human might enable the spirit to maintain a physical form or experience the ecstatic flow of time. In turn, what effects does this have on the spirit? (A good opportunity for experimenting with schizophrenia!).

♀ Medusae, Harpies and Lamia appear to have one serious problem- how do they reproduce? Male equivalents are never seen. Various solutions exist: Invent male equivalents; assume they are somehow magically created; assume they are interfertile with a species that has males; or let them reproduce asexually. Take into account the effect that your solution will have on their numbers, though: If harpies can reproduce at will, why haven't they taken over the world? On the other hand, if Medusae mate with human men, why aren't they extinct? (What man would show any interest in a creature with asps on her head?)

In conclusion, whenever you build up a non-human society, don't forget the 'superior' sex!

# More Deadly than the Male

## Introduction.

After looking last issue at female characters in conventional settings and at non-human women, this time I want to look at a few different sorts of societies, which could be used to add variety to a campaign world, as well as giving a few surprises, not to say shocks, for some of the more complacent players; three types of matriarchal society and the 'Utopia' of a society without gender bias. It is important to remember that there can be a large range of degree in patriarchal and matriarchal societies. In the extreme, one sex may be held in virtual servitude and regarded as **property** rather than as **people**, (eg. ancient Sparta), but less extreme societies are likely to be the more common. Often the dominant sex profess that their role is **protective** rather than **exploitative**, (an aspect of Chivalry), but **misogyny** (hatred of women), or the opposite may still play a part under the surface.

In order to introduce a non-standard society into a world, it is usually necessary to provide some way of isolating that society from the rest of the world. Fiction abounds with hidden valleys, mysterious or even floating or flying, islands, and the rest. Any of these would provide a suitable site. Often purely natural barriers will be perfectly adequate. Alternatively, what if the players were to discover that their own 'world' was just such an isolated society...? On the other hand, a matriarchal society may be strong enough to stand openly amongst the other nations, in which case its nature would be known in advance to outsiders. Of course, the reports are unlikely to be accurate... I always find feeding players false rumours (and having them believe them) one of the pleasures of refereeing.

I make no apology for the fact that these societies have few (but by no means no) historical precedents: I am not a simulationist gamer, but am interested in creating internally consistent, interesting backgrounds for rolegaming. History does provide a useful guide to basic human nature, and to what might 'work' as a society, but should not be followed slavishly. In a fantasy setting, magic and intelligent non-human races will both affect the nature of the society, opening up many new possibilities.

Another point to bear in mind is that no society should be totally 'one dimensional'. Any society should have quirks in its culture, unrelated to the main aspects that mark it out. These could include reverence for certain animals or

plants, taboos over food or dress and the rest. Also, when playing characters born and bred in such societies, remember that they will find their society normal, and others defiant. As a referee, I usually find it helpful to spend some time 'thinking myself into a society' before I run it, so that I know how the people within it will respond.

## 1). The Role Reversal, or Amazon Society.

In this type of society, women take on all the traditionally 'male' roles, as soldiers, rulers and the rest, whilst the men adopt the 'female' roles of child care and home keeping. Men will be striving to attract women, looking for a protector and provider. They'll beautify themselves, and always expect women to take the lead in courtship. Women, on the other hand, adopt the 'male traits' of aggression and dominance. A whole society of Maggie Thatchers, in fact! (Of course, TOTAL role-reversal would only be possible if the men could actually bear the children. Since this would effectively turn them into women, it would simply result in the standard patriarchal society. A somewhat pointless exercise!)

On the other hand this is perhaps the most common type of matriarchal society in fiction and films, (especially pulp fiction) and is the easiest to play. It is also the least interesting, since it is essentially the same as the patriarchal society, except that the other half of the population is in charge. However, such a society can still give characters entering from other lands a surprise. You can also have a certain amount of fun by making male NPCs fit the standard female stereotypes, as well as vice versa. Characters from such a society are likely to be horrified at the surrounding societies. They may well despise the women for allowing their men to dominate them so.

## 2). The All Female Society.

This type of society has obvious problems, the principle one being reproduction. However, in a magic-rich world, it should not be beyond the wit of the GM to come up with a magical method of reproduction. Such a society will be very alien in feel. Think about how much of our society and culture is geared to attracting members of the opposite sex! What could take the place of this in such a society? Social contacts will be on some other basis than the need to meet the opposite sex. There may be greater creativity due to the loss of any direct

means to procreate, so that art and literature flourish. Or perhaps society will fall back on complex rituals of etiquette, or on social games (role-playing, perhaps?!?). For that matter, perhaps the social structure will produce artificial divisions, so that social gatherings are designed to bring together Reds and Greens (or whatever), where the actual difference between the divisions is impossible for an outsider to determine.

Then there are many other things to consider. How is society organised? Are stable 'marriages' formed between women? Or is there some different social structure? Society could be totally communal, with everyone living in large hearths, or it could be totally individualistic, with all members of society living alone (this is less likely - everyone needs some human contact).

Are any members of the society, even if just the rulers, aware that men exist elsewhere? What is their attitude to men? Are they remembered with fondness or as monsters? Much will depend on the history of the society. If the men were wiped out in some disaster, then they might be remembered with fondness, or regarded as purely mythical. On the other hand, a society founded by women who rebelled against or fled from their men would be likely to have tales of men as evil monsters. Either way, the image they have of men is likely to be so distorted by time that they may not even recognise them if they meet them. In the first case they would be looking for angels, and in the second, demons. Few male adventurers would fit either. Also worth considering is the attitude of these women to women from the outside world. They might well react negatively if women are seen to be subservient to their menfolk. Careless actions might spark a crusade to liberate the women in the rest of the world...

Similarly, do the surrounding lands have rumours of the land 'In the Mountains', (or wherever)? How do the men in the surrounding lands regard these stories? The women might seem as inhuman and un-natural demons, or as a 'challenge' to their 'masculinity'. They might well seek to prevent their women learning these stories. How do the women react to the rumours? A possible series of encounters could involve a group of women seeking this supposed Utopia, whilst being pursued by their menfolk.

It is common in fiction and films for (mainly male) writers to assume that women in such society will automatically fall in love with the first men to enter their



land in 'n' hundred years. I'm sorry to disappoint all those male egos out there, but this is extremely unlikely, not to say illogical. To women who are used to seeing only other women, and who do not associate men with procreation, men would seem like members of a different species. They may be friendly or unfriendly, perhaps even 'cute' or interesting, but how many of us would fall in love with a Gorilla? An interesting, if somewhat controversial, fictional all female society is '*Whileaway*', in Joanna Russ' *'The Female Man'*. '*Whileaway*' certainly makes an interesting contrast to the paranoia of works like John Wyndham's *"Consider Her Ways"*.

The mirror image of this is, of course, the all male society. Here we are on firmer ground, as we have more material to draw on. Besides the various societies in the real world which virtually exclude women from participating in them, we have such institutions as public schools and (until recently) the armed forces. Such societies appear to be both highly hierarchical and competitive, and invariably emphasise military virtues. On the other hand, they could put great emphasis on honour and team-spirit, as well as self-reliance and achievement. For a truly nightmarish account of such a world, again see Joanna Russ' *"The Female Man"*. It need not, though, necessarily be any more nightmarish than an all-female society, but the unpleasantness is likely to be of a different nature, perhaps in a lack of compassion or mutual support.

### 3). The Status Reversal Society.

This is perhaps the most confusing society for characters from a male-dominated one, simply because it may appear on the surface to be a totally conventional patriarchal society. Men are seen doing most of the heavy labouring work, they also seem to form the militia forces of the society. However, talking to members of this society can be a little disconcerting. The default pronoun is 'she' rather than 'he'; the heads of families are women, men frequently being referred simply as so-and-so's husband, a successful scheme or operation may be described as going from 'subtlety to subtlety', rather than 'strength to strength', and warriors command little or no respect. In contrast, men speak with respect (and sometimes a little envy) of the feminine skills of child rearing and house keeping. A few may seek to imitate female dress and mannerisms, and be regarded either as 'getting above themselves', or with a degree of tolerance. Gradually it is noticeable that all positions of authority are held by women.

To take an example from our own campaign, consider the island of Sohdhor, one of a small group of islands known as the Eastern Isles. Sohdhor was first settled when a group of women fled a long running war between two of the other islands. They were led by a great and wise sorceress, Anassa Sohdhora, and under her guidance the small group of women and children set up a society in hiding.

Anassa realised that her people needed power if they were to defend themselves once the neighbouring states stopped fighting each other. She therefore set about training her people in the arts of sorcery. Other women, and a few men (deserters from both sides), joined them, but men who wished to stay had to accept that the women would be in charge. For Anassa believed that the male virtues of physical courage and aggression and competition were responsible for the constant warfare in the region. She believed that a better society would be formed if feminine values were dominant in it, and she saw subtle magic, diplomacy and outright cunning as the keys to success.

When, many years later, the war finally ended, Sohdhor was already a growing community, with defences based on magic and diplomacy.

Now, some 200 years on, Sohdhor is a powerful force in the island group. It never gets involved in physical combat between the other islands, but her diplomats and spies are skilled at playing the islands off against each other, whilst the island itself remains at peace. The other islands know of the great magical power on the island and Sohdhor is keen to remind them of the danger should this fall into the hands of one of the other islands. This has led to the long-standing peace, which is seen by the island's inhabitants (of both sexes) as proof of the superiority of female rule. Why, let men get too much power, and they start fighting each other: Look at the other islands! Women, who are the bearers of the next generation, and have greater compassion and gentleness, are clearly better suited to run things than men. Giving birth to and bringing up children are clearly the most important functions in society, and the goddesses have given these roles to the most important sex. It is only right that those who care for the next generation should be the ones with the political power to decide what sort of world today's children will inhabit. Men are too ready to let their heads rule their hearts; they do not have the understanding of the natural world a woman has, for they do not listen to their emotions, only their minds.

Warriors, of all types, whether male or female, have low status in Sohdhorian life. It is a low status profession, suitable for men. No well born or civilised woman

would want training in arms. Just as in feudal societies, young noblemen will gain training in arms, virtually all well born, and a good many not so well born young women on Sohdor have some training in magic. In these studies they learn the superiority of subtlety over strength, the well timed suggestion or illusion over the lightning bolt or fire ball, and how to turn the enemy's apparent strengths into weaknesses.

Throughout the islands there are rumours of the great power of the beautiful and deadly 'witches of Sohdhor'. Agents of Sohdhor on other islands are skilled at using male weaknesses against them. They are quite capable of using sexuality as a weapon. Many are trained courtesans or (in D&D terms) houris, and are the mistresses of powerful men on other islands.

Despite all this, however, the position of men is better than that of women in some male dominated societies: they may own land, and a few even study the magical arts, if they can pass certain tests set by the Guild leaders. However, crimes against women, such as rape, carry the most severe penalties. Violence of all kinds, no matter how noble or 'justified' is despised as the 'last refuge of the incompetent': the fact that it still occurs occasionally is a sign of how far their society still falls short of the ideal.

A society such as Sohdhor has many possibilities for scenarios. For players who role play well and are prepared to talk to NPCs, setting a comparatively straightforward search or mystery type scenario within such a society should provide an interesting role-playing experience, with plenty of opportunities for mis-understandings and social gaffes. Alternatively, the party could find themselves being used in a Sohdhorian sponsored scheme on some other island. Try to avoid using this society purely as a source of villains: there is much that is good in Sohdhorian life. Individuals within the society will be as varied as from any other society. For example, a man from Sohdhor might be horrified by the levels of violence common in many standard fantasy societies, and thus become a fanatical advocate of female rule!

### 4). The Unbiased Society.

This is, perhaps, the most difficult society to set up. It is basically one in which everyone is treated on their merits, whether they are male or female. In a totally unbiased society, for instance, inheritance (including titles and position) will be via the eldest child of either sex, or will otherwise treat the sexes equally. However, such a society need not mean that there are no differences between men and women: rather it would recognise and value equally the special qualities of both. Women could still be feminine





(although not automatically submissive) whilst men could still be masculine (although not automatically dominant). Similarly, such a society would not have preconceived ideas about what roles were suitable for men and women, the effeminate man and the masculine woman would both find it easier to be accepted in such a society. The best fictional example of such a society that I know of is the world of Vonda McIntyre's "Dreamsnake", where equality is a product of the fact that both sexes have total control of their own fertility.

As with any Utopia, the scenario possibilities arising directly from this aspect of such a society are somewhat limited. A Utopia is a lovely place to live, but would be extremely dull in game terms. (Of course, other aspects of the society need not be so perfect). A party could be involved in protecting it from an outside threat or the like, but the main use in gaming terms is probably to provide a safe haven or an interesting background for characters.

### Bibliography.

A number of books touch on this subject. Below are just a few that are worth looking at.

Andre Norton's 'Witch World' books are probably the best known 'status reversal' society in fiction.

Vonda McIntyre is a good writer for unbiased societies. 'Dreamsnake', is really Science Fantasy, but has a very 'Fantasy Feel'. Also, her contribution to the 'Thieves World' set, 'Looking for Satan', ('Shadows of Sanctuary'; Penguin), is an excellent description of the responses of people from an unbiased society to a standard low fantasy one, (and vice versa).

All female societies: Firstly two dreadful ones, prime examples of how not to do it. Paul Anderson's 'Virgin Planet', a mixture of male sexual ego-tripping and paranoia, and John Wyndham's 'Consider Her Ways' (Penguin), purely male paranoia. One that I find more interesting, although certainly controversial, is Joanna Russ's 'The Female Man' (Women's Press). Not an easy read, but well worth the effort.

The descriptions of 'Whileaway' evoke a fascinating society. The descriptions of 'Manland' and 'Womanland' are both equally nightmarish. Buy is for the man in your life!

Finally, two books which certainly relate to the subject, although I'll leave it to the reader to make what they can of them. Firstly, Ursula Le Guin's 'Left Hand of Darkness' (Orbit Books), set on a world of one sex, neither male or female, but both. This is science fiction rather than fantasy, but gives two fascinating, multi-dimensional societies in some detail. The second is James Tiptree's 'Up the Walls of the World' (published by Pan). As well as being a superb science fiction novel, it includes a society where the men are responsible for child-rearing, yet which is still patriarchal.

I'm afraid all the books I've been positive about were written by women (James Tiptree is a pseudonym for a woman writer). I've probably missed some good examples by male writers, but I know of none. Perhaps some writers could accept the challenge...

# BEYOND VOYAGES

In reply to Wendy Graham's comments in *Adventurer* #6, and to let you know how biased I am, my mention of Harlan Ellison was the result of pure partisanship; I happen to believe that Mr Ellison was seriously slighted by TV; he spent six months watching his dream turn into a nightmare at the hands of a Canadian production company, and as one of the great contemporary SF writers, deserves as much exposure for his other TV work as possible, if only as recompense for this. He did, after all, write the 'finest Star Trek episode ever made'.

I wasn't attacking bias in *Voyages Beyond* in general, the trouble is that Wendy's column was actually biased against SF. If VB is an American Tourist's whistle-stop, then the tour guide missed the Acropolis, St. Paul's, and the Louvre, spending all her time in buses and hotel lobbies instead.

Assuming that the column was aimed at 'the man on the Clapham omnibus', devoting almost half of it to TV was absurd, he's already going to be familiar with TV SF, and anyway, television represents the lowest common denominator of the genre. The people responsible for commissioning TV programmes see SF as light (juvenile) drama involving actors in shiny suits being chased around by people in rubber alien costumes.

You can get a pretty good idea of how TV abuses SF from the experiences of Harlan Ellison, who was approached ("We want the top SF writer in the world") to write an SF TV series.

He was no stranger to the medium (having worked on Star Trek, The Outer Limits, The Man From U.N.C.L.E. and a couple of other US series) and realising that the producers wanted a pretty basic SF plot, suggested an old standard:

*After several centuries of travel, the crew of a generation starship go into a bit of a decline and end up forgetting that they are in a ship at all. The ship is going to crash into a star. One 'crew member' discovers the awful truth, gets chased around a bit, and finally saves everyone.*

Ellison called it The Starlost. The TV producer was stunned; no funny rubber suits, no space rays, this was obviously the greatest work of

original genius since Leonardo invented the helicopter. Harlan had his own TV series.

After the ubiquitous delays and a myriad of personnel changes, Starlost went into production. By the time it reached the small screen, there so little left of his creation (even the pilot episode title had been changed from 'Phoenix without Ashes' to the dazzlingly unoriginal 'Voyages of Discovery') that Ellison refused to allow his name to be used in the credits; to protect his royalties he insisted they use the pseudonym 'Cordwainer Bird' instead.

Starlost was an unmitigated disaster, but some indication of what it might have been can be drawn from the fact that Ellison's original script (not the defaced version that was finally filmed) won the *Writers Guild of America Award* for the Most Outstanding Film/TV screenplay of 1974. Accepting the award, Harlan offered the advice "If the \*\*\*\*'s want to rewrite you... hit'em!"

Starlost was an extreme example of the relationship between TV and SF, but the same bias towards the least innovative, most mediocre, exists in almost all TV treatments of the genre. Quite honestly, in a 3000 word history, TV SF doesn't warrant mention.

SF fares rather better at the cinema and some excellent SF films turn up (*Dark Star*, *Static*, *A Clockwork Orange*, etc.), but are usually overshadowed by the much less interesting 'blockbusters'. The trouble with a blockbuster is that it costs so much to make, it simply can't afford to fail. In order to 'assume' success, all the tired old clichés that are assumed to guarantee 'bums on seats' are rolled out.

Ridley Scott's 'Blade Runner' is generally agreed to be one of the better big budget SF movies (I've even seen it described as a flawless masterpiece!) and is ostensibly based on Philip Dick's novel "*Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*". If you actually read the book, you'll discover that part of the film's plot belongs to a completely different story (Dick's "*We can build you*"), and the whole concoction has been beaten into the mould of a sub-Chandleresque detective

story. All that really remains of the original is Dick's decaying San Francisco, brilliantly realised by concept artist Syd Mead. It's not that "*Do Androids Dream*" wouldn't have made a perfectly good movie as it was, just that it doesn't mirror the Hollywood stereotype of SF.

No 'explanation' of SF would be complete without some mention of cinema, but with very limited space, it's sufficient to simply list a representative film from each of the last few years (Let's say, "*Invasion of the Body-snatchers*" for the '50s, "*Star Wars*" for the '70s), most of *Adventurer*'s readers have almost certainly seen them anyway.

Literature is by far the most important SF media, and the most difficult to define. With a 3000 word limit, you might just manage a list of notable SF writers and their key books. The subject is simply too broad for any short analysis to be worthwhile. Even at nearly 300,000 words, *Trillion Year Spree*, Brian Aldiss's history of SF only devotes a few lines to several important authors. In short, I think Wendy's brief was at fault; the task set was practically impossible.

Unfortunately, *Voyages Beyond* hasn't really improved since issue #3; it seems to be an unholy alliance of 'society' and Star Trek columns, with book reviews running a very poor third. The 'society' bit surely belongs in *Town Crier*, and if you really want a *Trek* column, why not call it that and be done with it? *Adventurer* deserves a decent book review spot, and on that front, at least V.B. in #6 is far better than any previous, but the rest of the column is still a bit of a non-entity.

Just to fan the flames, I'll sign off with two more definitions of SF. Brian Aldiss's much quoted conversation starter "*Hubris clobbered by nemesis*" (the conversations usually start 'Where the hell is the dictionary?') and Frederik Pohl's unimpeachable conversation stopper "It's that thing that people who understand science fiction point to, when they point to something and say That's Science Fiction!"

BY NIC COATES

# More Deadly than the Male

## WOMEN IN THE HOBBY:

I often feel very much in a minority at rolegaming conventions. I can't get away from the fact that there are very few female rolegamers. In fact, there are few women in the majority of games; there are, for instance, very few top class women chess players. This is usually put down to inherent psychological differences; to women being naturally less aggressive and competitive, less able to deal with abstractions and strategies. Even accepting this somewhat doubtful hypothesis, it does not explain the lack of female players of rolegames. Given this view of female nature, rolegames ought to be uniquely attractive to women, since they involve more than just tactics and abstractions. Rather, they are frequently more cooperative than competitive, and involve a large degree of creativity. My experience is that a surprising number of women do get 'hooked' by rolegames once they get involved.

## THE IMAGE PROBLEM:

The problem is that the image of FRP games does not appeal to women, since it usually suggests that all role-playing games are for violence-obsessed boys and men. Personally, I believe that women are less violent than men, (yes I know there are exceptions as well, but I'm talking in generalities here) so I am not surprised that there are few women wargamers. Unfortunately, wargames and rolegames are still synonymous to many people outside the hobby. This is partly due to historical reasons; fantasy games did after all arise originally out of wargaming. However, as the hobby has matured, it has become a separate entity, and is now often embarrassed by its link with its juvenile progenitor, the wargame.

Then there is the fantasy and science fiction input to the games. F&SF are often seen, certainly by the games companies, as a largely male interest, and the publicity is designed to appeal only to a male audience. However, this is perhaps a false impression; my experience is that many women are interested in the genre too.

As an example, I first encountered the writer Terry Pratchett when 'The Colour of Magic' was read a few years

ago as the serial on Radio 4's Women's Hour (!). A second Pratchett novel was recently broadcast, so presumably the first was well received. The interesting point is that *The Colour of Magic* in particular, could not be properly appreciated without some knowledge of, or at least interest in, the wider fantasy genre. For that matter, *Adventurer's* own Wendy Graham (not to mention the multitude of female SF writers) illustrates that women can be involved in science fiction.

## THE GREAT ALL-MALE MARKET:

The effect of the hobby being seen as a male preserve is that the bulk of the audience for RPGs are adolescent males; probably the most sexist section of society. (Fortunately, most of them grow out of it.) At this age (12-16) few boys want real girls of a similar age around, (although many do express a juvenile, and largely ignorant interest in sex).

Because they appear to be the majority of gamers, and therefore are the market that must be targeted by the games companies, this leads to most of the publicity and commercial advertising being aimed almost exclusively at this group. This gives a self-reinforcing circle that must be broken for any other section of society to be drawn into the hobby.

## THE ALL-MALE IMAGE:

The current situation has unfortunate effects on the presentation (in particular the artwork) of game covers and magazines (aside from *Adventurer*, of course!), which either show no women at all, or show women as projections of male adolescent sexual fantasy. In terms of putting off potential female interest, I'm not sure which strategy is worse:

1. If no women are shown on the cover, the assumption will usually be that the contents are for boys.
2. When women are shown, they are rarely shown in ways calculated to attract the interest of women and girls. It's not so much the number of inches of exposed flesh (although would you go orc-hunting wearing a stainless-steel bikini and not a lot else? And yes, I would say the loin-clothed male is just

as ridiculous!), but that the images of women usually have nothing to do with women's and girl's own dreams and fantasies. For instance, most fantasy art women seem to have chest measurements of 40"+, pandering to the standard adolescent obsession, yet the majority of women would like to be slimmer than they actually are. The female ideal of feminine beauty is, I'm afraid, different to that of the typical adolescent male.

The artists seem particularly bad at depicting female faces (maybe they're not interested in them?), and usually revert to either the arrogant minx or the wide-eyed childish innocent expression. Why are games companies unwilling (or unable) to show women in positions of power without making them villains, or to show women who are dressed for what they are doing, rather than to attract men?

All fantasy art and games are about dreams, and people are bound to be idealised in some way. When the artists show male characters on products or magazines, they are in effect saying "Wouldn't YOU like to be this dragon-slaying Hero?". The female images, in contrast, are not aimed in the same way at women and girls. Instead, they fall into two groups:

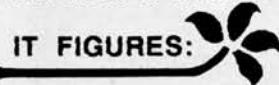
They are either simply to give further excitement to the male observers ("When you slay the dragon you get one of these free!" seems to be the message) or they are shown as villainesses to be 'conquered', however you want to interpret that... No wonder such images don't appeal to women and girls!

Games Workshop are particularly bad in their choice of artwork. The old Avalon Hill box cover for *Runequest III* showed an intelligently dressed warrior-woman who actually looked like she could (and would) fight! The new Games Workshop printing, however, replaces her with an all-male cover stressing chaos, gore and violence. The Workshop cannot (or will not) show images of women reflecting female wish-fulfillment. They seem incapable of showing a non-surrealistic woman who is not a 'pin-up'. Therefore, presumably so as not to offend the parents of their younger customers, they have played safe, and ignored women entirely. Given this and their total dedication to bloodshed and mass carnage at the expense of the more creative aspects of the hobby, I find it difficult to avoid

the conclusion that GW are actively trying to **discourage** female participation.

On a more positive note, SOME of the TSR artwork seems to be reaching a reasonable compromise between male and female idealisations of women. A number of the female images in the **TSR Art Book** are superb. Of particular note are **Alerielean** (originally from Dragon #94), and '**Moon Dragon Summer**' (I stress that I'm merely talking about the quality of the artwork, not the contents of the product!) I will generously ignore some of the less pleasing examples, such as **Ravenloft 2**. Isn't that nice of me?

## IT FIGURES:



**A** related problem is that of figures. These are again important to the image of the hobby because they frequently form the most imposing display in a shop. Unfortunately, again, the range of figures available is hardly calculated to attract female players. I accept that commercial realities dictate that the proportion of female figures reflects the number of female players. The real problem is the forms that those few figures take!

Firstly, no woman in her right mind is going to go into battle bare chested, especially if she is built in the proportions that most female figures are. They'd simply get in the way, flopping all over the place... Similarly, women are as likely to want to cover the rest of their bodies as men. (And who decided that the most sensible way to armour a woman is to wear saucepan lids on her chest? If nothing else, they would be extremely painful!). Women can pick their clothing with as much sense as men: so why aren't the figures intelligently garbed?

While we're on the subject for that matter, I heartily recommend that some designers go to anatomy classes to learn what the human body looks like! Oh, and could whoever designed the AD&D female thief for **Citadel** please note that you cannot see the shape of a woman's nipples through leather armour!!

I seem to be spending a lot of time criticising Games Workshop in this article, but once again, in the shape of **Citadel**, they are the worst offenders. The trouble is, they have a near monopoly of the outlets outside the big cities, and so can get away with almost anything, however lousy. What's even more depressing is that they have got worse over the last few years. About four years ago, I was able to buy almost a complete set of female adventurer types in just one visit to Nottingham, and the majority were

(fairly) reasonably dressed and proportioned. Now, finding a single reasonably dressed figure is a cause for celebration. Have they lost the designers who did the **Chalana Arroy** and **Eirithra** adventuresses from the **RuneQuest** set? Or are they all working on chaos mutant ninja death wombats?

To be fair, though, there are a few companies that are making good female figures. Particularly worth a mention are some of the **Prince August** range, despite the use of the word 'girl' to describe them (can we expect to see boys-of-arms figures?) Take a look at the Enchantress, elf girl (sic), and girl thief (sic) figures, not to mention the excellent female hobbit. Also deserving some praise is **Grenadier Models**, who have actually remembered that female monsters must exist, (giants, a mummy, and a kobold to name but three).

## THE FEMALE ELEMENT:

**H**owever, the general public image of the hobby tends to have the all boys together 'rugby club' ethos. This can be very intimidating, and make it very difficult for girls (particularly those in the younger age range) to get involved. To go into a shop or a club where everyone else is of the opposite sex can require a lot of courage. (Male readers: imagine gate-crashing a **Women's Institute** meeting or going into a lingerie shop!!!)

Perhaps all this is why those women who ARE involved are often older than the men: I know a number of women in their thirties who discovered the hobby through their teenage sons, only later becoming hooked in their own right. I got involved with a group at university, and was an addict after the first session! It is also notable that, given the small total number of female players, there is an extremely high percentage involved in creating commercial material, or refereeing at conventions. It seems that what needs encouraging is the body of the less involved and younger women and girls. I have never met a female 'Munchkin' or 'Irving'!

Does any of this matter? After all, if the male players are happy gaming without women and girls, why not let things be?

Firstly, it seems grossly unfair that women who might be interested are put off by **externals**. Presumably this is bad for the games companies as well.

Secondly, my male gamer friends, (in particular my husband), tell me that having female players has a profound effect on the game. (My knowledge of

all-male games is, of course, somewhat limited!). In general, having a female player or two leads to a stronger emphasis on role playing and less on monster killing. Women are less likely to become power gamers, obsessed with gaining high levels and at 'winning' at all costs. All-male groups tend to be more aggressive, in vain attempts to out-Macho each other! (I apologise to those all-male groups who have outgrown such childishness). Also, all-male groups tend to demonstrate more in-party competitiveness (OK in **Paranoia**, but often a pain in the neck in other games) for no real reason.

My own view is that getting more women into the hobby would be a beneficial goal, both because of the effect they have on games and because of the pleasure the women themselves will get from being involved.

## SEX DIFFERENCES:

**T**here are differences, both physical and psychological between men and women.

Saying this is not the same as saying one is **superior** to the other, but both have **different** qualities. To use a gaming analogy, no one would argue over whether dwarves or elves are superior. They are simply **different**, with different strengths and weaknesses. Many games reflect these differences in their mechanics, but they do seem more willing to reflect feminine weaknesses than feminine strengths.

In general, women have less brute strength than do men. Most games do restrict female strength in some way on these grounds. This is reasonable: You don't find many female Geoff Capes's around! However, **RuneQuest** is far too harsh with a maximum female strength of 14 (on scale for men of 3-18). It then makes a nonsense of the whole issue by saying you can ignore the limit for PCs. What's so special about PCs? Any peasant woman, working in the fields all day, has as much chance of developing her strength as any adventurer.

However, if women have less strength, they are frequently tougher in many ways. (How many men could stand the pain of child-birth?). Physiologically, there is an extra layer of fat beneath the skin, making them less vulnerable to extremes of temperature. If you use a system that restricts female strength in the name of realism, you really ought to consider boosting female constitution on the same grounds!

To digress slightly, the apparent frailty is often due to extraneous matters. Historically, 'respectable'

female clothing has often been designed apparently to restrict female activities: long, full, skirts, high heels, large numbers of petticoats and later, tight corseting and the rest are hardly calculated to facilitate physical activity!

Also, historically, the differences in the upbringing of boys and girls leads to differences. Girls stayed in and learnt needlework, whilst their brothers learnt horse riding and sword play. At various times in history, most recently in Victorian times, (but also earlier,) it simply wasn't respectable for a woman to be too healthy. To be sickly was a sign of beauty, so respectable women often pretended such.

Finally, many women (including myself), do on occasions take advantage of their presumed frailty, and get their menfolk to do the heavy work!

Another aspect of feminine toughness is the fact that women often remain at their physical peak for longer than men. For example, female athletes often maintain their peak well into their mid and late thirties, long after their male equivalents are 'over-the-hill'.

A second area where women have the edge over men is in manual dexterity. In general, women are more nimble-fingered than men. A system which separates manual dexterity and agility ought to allow for this, or perhaps women ought to get a bonus for manual dexterity based skills, such as picking pockets and opening locks. As far as I know, there is no evidence of consistent gender differences in physical agility. My instinct and general observations suggest that if anything, women have the edge here as well.

## PSYCHE DIFFERENCES:

**M**ore controversial are the assumed psychological sex differences. At the risk of annoying some members of my own sex, I believe that there are differences between the sexes, although these are exaggerated by environmental factors. However, I emphasise again that these make us different, not (necessarily) superior. I also accept that many men display these feminine qualities, just as many women display masculine ones. Of course, bringing these aspects out is a matter of good roleplaying rather than game mechanics. A couple of points are worth looking at in detail:-

Women tend to think with the whole of their minds, the emotional parts as well as the reasoning parts. This means they can frequently see connections that are not necessarily obvious to

men, often leading to different solutions to problems and insights to situations (the so-called feminine intuition).

Another important difference is in the attitudes of women to relationships and sex. It is extremely unusual for a woman to take a 'scalp hunting' attitude to such things. She is also generally less concerned with the purely physical attributes of a potential partner, more with his personality and nature. All through this section, I have been discussing human women. There is no reason why sex differences in other races should be expressed in the same way. Some races may have no differences beyond those related to biological function, but that could make life very boring.

## CROSS-SEX ROLEPLAYING:

**P**laying a character of the opposite sex, and doing it well, is both extremely difficult and extremely rewarding. It is more difficult than playing a member of an imaginary race because, whilst it is difficult to criticise another's interpretation of, say, an elf, we have a better idea of what men and women are like. I have seen male players playing female characters, and make them behave as no woman would, simply because they were still thinking as a man. For example, in my campaign a sorceress accepted an invitation from a sorcerer with a 'bad reputation' to visit him in the evening to discuss a matter of mutual concern. The player was startled when it transpired that by accepting the invitation, the sorceress had lost any protection she might have had from the town authorities. In merely visiting him alone, she is asking for whatever she gets, in the eyes of that society.

On a deeper level, playing a character of the opposite sex can be a fascinating experience. If you let yourself do it properly, I think you can learn a lot about the other half of the human race.

I also have no doubt that if I don't think about what I'm doing, I make an equally bad job of playing male characters! To be fair, it is easier for a woman to play the role of a man, since fiction and films provide us with a multitude of male role-models to base our characters on. There are few equivalent female role-models. Playing a character of the opposite sex is not easy. A lot of male players need reminding that calling a character female, adding some curves to her description, and adding a make-up pack to her equipment does not create a female character!



# More Deadly than the Male

## A FEMALE FUTURE:

I Have Seen the Future - and it Is Female.  
This month, the final column in my series on Women and Roleplaying, I'm covering a number of bits and pieces I've previously missed. Firstly, I'm going to turn to the "poor relation" of rolegaming, the science fiction game. The Science Fiction games are, I'm afraid, often just as sexist as their fantasy brethren, which strikes me as somewhat odd. On the face of it, there is even less excuse for a science fiction society being biased on grounds of sex than in a fantasy society.

In a technologically-advanced society, women are at least as capable of pushing buttons or reading VDUs as men; why shouldn't women fly starships or handle lasers alongside the men? In a technological society, differences in physical strength are largely irrelevant.

Unfortunately, not all science fiction writers seem to have realised this. These writers, (even, I am sorry to say, some female ones), are often technologically very inventive, but socially conservative, and assume that society will always consist of men doing things, with women on the side-lines (if they are there at all). Prime culprits in my library include Poul Anderson, James Blish, 'Doc' Smith, Jack Vance, Andre Norton, Anne McCaffrey, and AE Van Vogt to pick only the major names. For that matter, there are a few authors, (yes, I am thinking about Heinlein) who ought to ignore women, since they appear quite incapable of portraying realistic women or understanding female psychology. (Quote from Friday - "Being raped is fine," thinks heroine Friday - "if only the guy doesn't have bad breath." Need I say more?). This is quite separate from many writers (such as Arthur C. Clarke!) who are totally unable to create any people with any depth.

However, the reason for this savage attack on parts of the science fiction community is that they have left SF looking like a male preserve, where only men are allowed to be seen doing anything. With a few honourable exceptions, the SFRPG reflect this. Most are based on space operas rather than on the more complex and deep Science Fiction novels. (Fantasy is just the same, actually). Fictional

space operas, in the main, tend to assume that women are prizes rather than proponents. Many, in fact, are identical to fantasy pulps, with double-talk science replacing magic! However, even in space opera there are exceptions: try James Schmitz's *The Witches of Karres*. Sometime, I'll write a scenario based on that! The SFRPGs also tend to have an excessively militaristic tone, again borrowed from the space operas. As I said last time, I don't personally think that many women are particularly interested in playing at being soldiers.

## RAMBO GAMES!

Traveller is a good example of what is wrong in SFRPGs, and is, unfortunately still the most popular.

1. Firstly, it forces all characters to pass through a military or para-military background, which anarchists like me find somewhat distasteful.

2. Secondly, the skills structure leaves Traveller characters unsuited to anything other than stealing starships and killing people. (Try designing a journalist under the basic Traveller system: unless you create about ten new skills and a new character generator to give the character those



skills, it is impossible. This is stupid!!)

3. Thirdly, supplements such as *Mercenary* seem to stress that the emphasis is on powerful weapons systems such as plasma guns and powered armour to the exclusion of all else. The basic feel seems designed not to appeal to women, but simply to adolescent Rambo's.

Traveller also exhibits one very common trait in Science Fiction rules: paying lip service to equality, but no more. Rules often state that women should be treated equally to men, but then set about ignoring women or tactically assuming that men are the only people that matter. Another beautiful example is *Paranoia*. "There are no sex distinctions in the complex".

Oh yes? Find an illustration in which the women out-number, or even equal the men. Tokenism rules! For that matter, why do the rules assume that Ultra Violets will be male? (Spot the reference, on page 32 in the Games Workshop printing, to UVs keeping harems! The fact that it is the concubines having the children shows that it is the men who are the UVs). Really, all I'm saying is that Science Fiction game designers ought to show a bit more imagination!

## THE UNBIASED SOCIETY:

Clearly, in a science fiction society, it ought to be possible to approach the Utopia of any unbiased society. To be fair to the SF community, there are some novels where such societies do exist, at least to an extent. Niven's *'Known Space'* is a good example, as are the books of Robert Silverberg or Vonda McIntyre, or Ursula Le Guin's *'The Dispossessed'*. The problem for the referee is simply one of habit. The normal assumption is that a character is male; it is very easy to end up with a 90% male cast of NPC's, only using women in exceptional circumstances. My suggestion to referees is that they roll a d6 whenever designing a character; if the roll is even, the character is female. (I normally don't go in for dice rolling when designing NPCs, but here it could be useful to help break the male bias). After all, in an unbiased society, the numbers of active men and women will be equal:

So the numbers of characters encountered should be equal. Another interesting exercise is to write a scenario or two assuming that all the NPCs are female, unless there are extremely good plot reasons for making them male. Such a scenario could be run in a Science Fiction campaign with absolutely no comment from the referee, just to see if the players notice.

On a more positive note, there are some systems other than Traveller which are more to my liking. The recent *Ringworld* game is mechanically one of the best systems around. Its emphasis on characterisation, and on skills other than combat, should have opened new possibilities for Science Fiction gaming, certainly in areas more interesting to female gamers. Unfortunately, the 'Known Space' background was just too safe and orderly to write scenarios for, and games set on the ring itself risk quickly degenerating into a pseudo-fantasy structure. As a result, the game has not sold well.

Dystopias are far more interesting, and far easier to write scenarios for. If you design a society where part of the unpleasantness is sexual bias, decide why the bias is there. All too often, scenario designers simply assume that men will be in charge. If you want to be sexist, justify your stance! For example, a particular society might demand that women be subservient to men on the basis of the local religion. (A technological society can still be strongly religious - think about Heinlein's *Revolt In 2100*, or Leiber's *Gather, Darkness!*). In another example, a post holocaust society (assuming you can justify such a thing existing) might well hold male domination as responsible for the disaster, and therefore keep careful rein on its men.

#### THE TYRANNY OF PREGNANCY:

**T**hink about the effects of the sex differences on a future society. In societies such as in Huxley's *Brave New World*, reproduction and sex may have been separated; this is one method that ought to lead to women being free to take any role that a man can take. On the other hand, it may well de-humanize that society. In societies where there is some form of immortality, or simple very long life spans, child-birth will be far less important. Again, women will be freed to an extent from the tyranny of pregnancy. This is a dangerous road to take; immortality is one factor guaranteed to alter the very nature of society. Think carefully about the

effects! One aspect of all this will be fertility control; where a woman is in perfect control of her own fertility, she is far freer to choose her own goals. Similarly, if men have control of their fertility, they are less vulnerable to forms of emotional blackmail (see Vonda McIntyre's *Dreamsnake* for more details). In either case, the birth of an unwanted child is likely to be a disgrace to BOTH partners.

Less pleasant societies (such as that of *Paranola*) may seek to limit a citizen's sexuality, so that drugs curb sexual demand. This could result in men and women being treated precisely identically, since any physical difference will be unimportant. Physical differences might even have been bred out, leaving a race of hermaphrodites or asexuals. I personally don't like this idea: it would create a particularly dull world!

Finally, there is always scope for really strange societies. This is not an area for hard and fast rules; all I can do is suggest examples of the societies that are possible, if a referee is prepared to be adventurous. The first example is the Kzinti (from Larry Niven's *Known Space*), where one sex is non-sentient. (Why Niven had to decide that the non-sentient sex would be female I do not know. Shame. My experience suggests that, in our world, more men are non-sentient than women...)

The second type are the people of *The Left Hand of Darkness*, Ursula LeGuin's superbly evocative exploration of a trans-sexual society.



(If you haven't read it, go out and buy it NOW). Setting a scenario on Winter is an exercise I recommend only to experienced referees.

My third suggestion is the Tyrenni, from James Tiptree's *Up the Walls of the World*, which I mentioned earlier in the series. Again, characters, especially the adolescent Rambos, who contact the Tyrenni are in for an interesting experience.

#### HISTORICAL GAMES:

**G**ames set in a more or less accurate historical background provide serious problems for the feminist, since historical accuracy rears its ugly head. I freely admit that some societies were extremely sexist, and that there is little a referee or player can do about this. Part of the interest in these games comes from the realistic historical background. The ultimate example is probably '*Privateers and Gentlemen*', where female characters are virtually impossible. On the other hand, don't let 'Historical accuracy' prevent the appearance of any female characters in historical games. Throughout history there have been a few maverick women, ranging from *Boudicca* through *Jeanne D'Arc* to the Victorian travelling ladies right up to the *suffragettes*. There is no reason why a female character should step outside the norm, though she may well suffer serious pressures. The women who do break away from the norm are likely to be extremely interesting and strong personalities. Make the most of the opportunities, and take care with designing them: let the quality of female characters make up for the lack of quantity. For that matter, don't forget that the typical women of those societies were still people, with their own feelings, aims and personalities. I find it particularly important to develop detailed and interesting personalities for female characters in more sexist societies, simply to remind players that the women do exist.

Whilst on the edge of historical games, I ought to mention *Pendragon*. Pendragon is clearly a fantasy game - but its feel, and the insistence on its background justifies its inclusion here. The two problems with Pendragon, so far as I am concerned, are firstly that it largely seems to ignore warrior maidens (such as Spenser's *Britomart*), and secondly its assumption that wives are only for the production of heirs, rather than having any major importance in themselves. As a referee, I find the statement that wives may be left nameless and characterless incom-

rehensible. Why waste all those scenario opportunities?

## SEX AND THE SINGLE ADVENTURESS:

To return to fantasy games. I want to deal briefly with a problem that many male gamers have told me (usually with the self satisfied grin of one making an unanswerable point) justifies the exclusion of female adventurers. The problem is that of sex and, in particular, contraception. The argument runs that any female leading the lifestyle of a typical fantasy hero is likely to rapidly end up pregnant, and be forced into early retirement. (The men, presumably, neither know nor care about their own children. A mean referee could probably find interesting ways of reminding them of their existence. It rather detracts from the image of a tough barbarian to find himself left, literally, holding the baby!) First of all, there is no reason that the lifestyle of an adventuring woman will be identical to that of a man. Secondly, any reasonably intelligent woman who chose to live in that way could take precautions. Contrary to popular opinion, contraception was not invented in the twentieth century, even in the 'real world'. Indeed, the women in many 'primitive' societies knew that certain plants could reduce their chances of becoming pregnant. (Such secrets were often unknown to their men-folk, who would have feared such an assertion of female power. This partly explains why such things were not always discovered by the mainly male, early explorers). Somewhat closer to home, doesn't every folk-lore village wise woman have the power to control a woman's fertility? 'Barrenness' is amongst the commonest of her 'curses'. In the context of a fantasy campaign, where magic in general works, such powers whether 'herbal' or 'spell-like' in nature, ought to be extremely effective. It is certainly something which should have been included in WD's Houri spell list! Furthermore, in a society where disease and the rest are kept in check by magic, smaller families are likely to be the norm, and some form of contraception is likely to be the essential, since infant mortality rates will be lower. (AD&D: think about the effects of Purify Food and Drink and Create (clean) Water in the hands of lowly village priestesses, let alone Cure Disease and the rest that more powerful clerics can call on).

Of course, there may still be social or religious objections to the use of such methods, especially in a strongly patriarchal culture. However, it is also

possible in a society where relationships between men and women are particularly formal, that the men would be unaware of what their women are doing. Such matters only add to the interest and variety within a game...

## GENDER AS A CENTRAL MOTIVATION:

It is quite possible to use gender differences as a major force within a campaign. All games need sources of conflict, and the 'sex war' certainly has possibilities here! For instance, our campaign world includes two cities which are in a semi-permanent state of undeclared war. One is an 'Amazon style' matriarchy, the other is the holy city of a religion that holds the inferiority of women as one of its central tenets! A referee probably needs to take care when introducing such an overt manifestation of the sex war into his/her campaign. Not all players will be happy with such a structure, and some may find it a little close to the bone. It may be sometimes necessary for the referee to remind players that the attitudes of the campaign societies are not necessarily the GM's own! On the other hand, a sex war does provide an interesting background, with plenty of opportunities for PCs to take sides. Making neither society totally good or totally evil can make these choices more complex than they might first appear. One risk, of course, is that a mixed party will be split along gender lines. Again, giving other



characteristics to the society can be helpful here. For example, even the most sexist Druidess could be persuaded to help a patriarchy that has respect for nature, whilst the other is systematically destroying forests. On the other hand, she may set 'interesting' conditions on that aid.

At a more personal level, religions such as the one mentioned above can certainly provide motivations and targets for individual female PCs. A female ranger of my acquaintance is both hunting and hunted by the followers of that particular religion...

Another area where gender can provide motivations is in that of romantic interest. Certainly, a woman might find the rescue of her lover gives her a stronger motivation for becoming involved in a situation than simple greed for treasure. It could also lead to a more interesting and subtle contest than a straight 'kill the monster and steal the treasure' structure. On the other hand, don't assume that all relationships between men and women will be sexual, or even romantic. Platonic relationships can also be very deep and long-lasting, and give strong reasons for actions.

Other relationships, equally dependant on gender, can be used similarly. I recently ran a 'rescue the lady' scenario (yes, even I sometimes run things that way round!) in which the lady in question was the mother of one of the PCs. A formidable, forceful, and stubborn lady she is, too, (I decided she was at least partly responsible for those traits in her son) and I've got more plans for her in the future... Other possibilities would involve the mother rescuing or seeking revenge for a child, or brother-sister rivalry (frequently very strong) being at the base of a conflict the PCs are entangled in. There are many other possibilities inherent here.

I'm going to finish with a quote from Joanna Russ, which although it was made about writing fantasy/science fiction, applies equally or perhaps even more, to writing scenarios. It comes from the introduction to *The Adventures of Alyx*, published by the Woman's Press.

*"Long before I became a feminist in any explicit way, I had turned from writing love stories about women, in which women were losers, and adventure stories about men in which the men were winners, to writing adventure stories about a woman in which the woman won. It was one of the hardest things I ever did in my life."*

I hope that, in the role-gaming field at least, these articles have helped make that change of attitude a little less hard.