

In Open Box, science fiction and fantasy games and rulebooks currently in the shops are reviewed by independent authorities.

OPEN BOX

AVENGER! ASSASSIN Gamebooks Knight Books

£1.75

£1.75

'You are Avenger, a Ninja warrior... Supreme Master of Unarmed Combat... Trained in the Way of the Tiger.' And in for a busy time in these, the first of the new *Way of the Tiger* gamebook series. Raised as an orphan by the monks of Kwon, and taught to use the skills of ninjutsu in the flight against evil, you now have to recover the stolen Scrolls of Ketsuin from the evil Yaemon (hiss) before he speaks the Word of Power at the Pillars of Change, condemns Kwon to spend eternity in a lake of boiling blood, and allows the Doom Legion and the Monks of the Scarlet Mantis to sweep across the world. Then you have all the fun of returning the scrolls in the second book.

The combat system is based on kicks, punches and throws. In combat you have to throw over the opponent's Defence score against the particular form of attack, then take damage from their Endurance score until it reaches zero - when it does then they are dead.

onto the world of Orb, already used in *Talisman of Death*. It is possible to successfully complete it with only one point of Endurance left, and much depends on making sensible choices and picking up clues given earlier in the book. *Assassin!* shows signs of being written in haste, with more chance of being killed, and less of using your wits. Plot and atmosphere may be a bit 'Kung Fu meets AD&D', but both add a few new twists to the adventure gamebook formula, and deserve credit for that. Overall, good entertainment value.

Ease of Use:	7	Value:	8
Production:	6	Skill:	7
Overall:	8		Chris Elliott

VAPORS DON'T SHOOT BACK RPG Scenario West End Games

£6.95

Friend Computer, can I tell the readers about this adventure?

WHAT IS THEIR SECURITY CLEARANCE?

I don't know. Probably infrared. ACCESS TO THIS ADVENTURE IS LIMITED TO GRADE ORANGE.

OK. Can I give them a rough outline without revealing specific details, Friend

his title in the 84th annual High Programmers Invitational Tournament. Naturally this competition is illegal, and... PLEASE BE VERY CAREFUL, CITIZEN. YOU ARE RELEASING RESTRICTED DATA.

The adventure is 32 pages with a loose cover containing character data. It takes the Troubleshooters to various parts of the city, in particular CENSORED and CENSORED. Ultimately they are sent outside the city, on a quest to recover CENSORED before it can be captured by loyal servants of the Computer. As the adventure proceeds the Troubleshooters will gradually realise that there is something odd about their assignment, and may be able to use the information to CENSORED or even CENSORED. The troubleshooters...

HAVE BEEN TERMINATED. THIS BRIEFING WILL NOW END PLEASE REPORT TO THE EUTHANASIA CENTRE, FRIEND REVIEWER. HAVE A NICE DAY.

Seriously, though, folks, *Vapors Don't Shoot Back* is a fun adventure with no obvious flaws. As usual, lethality should top fifty per cent for each encounter. The idea of playing with less than four or five troubleshooters is fairly ludicrous; although they aren't expected to survive the various traps, incidents, and firefights in this scenario, they should stay around long enough to learn why they are being killed, and appreciate the funnier aspects of the adventure. All the High Programmers are eccentric; Nevo-U is a bit odd, but others are downright strange. There's also lots of interference from the secret societies, cults, and other groups within the city, and a chance to meet the unusual inhabitants of the world outside the dome.

Production:	8	Usefulness:	7
Complexity:	6	Skill:	6
Overall:	7		Marcus L Rowland

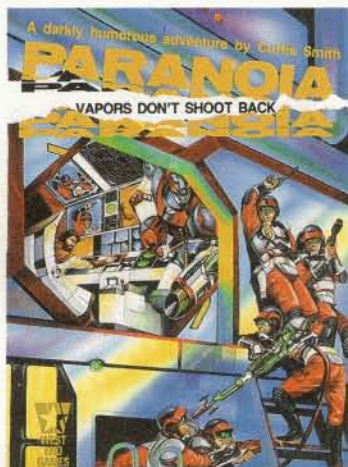
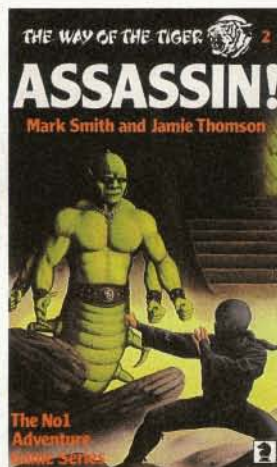
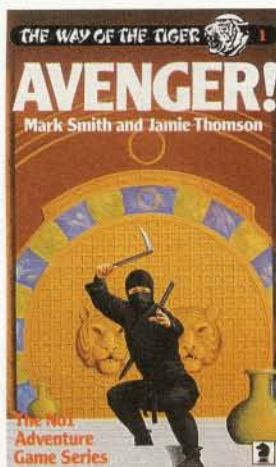
MASKS OF NYARLATHOTEP RPG Scenario Chaosium

£19.95

Masks of Nyarlathotep is the latest *Call of Cthulhu* supplement to come from Chaosium, and it is undoubtedly the finest. It is an episodic, globe-trotting campaign to save the world from Ultimate Doom at the hands (tentacles?) of the Outer Gods. *Masks* is boxed, and contains five scenarios, a book of hand-outs and various other odds and ends.

Taking the scenario booklets in the order in which they are presented, we begin in New York. The Big Apple is the central stage for an horrific murder of a friend of one of the investigators. The mystery surrounding his death, and a huge wealth of clues serve to introduce the investigators to the campaign proper. Hidden within the pages of the New York booklet is a write-up of a cult, new spells, monsters, items and adversaries, and most importantly the low-down on the Carlyle Expedition.

The next book covers London, with the investigators going there to follow up leads gained elsewhere. The booklet details another cult, more spells, etc, and has a bewildering array of red herrings, dead-ends and puzzling situations for the players to solve. Several interesting NPCs appear in this scenario, provid-



Although simple in essence, there are some nice elaborations; a throw does no damage, but allows an extra attack, with increased chances of success, and blocking blows can negate damage to yourself, but lessens the effectiveness of the next attack. Inner Force can be used five times to double damage, and Fate rolls are used to decide whether perilous leaps and the like succeed or not. Nine ninja skills are listed, ranging from the use of shuriken to immunity to poisons, feigning death and climbing. All 'characters' have shuriken, plus three other skills. A number of ninja tools are also carried.

Avenger! works well, despite the fact that the ninja theme, although accurately detailed, is rather flimsily tacked

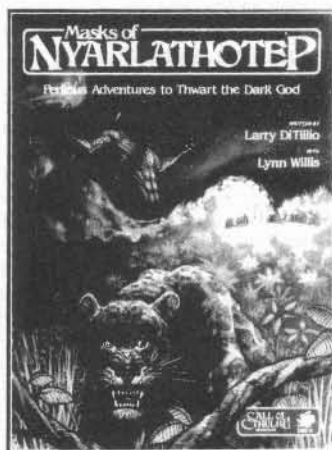
Computer?

WHAT IS YOUR SECURITY CLEARANCE, CITIZEN?

Ultraviolet, Friend Computer. YOU MAY PROCEED, CITIZEN.

Vapors Don't Shoot Back is an Orange-clearance adventure for *Paranoia*, the RPG set in a closed city dominated by a totally insane, sorry, lovably eccentric, Computer. PLEASE SPEAK MORE CLEARLY, CITIZEN.

Sorry. A team of two to six troubleshooters, unfortunately infiltrated by treasonous commie mutant scum and other undesirables, are tricked into undertaking an assignment which is not necessarily in the best interests of the Computer; they are to serve the High Programmer Nevo-U in his bid to defend



ing the keeper with a bit of fun as he portrays each eccentric character. The London episodes are extremely atmospheric, and should prove to be one of the high spots of the campaign.

Cairo, the intended destination of the Carlyle Expedition, is covered in the third booklet. The atmosphere of 1920s Egypt created is almost tangible. There is certainly lots for the investigators to do here, though again not all leads are bona fide. The mass of information builds up, and may engulf the players if they don't connect the various elements.

Kenya is the subject of the fourth chapter, and contains more of the same kind of plot that the previous three books have held. This adventure deals with the end of the Carlyle Expedition. Much of the scenario takes place away from civilisation, although a sizable portion also occurs around Nairobi. There are plenty of NPCs to interact with, and a familiar cult reappears.

The final booklet covers Shanghai. Here too can be found more adversaries, another cult, and mystery galore. There is also an old enemy for the players should they have completed another CoC campaign. On the plus side, Shanghai also contains many allies for the investigators, though these are slightly elusive.

The handouts booklet provides newspaper clippings, letters in *real* handwriting, quotations, a telegram and various other pieces that may be useful to the investigators. There is also a supplementary set of handouts on a separate piece of stiff card in the box, providing two business cards and a surprise item... *Masks* also contains a 4-page introduction so that the keeper can familiarise himself with the basic plot before tackling the scenarios.

Though many praises can be sung for *Masks*, I can foresee several problems.

Firstly, the plot is *very* complex, and novice keepers would be well advised to try other, smaller campaigns before attempting this tough cookie. The information is difficult to assimilate all in one go and even experienced keepers will probably have to read the work several times before they are fully happy with the story.

The campaign itself has such a deadly, difficult plot that players may find it very easy to lose investigators without uncovering much of the mystery. Whilst this is true for many *Cthulhu* scenarios, *Masks* emphasises it to a fine point. Players must learn to tread the very fine

line between being too inquisitive and not inquisitive enough, and must balance knowing too little and acting too early against knowing more but possibly acting too late.

Masks Of Nyarlathotep is an adventure that is fun for both sides to play. The players have a real mystery to get their teeth into, and the keeper is provided with NPCs in great numbers, all of which are fun to play. Some are dastardly, some insane, some whimsical. All have their own desires and motivations. This is the best campaign I have ever seen, from *Chaosium* or other sources. It will take some beating.

Complexity:	9	Ease of Use:	7
Production:	8	Value:	9
Skill:	9	Overall:	9

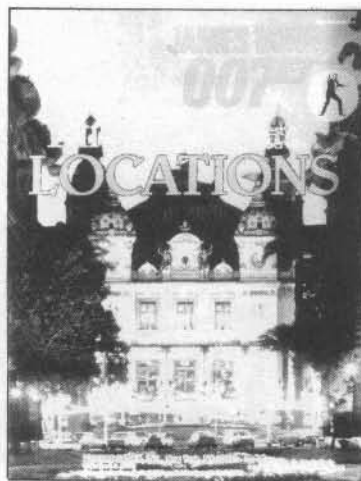
Phil Frances

THRILLING LOCATIONS RPG Supplement Victory Games

£9.50

I've had mixed feelings about supplements and scenarios for the *James Bond 007* RPG – the excellence of products like the *Q Manual* being let down by mediocre packages such as *For Your Information*. *Thrilling Locations* goes a long way towards putting the balance back towards quality, joining the *Q Manual* as an indispensable aid for the *007* game master.

Information on cities apart, background for the game has been thin on the ground; most GMs having to rely on their own knowledge of exotic environments and



settings in the world. *Thrilling Locations* provides information on a number of important places and things that will fill in a number of blank areas in the game master's knowledge. It is effectively a useful insight into the semi-unreal, glossy society world of cinema Bond; places to be *seen* at and transport to be *used* (and to be seen doing so!).

Previous information on cities, etc, has always been scant: *Thrilling Locations* hints at what is possible. The principality of Monaco, besides the usual map and notes typical of city descriptions, also has some of its more notable features, namely the Casino de Monte Carlo and the Hotel de Paris, covered in some depth. Background information is supplemented by colour

and black and white photographs – something that continues throughout the supplement, and very welcome it is too. The photographs round off the product nicely, providing useful visual images of the many locations.

The casino scene (a 'London casino' is covered as well as Monte Carlo) is complemented by a useful guide to the various games – roulette, chemin de fer and craps are a few that are detailed. The explanations are especially useful for non-gamblers like myself. The notes complement the more clinical handling of gambling in the *007* rules.

Famous hotels and restaurants are among the other locations included. Colour photographs and floor plans are again provided; floor plans of hotels being especially useful given the nefarious activities usually associated with them. Hotels come complete with notes on suites, facilities and entertainment, whilst the restaurants have all-important notes on the menu offered... Space is the enemy of this section: there is undue emphasis on American locations and, given that Bond is the epitome of the English gentleman spy, very little in the way of information on classy British establishments. Perhaps it says something for Britain's potential as a wildly exciting place.

From 'Where to Go', *Thrilling Locations* also lets you know 'How to Get There' – travel by rail, ship and plane. The railway section is primarily concerned with the Orient Express. Apart from one literary glitch in the references (Graham Greene wrote *Stamboul Train*, not *Stamboul Express*, as stated – someone was obviously on the wrong track), the section seems well researched, covering the modern Orient Express rather than the original. Floor plans and more photographs provide a useful look at opulent travel.

The section on luxury boats is a little disappointing – in a game of luxury travel, I might have expected a little on cruise liners such as the QE2, rather than what turns out to be a section on luxury yachts. Similarly, the notes on luxury air travel (on Regent Air) and the short notes about international airports are a little short on inspiration for the GM.

The amount of information provided in *Thrilling Locations* is one thing, but *Victory Games* have also seen fit to include a host of scenario and encounter ideas with each section of the book. These range from the implications of being given an object by a strange child in a hotel lobby (is it a gadget from Q or a bomb?), to finding the irrepressible Sheriff J.W. Pepper floating around in an inner tube far out to sea. Hard-pressed GMs will welcome these amusing sidelines and potential scenarios.

There's still plenty of information to be covered, however, and no doubt the equivalent of a *Thrilling Locations 2* (and 3, and...) will appear in due course. On the whole, I have very few quibbles about this supplement and would whole-heartedly recommend it to other *Bond* GMs.

Production:	8	Ease of Use:	7
Usefulness:	9	Value:	8
Overall:	9		Bob Neville