HOW TO PRODUCE A CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

A document for provisional chapters

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Introduction

The Chapter newsletter is one of the most important means of communication in a chapter. As soon as a provisional chapter is prepared to handle the job, they should start producing their own newsletter for the benefit of their membership.

This document was written to help those new chapters who are interested in starting their own newsletters. Included are suggestions about material to include in the newsletter, printing and mailing costs, and how to obtain articles. The material in this document contains suggestions only, and should be taken in that spirit. Chapters should use their newsletters to express their own individuality and not be a clone of other chapter.

This document was originally written and produced by Margo Toth, 1990 chair of the Internal Publications Committee. Significant contributions were made by Leslie Gillies, a previous editor of the Dallas Newsletter, and her help is greatly appreciated. Updates for the second revision of this document were supplied by Nikki Hansen and David Bartz, editors of the West Los Angeles newsletter and Ray Appling, editor of the Society newsletter. Any questions or comments concerning this manual should be addressed to:

IFGS – Internal Publications

PURPOSE OF A NEWSLETTER

The purpose of a newsletter is to serve as a means of communication between members of the chapter. Additionally, the newsletter can serve as a means of publicity for the chapter and can be distributed at conventions, gaming stores, etc.

PUBLICATION FREQUENCY

Newsletters are usually published monthly. Each editor should establish his or her own publication date, but it is commonly the first week of the month. Whatever the date chosen, publication should be reliable and consistent.

CONTENT

Each issue usually contains regular features. The list below contains some of the most commonly used features by the various chapters in IFGS. These are not requirements, and each newsletter editor and chapter membership should decide what they would like to see in their own newsletter.

1)	*Board Minutes* - Minutes for the last board meeting should be included. These minutes can be shortened if space in the issue is limited, but the editor should include a note stating they are abridged. Minutes can be obtained from the Chapter secretary.
2)	C*ommittee Reports* - If any of the standing committees have reports to make, these should be included. These include Safety, Public Relations, Quartermaster Corps, Membership, and Treasurer. Generally the editor will not hear from committee heads unless they have something to contribute, but the editor should touch base with them every several months anyway.
3)	*President's Corner* - The current president of the chapter can write a short article about events in the chapter. The editor will undoubtedly have to remind the president of this obligation.
4)	*Calendar of Events* - At a minimum, this should include the time and location of the next Chapter Board meeting. Dates of games and other committee meetings should also be included when available. The calendar can take any format, from a simple list to an actual calendar for the month. Other items you can choose to include are fighter practices, NPC meetings, committee meetings, birthdays, anniversaries, etc.
5)	*Editor's Column* - This is an optional column, but most editors have chosen to include it. Basically, the editor writes a short article concerning any current item of interest to the editor. The article should probably be included on the page of "letters to the editor".
6)	*Game Sanctioning Status* - The Chairperson of the Sanctioning committee should provide a list of the status of all games in sanctioning. It's very important that this list be included in each issue, since it's often the only means chapter members have of seeing the long-range possibilities for the gaming season.
7)	*Feature Articles* - Feature articles include articles written about games, interviews with chapter members, lore for upcoming games, short stories, character histories, poetry, etc. These types of things may be the bulk of the newsletter, and will need to be solicited by the editor. It's best to get a backlog of these so that you have them to use when you need them.
8)	*Letters to the editor* - Any letters mailed to the editor should be published. However, if a letter contains defamatory material, the editor may choose not to publish it, or alternatively, may choose to ask someone on the other side of the issue to publish a rebuttal (see editor policy below).
9)	*Artwork - S*ome artwork and (or) cartoons will help the presentation of the newsletter greatly.
10)	*Chapter Safety Officer Report* - A report from the Chapter Safety Officer (CFO) on up-coming game, sometimes about the game just past, sometimes with policies from the Society.
11)	*Game Producer's Report* – This is a column that almost everyone reads first, and lists the awards given for recent games (Best PC and NPC Roleplaying, costume, etc.) for a game. Work with your Chapter Registry and Game Producers to get this information.
12)	*Transitions* - This is a column which can be used to announce in- or out-of-game birthdays, weddings, deaths, births. Also included here are obituaries for player characters who have died in games. If the

	player doesn't want to write their own obit, you can ask their loremaster, GM, or anyone else that was there. (Of course, sensitivity as to whether the individual *wants* their obit published is also recommended)
13)	*Official History* - This column is usually written by the game writer after a game is finished and is supposed to tell the final "official" end to the story. Sometimes every team comes up with a different ending so an 'official" ending is needed. It is very hard to get these columns written.
14)	*List of NPCs for a Game* - This is a list of who played what roles in a game and who had what support functions. It lets the PCs know who was playing the NPC who beat up on him or her, or who was Safety, or who played the two zombies, etc. Check with the GD or Chapter Bank for this information.
15)	*Miscellaneous* - Several miscellaneous articles commonly occur in the newsletter. The editor can determine when he or she wants to include them, and may want to print them when the issue is shorter. • Phone List - At least twice a year, the newsletter should send out a phone list of all current members in the chapter. Work with the membership chairperson to get this list, but be sure you have permission to print everyone's phone number. • Flyers -Many game designers will want to include flyers for their game in the newsletter. This is an excellent service for the Chapter newsletter to provide, and is usually done at no charge to the game designer (except for making him/her help staple and fold). However, if the flyer insert adds to the postage, then that game's budget should be charged for the additional postage. • Personals - Personals usually occur in the newsletter on a monthly basis, and are one of the things about the newsletter that many people enjoy the most. These are tidbits of in-character correspondence that can supply colorful information on current events. • Submission Dates - each issue of the newsletter should list the due dates for submissions for the next issue, along with the location to send articles. A simple note stating the newsletter welcomes contributions from members of all chapters is a good thing to include.

VERIFICATION OF FACTS

From time to time the editor will need to verify critical information contained in articles submitted for publication. In particular, calendar dates for games should be verified with the chairperson of the Sanctioning Committee or the Game Designer.

PRODUCTION AND FORMAT

The production and format of the newsletter is up to the editor. An editor may choose to have a separate production staff or produce the newsletter him or herself. Obviously, the newsletter should be produced on a computer, but the only requirement for the production is that the printing be legible and that spelling errors be corrected.

The editor will need access to a computer for this job. A two-column format with flush right margins is a useful format because it puts more words on a page. Many word processing programs available today (such as Microsoft Word™) include templates that you can use for quick and easy publication. Depending on your computer experience and daring, explore publishing programs such as Adobe Pagemaker ™ or Quark Express ™. These can help you set up set formats and save you hours and hours each time you publish an issue.

A good printer has a lot to do with your final product. Some dot matrix printers don't make originals that copy well at the copy shop. Even a new ribbon doesn't always help. Check it out before you decide to do a year's worth of P.R. on any particular printer. If you can't print all of your copies directly to a printer, get a clean laser-printed draft for use as a copy master. The cleaner your original, the better your subsequent copies will look.

DEADLINES

The first and biggest rule of being a Newsletter Editor is: SET A DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS AND STICK TO IT FOR ALL YOU'RE WORTH. When you try to be flexible with your deadlines, your members will discover this very quickly and then all the promised material begins to come in later and later and you have less and less time to actually get it produced and in the mail. Material that comes in before the deadline should be guaranteed to be printed in the current issue if you have room. Material that comes in after the deadline becomes subject to your whim and will only be printed if you have room and time.

MAILING

The editor is responsible for getting mailing labels from the membership committee, purchasing stamps and mailing the newsletters. The editor can make a significant savings by hand delivering the newsletter to people that the editor sees o a frequent basis. However, this is NOT required, and has been known to cause distribution delays.

Ten pages of text copied front-and-back onto five pages is most that you can reliably put under one stamp (currently $0.32 for the first ounce). A sixth page is flirting with the $0.20 required for each additional ounce. The cost of the second ounce could destroy your budget. Investigate total expenses before you decide to commit to a second ounce. Once you do decide to commit to a second ounce, don't waste that extra postage on just one sheet of paper. Try to get more material, but be careful of your costs, every page drives the copy cost up.

The cheapest method of reproduction is Xeroxing for low volume newsletters. However, if the membership increases to 300, offset printing methods should be considered.

Another option is electronic printing for those members with access to email. Creating your newsletter in a PDF format can save hundreds on copy cost and postage for your chapter.

STAFFING

Outside of the editor, no one else is officially assigned as staff to the newsletter. The editor will certainly receive regular contributions from the secretary of the board, the sanctioning committee, the president of the board, and committee members. Any other help the editor requires (for production, folding, stapling, mailing, etc.), must be solicited by the Editor - and additional help is highly recommended. This can easily become a burnout job without adequate help.

BUDGET

The editor is required to stay within budgetary constraints as established by the Chapter Board. With changes in printing costs and postage, the budget may increase or decrease, so the editor should remain in contact with the treasurer concerning any anticipated changes. The editor should turn in a new budget to the treasurer each year. The editor should obtain receipts for ALL purchases, including stamps; the treasurer cannot reimburse payments without a receipt.

On the matter of cost, check every single copy shop in town. There are two different methods of calculating the cost for printing, and one of them is a lot cheaper for front-and-back copying than the other one. Most of the professional shops calculate their charge at a flat rate per each original page, even though you are printing on front and back, and they want you to turn in one-sided originals. Some places charge for the piece of paper, for the ink on one side, for the ink on the second side, and there is a separate charge for collating and stapling. When you sit down with a calculator, this method comes out quite a bit cheaper. A good actual cost is about 4.75 cents per two-sided page. The moral is: "Don't assume anything". Get a quote far enough in advance to not mess up your mailing date. Sometimes being a not-for-profit organization can get you a break too. Ask. Also, rates may change if you're doing more than 100 copies. Again, ask. If your treasurer approves, it might be useful to get a charge account at the printing house that you choose to use. That way you have to deal with fewer receipts and it makes your life a bit easier.

EDITORIAL POLICY

Each editor should determine what their policy for the newsletter will be, and discuss their position with the board when they take over job. The editor's policies will mostly effect the type of articles that are printed. If the editor is interested in stirring people up, he or she might choose to include controversial material. Alternatively, the editor may choose to keep the newsletter relatively non-political. These decisions are up to the editor, but should be discussed with the Chapter Board beforehand for the protection of all involved.

HOW TO CAPTURE SUBMISSIONS

- Publish your newsletter mailing address frequently.

- Publish your guidelines and policies several times a year.

- If you have to reject a submission, be sure to contact the author and explain why you couldn't use it. This avoids hard feelings and may get the article rewritten into a more dramatic piece. Sometimes inadequacy is the result of lack of time rather than lack of talent.

- If you change a submission, be sure to contact the author and let them know. Tell them what you did and why. This is just as important as communicating rejections and should be done before the issue goes into publication.

- If you told someone that you were going to use their article one month and have to put it off until next month because of lack of space, let them know. Otherwise, you will receive irate phone calls asking what happened.

- Take the initiative and communicate with your authors before they see something in the newsletter they don't like and jump to the wrong conclusion.

- Make yourself available. Talk about the newsletter to people after games, board meetings, membership meetings, anyplace where IFGS people gather. Bounce up to complete strangers and let them know you're the editor. Be brazen and ask if they can draw; you should always be on the look-out for art and artists. When participants know who you are, once they feel comfortable with IFGS you stand a better chance of getting personals and maybe articles. You can't be a stranger to the membership.

- Hanging around at sign-out at game sites is a great way to get a hold of people. PCs and NPCs are still caught up in the game and they may be willing to write up a decent personal or talk to you about a future article or their own up-coming game. After game parties are another good location. Bring a small pad of paper and a pen and pass it around the table, or bring a box for folks to drop their personals into, if they don't want others to read them before publication.

- Have 'themed' issues that spark the creative juices of your membership. These can be as fantastical or sensible as you like – from 'travelogues' to administrative or novice issues. The main goal is to engage the interest of your readership, and more importantly, their participation.

WORDS OF ADVICE

1) CONSISTANCY: Decide on a format style and stick with it, at least within any one issue. After a while you will probably settle on a permanent style, I like two-column and 10-pitch whenever possible but most of the time it was necessary to use 12-pitch to help space things out. Be consistent within an issue if you are experimenting with design elements. Doing labels and headings in 5 different script styles doesn't look very professional. Of course, sometimes there are submissions that just cry out, to be treated differently. Go with it.

2) ACCURACY: You will have to come to some kind of understanding with your SC about what kind of game information/advertising you can print before the game runs, especially if the game is still in sanctioning.

3) ART: Beg, borrow, or steal artwork. It is a rare commodity. If you happen to capture a resident artist or cartoonist, treat them like royalty. Don't turn your nose up at "designs" or "doodles"; they are easier to come up with than cartoons and are great for filling in the blank space at the end of a column.

4) EDITING: It is your decision as to what is dirty or in questionable taste. You are the editor. You may delete, change, or add anything you want, but always notify your writers of changes in their material or the timing of publication. NEVER put anything regarding death, demons, witches, or anything that could possibly be misinterpreted where the U.S. Post Office or some nosey neighbor could see it. That's a good place for art work, membership forms, and safety waivers.

5) "COLOR" ELEMENTS: One of the biggest elements that shapes the mood of your newsletter is "personals." The policy of what constitutes a "personal" is the one thing that varies the most between chapters. Don't print "personals" that can't be understood by at least five people. Avoid the "Hi, Joe.. How are you?" type of personal. They can use a stamp for the same thing. They shouldn't be using yours. Avoid personals dealing with the real world; as in "Go Texas" or "Go O.U." They don't have a place in IFGS. Decide whether you want to scatter personals throughout the issue as fillers or whether you want to create a "Personals" page. Try to get the personals to be longer than one line. Three lines at a minimum makes for a nice piece of characterization.

6) Welcome submissions with cries of joy. Hugs are not out of place. If you are openly enthusiastic, your readership is more likely to be, too.

7) It is possible to assemble and mail the newsletter by yourself, but if you can get help, spread the work around. People are usually willing to help if you just "happen" to appear with the newsletter and draft them for a work party. Be sure to acknowledge their help in the next issue. People love to see their names in print. Especially if it only cost them an hour's worth of time.

8) YOU ARE THE EDITOR. Your word is law. Your decisions are final.