

GREG STAFFORD

At last year's GenCon convention, the Editor recorded this interview with Greg Stafford, creator of the world of Dragon Pass.

WD: *White Bear & Red Moon*, *Nomad Gods*, and *Runequest* are all set in the world of Dragon Pass. What originally inspired you in the Creation of Dragon Pass?

GS: Dragon Pass is part of the natural evolution of the world of Glorantha. I had been working on the world mythos and history for about eight years before I made *White Bear & Red Moon*. At first I began writing because I'd run out of material to read and I just let my imagination run for my own entertainment and a few friends that I told stories to. Then for a couple of years I tried to sell my fantasy fiction to the book and magazine market without much success. I had a few stories published in some semi-pro zines but not much to write home about. Then one day I got a rude rejection slip from an editor which stated, among other things, that "All S&S is the same hackwork." I was put off of course, but after some literary and psychological analysis of Conan, Brak, or the other Noble Barbarian pastiches, or of Elric and other Outlawed Nobleman pastiches, I decided that the rude comment was true. Or at least partly so, and I began figuring out how to use this revelation.

I was struck with the idea of using the systems of S&S hackwork and mythical archetypes to create a 'do-it-yourself novel.' I already had a setting in Glorantha. I worked the archetypes into game systems, personalized the characters to make standard S&S types fit it into a unique setting, then laid out the grand scheme for a mythical and legendary boardgame. Then I cut it into thirds and laid two thirds aside keeping the standard type of wargame because I thought that would be most easily accepted. That was *WB&RM* (pronounced Wilbrim by us here). Also, *Nomad Gods* was the second section, which came out a year or two later. The third, *Masters of Luck and Death*, is still being reworked.

WD: Can you tell us anything about the final game in the *WB&RM* Trilogy?

GS: Love to. By the way, we call it the *Dragon Pass Trilogy*. *MOLAD* is a quest-type of game wherein the players attempt to become god. That is, at least in the final scenarios. And the god mentioned is the ruling deity of the area, called the Pharaoh who rules the local pantheon. There are certain quest-paths set down in the rules which will allow a player to climb the ladder of success by allying with more and more powerful spirits and deities while squelching those of his opponents. At last they can approach one of the greater deities in the game. These include Orlantha, Storm Bull, Ernalda, Argan Argar, and so on. With this kind of help they can, at last, make a bid for Pharaohdom.

WD: If you designed this as part of the larger game in 1974 what has been holding up its appearance?

GS: Development. I have had to rewrite the rules three times so far. It is very different from a normal wargame and it is important to me to do it right. I am not as concerned with meeting a schedule as I am with producing a quality game, unique in itself with a playable and re-playable system. The first time it was too complex, the second too boring, the third too vague. I think I've got a handle on it now, though, and hope everyone will be satisfied with the long wait.

WD: Do you find any inspiration from Fantasy and SF novels? Which authors inspire you most (or which authors do you most enjoy reading)?

GS: My literary background in the field begins in the classics. You know, Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* first, the Greek Playwrights, and so on. I began reading these while still in grammar school. By High School I had devoured *Beowulf* and the *Nibelungenleid*, the *Eddas* and the *Vedas*, *Gilgamesh*, and all that.

In college I met Elric, then Bilbo and Frodo, then Conan, in that order. Those were the years when Lin Carter was editing the *Adult Fantasy Series* for Ballantine. I was lucky enough to get exposed to the old masters like Dunsany, Lovecraft, Smith, and then the rest of Moorcock's tales. When the series got into such drek as Vathek, then I switched to the more numerous sf material, but didn't find it as interesting in general.

A list of authors will include several which are assuredly out of the field for most readers. But, without any special order imposed, I would list Tolkien, Homer (try to get the Lattimore translations), the Eddic poets, Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Frazer, and Bob Dylan.

WD: What is the history of *Chaosium* and were you involved in games as a business before you started it?

GS: *Chaosium* was founded in 1974 or so when a Tarot Card reading told me to publish *WB&RM* myself instead of trying to sell it to someone else. I had already been frustrated by two previous offers to publish it by others who will remain unnamed. So I got a job, bought a mimeo, then began cranking out the first edition.

I was not involved in the business at all before doing the game. In fact, I didn't even think of how I'd eventually sell the games I made. Lou Zocchi and Tony Pierro were instrumental in getting me lined up to sell them, though. I squeaked by for a while, then met Tadashi Ehara who pitched in to help out voluntarily at first, then got hired part time. Now he is editing *Different Worlds* as his main job. A year or so later I hired Lynn Willis to take charge of production. My wife, Cam, is Office Manager now too. Together we manage to keep things rolling.



Greg proudly displays the Strategists Club Award "For Creativity in Wargaming" won by *Runequest* last year.

The company name, by the way, is a combination of the words Chaos and the ending of coliseum. It was named because, when I began, the company shared a four room apartment with me and my wife and two children in the Oakland ghetto near the coliseum, it really was a coliseum of Chaos, too, believe me.

WD: What interests do you have outside of gaming?

GS: My family, my garden, wood carving, practical magic, writing fiction, picnics, reading, beer, going to conventions, travel in general.

WD: To what do you attribute the popularity of Role Playing Games?

GS: RPGs fulfil several very important functions for people today. I have done some very serious discussion and analysis on this question and broken down the answers to fill four needs: 1. Communication with others; 2. Participation in a shared fantasy; 3. Exploration of our minds; 4. Exploration of the psyche. These may vary in importance, of course, but all are important.

WD: Care to elucidate on any of those?

GS: Sure.

Communication is the basis for a group activity. It is the basis for society at large. Without communication we are stunted and hurt. Any hobby fills this function if it gets people together to share their ideas. That is, we game so that we can get with other people and have a good time.

Participation in a shared fantasy occurs among people who are intense or involved with the game and other players. Many of us have read a good book and been so impressed by its impact on us that we want to share it. So we get together and talk about it. But none of this talk can capture the experience and share it, first hand. A good RPG *does* allow people to actually share their experience, though, and so surpasses the enjoyment we can get out of talking about a book.

Exploration of our minds is always educational. By this I mean that when we play a good RPG we can get into a sort of "adventure Dreamland" and stretch our activities to include things we'd only ordinarily think or dream of. I mean, of course, the regular murder and mayhem which most RPGs consist of. And, I hope, people will be educated by these sublimations of their activities. I would hope that they will take the opportunities to experiment on what their minds can devise beyond the superficial possibilities of a FRP game. Within this category I include the pleasure of players discovering just how clever they really can be.

Evolution of Psyche is an occasional by product of FRP too. By this I mean that it is possible to actually learn something of value to apply to everyday life by playing a RPG. Of course, it is not the purpose of RPG to be a moral instructor, but it is part of the possible by product.

Overall, of course, all this goes to provide fun, some play and relaxation. Without that it is an empty game.

WD: Even though there were many role-playing games already on the market, what decided you to produce *Runequest*?

GS: Because there was not yet a reasonably simple but complete system which provided for the needs I wanted fulfilled in an FRP. I had tried *D&D* but found it confusing, discouragingly illogical, and very unrelated to the world we live in. I wanted something which reflected the

WHITE DWARF INTERVIEWS

GREG STAFFORD

world we know in a clean and flexible system. The success of the project must go to Ray Turney and Steve Perrin, for the most part. I laid down some basic requirements, such as no character classes and no experience points and a power point magic system, but they did all the work.

WD: Were you surprised by *Runequest's* immediate success in a crowded field? And to what would you attribute that success?

GS: No, I wasn't surprised. It was all that I had hoped it would be and more. I had hoped that a segment of the market had the same outlook as I had. The designers did, and managed to put it forth in a logical and understandable manner. Its success is attributable to the fact that it is familiar, realistic, relatively easy to understand, and handles almost all the activities of FRP by using the one game-system of a percentile roll to decide success or failure.

WD: Has *Runequest* inspired you to contemplate producing other RPGs?

GS: Yes, indeed. This is the birth of a new art form and we intend to continue leading the field in innovation and quality. Right now Rudy Kraft is working on an Elric-based RPG using a lot of the RQ system. We are closing negotiations to produce a Lovecraft-based RPG designed by Kurt Lortz, preparing other pleasant *Runequest* addenda from well known sf and fantasy authors which we can't talk about yet, and are getting new queries from outside designers almost weekly. These include historical RPG as well, and I am sure that some submissions will be of *Chaosium* quality and see print by us.

WD: Many *Chaosium* games are imbued with a sense of humour. Is this a by-product of your own sense of humour or is it deliberate policy because you believe that gaming should be fun.

GS: Ha ha. Thanks for asking. The Trickster is often my friend and I promote the good times which he can bring. I think a sense of humour and its pleasure ought to be sought by every living person in their lifetime. If something is not fun, or at the very least if it cannot take a little bit of self-mockery when things get grim, then I don't think it worth my time. I have happiness in my life and strive to pass some of it onto others. Thus, in one way, the humour of my games is a result of my personal outlook. But I also believe that games *should* be fun to play and try to put some into the games I design.

My humour in the games has occasionally been commented on by others. I was very surprised to find that some people were actually offended by the humour in the *Cult of Geo* article which was published in *DW*. They thought humour had no place in FRP. I must admit, I'd have little fun playing with them! The Dragon Pass which I know has a place for joyous laughter, ribald belly laughs, grim humour, in-jokes, and mythical mirth.

WD: What direction do you see hobby gaming, especially RPG, taking in the future?

GS: Rapidly expanding is the word. RPG fulfills so many needs in the confusing world we live in that it would be hard to find a suitable substitute. Times are getting more thin for luxuries and much to expensive for most of us. But it isn't necessary to be rich or famous to find satisfaction and enjoyment in life. RPGs

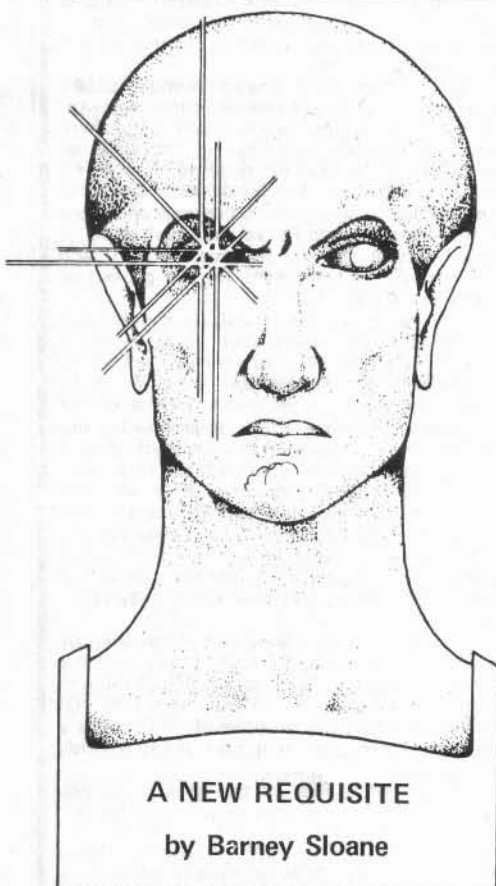
provide an excellent outlet for people to express themselves and partake in the four items I mentioned above. If there is another Great Depression, which appears likely when gasoline gets tighter, then there will be plenty of time for gaming as a way of life to fill empty and otherwise lonely hours. *Monopoly* gained its popularity when it fulfilled the "Great American Dream" during the last major depression. I think that the RPG field will fulfil this same sort of role in the next major depression. This is a measure of the growing sophistication, awareness, or needs of what can be the "American Dream," or the "British Dream" or whatever.

WD: What games do you most enjoy playing?

GS: *Runequest* is certainly my most-played game and probably my favourite. But close behind are *Poker*, *White Bear and Red Moon*, *King Arthur's Knights*, *Dungeon!* or *Sorcerer's Cave*, and *Korsun Pocket*. Other than these I am usually busy test playing my games under development or games submitted by freelancers to *Chaosium*.

WD: Is *Chaosium* still looking at freelance submissions?

GS: WE certainly are. We're interested in fantasy or historical material, and also in *Runequest* supplementary material. Especially non-Gloranthan *Runequest* material which will be produced under a *Runequest/Gateway* label. Interested parties should contact us to get guidelines first. We have a designer's delight of a contract, an excellent royalty agreement, superb graphics, experimental tastes, and high standards.



PERCEPTION

Perception Score	Bonuses for Various Areas of Sight Etc.							
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
3	-10%	-1	0%	-2%	+1	-10%	0%	-10%
4	-8%	-1	0%	-2%	+1	-10%	0%	-9%
5-6	-5%	-1	5%	-1%	0	-5%	3%	-5%
7-9	0	0	7%	-1%	0	-2%	5%	0
10-11	0	0	10%	0	0	0	8%	0
12	+2%	0	12%	0	0	0	10%	0
13-14	+5%	0	12%	+1%	0	+2%	10%	+3%
15	+7%	+1	15%	+1%	-1	+5%	12%	+5%
16	+10%	+1	15%	+2%	-1	+5%	15%	+7%
17	+12%	+1	17%	+2%	-1	+10%	20%	+10%
18	+15%	+2	20%	+3%	-1	+15%	25%	+12%
18(01-50)	+15%	+2	22%	+3%	-1	+20%	30%	+15%
18(51-75)	+17%	+2	25%	+4%	-1	+20%	35%	+17%
18(76-90)	+20%	+2	25%	+4%	-1	+20%	35%	+20%
18(91-99)	+25%	+2	25%	+5%	-1	+20%	35%	+22%
18(00)	+30%	+3	30%	+8%	-1	+25%	35%	+30%

A is a bonus for finding traps (gained only by thieves etc.)

B is a bonus for locating secret doors, open to all.

C is the chance of spotting other hidden or invisible (hearing) things

D is a bonus for spotting disguises or *charmed* people (subtle differences in mood etc)

E is a bonus for chance of being surprised.

F is a bonus for chances of noting magical changes i.e. *Explosive runes* on scroll etc.

G is the chance given to someone of noting a boulder or slow missile, and reacting thus — *Dexterity* stated as a % of dodging (if possible) the missile etc.

H is a bonus for hearing noises.

NB: All these percentages are not rock-hard and the DM using them must make alterations according to the situation presented e.g. a person who has just been wounded in the face, will not have for instance 18(56) Perception, as blood will be streaming in his eyes, and his head will be roaring etc. Make of it what you will.

For a long time now I have been finding out time after time that a new requisite should be looked into, that of the characters **PERCEPTION**. This encompasses noticing the hairline crack signifying a secret door, to spotting that man with bow knocked in the trees, to a boulder falling from great heights upon ones head! Here is an attempt to rectify this situation: