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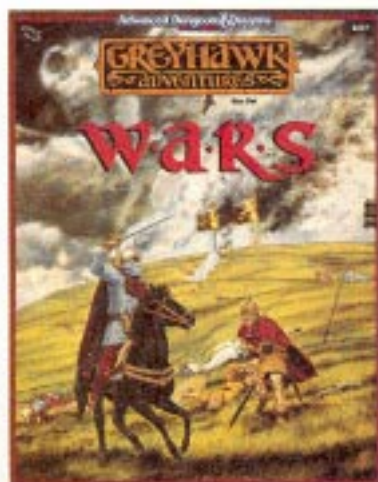
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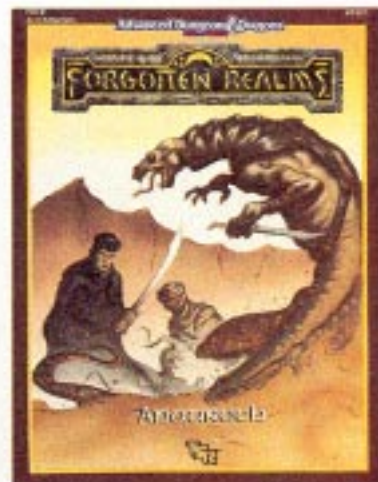


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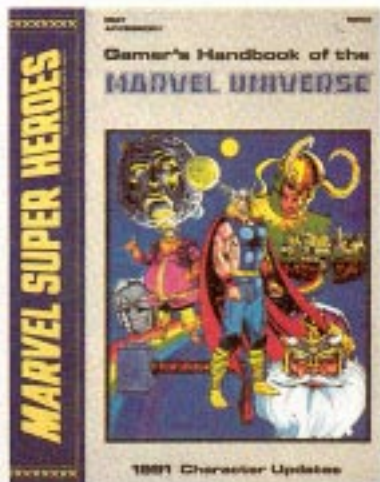


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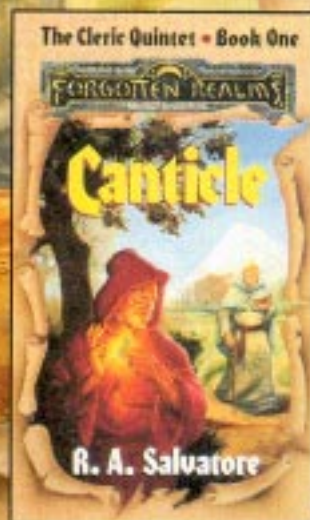
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CONTENTS

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

- 9** **Trouble in Campaign-Land**
Need creative solutions to adventure design? Here they are!
- 10** **Inventing the "Instant" Adventure—Arthur Collins**
You can improvise with the best of DMs—if you prepare for it.
- 16** **The perils of Prehistory** — Gregory W. Detwiler
Dinosaurs could be the least of your problems in fantasy time-traveling.
- 24** **Creative Campaigns: A New Recipe** — Tim Schroeder
New histories, new magic, and new universes: three keys to an all-new adventuring world.

OTHER FEATURES

- 31** **The MARVEL®-Phile** — Steven E. Schend and Dale A. Donovan
At last, for the first time, the incredible 3-D Man™! (Who?)
- 41** **The Voyage of the Princess Ark** — Bruce A. Heard
It all started with a Spanish-speaking halfling clown. . .
- 48** **Uktena's Crest** — fiction by Kit Wesler
A rash promise breeds many outcomes—among them, death.
- 57** **The Role of Computers** — Hartley, Patricia, and Kirk Lesser
Your goal is to build a castle or die trying. Your foes would prefer the latter.
- 72** **Only the Best Will Do!** — The editors
What was 1990's best role-playing game or magazine? Check the ORIGINS™ Awards.
- 80** **Role-playing Reviews** — Allen Varney
Evil biocomputers! Punk vampires! Cthulhu with a chain saw! On sale now !
- 87** **Rhyme & Reason** — Scott Roach
The Riddle in Gaming, Part 1: Some uses and examples. . .
- 91** **The Answer is... the Riddle!** — Mark Anthony
The Riddle in Gaming, Part 2: . . .and how to make up your own.
- 96** **The Role of Books** — John C. Bunnell
If you mix cyberpunk and high fantasy, you get *Life on the Border*.
- 112** **Through the Looking Glass** — Robert Bigelow
'Tis the season to give: the annual holiday shopping-list round-up.

DEPARTMENTS

5 Letters	38 TSR Previews	102 Dragonmirth
6 Editorial	69 Forum	104 Twilight Empire
35 Convention Calendar	75 Sage Advice	108 Gamers Guide

COVER

In keeping with our issue's theme of creative campaign design, we present Paul Jaquays's vision of a unique world called Bramble, composed entirely of thorn vines. It and similar worlds are found in the Thorn World sphere in the SPELLJAMMER™ setting (the world Briar is in the background). Who lives here, and how would you go about mapping the place? That's for the heroes to worry about!

LETTERS

What did you think of this issue? Do you have a question about an article or have an idea for a new feature you'd like to see? In the United States and Canada, write to: Letters, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Letters, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

Sci-Fi TV News

Dear Dragon,

A new cable channel is starting up, called the Sci-Fi Channel, which pledges to present the very best in science fiction, fantasy, and horror. Its address is:

The Sci-Fi Channel
2255 Glades Road, Suite 237W
Boca Raton FL 33431

There is a "fan line" operating at 1-900-847-SFTV [calls are \$2 for the first minute and \$.95 for each additional minute]. The director of fan relations is Auriette Hahn.

Readers are encouraged to write for information and urge their local cable systems to carry this channel.

Pierre Savoie
Toronto, Ontario

My brochure on the Sci-Fi Channel says that it will run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, presenting numerous science-fiction and fantasy movies, television series (like Dark Shadows, The Prisoner, Doctor Who, Flash Gordon, Space 1999, and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy), and "much, much more!" I have no current information on the channel's starting date. Let's hope for the best!

And a final note: Don't dial a 900 phone number without your parents' permission, if you're living with them and want to avoid having them wave the phone bill in your face.

Well, maybe not

Dear Dragon,

What I think would be a great new feature for your already great magazine would be a pen-pal section, something in which people could send in their addresses. . . . There's a lot gamers have to talk about. Beneath each name and address, the interested people could write down which games they like. What do you think?

Cynthia Carman
Mesa AZ

DRAGON Magazine and its predecessor, The Strategic Review, have actually tried to produce pen-pal columns several times in the last decade or so, but it is very taxing for your editors to sort through letters, input new letters, update changes of address, etc. When we gave it up the last time, it was for good. We'd rather not run a

pen-pal section as such, but I do have a partial solution. Barbara Young has been running the full addresses of those whose letters are published in DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® Adventures if the writer asks this to be done. We can do the same for the "Letters" and "Forum" sections of DRAGON Magazine—and, from now on, we shall.

What's the record?

Dear Dragon,

On April 15, 1984, my cousin and three of his friends set a world record of 110 hours of playing the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, as part of a fund raiser for the Muscular Dystrophy Association. Now, three of my friends and I are wondering what the present-day record is for the longest time the D&D® game has been played. We would like to break this record and would probably do it as part of a fund raiser. Any information you could send us would be gratefully appreciated.

Jon Hughes
Dubuque IA

We've stopped keeping records on who's played the longest role-playing game and how long the session lasted. We are also not sure we want to recommend that anyone stay awake for any period over 24 hours doing anything, even playing a D&D game. It isn't particularly good for your health. We've received several letters over the years asking this same question (we've answered it before in this column, too), and the best answer your editors have is that we can't help you. But you've certainly picked a worthy cause. Why not have a fund-raising tournament, then donate the proceeds to your favorite charity? We wish you all the best.

TSR means...

Dear Dragon,

I've been wondering for quite a while what "TSR" stands for. Thanks.

P.S. Space hamsters rule!

David Countryman
Menlo Park CA

We've answered this question in this column before, too, but you are obviously a gentleman and scholar of considerable taste and distinction, so we will answer it again. TSR, Inc. was originally known as Tactical Studies Rules, back in the Precambrian epoch of gaming history, until about 1975. At that point (judging from the notices run in The Strategic Review, DRAGON Magazine's original incarnation), the acronym took over and the company was variously known as TSR Rules, TSR Games, or TSR Hobbies, Inc. Today, the letters "TSR" actually don't stand for anything at all; they're merely part of the corporate name and logo.

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EDITORIAL

REEEEEEEP!!!



Because this is the 101st* issue of DRAGON® Magazine that I have worked on since I came to TSR, Inc. in 1983, I was moved to write an editorial that would stand apart from all before it for its insightful commentary on gaming today, one that challenged readers with its intellectual depths yet moved them with its heart-felt, world-wise humanity.

And then I changed my mind.

Certainly, one of the most important controversies involving role-playing in recent years concerned the appearance of the giant space hamster in the *Monstrous Compendium SPELLJAMMER™* Appendix. Gamer was set against gamer, DM against DM. Board, miniatures, computer, and play-by-mail gamers feared they would be dragged into the storm. The Soviet Union collapsed.

To resolve this strife, I set up a contest in DRAGON issue #171 to hear from the readers themselves as to the reasons why they love giant space hamsters. A year's subscription to DRAGON Magazine was offered to the most original letter on the topic, with other prizes going to the runners-up.

The contest has officially ended, and the results are now in. Do gamers like giant space hamsters? No—they LOVE them! I have incontrovertible proof that the giant space hamster is here to stay. Over 120 effusive letters were received, quite literally from around the world, from places as far away as Iowa.

Judging the entries was difficult as the readers proved to be strikingly creative and original. (Note to several readers: That's "hamster;" not "hampster.") Some

entries came with cartoons or decorated envelopes, and others were many pages in length. In the end, a grand-prize winner was chosen with four runners-up; each of these top entries will receive a DRAGON Magazine/DUNGEON® Adventurers mug, with the grand-prize winner getting the subscription as well. Runners-up include Michael Sykes and Eric Finley of Edmonton, Alberta; Jordan T. Dawe of Qualicum Beach, British Columbia; and Ian "Hamster-Crazy Dude" Williams, of Lexington, North Carolina.

The best comments offered on why giant space hamsters are so loved by DMs and players are reproduced here, in no particular order. I'll note that Jarret Schumann (Seguin, Tex.) sent the most letters, Rich Burlew (Clark, N.J.) sent the longest species name, the Fenderstradt Gaming Society and Bridge Club (Lawrence, Kan.) sent the most species names, and John Park (Waukegan, Ill.) sent the longest short story (too long for the contest, but fun to read). Tracey Greathouse sent a clipping from the August 20th issue of *Weekly World News* about the topic ("Farmer raises giant hamsters— 3 feet tall!"). To everyone who sent in any response at all, you have my undying gratitude and that of hamsters everywhere. And thanks to Jeff Grubb for thinking of them to begin with. Happy 101st issue to you all!

Roger E. Moore

* I was in error in the editorial of issue #170 when I said this would be my 100th issue (I started with issue #75). Statistics was never my strongest talent, and 101 is a perfectly fine number anyway, so who cares.

Giant space hamsters are the greatest and most versatile monsters ever devised for the AD&D® game. Have the carnivorous ones raid a town or have an intelligent hamster lead a goblin tribe. The amount of adventure to be had with hamsters is virtually unlimited.

I personally let a few loose in my FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign to my overwhelming entertainment (you should have seen the looks on the players' faces when their characters got stunned by a Two-Headed Lernaean Bombardier Giant Space Hamster). My two personal favorites are the Fire-Breathing Phase Doppleganger Giant Space Hamster (because it's got brains and brawn) and Tyrannohamsterus Rex (because I like intriguing new pancake recipes—i.e., 10d10 damage feet plus slow PCs).

I've never had a problem with my players cross-breeding with the hamsters—yet. But marriage is planned between a (unique) Albino Flying Sentient Kleptomaniac Giant Space Hamster and a kender. [We hope you really mean "characters" and not "players."]

Just try to imagine things like *grain of hamster summoning*, *amulets of hamster warding* (resembling either cats or mousetraps), and *potions of hamster control* (in bottles shaped like a hamster's water bottle).

On Ravenloft, the demi-plane of Terror, the evil gnomish vampire Count Strahd von Gnomovich keeps the poor townspeople of Bore-ovia under the dark heel of tyranny by letting loose his flights of Carnivorous Flying Giant Space Hamsters. Across the sky they soar, in numbers so great that they block out the sun, screeching like a horde of furry banshees. Will no one aid these people and free them from this soulless devil?

In my campaign, giant space hamsters have the innate ability to cast a variation of the *maze* spell once per day. It's called *hamster wheel*.

[U.S. embassy, Vienna]

I like (no, LOVE) giant space hamsters because Roger Moore (not the James Bond guy) loves them, and I think that's a pretty darn good reason! [Exactly 3,306 exclamation marks followed this comment.]

As a giant space hamster, I became enthused when a gnome came brandishing DRAGON issue #171 and asked if he could interview me for a letter to submit to your magazine. I promptly stepped on and devoured him, but the concept kept tugging at me, so I decided to write the letter myself.

Despite popular assumptions, we're not dumb, useless creatures, but are instead quite ingenious. While "intelligent" creatures prance about getting slain by adventurers, we just watch and lick our fur. When the adventurers try to pet us cute "dumb" creatures, we step on and devour them.

One of my best characters is a giant space hamster converted to the lands of the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. Right now, he is a 21st-level ranger with 154 hit points, and armor class of -4, and he uses an obsidian bow (damage 10-50).

I like giant space hamsters because they all have supra-genius intelligence and they are all NPC spellcasters. Here are some spells that only giant space hamsters can use:

Fluffy fall: Causes body hair to grow to 8' long for one round, cushioning the impact of a fall;

Passage: Allows escape from any type of cage, no matter how complex;

Fuzzy ball: Shoots a ball of fur from the caster's hands [forepaws?], exploding on impact for 8d6 points of cute & cuddly damage; and, the dreaded

Habitrail the soul: Encases the victim in a glass cage, forcing him to wander a shifting labyrinth of clear plastic tubes. Breaking the cage will free the victim.

I love giant space hamsters because they brought me out of GM retirement. The inspiration of the sheer havoc I could let loose bounced around in my skull until I came up with an adventure: The Hunt For Wooly Rupert. A colony from the Gnome Planet hadn't been heard from in two years, and a special committee was chosen to investigate. A Cleric of Applied Technology, a Transmuter, a Troubleshooter (thief subclass), and a Samurai (all gnomes) were the closest ones handy. . . . I'm already working on the sequel, based on the civil war that ensues on the Gnome Planet over the issue of whether a Mixmaster should have a lid.

Now, with the creation of giant space hamsters, I can combine my two favorite pastimes: AD&D games and communicating with small furry things (except now they're large furry things).

I think whoever invented the giant space hamster is simply a genius! [from Israel]

Elves, Thyatians, Tinker Gnomes, lend me your ears:

What a piece of work are hamsters! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!

Oh, that this too too solid flesh would melt,

Thaw, and resolve itself into hamster fur!

Giant space hamsters are related to the spunky and ornery three-legged-war-hamsters-with-horns that have been known to sing the actual concert lyrics for various artists like Milli Vanilli and Janet Jackson,

Imagine injecting yourself with lye. You'd know the pain is there because you'd be able to feel it, but it would be so intense that it would be impossible to describe. It's the same way with my love for this godlike being.

The development of over 9,000 distinct sub-species of giant space hamsters has opened a new science for gnomes. The field of hamsterology is projected to create 10,000 new jobs and generate enough money to pay for the damage caused by two Fire-Breathing Phase Dopple-ganger Giant Space Hamsters to the outer three planets of Krynnspace.

Space hamsters rule! Death to unbelievers!

I love giant space hamsters because they go so well with scallions, garlic, corn bread stuffing, and cayenne pepper. I also like them broiled with a honey glaze, or coated with egg white and cracker crumbs, then deep fat fried. My favorite, however, has to be giant space hamster tartare.

B. Constrictor
[Thanks, Loren.]

Giant space hamsters are the epitome of beauty, and if given proper education they should flourish. I think that one day giant space hamsters will be gods and rule the universe.

I was orphaned as a baby, about to be annihilated by the Death Koalas, when these tall, sexy, and furry space hamsters rescued me. Though I was allergic to hamsters, they were always there for me. For 20 years, I ate, dated, bathed, and learned from these noble creatures. They taught me that I should respect all life and love everyone as my brother. When I left them, I felt I was a true hamster.

I have created entire planets of hamster-riding gnomish knights. I think there is no more pliable or survivable creature in any realm.

Giant space hamsters are the best, cheapest, and most efficient creators of artificial gravity around. Just let 'em run around in a space station for a little while, and you should feel the Gs mount up pretty quick.

Who wants to ride some silly war horse when you could have the giant space hamster mount?

I like Giant Tyrannosaurus Space Hamsters. Every paladin should have one. After proper training to fetch a stick, they are GREAT! You just throw the stick to the far side of any opposing critters and yell "Fetch!" Fido (my hamster) runs over the critters to get the stick, then across them again to bring it back. Fido has 376,423 XP so far!

The only problem with them is that "hamster" begins with an "H" and not with an "A," so that they could be more proudly displayed at the beginning of the *Monstrous Compendium* and not stuck in the middle with wimps like death knights, helmed horrors, and halflings.

As a giant space hamster, I am appalled to learn that some people find us so ludicrous that they tear out our page. Poor little sorry giant me and my friends should be given a full-color, four-page spread. How many spelljamming ships have been destroyed by flying into giant space sunflower seeds? Not many, and do we get any praise for our pains? No, we just get torn from the book.

The real reason I like giant space hamsters is because Wooly Rupert came to me in a dream and said he would sit on me if I didn't devote myself to worshiping giant space hamsters.

Hamsters are wonderful,
Hamsters are cool,
And if you don't like 'em,
You're really a fool.
So if you're in the mood
For something real funny,
Use the space hamster,
Not the space bunny.

Giant space hamsters are a veritable plethora of wonder.

I was personally visited by giant space hamsters when I was younger. And they were not the monsters that everyone has made them out to be. In fact, they were quite kind. They told me what my life's purpose would be. "Someday," they said, "we will be unjustly accused. When that day comes, you must speak for our race and tell humanity of our true nature. We wish for humanity and giant hamsterkind alike to walk together in peace." And now I ask—no, beg you to join with me in the welcoming of our spacebound friends.

Your idea about giant space hamsters is a stroke of unadulterated genius. It may be the best idea I have ever heard. I run 53 AD&D campaigns, and every character has a pet hamster. I have devised a new PC race called Hamster Thieves. I own 36 hamsters. When I'm reincarnated, I want to come back as a hamster. I can't believe that those dullards didn't like your idea. If I was in charge of Game Design, I would make a Royal Bureau of Giant Space Hamster Lovers. I would write a novel called *Everybody Loves Those Cute, Furry, Loveable Giant Space Hamsters*. I would like to be a giant space hamster just for the sex because I love them so much. I hope that all the other gamers of the world share my views.

It would be awesome to be able to ride a Giant Space Hamster to school instead of a loud, smelly, cold school bus.

I run a WORLD OF GREYHAWK® campaign in which I have allowed giant space hamsters as companions for a wild elven tribe of beastmasters. [from Italy.]

All nonbelievers, I must implore—
The giant space hamster, do not ignore.
The life of a hamster may lack fanfare;
A bleak cage of glass is its only lair.
Yet think: Was it not the rodents of lore
That outlived the fabled dinosaur?

My character, Sandy, spent a lot of her time in the prison of the Pasha of Manashaka, Calimshan. She was given only dried bread and water for dinner, so to spice it up she had mice. Of course, when she escaped she had a liking for roast mouse. . . . [Later] Sandy purchased two giant space hamsters. One was a pet; the other she cooked. It then became a delicacy all over wildspace. [from Australia]

I have a wonderful feeling inside myself ever since the release of the SPELLJAMMER™ appendix to the *Monstrous Compendium*. Flipping through its pages, I invariably end up gazing for long and joyous hours at the article on giant space hamsters. These amazingly creative and imaginative creatures are definitely the most wonderful monsters I have ever seen, read of, or heard of. Undoubtedly they took a great many hours to dream up, and whoever thought of them is an absolute genius. Were there such a thing, I am sure the designer would be awarded a Nobel Prize in the field of monster design.

Continued on page 100

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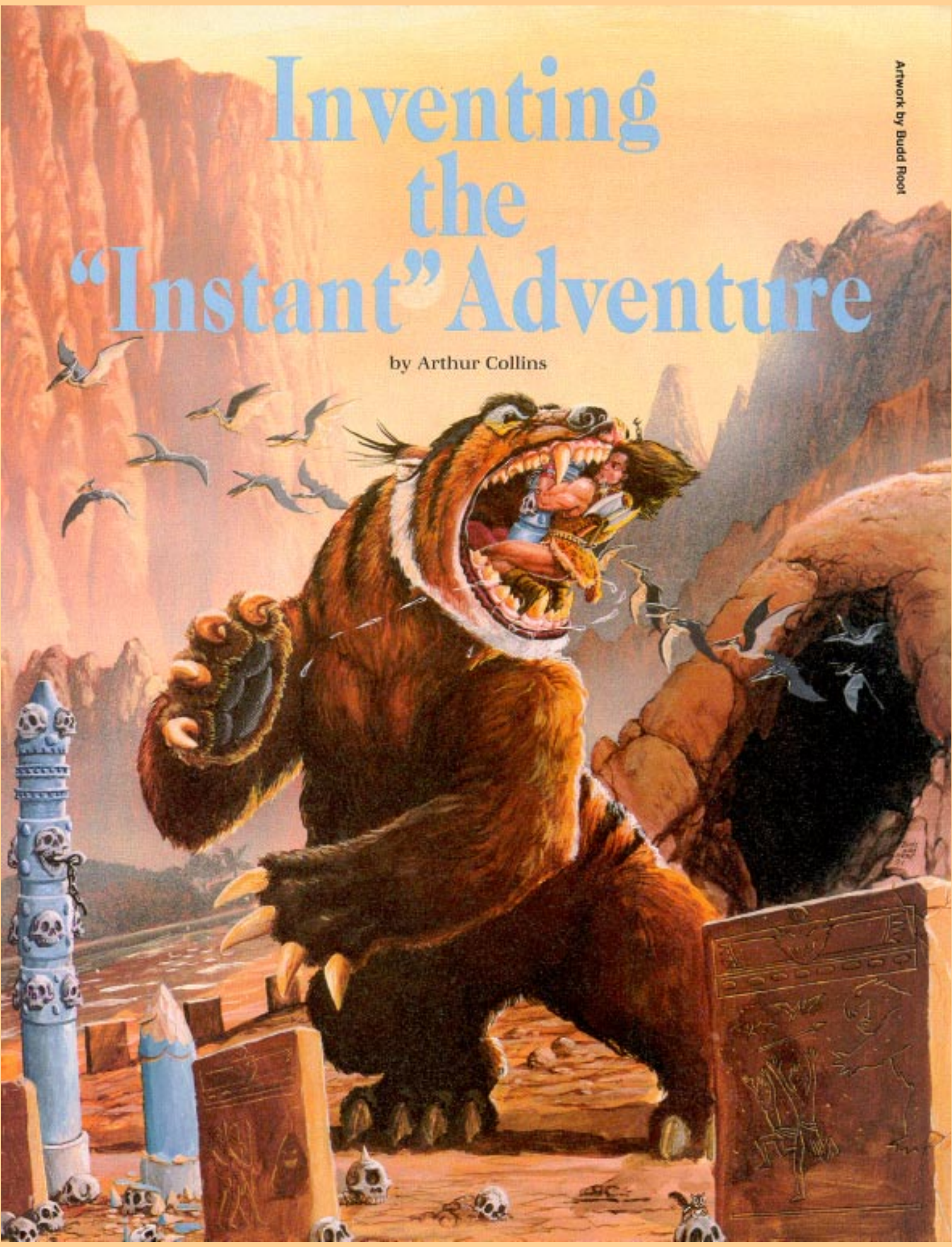
Trouble in Campaign-Land

Artwork by Lissanne Lake



Inventing the “Instant” Adventure

by Arthur Collins





DMs: If you have to wing it, make out a flight plan

All of us, Dungeon Masters and players alike, have fond memories of some magnificent AD&D® adventures we played. Sometimes these were published modules; at other times, DMs labored long hours over the adventures to make them what they were. In either case, we love to sit and rehash the puzzles, struggles, and hair's-breadth escapes we had.

One problem with role-playing in an ongoing fantasy role-playing campaign is that you can't have big, set-piece adventures all the time. Players need minor activities to fill out their PCs' time; DMs need breathers in which to construct new marvels. In the meantime, what are the characters to do? Also, players are prone to make choices not provided for in the DM's scenarios; this often sends them in directions that the DM has not anticipated. What are the consequences of their choices?

There will always be the need for "instant" adventures that the DM throws together and referees by the seat of his pants. This article aims to help the DM in his design of such adventures by discussing game-mechanics shortcuts helpful for creating them. Following this, two dozen scenarios for instant adventures are offered.

Instant problems

Two sorts of problems confront the DM constructing an adventure on the wing. The first sort is that of game mechanics; AD&D and similar games are very complicated affairs, with lots of numbers associated with every peril; even if they weren't, they often take place in very complicated locales—castles, mazes, and so forth. To

simplify the load on the DM, certain shortcuts are advisable.

1. *Keep an NPC database.* Whether a computer database or just a card file, use this to store the NPCs and monsters with personality that you created for earlier games. Then when you need a 7th-level mage, a bugbear shaman, or a gnome thief, you don't have to create a new one; just change the name and start playing the new character with the same old statistics. The players won't know the difference, and you can edit the NPC's possessions and skills as you go. The great advantage is that the armor classes, THAC0s, spells, and whatnot are already done up. After saving them for a time, you will have loads of NPCs and monsters at your fingertips. If you don't have the time to make up new characters for your games, copy them from published scenarios—but keep them on file!

2. *Use the law of averages.* When you suddenly have to come up with a tribe of bugbears or troop of yeomen, don't waste your time rolling hit points and such. If a given foe has 3 HD, figure 5 hp/HD for average types, or 6 hp/HD for elite types. Likewise, to beef up a bunch of guards, don't bother to figure up their strength scores; just look up their THAC0 and give them all a +1 bonus to hit for being tough. After all, once they've been slaughtered, who's going to care?

3. *Take the players where you've been.* When you don't have time to map out an area, imagine some place you've actually been. A wilderness area or town square you are familiar with makes a great encounter area, and you'll have no trouble

describing it to them. I once used a Boy Scout camp I was familiar with for a druid's lair, as I knew all the campsites and trails. You can also do this with state parks and other places that furnish you with simple maps. Towns are no problem, either: The drug store becomes an outfitter's, the undertaker's remains an undertaker's, all the bars around the square are taverns, etc. The players' minds are seeing a medieval city, even if you're describing the town you grew up in. Large buildings in your campaign can be court houses, schools, churches, and so forth from your memory.

4. *KISMIF.* This stands for "Keep it simple; make it fun." When under the pressure of setting the stage even as the play is being acted out on it, keep the stage simple. People are more interesting than buildings, so let your improvised adventures take place in open areas, simple buildings, etc. Without sounding like I'm advocating all hack-and-slash adventures, remember that action is more fun than architecture. Keep the players doing things, not listening to complicated explanations. In set-piece adventures, you would have maps, pictures, and prepared items to show them. When you don't have all that, don't overcomplicate the game.

5. *Have a wandering-monster menu.* Notice that I said a menu, not a table. When you are creating on your feet, you don't have time to fool around with random events. Select your encounters according to your experience of what works. Is it time for a big encounter, or do you think only a minor harassment is called for? Should you soften the PCs up some

more, or is the party having a hard time keeping up with what you've thrown at it so far? Pay attention to the rhythm of the game and how the players are handling it. Keep them slightly off balance, but don't overwhelm them. Be logical, but if logic is boring, throw it out the window. Keep the action moving. Tables and reference books are lists of suggestions, not commands.

6. *Don't tell the players everything.* This is particularly important when you don't know everything yourself. Players get used to being handed the "whys" of a situation (e.g., the NPC did that because he's on so-and-so's side). Don't tell the players "why"; let them *worry* about it. Along the way, they will argue over many possibilities while you merely smile devilously. If you let them stew over it long enough, they will even think up ways of rationalizing your most bizarre lapses of logic for you. Listen to your players, keep providing the fun, and worry about how to make sense of it all later.

Adventurous adventures

There are two bases upon which all adventures rest: conflict and wonder. Without conflict, no story can be told; without wonder, one might as well role-play accountants and cashiers. The instant adventure needs conflict and wonder just as much as the completely thought-out adventure does.

It is important to remember that several types of conflict can drive a story. The main characters can experience conflict among themselves. They can experience it within their social or physical environment (politics, intrigue, war, survival against the elements, etc.). They can struggle to change their environment. They can be so placed that they must conquer or die. They can try to escape. They can be waylaid by perils. They might find themselves ill-suited to deal with the environment (social or physical) because they prepared for a different environment. Their status changes can create new difficulties. An individual can also experience conflict within himself.

Not all of these types of conflict are as fun to role-play as they are to read about. For example, conflict among the party is usually guaranteed not to be fun. For another example, look at Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* is neat to read and impressive when acted, but it is lousy to role-play as long as the focus is kept upon Hamlet's self doubts. (On the other hand, ghosts and revenge, which *Hamlet* also features, make good foci for adventures.) The conflict employed in an AD&D adventure needs to be action oriented: The characters need to *do* something. Just make sure that the action in an instant adventure does not require a great deal of setup and detail to make it feasible.

Wonder comes from new experiences, and this is the other base of all good fantasy adventures. Fantasy role-playing games make it possible for us to experience im-

possible worlds. This places a great burden upon the DM when faced with the need to create an instant adventure. What haven't the PCs done before? The need to come up with something new is a hard taskmaster for the poor DM.

On the other hand, if you just pile on marvels upon marvels, things get stale pretty quickly. This is a great problem with many campaigns. After so many fantastic foes and gorgeously realized locales, the most extraordinary encounters seem merely ordinary. "How many hit points [yawn] does the thingamajig have?" The thingamajig may be a unique creature, even a supernatural nonesuch, but after such a superfluity of enchantments, it is merely a pile of statistics.

It takes the ordinary to make the extraordinary stand out. The contrast between the two is fundamental. Instant adventures, especially, should provide good, solid fun without over-wowing the players. It behooves the DM to have ready some ordinary but varied adventures with which to beguile the players—something fresh, but not too jazzy.

The DM's sampler

The following 24 scenarios should provide DMs with some solid ideas for instant adventures. Not all are appropriate for every campaign, and a lot depends upon what the PCs are doing when the need for an instant adventure arises. Some ideas are adaptable to any party's average level, while some are more appropriate for specifically high-level (or low-level) parties.

1. *Not him again!* Having ongoing clashes with foes helps a campaign tremendously. A shadowy figure of great power in the background adds menace to a campaign. When things are lagging, just knowing that this villain is behind an attack adds excitement to an encounter. Constant assassination attempts would be boring, but an occasional attack from the same source keeps the PCs edgy and the game tension up.

However, you do not need a "Mr. Big" for recurring troubles. A competitor who keeps showing up to edge out the PCs or a relentless pursuer who keeps them on the move can pop up in a dull moment to enliven the game. These recurring foes can be developed to a great extent. (Certain monsters, such as vampires, can be played this way to great effect.) Don't have your NPC attackers always stand and fight to the last hit point. Let the PCs win without total victory, so that the "bad guy" will always be available to come back at them.

2. *Son of Godzilla.* In grade-B monster movies, the Big Awful would manage to get itself nuked, only to return in another low-budget thriller six months later. In this variation on #1, you, too, can resurrect monsters that are too much fun to let die. Most playing groups have fond memories of one or more monsters whose challenge they particularly savor (from the safe perspective of hindsight). Why not just use

the same monster again? Sometimes you have to work out a rationale that allows you to say that this creature is the child of, mate of, or another example of the original monster; sometimes you can get away with *cloning*, reanimating, or even *resurrecting* the original. Curses that make "normals" into "awfuls" (such as vampirism and lycanthropy) are a good way to have your cake again after you've eaten it. Don't do this too often; this is for some player-group nostalgia, and too much of it can be boring.

3. *You're under arrest!* Having one or more of your PCs run afoul of the law is great fun. It can be a false arrest cooked up by an enemy or a case of mistaken identity. Since some PCs are crooks in fact, it can be a case where the law finally catches up to your lovable halfling thief. In an unfair world (i.e., most of them), it's also possible to be subject to arbitrary arrest because you're related to someone in trouble, or hail from a rebellious town or shire, etc. Suspicion of treason is a great charge, and most medieval kingdoms won't require any messy court papers to be filed to throw you in jail (no benefit of *habeas corpus*, either). And don't forget back taxes as a cause of legal action. Getting yourself or your buddy out of the jug can be a cause for fancy legal work or even breaking out of jail.

4. *The rush is on!* Prospecting for precious metals is the stuff of adventures. Wild animals, armed natives who resent your presence, boom towns, wild saloons, claim jumpers, and hostile climates all await the brave souls who succumb to gold fever. There have been several real-world gold rushes that have furnished the stuff of great tales (and bizarre truth), and you can use them for background. The Yukon Gold Rush, the California Gold Rush of 1849, and similar episodes in Australia and South Africa can give you some ideas. When you don't know what else to do, have someone come through your town screaming, "There's gold in them thar hills!" Your PCs can join the rush as prospectors, claim jumpers, or even merchants.

5. *Getting there is half the fun.* Certain natural environments provide great physical challenges and exciting encounters. Climbing a mountain or crossing a jungle can be a great adventure, even if the errand that sent you there is rather mundane (goals can be critical, too, of course, such as having to gather spell components, rare herbs, or dragon's eggs). [Among many other adventure examples, see *DUNGEON®* issue #27, "Courier Service."]

Dealing with the aftermath of an earthquake, blizzard, flood, or some other natural disaster can be exciting, too. One must provide for the survivors, procure food and water, stave off looters, haul in medicines and curative spells, etc. This is the stuff of real heroics.

6. *The posse.* Poses are not just a creation of the American West; they derive

from Anglo-Germanic law. When dangerous law-breakers need to be apprehended, the law-abiding members of the community will get up a *posse comitatus* to go get the nasties. Your PCs may find themselves asked to help capture desperados. This could involve tracking, ambushes, desperate fights at the outlaws' lair, and the need to bring the villains to justice alive—a real challenge!

7. *A hunting we will go.* Wild animals are the quarry here, rather than people as in #6. The PCs can be hunting to set in a supply of meat for the winter. They could be recreational hunters, looking for a particularly impressive trophy. They could be guides for someone trying to get a specimen. They could be professionals, like the buffalo hunters of the last century, who slaughtered buffalo by the millions for meat and hides. Remember Buffalo Bill, who hunted game animals for the army and railroad crews, rather than shipping their carcasses back to civilization. Nobody ever thought Buffalo Bill was dull.

8. *Shanghaied!* Kidnapping the PCs is a great way of getting them into fixes they have to escape. They can wind up as galley slaves or salt miners. You can stick them on a fantasy Devil's Island. Supernatural foes can shanghai the party to other planes (with the added bonus that the PCs may not realize they are on another plane). Press gangs can burst into taverns and forcibly enlist the PCs in the army or navy of whatever kingdom they are in at the moment. Just avoid kidnapping them more than once a year, or the players might resent the loss of control over where their characters are going.

9. *All the world's a fair* Fairs were very important in medieval times and were held at various locations several times a year. Not only were they vital conduits for goods, but they were great social events as well. At fairs, PCs can buy luxury items not available most of the year, make desired contacts, pick pockets, run con games, or compete in various contests. Competitions as varied as archery, dancing, racing, wrestling, piping, and tossing the caber are held at fairs. There's always opportunity to gamble, as well. Tournaments (jousting) are common in conjunction with medieval fairs. In Greco-Roman areas, gladiatorial contests, beast hunts, and chariot races in coliseums are staple events. [See *DRAGON* issue #118 for several articles on gladiators, jousting, archery contests, and fairs.)

10. *By the beautiful siege.* Sieges are great changes of pace in a campaign. PCs find besieging castles dull (it takes so long), but when their own castle is threatened, sieges are exciting. PCs can rush to raise a siege of a friendly castle and wind up fighting with hordes of hostile beings. Being stuck inside a castle under siege is also a new experience, particularly if the PCs are strongly motivated not to give up the stronghold. Besieging a PC's own castle is even neater, since it allows a player to

use all those castle designs he's made up, and it puts at risk something he feels strongly about. Needless to say, the DM needs all the maps and a great deal of information to turn the tables on the PC and invade his turf.

11. *Escort service.* One of the things that penniless PCs can do to earn money is hire themselves out as guides or guards to NPCs. This is especially fun when the person they are supposed to be escorting is a willful type: an heiress going to an unwanted wedding, a student on a tour determined to see what his tutor has left off the itinerary, or a tourist with a penchant for finding trouble.

12. *Who are you?* Having a PC dispossessed by an impostor has its possibilities. The PC finds himself somewhere else, without his usual possessions or companions, and makes his way back home, only to find someone else is impersonating him. This can be done by makeup, by shape-changing, or (for a real mind-bender) by an exchange of minds between the impostor and the real PC. Friends are suspicious and hostile, you are cut off from your money and magic, and the impostor thought he got rid of you once and isn't about to make the same mistake twice.

13. *Congratulations, Your Majesty.* Sacred kingship, as discussed by Sir James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, has formed the basis of several fantasy novels. A person comes to a strange town and is either maneuvered into challenging (and defeating) the present king or is somehow elected or chosen the successor to the previous king. In either case, one soon finds out that the sacred king is expected to remain in this town until his tenure is over—i.e., when another challenger kills him, or when a particular festival comes, the main feature of which is his ritual slaughter and dismemberment. The PC is the chosen of the gods, which also means he is intended to be a human sacrifice. The Aztecs had a variation on this deal: The most beautiful young men and women available were selected, given a year of coddling and worship, then were sacrificed. It was great fun for them while it lasted. In the same vein, followers or spouses of deceased rulers were sometimes killed to serve the dead in the afterlife, and the PCs may find themselves in this situation.

A less-lethal variation is that of the dubious legacy. One's great-uncle Rhadamanthus dies and bequeaths the PC an object, obligation, or piece of real estate, which involves the PC in endless difficulty. [See *DUNGEON* issue #26, "The Inheritance."] Inheriting cursed objects and haunted mansions are among the possibilities, as are the acquisition of family friends such as the Hound of the Baskervilles.

14. *Scouting ahead.* Investigating unfamiliar territory brings with it strange terrain, new cultures, and dangers in unfamiliar guises. Lewis and Clark had real adventures, as did those who searched for the American Northwest

Passage. Similarly, protecting surveying parties (like Custer did in the Black Hills) puts the PCs out in unfamiliar territory. The PCs can be looking for a site for a fort, investigating trade routes, or merely mapping the wilderness.

15. *Wagons, ho!* Protecting caravans is something PCs can do on the spur of the moment. The wagon train in question may be settlers (including the PCs themselves), a supply train for an army, a merchant caravan, or somebody's payroll. Having the wagons cross hostile territory is only to be expected. [See *DUNGEON* issue #23, "Deception Pass."]

16. *Wolf in the fold.* A threat from within is a refreshing change of pace. Have your castle or manor cut off from aid by a snowstorm, flood, etc. Then stir in a werewolf or doppelganger. Who's the next victim? Trust is weakened by this maneuver, and terror rises in proportion. Since the monster could be anybody, no one is safe and everyone is suspect. [See *DUNGEON* issue #28, "Night of Fear."]

17. *The wayside encounter* Lots of encounters hold menace for the party, including those along traveled roads. In addition to bold highway robbers, there are such foes as the gynosphinx (the Sphinx was an early Greek road hazard) and folks like Procrustes (another Greek-myth character), who insisted that all his guests stay the night and sleep on his plank bed. Procrustes trimmed the tall guests and stretched the short ones, thus always having a bed to fit.

Journeys are helpful because their underlying purpose gives value to the time lost in dealing with these hazards. Circe and the Lotus Eaters delayed Odysseus and threatened to strand him indefinitely. Likewise, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, and the clashing rocks are common journey hazards from Greek mythology. Ta-boos are also helpful in constructing wayside encounters. An island whose goats are sacred to Apollo, a city where killing a certain common animal is a desecration, etc., allows the PCs to get into trouble without realizing it, while making them late in reaching their goal.

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18. *Get me to a doctor!* Having a member of the party fall seriously ill or get himself seriously injured is a device for imperilling the party. Without the proper healing magic (which the wise DM will limit when he thinks it prudent), the party is forced to suspend the adventure they are on and get the sick or injured fellow to aid. This can involve considerable difficulty. Adding a time pressure—such as knowing that they have only two or three days before the patient dies—can add to their discomfort and to the environmental conflict they must overcome.

19. *The heat is on.* There are times in every thief's life when he has to lie low because the law is after him. Likewise, there may be times in an adventurer's life when there is a price on his head. When the PCs are pursued, they may be forced to hide in not-so-nice places like sewers, caves, crypts, and catacombs. In addition to the native hazards of such hiding places, the PCs must establish a means of getting news from home so they will know when it is safe to come out. This entails risk of betrayal if they depend upon friends, and it entails risk of capture if they have to sneak out to gather the news in person. If food is hard to obtain in their hiding place, they must hunt or scrounge, or trust to friends for supply.

20. *You sold that white elephant?!* The stuff that the PCs mistakenly sold turns

out to be incredibly valuable. They must chase it down from buyer to buyer to recover it, or else their mentor (or whoever) is going to be really out of sorts with them. This is a great possibility for slapstick adventuring, as PCs race after the lost goodies to endure disappointment after disappointment.

21. *I owe, I owe.* Debtors' prisons may be presumed to be part of many fantasy societies. The DM could bankrupt one or more PCs and threaten them with jail. In any case, it often makes parties look for quick profits (which can be a way to make normally cautious PCs take risks), or be forced to abandon surroundings that have become too comfortable.

22. *Seeking a vision.* Plains Indians sought visions; other religious communities welcome them, even if they don't encourage them. Have a PC go off alone to seek a vision. Throw horrendous monsters at him in dream-form; that is, the combats are real, but not necessarily life threatening. Only after winning all the dream-combats will the vision the PC is seeking be granted him.

23. *Change the PCs' size.* Magically shrinking the characters forces them to deal with mice and roaches on a different level. [See *DUNGEON* issue #18, "Chadranther's Bane."] Furniture is now mountainous. Normal people are tremendous giants. Conversely, you can make the PCs gigan-

tic, so that their footsteps trample crops and their neighbors chase them away. In addition to being a curse (and getting rid of curses is always a good source of adventures), it changes the players' perspective on normal things, refreshing the sense of wonder.

24. *Transform everybody.* In L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt's *Land of Unreason*, Fred Barber was changed into a frog. Above the water, he looked like a frog; below the water, he and the other denizens of the Pond were humanoid in form. He wound up relating to a seductive vole, knightly crawfish, mussel serfs, communist leeches, gangster trout, and so forth. This takes more thought than a true instant adventure, but if one is going to do it only for a short while, it's not too difficult. I once sketched in a side area in my campaign that I called Arborea; tree-dwelling mammals and birds were sentient creatures there. I didn't bother to figure out their stats, since I never expected my players' characters to fight any of these things. The whole point was to increase the strangeness of their experience, and therewith to increase the resulting sense of wonder.

Wherever the adventure leads, be prepared to follow it. A DM who can wing it with the best of them is one of the rarest treasures an adventuring party can find. ♫



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The Perils of Prehistory

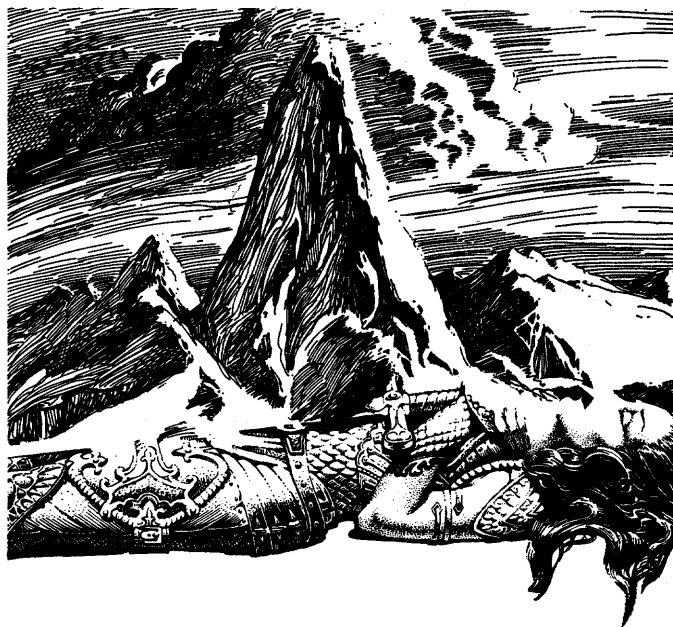
by Gregory W. Detwiler



A fantasy hero's most dangerous journey: into time!

Artwork by Michael Weaver

WEAVER



Adventures using time travel to prehistoric times are favorites in fiction and AD&D® games alike, due chiefly to the exotic animals encountered. However, even the largest dinosaurs are no match for high-level player characters. Be assured, however, that ways exist for a clever Dungeon Master to even the odds in prehistoric adventures in a fantasy world.

This article assumes that your game world had a prehistoric period similar to that of our Earth. Even without time travel, other worlds in wildspace and alternate Prime Material planes might have conditions matching those at an early epoch in our Earth's history, and this information will prove useful in designing and running scenarios in those places.

Against the world

The first thing you have to realize about the various ages of Earth's prehistory is that, except for the Pliocene and Pleistocene epochs, there was no human life of any sort. If characters get into trouble in a time period, there will be no friendly NPCs around to bail them out.

Without people, of course, there is no civilization (nonhuman civilizations will be touched on later for special cases). In other words, there are no cities, towns, or other fortified areas of relative safety; no high-level mages to recharge magical items; no source of supply for arrows, sling bullets, oil, weapons and armor repair, etc.; and no artificial material components for spells. There are no glass rods for *lightning bolt*, no miniature platinum swords for *Mordenkainen's sword*, and so on. For a prolonged trip into the past, heroes will have to take along an ample supply of everything that they need, possibly including food and water (more on

that later).

The two problems that will hurt combat-happy characters most will be the lack of recharging facilities for wands and other magical items, and the relative scarcity of clerical healing spells. To fight big dinosaurs and other beasts, you need big-hitting spells, just the kind that rapidly drain off item charges. Fighters can melee the beasts to death, but the warriors will be wounded in the process. Why not have the clerics heal them, you ask? Simple: In an age before humans and their gods appear, the clerics will be cut off from their deities, and hence unable to recover any spells above second level. It'll take an awful lot of *cure light wounds* spells to repair the battle damage a *Tyrannosaurus rex* leaves behind it, and that is the only true curative spell that can be recovered. Unless the PCs can amass an improbably large collection of healing potions and other magical items, even the more dangerous wounds may have to be left to heal naturally, as the clerics carefully husband their vital healing spells for the very worst of emergencies. Indeed, with so few healing spells available, clerics preparing for such trips may just decide to pray for *raise dead* and *resurrection* spells exclusively when gaining fifth- and seventh-level spells. This spell scarcity should convince the most battle-happy heroes to change their ways or die.

Being cut off from spell components is not a concern just of spell-casters who need artificial material components. The further back in time the heroes go, the fewer types of plants and animals there will be, so natural spell components will also be scarce. Both bats and mistletoe did not appear until early in the Cenozoic era (the Age of Mammals), putting *fireball*

lovers and druids in a real bind. The illusionist spells *phantasmal force*, *improved phantasmal force*, and *spectral force* all require fleece as a material component, but sheep did not appear until the Pleistocene epoch, which started a mere 600,000 years ago. And if a hero believes himself lucky enough to find a substance that might work as a substitute for a much-needed material component, wait until you see this article's section on metaphysical evolution.

Mundane evolution

Evolution assumes the gradual change of plants and animals over the course of time when conditions are right. This little-realized fact can be used by a subtle DM to hit the characters with difficulties they never even imagined existed, particularly in a fantasy world.

Convergent evolution occurs when animals that live in the same environment come to look superficially alike, even when they are not closely related. For a maritime example, consider sharks (fish), dolphins (mammals), and ichthyosaurs (reptiles). Similarly, catlike creodonts (primitive mammalian predators) prowled the early Cenozoic era, and these will not respond to any spell, device, or being with command over true felines. An early amphibian called *Platyhystrix* had a sail-back fin like its better-known reptilian contemporary *Dimetrodon*, possibly causing adventurers to waste an *arrow of reptile slaying* that may be sorely missed later on. If the heroes have one *arrow of slaying* each for reptiles and birds, which do they use when the DM hits them with a giant *Archaeopteryx*? As will become clear later, it is possible that neither may work!

Our heroes may decide to live off the

land, finding food for themselves and for any mounts or pack animals they bring along. One might think that there will be plenty to eat once green plants appear on land in large quantities. One could well be wrong.

Picture a prehistoric time similar to the Mesozoic Era (the Age of Reptiles), sometime after the first big herbivorous dinosaurs like sauropods have appeared. Their gluttonous appetites threaten to strip all the local plants bare, so a counter must be evolved, and fast. Though the local plants resemble those of today, let's imagine that they have evolved the ability to secrete a bitter chemical or poison to keep the piggy dinosaurs from swallowing them down to their roots. The stuff is a partial success; the dinosaurs still graze, but they don't totally consume the plants. When the adventurers and their mounts try eating the stuff—yeech! No one can stand the plants' awful taste or their digestive aftermath, and persistent diners may find themselves poisoned in a world with a scarcity of *neutralize poison* spells. Anyone who's a vegetarian might as well pack it in unless he's willing to turn pure carnivore on short notice. (Incidentally, once the dinosaurs die out, the innate toxins would not be necessary as a defense against smaller grazers, so the plants would phase them out in favor of the ability to grow taller or leafier; thus, their modern descendants are perfectly edible.) This is only a thought experiment, but it's certainly an interesting one.

Metaphysical evolution

In a fantasy world full of magic, it seems only right that a creature's natural dweomers should evolve along with its physical properties. This may make life difficult for magic-using characters trying to collect natural spell components. A prehistoric plant or animal part might have an entirely different dweomer than its modern counterpart, with results best left up to the DM's fertile imagination. An archaic spider's web might get a mage entangled in his own web spell, and using the guano of the first bats might put the whole party on ground zero for their mage's *fireball*. If prehistoric mistletoe acts up like this, a druid can kiss his spell-casting abilities good-bye.

Adventurers will need pack animals to carry all the proper spell components they'll bring with them, particularly for an extended adventure. If something happens to the animals (like becoming a dinosaur's snack or being poisoned by the local greenery), a mage may well have to carry those components on his own scrawny shoulders. Even with well-charged wands, the mage may well be hesitant about casting any spells that require material components. Again, this will serve to deemphasize combat, or at least combat made unfair by large amounts of magic. If the PCs don't guard their magical supplies, the result could be catastrophic.

[Other thoughts on substituting nonstandard material components in spell-casting may be found in DRAGON® issue #147, "Variety, the Spice of Magic."]

Monstrous evolution

If you assume evolution exists in a fantasy world, then it follows that monsters such as dragons and hydras must have had supernatural ancestors in the prehistoric past. Various dinosaurs could have evolved into dragons and other reptilian monsters, the displacer beast may have had a sabre-toothed ancestor, and so on. Indeed, writer Peter Dickinson argues in his speculative book, *The Flight of Dragons*, that dragons really did exist and evolved from the big flesh-eating dinosaurs. DMs should feel free to go wild in creating supernatural prehistoric beasts, including those supposedly created by one or more gods.

Go for small changes at first, emphasizing defense over offense. Many prehistoric beasts already have good combat abilities in melee; just keep the magic-equipped characters from using this advantage to run roughshod over them. A carnivorous ancestor of the red dragon may appear to be a perfectly normal winged dinosaur from the outside, until your magic-user sees it fly through his *wall of fire* as if it weren't even there. When the fighter with a *vorpal blade* lops off a plesiosaur's head, he discovers too late that it is also a prototype hydra, of the Lernaean variety! A mammoth might literally blow away its enemies, if it's an overgrown ancestor of the hollyphant, while an ankylosaur may well reflect spells off its shell in the manner of its descendant, the tarrasque. When the PCs encounter their first spell-using *Tyrannosaurus rex* (a cleric, perhaps—see "Gods and cave men"), the first thing they'll ask the DM is: "Can we go home now?" If you do go this far, then think of the opportunity for introducing new (and long lost in your own age) spells.

The earth below

One of the juiciest problem-causers for time travelers is often neglected: continental drift. The continents of Earth didn't always stay in the same place; they slid about constantly (albeit slowly) over the course of ages. The areas of land and sea were different, too. For example, in the Cretaceous Period, most of the eastern U.S.A. was under the sea. A modern time traveler in New York who fails to take this into account will have a short (and wet) trip. So let it be with your players' characters. [Continental drift is not the only source of widespread geophysical change. Note, for instance the changes wrought by the *Cataclysm on the AD&D world of Krynn*, the aftermath of the *Rain of Colorless Fire on the AD&D world of Oerth*, or the sinking of *Blackmoor* by "accident" in the *D&D® game's Known World*.]

If the PCs don't do research to determine the relative positions of land and sea

in the age that is their intended destination, feel free to dump them in the water. Unless you're feeling mean, put them somewhere close to shore; the dunking will be bad enough. Aside from the chance of drowning (particularly for armored characters), an unexpected drenching will also ruin unprotected objects, including spell books, material components, and perhaps a few magical items (like *dust of sneezing and choking*). The reverse can be true, and characters intending to explore prehistoric seas may find their *folding boat* or *apparatus of Kwalish* left high and dry in a mountain range.

This sort of soaking is an ideal way to punish PCs who do not take the trouble to do research on their destination before starting out. If their worlds prehistory is relatively unknown (learning about it may be the motive for the trip), and the PCs are going in blind through no fault of their own, then you can be lenient.

The unknown

Ignorance of local prehistoric conditions is a serious handicap, particularly for fantasy heroes who don't have any handy paleontology books for reference purposes. In this case, what they don't know can hurt them, perhaps fatally.

An example: One modern theory concerning dinosaurs is that they were not actually reptiles, but in a class by themselves, a class of which birds might be a subclass. Pterosaurs (flying reptiles) are included in this class, while the mammal-like reptiles that preceded the dinosaurs are now considered to be more mammal than reptile. This obviously takes much of the starch out of a *sword + 1, +4 reptiles*, to say nothing of *arrows of reptile slaying*. Given the bird/dinosaur debate, an *arrow of avian slaying* might work against dinosaurs, though I personally wouldn't allow it. To be sure of killing special or intermediate beasts like dinosaurs, mammal-like reptiles, etc., it might be necessary to use their blood (or whatever) in work to construct a magic weapon specifically directed against them. The aforementioned convergent evolution problem is another example of how this sort of solution might become necessary.

If the heroes are really going in blind (i.e., traveling into prehistoric times unwittingly through a spell, curse, or unknown magical gate), then their problems are even worse. If they are in a relatively mundane prehistoric world with no lycanthropes, undead, elementals, etc., then much of their gear and many memorized spells will be useless. *Protection from evil*, *conjure elemental*, *summon shadow*, and a host of other spells simply will not work. In the magical-item line, a paladin won't get the most out of his *holy avenger sword*, while a *mace of disruption* is just an ordinary mace + 1 if there are no undead to fight. Many types of *arrows of slaying* will be totally worthless, unless their owners "waste" them by using them



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as ordinary arrows. Mages who have memorized the wrong spells can learn appropriate ones if they were lucky enough to have brought their traveling spell books along (though this doesn't help the clerics much), but scroll-spells that are useless will stay useless.

If you really like elementals and other extraplanar monsters, you could put them in—but heavily modified. Forget human forms, except in the Pleistocene epoch, and make them look like whatever animals are dominant at this stage in world history, particularly if intelligent, civilized “animals” (such as lizard men or giant beavers) are running around. If conjuring spells are allowed to work in your prehistoric world, the results could be something of a surprise!

Gods and cave men

Here we go from “lesser” supernatural beings to the gods themselves. For a change of pace in your fantasy world, assume that the gods created the world or were created along with it, and did not have to wait until worshipers appeared to give them life. If that is the case, then the same gods might be worshiped all throughout time, assuming a succession of intelligent races. In order to be best appreciated by those worshipers, of course, the gods may come to look like them, or at least to look like the dominant race. In the Age of Reptiles, for example, Odin, Zeus, and company could look like dinosaurs or lizard men, with generally the same attributes as given in *Legends & Lore*. There would be a few modifications, of course, like a hammer-throwing lizardly Thor who also has a tail-slap attack.

There is no limit to the number of old deities in new bodies you can get out of this. If your world is like Earth, large birds beat mammals to the big-body niche when the dinosaurs died out, so the gods could change to look like dire corbys, vulchlings, etc. All throughout time, the gods could change, bestowing their “stamp of approval” on each new race that becomes dominant by taking its form. I leave to your imagination the trouble adventurers would get into by slaying fellow worshipers just because they look odd.

When PCs get to the Pleistocene or a similarly recent time period, they can encounter early man, and this can be the stickiest part of the time-travel business. In terms of pure combat ability, “cave men” aren't much of a threat to a powerful group that hasn't been greatly weakened already by combat or privation (all the more reason to follow the suggestions earlier in this article). Therefore, the DM may have to take certain measures to make certain the PCs don't simply engage in a general massacre.

Since we are assuming that the PCs are going into the prehistory of their own world, their actions could well change their own home period when they go back. (Actually, they could do that in any

time period.) The classic example is Ray Bradbury's story, *A Sound of Thunder*, in which a time traveler turns the U.S.A. from a democratic country into a dictatorship by stepping on a butterfly in the Cretaceous period. This story, particularly Bradbury's explanation for historical change, is must reading for any referee running a time-travel adventure in any game system. This opens up an almost infinite range of possibilities.

If you want to end the campaign quickly, the easiest way to do so is to have the PCs fight cave men who turn out to be their own ancestors. When their ancestors die, the PCs immediately disappear as though they had never been. Alternatively, nothing could happen to them. Since the PCs killed their ancestors, they prevented themselves from being born. But since they were never born, they couldn't very well go back in time to slay their ancestors, thus they will be born, and . . . you get the idea. Paradoxes are fun, but handle them with care.

Stomping on the PCs directly is a rather heavy-handed method of DMing. DMs who want the PCs' actions to change history should be more subtle if possible. There is the *Sound of Thunder* option, in which slaying someone's ancestors can change the moral or political outlook of an entire kingdom, if not the world. Using this system, the victorious PCs could return from the past to a world that is suddenly (and no doubt mysteriously) inimical to them. It could take the characters a while to figure out what went wrong.

There is, of course, the genocidal option. The AD&D game provides for antipathy between specific races, such as orcs vs. elves and goblins vs. dwarves. If the very first members of a hated race are encountered, the PCs may get the bright idea of wiping them out, thereby preventing the spread of a race that will otherwise give their characters no end of trouble in the modern world. For that matter, if some prehistoric animals are ancestral to dragons or other troublemakers, the PCs may undertake a worldwide cross between a safari and a search-and-destroy mission. A truly great and noble idea, right?

Well, not exactly. Even assuming one's morals permit such actions, there are a few problems. After all, the PCs no doubt fought many of the descendants of these creatures and killed them, winning monetary and magical treasures from them and definitely gaining experience points from their defeat. If the PCs keep some of their opponents from being born, the DM should feel free to strip them of the experience points, magical items, and riches that were gained after fighting these foes. Again, if the PCs aren't particularly perceptive, it might take them a while to figure out what happened. If you don't like these complications, ignore them. (The mage who cast the time-travel spell arose to a high-enough level to cast it because of the monsters he defeated. If he never

defeated them, he couldn't rise to a high-enough level to cast the spell, the party never went back to slay the ancestral monsters, etc.)

We now return to the gods (in this case, including extraplanar monsters). If we assume, as many game designers do, that a fantasy world's gods are created and sustained by their worshipers' deeds, offerings, and prayers, then we have some interesting possibilities. By slaying all of a god's first worshipers before his religion is firmly established, the PCs could stop the creation of an entire pantheon. Again, this sounds nice if it's an enemy deity, but it is a real killer if your own pantheon gets wiped out. If you follow my earlier suggestion that the gods were created by the very first intelligent beings on Earth and simply changed their forms to match the evolving races, then look out! Xenophobic PCs of the “hack-and-slash” school who attack anything that moves could well wipe out their own gods by destroying a strange race simply because it is different. Aside from the obvious loss of power to clerics, any suitably cataclysmic punishments are left up to the DM.

If the PCs do not kill a deity when they slay his worshipers (due to time paradoxes or the like), then they will have him as an eternal foe, in the ultimate sense of the word “eternal.” Even an impersonal deity might have a sentimental attachment to his very first worshipers or temple, however crude and humble. This sentimentality could drive the god to seek revenge even more than if the PCs had sacked a temple of his in the modern world. Not only that, but the wronged deity will have no scruples about helping a band of adventurers of his own alignment travel to the past to chop up the first worshipers of the PCs' deity or even their ancestors. Things can easily escalate out of control in this manner, with potent magical warfare being waged all throughout history and prehistory. The DM should consider all the implications before using this option.

If the PCs go into a past where their deities exist but are worshiped by another race, such as lizard men of appropriate (and possibly different) alignment, the PC clerics might get their god to grant them spells, if they can convince the deity that they are his true worshipers (and if that deity's followers don't slay the PCs first as “monsters” —turnabout is fair play!). A xenophobic deity might simply squash his future worshipers for daring to ask, since their race hasn't appeared yet. If holy symbols, proper deeds, or mind-reading can convince him that the characters are true believers, he may grant their request. Since the characters' race will eventually replace the current worshipers (or so they say), the god may take a “show me” attitude, granting the PCs their spells only if they can defeat his current worshipers in a fair fight. This could be a full-scale battle or merely a single duel between individuals (especially clerics, paladins, or

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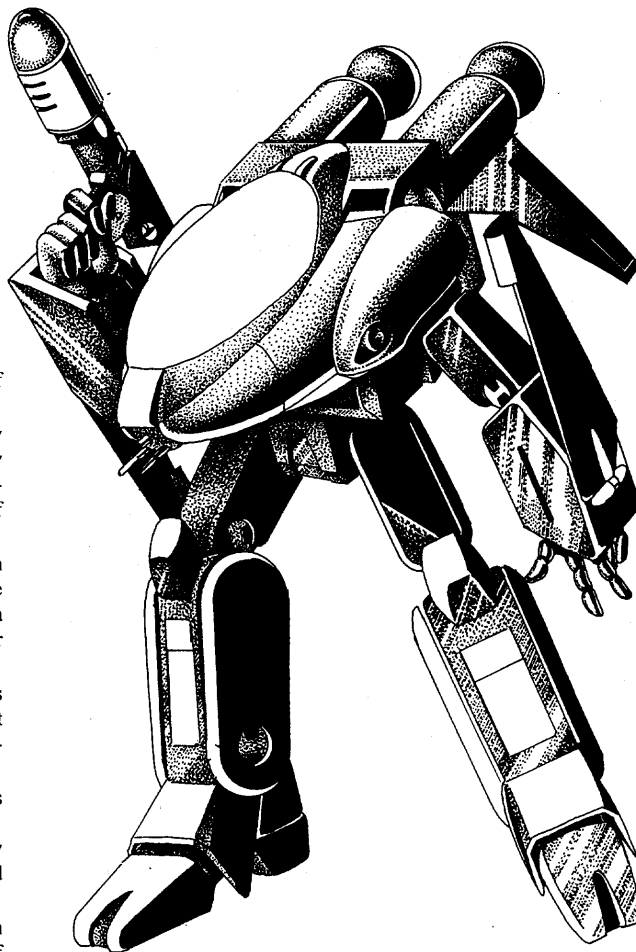
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Volume Four: Episodes **46: Star Dust**, **47: Outsiders**, **48: Deja vu**. Dana continues to exhibit a bit of empathy and psychic hunches and can not shake certain feelings about the captive bioroid pilot (Zor). **Available late February, 1992.**

Volume Five: Presents episodes **49: A New Recruit**, **50: Triumvirate**, **51: Clone Chamber**. It is decided to induct Zor into the Army of the Southern Cross. A full scale assault is launched against the Masters. Zor, Dana and Bowie get closer to the secret of the Robotech Masters and protoculture. Plus epic space battles! **Available late March, 1992.**

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druids). If the characters are unable to prove their heritage in battle, the god might just decide to suppress the upcoming evolution of their race as a penalty for being "inferior"!

As stated before, primitive humans (or whatever) will be inferior to any adventuring band that has not been put through the wringer previously. This is, of course, all the more reason for the DM to put them through the wringer in previous adventures, unless the PCs have worked very hard to avoid this sort of thing. Failing the depletion of their fighting strength, the twin threats of changing history and the gods are absolutely necessary to keep the party from conducting an easy slaughter of primitive men and force them to negotiate, at the only time in normal pre-history when they are able to do so.

Scenarios

Many DMs who have read thus far might love the prospect of sending their player's characters into the prehistoric past. What, however, is the motivation for this journey? Aside from the usual explanations (time elementals, a gate into the plane of Time, an angry time-traveling mage of enormous power, etc.), there are perfectly valid reasons for having time-travel scenarios creep into your campaigns.

The simplest scenario is exploration. Some wealthy sage wants the PCs to either accompany him into the past or go by themselves to study conditions in another age. Exploration scenarios usually require that some rich NPC foot the bill, as there is no guarantee that the party will find any treasure in the wilderness. The DM should also figure out a way to assign experience points for information obtained.

Mercantile scenarios are another method. The characters go back in time to collect baby dinosaurs, mammoth and mastodon ivory, etc. Body parts of creatures can also be used as ingredients for magical items, but this isn't as good a motive, even in modern campaigns. How many PCs go around shaving the heads of dryads for ingredients to make *philtres of*

love? How many actually go to the trouble to collect a fiend's ichor or a giant slug's spittle? If prehistoric beasts are extinct in the modern campaign world, there would seem to be little justification for going to the trouble to create an arrow of *dinosaur slaying*. Money-grubbing scenarios lack glamour, anyway; high fantasy is supposed to do better than that.

Best of all is the long-term quest. If you want a thorough prehistoric adventure, break up an artifact or relic like the *Machine of Lum the Mad* or the *Mighty Servant of Leuk-o* and put one piece of the item in each of the separate prehistoric environments and ages where danger can be found. (Bone up on paleontology before you try this.) Starting with the Carboniferous period (when the first giant amphibians appeared on land), at least two pieces of the relic should be left in each time period: one on land and one in the sea. If you can get detailed information about different faunas on the various continental areas, more pieces could be scattered to those spots.

A search for the pieces of a mighty magical item over a span of 600 million to five billion years (depending on whether you start with the Cambrian period or a fantasy Precambrian era) could with justification be called the ultimate quest. This scenario alone could take up an entire gaming tournament. Not only will the characters meet a wide variety of monsters and environments, but if any of the restrictions mentioned earlier are used, they will be forced to use intelligent play along with brute force, even though the overwhelming majority of their opponents are "mere" animals.

Consider the situation: In a long-term adventure, the party will be cut off from all the usual sources of reliable supplies for everything. They will be alone in the wilderness (or, rather, in a series of wildernesses) having to constantly be on the alert for attacks by wild animals, many of whom are of incredible power, and watching their supplies and magical abilities gradually dwindle away. Sneakiness will be at a premium, as will be using their

wits to find the pieces quickly, thus reducing the amount of time spent in the period (and the number of encounters and fights they will have). Provide the PCs with a series of riddles or clues to each piece's whereabouts. If they play intelligently, they should escape the adventure with only a few hard knocks; if not, well . . .

Remember that intelligent races, whether special prehistoric types or humans, should be treated to negotiations rather than brute force. Perhaps the characters should get a chance to see a primitive but still recognizable symbol of one or more of their own deities. Even without the peril of changing history, this should be enough to convince them that an open attack might violate alignment restrictions (even evil pantheons might not want followers killing their own clerics and worshippers).

Negotiations, riddles, stealth, cross-country travel, and (of course) combat: Can any adventure be better than this? Only a quest that also takes place in the prehistoric Inner and Outer Planes or on an ancient world elsewhere in wildspace using the SPELLJAMMER™ rules.

Perhaps the most appropriate scenario for time travel is the "changing history" scenario. A band of (possibly misguided) PCs goes into the past to exterminate a species of creature, wipe out an intelligent race, or nip a pantheon in the bud, in the belief that this will make the world a better place for them. They might even go back into the past to prevent a rival group from doing this very same thing. The possibilities here are staggering. The world could change somehow without warning, and the PCs must find out through mages or sages what happened, then go back in time to change it. While they're mucking around in the past, they might change time in other ways without realizing it. With enough time and creativity, the DM could have characters return a number of times, each time to a world changed in some different manner, until they finally learn to be careful. Some adventures, especially pantheon-busters, will involve the gods, possibly in radically different forms in various prehistoric ages.

This article should help increase the amount of excitement and suspense in any AD&D adventure taking place in prehistoric times. Players whose characters go into the past may get nervous or worried, but they will never be bored. Ω

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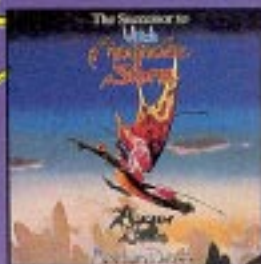
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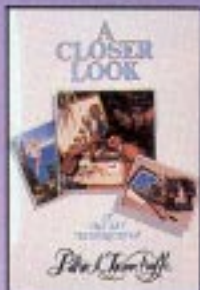
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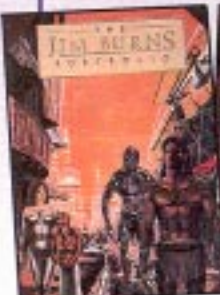


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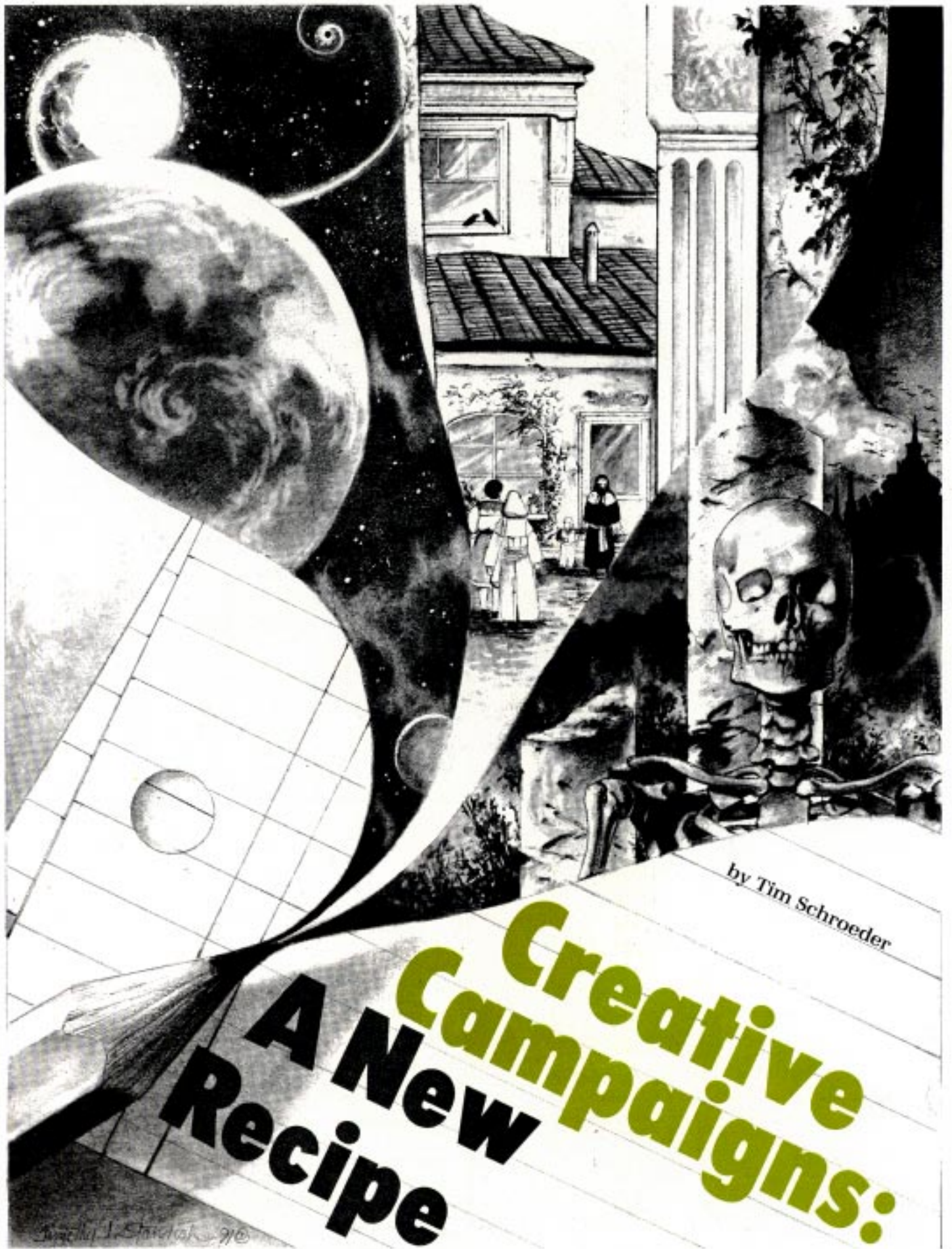
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The way to break free of this standard mold is to change the recipe. The AD&D game has been set in its traditional medieval setting so often that DMs often neglect all the interesting variations and twists that can be added to the usual campaign. This article will discuss a few such variations to give the world a distinctive flavor. The variations to be discussed can be grouped into three categories: new histories, new magic, and new universes. Although only a few ideas can be discussed here in detail, a DM with a mind to do so can create dozens of such innovations. All that is required is that the DM consider two things: what the change will be, and what effects it would logically have. Let's begin with a campaign worlds history.

New histories

Suppose that a continental empire existed in the campaign worlds past. What effect would that have? Most medieval-

style campaign worlds are loosely based on Europe, but many DMs fail to exploit the possibilities created by the historical Roman Empire. After all, a fallen empire can leave roads that lead to ghost towns, an exotic currency found only in long-lost hoards, valuable art and literature entombed in once-mighty fortresses, great works of architecture like the aqueducts, and so on. These remnants of the old empire act as story hooks for adventures, and will make the campaign world more interesting. Deceased empires also leave languages like Latin that act as a common tongue for the learned, and could perhaps even explain a widespread common language (for those DMs who hate bothering with language barriers every hundred miles). From just one supposition, a whole wealth of background can be built.

It is even more interesting to speculate on what the campaign world would be like if the old empire had been of a very unusual nature. For example, what if the old empire had been an evil dictatorship in which conjured fiends (from the *Monstrous Compendium's* Outer Planes appendix) were used as policing troops? Many of the old government buildings would have had elaborate conjuring rooms to bring in the fiends and control them. The law rooms might have had special arrangements so that the fiends could use *ESP* or *suggestion* spells on accused criminals. Now that these buildings are no longer in use, who controls them? They might be in the hands of stupid humanoid, or modern-day conjurers might be reviving their old uses. Either way, the effect is to create unusual adventuring opportunities. Strange ancient buildings are only the

beginning of the possibilities, though. Back in the days of the old evil empire, iron-based weapons might have been outlawed, as might the sale of cold iron in any form, in an effort to prevent good-aligned adventurers from fighting back against the fiends. Such laws would have forced adventurers to use bronze or other metals. Thus, much of the modern campaign's old magic would be made of bronze (perhaps the greatest paladin of the old times wore bronze *plate mail* +5). Of course, some of the surviving magic from the old times will be directed against fiends—protection scrolls, potions of *fire resistance* and *flying*, and specially enchanted swords, to name just a few.

Finally, there is the possibility that there are still fiends left over from the old empire. Fiends might have been trapped using the *binding* spell and "stored" for future use, only to be forgotten when the empire collapsed. The campaign world might be occasionally (or even regularly) terrorized by newly escaped fiends looking to exact revenge on the civilization that imprisoned them.

Another interesting historical possibility is that of migration. What might a campaign world be like if humans moved into the area only within the last 200 years or so? Perhaps there were human-dwarf or human-elf wars initially, and the hard feelings have died down only recently (perhaps they still exist). In such a campaign, there could be long-abandoned trenches and castles along the old battle lines, now inhabited by humanoid hordes. Mass graves of soldiers now full of undead could be unusually common, or there might be special anti-demihuman magic.

Potions of *invisibility*, *demihuman control*, and *infravision*, *wands of defoliation* (to negate elven cover advantages), and *horns of blasting* (to collapse dwarven tunnels) might have been common human creations. In return, the demihumans might have made magic arrows that do structural damage (to break down human castles) or *wands of fear* (to break cavalry charges). Of course, the magic that survived the wars is just waiting to be found.

There is also the possibility that the humans brought unusual animals to their new home, animals that are now wreaking havoc on the locals. Did they release 100 rust monsters in their battle against the dwarves, or did they just bring in hoofed grazers that are now turning the grasslands into desert, as is happening in Australia? You decide. A distinctive campaign is guaranteed no matter what the choice.

On the other hand, maybe the humans were invited in to help fight some other enemy, like orcs, and the soldiers just settled down afterward. Human towns might have names derived from the elven tongue because they were populated by elves before the settlers arrived. This might seem like trivia, but it is the kind of detail that makes a campaign world different and memorable.

Obviously, a good history can add all sorts of depth to a campaign, changing it from a faceless fantasy world into a realistic place with an involving background. But history is far from the only source of innovation in campaign backgrounds, Magic is an even more interesting source.

New magic

A very significant campaign twist can be created if one assumes that mages work together in well-organized groups. Wizards are already commonly assumed to form guilds [see *DRAGON®* issues #123, "The Mystic College," and #139, "Where Wizards Meet"?], so how much difference would a little more organization make? The answer is, quite a lot.

Imagine a campaign in which there exists one strong group of mages. These spell-casters, we will assume, have no members higher than 14th level. Even so, their abilities are huge. With *continual light* alone they can do wonders. The mages could make a bargain with the king, for instance, to magically light his castle or even his entire capital city in return for special privileges (like free lands, or a monopoly on magic within the kingdom). Such a magically lit place would be almost impossible for thieves to work in because shadows would be almost nonexistent. The 2nd Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide* recommends that NPC mages charge 1,000 gp for the spell (page 113), but a well-organized group would charge less in order to make the light available to more people, and so earn more money in the long run. Magic light in the hands of common shopkeepers would have far-reaching effects. Working hours could be extended,

with resulting increases in the availability of goods. Nighttime entertainments could also become common. The theater, dance, music, and sports could be made available to the upper classes. Needless to say, all the adventurers from the region would have magical light, much to their benefit.

And magical light is just the tip of the iceberg. With permanent *walls of stone*, the mages could engage in great constructions. Bridge making, road building, and simple house construction would be much easier, and so could be done more often. The surrounding lands could be made easy to cross, so trade would be improved. Even the problem of bringing stone to places far from quarries could be solved, by magically creating some of the needed stone.

With spells like *transmute water to dust* and its reverse, swamps and arid lands could be made into farmland. This would allow large populations to exist where only small populations were possible before. Large cities could spring up on the edge of deserts as long as the mages engaged in water creation.

Control weather is another valuable spell. It can be used to save crops and prevent starvation, it can slow or stop invading armies, and it can ensure that important events are unhindered by poor weather.

Needless to say, few monsters would be able to withstand an attack by an organized group like this (just imagine, three of its spell-casters could easily do 50 hp damage a round in *magic missiles* alone), so the lands around the group would be amazingly safe.

It goes without saying that if a member of this group was able to cast *enchant an item*, *permanency*, *wish*, or a similar spell-prolonging spell, the face of the kingdom could be changed. If permanent *teleport* spells and some cleverly constructed landing areas were used, teleporting trade routes could be established. If used with *enchant an item*, the spell could be used for making strong magicks. Within 100 years of the group's formation, *crystal balls* could be widespread enough for a kind of telecommunications network. Even without *permanency*, nothing could keep the group from amassing potions, wands, and scrolls to be bartered for other magicks or political favors. In fact, the group could easily become a very powerful political force. The mages might face all sorts of difficulties, but they have two huge advantages. The first is that they are a very knowledgeable and powerful group, and the second is that they can use long-term planning to great advantage. One magically constructed bridge will make no great difference to a country, but a hundred such bridges a year (an easily achieved number) would have quite an effect. Long-range planning could benefit the mages in a hundred other ways.

Don't forget that these results would come from creating just one such group of

mages. If the campaign world was full of such groups, they could conceivably dominate the politics of the civilized world. Standard AD&D game wizards are assumed to be aloof from such affairs or else too independent to join such groups. But just change the assumption, and the background of the whole world changes.

Priestly organizations are an equally interesting matter. What would happen if clerics were played to their full potential? After all, they can cast *continual light* almost as easily as mages, and they can *create food and water* even more easily. There must be some benevolent sects that would do so for free for the benefit of all. Similarly, the effects of *cure light wounds* spells from kindly healers could be enormous. In 1100 A.D., a man who cut a sizeable artery while scything would be dead within a few days from shock, infection, or hemorrhaging. *Cure light wounds* would have him back in the field before lunchtime. Wounds that are magically cured never fester or get infected, and broken bones never mend poorly. Gangrene and lameness could be all but eliminated by quick tending, given enough clerics. Further, the herbalism and healing proficiencies would significantly reduce mortality from disease and injury even without clerics. Six hit points a day* restored without magic would quickly put a normal man back on his feet after most injuries. The *aid* spell could help mothers survive dangerous childbirths. All this curing could result in larger family sizes, longer lifespans, population explosions—all sorts of things.

These are just the changes that come from having well-organized 1st-level priests (3rd level in the case of *aid*, and 5th level for *continual light*). At the far extreme, imagine this possibility: All court mages of a certain king agree to brew, without consuming, one *potion of longevity* before they die. When the mages do die, their remains are kept in the castle crypt. In times of crisis or war, the mages are revived by using *resurrection* and given the potion. Within a month, the king would have incredible spell power (even assuming just one 14th-level cleric to do the casting). In a campaign world where this kind of activity was common, wars would be very magical affairs, and most monstrous invasions could be dealt with easily. Even if a king started with just one high-level cleric and one mage, he could soon have many powerful spell-casters at his disposal by reviving the dead ones.

Organizing spell-casters is not the only way to put twists into campaign magic. I once worked on a campaign in which standard AD&D game magic was a fairly recent invention, about 500 years old. Before "planar" magic, there had been "chalytic" magic, based on a crystalline substance called *chalyte*. Chalyte was extensively mined in the old days because it was a powerful source of magical energy. With chalyte, even low-level mages

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could make magical items, and casting spells was much easier. Eventually, supplies of it ran out, and so "modern" magic was developed as a replacement. In this campaign world, there were many magical items of low power that had survived from the old days of magic. As well, the ancient lairs of wizards had all sorts of unusual magical properties, because these properties had been much easier to create. Another interesting effect of this campaign twist was that chalyte still existed in a few places, particularly in old treasure hoards. If chalyte was collected, it could be used to work all sorts of bizarre magic.

One last suggestion on the subject of magic: What if one obscure kind of magic was very common? Imagine a campaign in which *bags of holding* and such things were very easy to make. They can be bought at specialty stores for a reasonable price, and there is no shortage of them. In such a situation, trade would be very different. There would be no more wagon-loads of goods—just a few sacks and some fast horses. The pace of trade would speed up; goods from far away could come to the player characters' area much more quickly and cheaply, allowing silks and spices to flow freely into northern latitudes, for instance. Other distinguishing features of such a campaign might include

unusual traps, well-concealed treasures, and headaches resulting from items lost in overcrowded magic sacks.

What if water creation was just as easy? Wealthy towns would be decorated with magic fountains. Farmers would never worry about drought, and marginal land would become arable. Artificial lakes would be everywhere. Deserts would pose little difficulty to travelers. Showers could be invented. A mad wizard might try to flood the world. [See *DRAGON* issue #171, "Care For a Drink?" for similar thoughts along this line.]

The consequence of such situations could be developed into very interesting settings for otherwise traditional AD&D games. Yet there are still larger scale innovations to be made.

New universes

A friend of mine once came up with a brilliantly weird idea. We worked on it together for a while, and came up with the Black Hole campaign. Imagine a fairly normal AD&D world with one big difference: it exists in our (real) universe. The campaign world happens to be located in a binary star system in which one of the stars is a massive black hole. Magic is simply the result of the very weird and distorted physics created by the environment. The implications of this sort of background are far reaching. The gods of the clerics, for instance, could be a small group of telepathic aliens, or perhaps the black hole itself is somehow sentient. To go to an even greater extreme, perhaps there aren't any spell-casting clerics in the traditional sense at all. Furthermore, magic can only be local: The farther characters travel from the world, the weaker their magical powers get. The other planes are nothing like their traditional descriptions; they are just other planets. Maybe fiends are a rival race living on a planet in the same solar system. Maybe the campaign world will one day be visited by strange aliens who say "Beam me up, Scotty." The possibilities are certainly interesting.

On a slightly more conventional note, who says that the multiverse must be structured the way it is in *Manual of the Planes*? In the campaign I am DMing currently, only the inner planes exist. The tanar'ri have different elemental natures and dwell on all the planes in contact with elemental Darkness; there are no baatezu; and the gods are related to the elements. In this world, there are places where the elemental forces are particularly strong; these places are often the settings of fiend summoning by evil mages. The players in this campaign have come to associate elemental purity with the number four (the four "classical" elements), and magic with fiends. It is a minor change, yet it brings a measure of newness to the old themes.

Finally, consider an idea that combines many of the other ideas already discussed.

What would result in a campaign world if the world was rarely but regularly visited by a comet whose presence affected magic and aided in the creation of many great magical items? Obviously, the world would contain a large amount of magic made possible by the arrival of the comet. This magic would probably be very powerful in nature; after all, if the comet only appears every 300 years or so, no mage is going to use it just to make a *dagger* + 1. Whatever the mages did invent (perhaps gateways to other planes, thrones of power, or animated artifacts), it would have been well guarded by them. Thus, this hypothetical campaign world would have many secret towers on lonely mountaintops, or scores of impregnable fortresses, all designed to protect the precious inventions of long-dead mages. Maybe the artifacts have since been destroyed, and only the buildings remain. Maybe the artifacts still exist. Perhaps every few hundred years there is an incredible surge forward in public magic as the comet reappears: Flying castles are built, rivers are permanently diverted into more convenient routes, great passages are carved out of the mountains, and so on. This background premise requires no changes in the rules, yet it creates a wealth of opportunities.

Conclusion

All of these ideas are only the bare bones of a detailed campaign world background. Yet there are enough unusual bones among them that the fleshed-out campaign will have a unique look all its own. It is hoped that DMs reading this will become inspired with their own unusual twists. Care should be taken to think of all the effects of any new ideas. After all, using something other than the standard pattern can be tricky, and it is easy to miss important details. But the effort is well worth it. After all, variety is the spice of life. ◻

* The 2nd Edition Player's Handbook is unclear on how many hit points a person can heal in one full day of complete bed rest. Page 105 of the *PHB* states, under "Natural Healing," that characters who get complete bed rest for one full day regain 3 hp. Under "Herbalism and Healing Proficiencies," also on page 105, it is stated: "Characters can also gain minor healing benefits from those proficient in the arts of herbalism and healing." The key word here is "also," which our dictionaries define as meaning "in addition to." Therefore, the points that are gained (page 59, *PHB*) from a full day of bed rest when being treated by a healer (2 hp) or by an herbalist healer (3 hp) are in addition to the 3 hp mentioned on page 105. The maximum number of hit points that can be healed with one day of complete bed rest, when being treated by someone who is proficient in both healing and herbalism, is 6 hp.—The Editors

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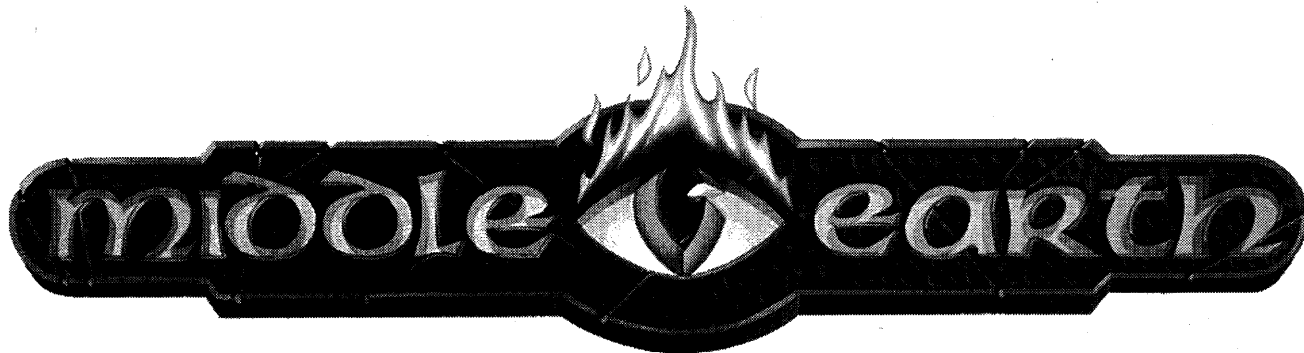
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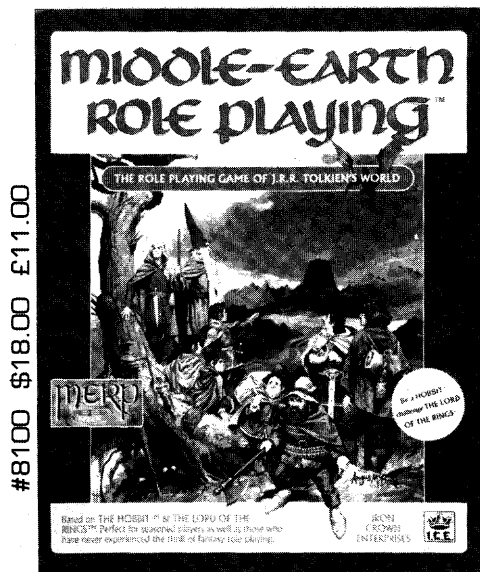
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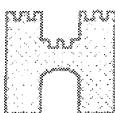
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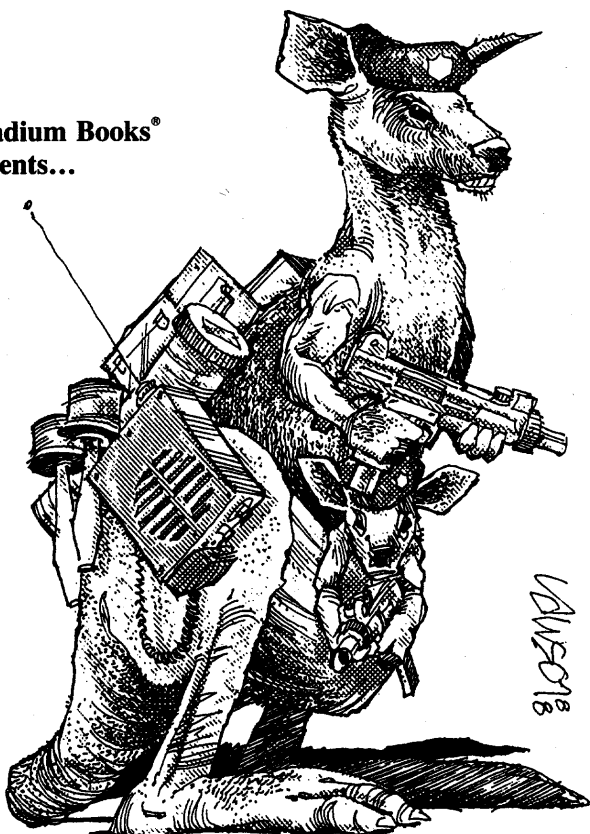
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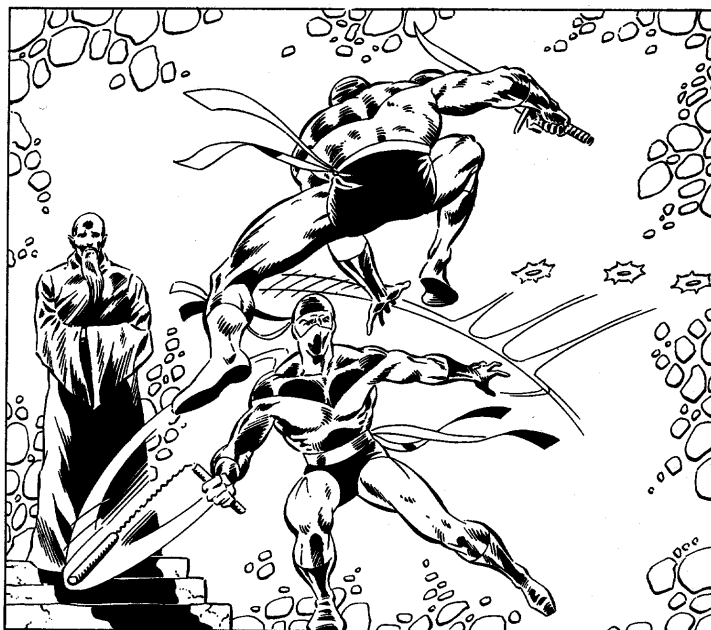
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by Steven E. Schend and Dale A. Donovan

THE MARVEL®-PHILE

Lesser Lights II: Long-lost heroes

This past summer has seen the reemergence of some Marvel characters who haven't been seen in action since the early 1980s. Of course, I'm speaking of Adam Warlock and Thanos, the major players in the cosmic epic Infinity Gauntlet miniseries. It's great to see these old characters back in their four-color glory, and I'm sure there are some great plans with these characters forthcoming.

Nostalgia, the lowly terror of night-forgotten days, is alive still in "The MARVEL®-Phile" in this, the second half of our quest to bring you characters from the dusty pages of Marvel Comics past. As the aforementioned miniseries is showing readers new and old, just because a character hasn't been seen in a while certainly doesn't mean he lacks potential. This is the case with our two intrepid heroes for this month, 3-D Man and the Blue Shield. They may not have set the world aflame when they first appeared, nor are they as cosmically powerful as Warlock and his entourage, but hey—their costumes are bright and colorful, their spirits are strong and noble, and they deserve a second chance in the spotlight. In a world full of cosmic destroyers and ageless amphibians, these heroes are a bit more down to earth, and your players' heroes could learn a thing or two from them (and vice versa). Look out world, these heroes may be making a comeback in a MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ game campaign near you!

3-D MAN™
Gestalt being

POWERS:

Alter ego: Hal Chandler owns a pair of special glasses that have identical red and green images of a human figure on each lens. When Hal dons the glasses and focuses on merging the two figures, he triggers a dimensional transfer that places him in a trancelike state. His mind and the two images from his glasses of his elder brother, Chuck, merge into a gestalt being known as 3-D Man.

3-D Man can remain active for only three hours at a time, after which he must split into his composite images and return Hal's mind to his body. While active, 3-D Man's brain is a composite of the minds of both Hal and Chuck Chandler, with Chuck usually being the dominant mind in the merging. 3-D Man's body is based primarily on Chuck's original form, including the experimental flight suit that was changed into the two-tone red/green suit (see "History"). Chuck's body was altered by radiation from an exploding Skrull ship, and 3-D Man has a number of powers in addition to his enhanced statistics:

—*Leaping:* 3-D Man has an Amazing rank Leaping ability, able to leap up 3 areas from a standing start.

—*Running:* 3-D Man has a ground speed of Good, enabling him to run at approximately 60 MPH (4 areas/round).



Color by Steve Sullivan

3-D MAN™ game statistics

	Chuck Chandler	Hal Chandler	3-D Man
F	GD(10)	PR(4)	RM(30)
A	GD(10)	PR(4)	RM(30)
S	GD(10)	PR(4)	RM(30)
E	EX(20)	GD(10)	AM(60)
R	GD(10)	GD(10)	GD(10)
I	GD(10)	EX(20)	IN(40)
P	EX(20)	GD(10)	IN(40)
Health:	50	22	150
Karma:	40	40	90
Resources:	GD(10)	PR(4)	PR(4)
Popularity:	0 (10 in 1958)	0 (5 in 1958)	0 in either era

—*Skrull sense*: Thanks to exposure to Skrull radiation while escaping the exploding space craft, 3-D Man has an Excellent ability to detect the presence of Skrulls within six areas.

TALENTS: Chuck Chandler has the Piloting and Martial Arts B skills. Hal has exhibited no particular talents. The 3-D Man could potentially tap into either brother's talents while active.

HISTORY: During the late 1950s, NASA's hopes in the space race were pinned on a number of experimental projects designed to put a man into orbit around Earth: One of the most important projects involved the XF-13 rocket plane, a machine capable of propelling itself and its pilot into the upper atmosphere. Its pilot was one of America's best test-pilots: Chuck Chandler.

Chuck Chandler was a former star football quarterback at La Brea University who rejected a professional football offer to become a test pilot. Given his athletic background and his piloting skills, he was constantly compared to another of America's best pilots—Ben Grimm. The night before Chuck's flight, he was attacked by foreign agents looking for information on the XF-13. With some help from his younger brother, Hal, Chuck escaped and proceeded with the XF-13's test flight. Chuck wore an experimental body-temperature suit specially designed for this flight, though its exact purpose remained unexplained.

Upon reaching the higher atmosphere, Chuck encountered a flying saucer that was hidden from the radar screens of the NASA base. He radioed his sighting in just as he disappeared from the base's monitoring radar screens. Chuck soon learned that his abduction was by a race of aliens known as Skrulls, who were interested in both Earth's military potential in their war against the Kree, and in the native Earth space programs of both the Americans and the Soviets. The Skrulls had, in fact, been behind the attack on Chuck at his home the night before the flight. Knowing that Chandler wouldn't freely divulge information, the aliens prepared to use a mind-probe device on him.

Chuck managed to break free and damage some of the saucer's internal systems. He escaped in the XF-13 just as the saucer's drive engines exploded, bathing him and the experimental craft in unknown radiation. Chuck crash-landed in the Mojave desert near a traditional meeting place he had with his brother. He fled the crash site and ran toward his approaching brother; suddenly, the alien radiation flared up, and Chuck disappeared in a flash of light. Hal had fallen in his rush to see Chuck, and he picked up his glasses only to find red and green images of Chuck imprinted upon the lenses.

Hal returned to NASA and then to Los Angeles to inform his parents of Chuck's

seeming death. He didn't mention the images on his glasses to anyone. When he was alone, Hal put on his glasses, focused on a blank wall, and visually merged the two images into one form. This triggered a dimensional transfer, and Chuck Chandler jumped back into three-dimensional reality as a changed man. His experimental flight suit had become part of his skin, and it and his body had become divided into shades of red and green. Chuck quickly discovered his new abilities and powers in this new form.

It was 3-D Man's ability to sense Skrulls that brought him into conflict with a variety of their schemes in 1958. The Skrulls were using their shape-changing abilities to infiltrate and undermine Earth's scientific advancements. The aliens had managed to take over high governmental positions and influence normal humans to aid them in their plots to destabilize society. One of their strangest operations was a mind-control gambit using a young rock-and-roll star, Vince Rivers, to control the minds of young teenagers in the Los Angeles area. This plot was quickly foiled by 3-D Man's attendance at one of Rivers' local concerts.

The 3-D Man's exploits were remarkable in the fact that he uncovered and neutralized a number of Skrull power bases while he could only be active for three hours at a time. After this time period, he had to return to Hal Chandler's comatose form and split into composite images again. During one such transformation, a Skrull blasted at Hal's form just as 3-D Man triggered the dimensional transfer. The only immediate result was that, upon summoning the gestalt form later, Hal's mind was in control of 3-D Man instead of Chuck. While in control of the two-tone hero, Hal defeated the Cold Warrior, an American scientist with artificial cold and ice powers who was duped into thinking 3-D Man was a Communist by a Skrull disguised as then-Vice President Richard M. Nixon.

After the battle and returning to his own form, Hal wrongly assumed Chuck's presence had been destroyed. The Skrulls' operations were crippled by 3-D Man's exploits, and the alien shape-changers would not launch another major assault on Earth for years to come. This, coupled with a growing affection for Chuck's former girlfriend, Peggy, caused Hal to decide to retire 3-D Man. The hero's constant presence could become a threat to Hal's burgeoning romance, and Hal and Peggy were married.

Twenty years later, Hal was forced to resurrect 3-D Man for what seemed to be his final adventure. Hal had inadvertently invited Dr. Bruce Banner to stay with his family without realizing his guest's identity or dangerous alter-ego. Upon discovering the danger to his family if Banner were to become angry, Hal triggered the dimen-

sional transfer and summoned 3-D Man into being for the first time in 20 years. Inexplicably, Chuck's mind was back in control of the hero's form and quickly surmised the situation, including the reasons for his long hiatus.

Ironically, it was the presence of 3-D Man himself that triggered Banner's transformation into the Hulk. After a fruitless battle, 3-D Man realized he was out-matched by the sheer power of the Hulk. He also determined that the Hulk was not an inherent threat to his family, but instead was simply misunderstood and persecuted. He helped the Hulk escape the authorities and later returned to his brother's glasses.

It is unknown whether Hal and Chuck Chandler will ever again revive their 3-D persona. It is also unknown whether the alien radiation that created 3-D Man has affected Hal's children. His two boys are approaching puberty, the prime time for mutant powers to surface. For now, Hal Chandler and his family reside peacefully in Los Alamos, New Mexico.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Chuck Chandler: Chuck was always highly enthusiastic about whatever he did, focusing all his energy toward his goals. Aside from Ben Grimm, he was the best test pilot in the U.S.A. in 1958, and he carried himself proudly with his reputation. He shared a close rapport with his younger brother, Hal, and treasured their friendship greatly. Chuck is quick to anger and deals with his problems aggressively. Being a physically active person makes his temporary and (ahem) two-dimensional existence hard on Chuck, though he remembers very little about his time spent as a double image and only comes to full consciousness as 3-D Man.

Hal Chandler: Hal, as a young man, was moody and believed himself inferior in others' eyes due to his polio-crippled leg and need for a crutch. He was also intensely loyal to his older brother, Chuck. Despite his disability, Hal tended to be independent, not wanting others' pity or help unless absolutely necessary. Hal is now a quiet, studious man who has settled into a peaceful life with his wife and family. He may have kept 3-D Man in forced retirement simply to keep Chuck from seeing Hal's new relationship with Peggy, Chuck's former girlfriend and now Hal's wife. After their last adventure, Hal reconciled his jealousy, but now considers himself a bit too old for the costumed hero circuit.

The 3-D Man: 3-D Man is a composite of both Hal and Chuck, but Chuck's mind was usually dominant and active while in this form. Therefore, 3-D Man had Chuck's aggressiveness, patriotism, and temper, but he also drew upon some of Hal's intuition and skills of observation.

3-D Man sometimes spoke of both Hal and Chuck as people other than himself, suggesting the possibility of a third gestalt personality. There is the possibility of a unique personality developing for the gestalt form if it is active more than three or four times in 30 years.

In your game campaigns, extenuating circumstances that threaten his home life and family may cause Hal to once again invoke 3-D Man. Given the past time limitations on his existence, 3-D Man could hardly become much more than a part-time superhero. It is unknown if the Skrulls are still interested in eliminating this hero, though the presence of Skrulls might cause Hal to bring the hero back.

Another option is to have another person don the glasses and focus on the images of 3-D Man and become the composite hero with Chuck. Hal's youngest son certainly seemed interested enough in his father's old glasses to try the stunt; imagine a 30-year-old hero appearing younger than he was in 1958!

A final option: Given the high incidence of mutations in the Marvel Universe, there are distinct possibilities of Hal Jr., or Chuck Jr., being mutants. Imagine the possibilities of a latent mutant invoking the strange Skrull energies involved in the dimensional transfer that generates 3-D Man. The merging could create entirely new powers and abilities for the gestalt form. While the glasses still exist, there is always the possibility for 3-D Man to return. Of course, only the Watcher knows what would happen to Chuck's personality and mind if the glasses were broken.

BLUE SHIELD™

Joseph Cartelli, security chief

F GD (10) Health: 105
A RM (30)
S EX (25) Karma: 26
E IN (40)
R TY (6) Popularity: 0
I GD (10)
P GD (10) Resources: EX (20)

POWERS: Originally, Blue Shield derived his powers from the microcircuitry-lined belt that he wore when in costume. The belt heightened his physical abilities and allowed him to project a personal force field. Over time, exposure to the belt (or perhaps its unknown power source) apparently mutated Cartelli's genetic structure to the point where no longer needs the belt to use his powers. The origin, designer, and current status of the belt are unknown. Blue Shield displays these powers:

Force field: Blue Shield is able to project a personal force field of Amazing (50) strength around his body. The field is impervious to all harmful gases and toxins

while allowing Blue Shield to breathe normally. The field also provides him with Incredible (40) resistance to heat- and cold-based attacks.

Lighting speed: Blue Shield's heightened metabolism allows him to move at Good (10) land speed—four areas per round.

TALENTS: Blue Shield possesses the Martial Arts B and C, Acrobatics, Tumbling, and Law-Enforcement skills.

HISTORY: It is likely that due to his costume design, undercover work, and his present position as Project: Pegasus Security Director, Blue Shield has some form of law-enforcement duty in his past. Blue Shield began his career masquerading as a mobster in the Bo Barrigan crime family, which brought him into conflict with Dazzler. He later attempted to join the Avengers but did not succeed. He eventu-

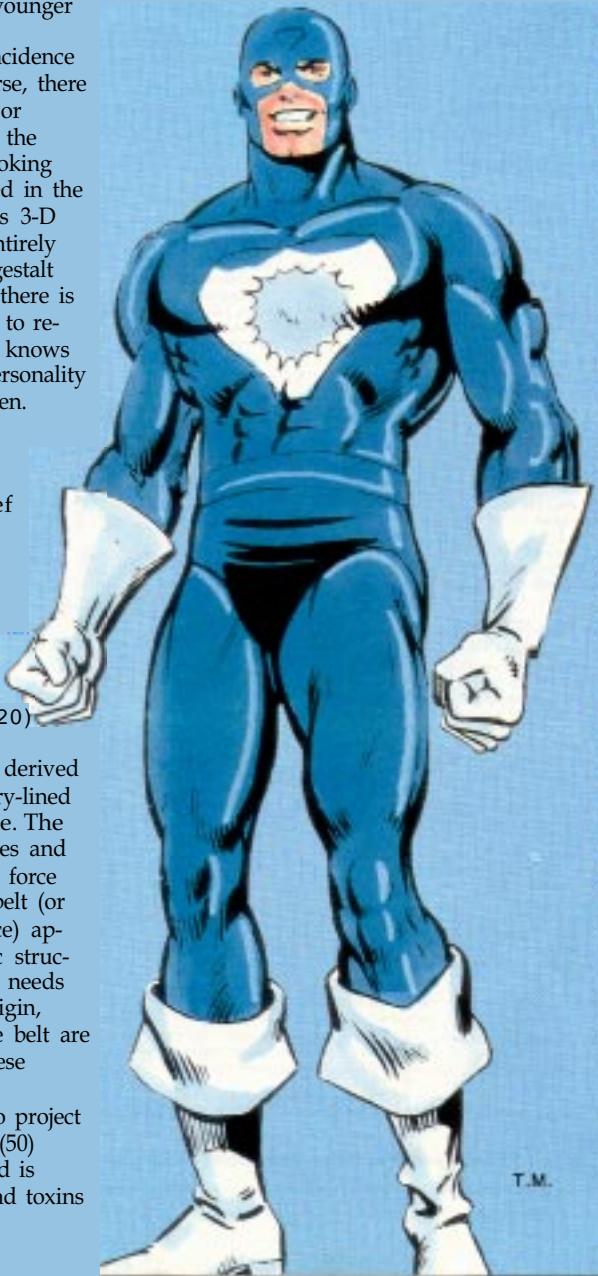
ally took the position of Security Director for Project: Pegasus in upstate New York. Project: Pegasus was devoted to finding new, alternative sources of energy. This included experimenting on convicted energy-using super villains, hence the need for a superpowered chief of security. When he failed to protect Project: Pegasus from the alien life form, Omnivore, Blue Shield resigned his commission. He did eventually accept reinstatement as the head of security for Project: Pegasus, and he continues in that capacity today.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES: Joey Cartelli is just an average guy trying to do the best he can with his abilities. He is not as high-minded as Captain America, nor is he as psychotic as the Punisher in his pursuit of justice. Blue Shield does occasionally lose his temper and can be short with others when he is under stress. Perhaps these traits reveal a degree of self doubt.

Your heroes could meet Blue Shield if they have business with Project: Pegasus (perhaps discussing new energy-collecting or energy-saving device that your heroes have devised), or he could seek the heroes' assistance in apprehending a superpowered thief who has some stolen Project: Pegasus gadget. It could be that the government has asked the heroes to work with Project: Pegasus staff, including Blue Shield, to help protect some amazing new widget while it is tested, transported to a new lab, etc. Foes could include super villains, terrorists, or unfriendly foreign governments.

Perhaps, since Blue Shield no longer needs his belt, it could be stolen and used for illegal purposes. Then your heroes would fight a villain with powers similar to Blue Shield's. This thief could also impersonate Blue Shield and send your heroes on a wild goose chase after the real Blue Shield. Or, the true Blue Shield could learn of the impostor and seek to stop him. If your heroes arrive during a battle between two Blue Shields, who will they aid?

Another option is that the secrets of the belt could be revealed and belt mass-produced (preferably at a lower power level than the original). The "Blue Shield Corps" could then become a true "super police" force, escorting superpowered prisoners to the Vault, standing guard duty during their trials, working with SHIELD, etc. Or (horrors!), perhaps the belt's powers are unraveled by a criminal genius who then starts mass-producing low-powered versions for his henchmen. That would almost certainly demand the attentions of your heroes and of the original Blue Shield!



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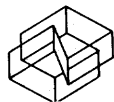
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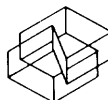


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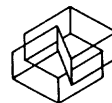


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CONVENTION CALENDAR

Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines **must** be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing **must** include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) and telephone number(s) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

WARNING: We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Our wide circulation ensures that over a quarter of a million readers worldwide see each issue. Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Announcements for Europe must be posted an additional month before the deadline to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, TSR Limited, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at TSR, Inc., (414) 248-3625 (U.S.A.). Questions or changes concerning European conventions should be directed to TSR Limited, (0223) 212517 (U.K.).

- ❖ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
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A.U.G. CON III, Nov. 8-10 NJ

A. U. Gamers present this convention, to be held at the Sheraton Tara Hotel in Parsippany, N.J. Events include RPGA™ Network events, a charity game, and board games. Other activities include a costume contest, a miniatures-painting contest, and a dealers' room. Prizes will be awarded to the best players and GMs. Registration: \$8/day or \$20/weekend by mail, and \$10/day at the door. Write to: A. U. Gamers, P.O. Box 218, Flanders NJ 07836.

GAME FAIR XIV, Nov. 8-10 IL

Sponsored by the Illinois Central College Game club, this convention will be held at ITOO Hall in Peoria, Ill. Events include AD&D®, BATTLETECH®, AXIS & ALLIES®, CHAMPIONS®, CAR WARS®, WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLEPLAY®, WWII naval miniatures, and SQUAD LEADER® games. Other activities include open gaming, a dealers' area, an auction, and painting contests. Registration: \$2/day, or \$3/weekend. Write to: GAME FAIR XIV, P.O. Box 308, Groveland IL 61535. WARNING: Do not phone; number previously given was incorrect.

NEBULOUS CON III, Nov. 8-10 WV

This gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn of Morgantown, W.V. Events include various role-playing and strategic games. Other activities include a murder mystery: Who killed the convention coordinator? Registration: \$13/weekend preregistered, and \$15/weekend, \$4/Friday, and \$7/Saturday or Sunday at the door. Send an SASE to: Nebulous Assoc., P.O. Box 925, Morgantown WV 26507-0925.

NOVACON '91, Nov. 8-10 *

This convention will be held at the Halifax Holiday Inn in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Events include panels, an AD&D® tournament, a costume ball and contest, dealers, and videos. Registration: \$25 (Canadian); day passes will be available. Write to: NOVACON Society, P.O. Box 1282 Main, Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, CANADA B2Y 4B9; or call: (902) 462-6796.

SCI CON 13, Nov. 8-10 VA

This SF/gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Va. Guests include Lois McMaster Bujold and Vincent DiFate. Events include panels, readings, videos, a costume contest, an art show, a hospitality suite, and gaming. Registration: \$25 at the door. Dealers are welcome. Send an SASE to: SCI CON 13, P.O. Box 9434, Hampton VA 23670.

IMPACT 1.3, Nov. 9 NE

This gaming convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Central in Omaha, Nebr. Events include tabletop and role-playing games. Registration: \$5. Write to: IMPACT, P.O. Box 4486, Omaha NE 68104.

LAGACON 12, Nov. 9 PA

This convention will be held at Kasper's Ark, north of Lebanon, Pa. Events include AD&D®, ASL®, and BATTLETECH® tournaments, with NUKE WAR®, DAYS OF DECISION®, TALISMAN®, RED EMPIRE®, and other introductory games. Vendors will be present. Ask about group discounts. Write to: Lebanon Area Gamers' Assoc., 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon PA 17042; or call: (717) 274-8706 from 5-9 P.M. week nights and 9-9 on Saturdays.

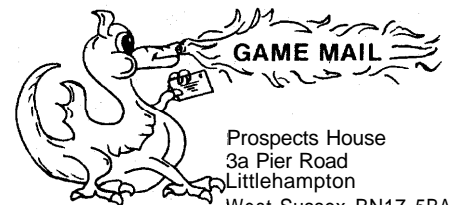
WATCON '91, Nov. 9-10 *

Sponsored by WATSFIC, this convention will be held at the University of Waterloo campus in Waterloo, Ontario. Events include AD&D®, CHAMPIONS®, and AFTERMATH® games, plus board and miniatures events. Other activities include panels, seminars, and all types of gaming and prizes. Registration: \$10/day (Canadian) or \$16/weekend preregistered, and \$15/day or \$20/weekend at the door. Write to: WATSFIC, c/o Room 215 (Clubs' Room), Campus Centre, University of Waterloo, Waterloo, Ontario, CANADA N2L 3G1; or call Ronald at: (519) 884-3842.

COWBOY CON II, Nov. 15-17 OK

This convention will be held at the OSU Student Union in Stillwater, Okla. Events include AXIS & ALLIES®, PANZER LEADER®, STAR FLEET BATTLES®, AD&D®, STAR TREK®, CHAMPIONS®, and WARHAMMER® games. Other activities include a movie room and a dealers' room. Registration: \$2/day or \$5/weekend preregistered; \$3/day or \$6/weekend at the door. Write to: Con Chairman, c/o Cowboy Campaigners Club, 040 Student Union, Box 110, Stillwater OK 74078; or call Wes at: (405) 372-9448.

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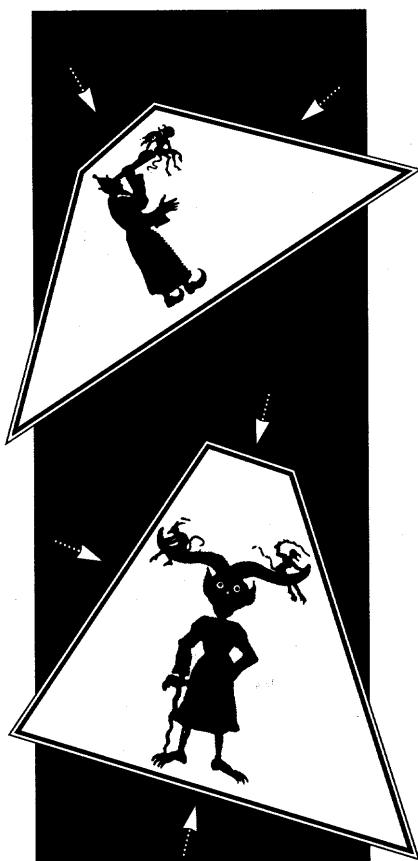
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U-CON, Nov. 15-17

MI

Note: The site of this convention has been changed. It will now be held at the University of Michigan Union on the U. of M. campus in Ann Arbor, Mich. Events include a wide variety of historical miniatures and strategic games. Registration: \$5/day or \$7/weekend; at-the-door prices slightly higher. Write to: U-CON, P.O. Box 4491, Ann Arbor MI 48106-4491.

PENTAGON VII, Nov. 16-17

IN

Sponsored by the Northeastern Indiana Gamers' Assoc., this convention will be held at the Grand Wayne Center in downtown Fort Wayne, Ind. Events include an RPGA™ AD&D® tournament, the NIGA Spotlight tournament, historical miniatures games, painting and costume contests, door prizes, and a flea market. Registration: \$5/day or \$8/weekend preregistered; or \$6/day or \$10/weekend at the door. Write to: PENTACON, P.O. Box 11176, Fort Wayne IN 46856; or call Steve at: (219) 356-4209.

NUCON '91, Nov. 22-24

❖

Sponsored by NUGS, this convention will be held at the University of Newcastle, Newcastle, NSW, Australia. Events include AD&D®, CALL OF CTHULHU*, CYBERPUNK*, SPACE: 1889*, and TOON* games. Registration: \$3 (Australian) per session, for up to eight sessions. Write to: NUGS, 2/16 Upfold St., Mayfield, NSW 2304, AUSTRALIA; or call Rodney at: (049) 1633230 or Matthew at: (049) 676610.

WARPCON, Nov. 23-24

MI

The Western Area Role Players will hold this convention at Sangren Hall, on the Western Michigan University campus in Kalamazoo, Mich. AD&D®, BATTLETECH*, CYBERPUNK*, and RAVENLOFT™ games will be held, with tables for visiting GMs. Prizes will be awarded, and miniatures and costume contests will be held. Admission will be \$2 per day, or \$3 for both days. Write to: Western Area Role Players, Faunce 2040, Mailbox #47, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo MI 49008; or call Craig Dalrymple at: (616) 375-7118.

MACQUARIECON '91, Dec. 13-15

❖

This gaming convention will be held at Macquarie University, North Ryde in Sydney, Australia. Events include a wide range of role-playing games. Write to: Macquarie Univ. Role-playing Society, Box 83, c/o Macquarie Univ. Students' Council, Macquarie Univ., North Ryde, NSW 2109, Sydney, AUSTRALIA; or call Patrick at: (024) 983639.

JANCON II, Jan. 17-19, 1992

CT

Sponsored by the RPGA™ Network club, TimeWarpers, this convention will be held at the Quality Inn in New Haven, Conn. Events include Network tournaments, a benefit for the Literacy Volunteers of America, and AD&D®, BATTLETECH*, CALL OF CTHULHU*, DIPLOMACY*, WARHAMMER*, and STAR FLEET BATTLES* games. Other activities include a costume party, a miniatures painting contest, a movie room, and an expanded dealers' area. Send an SASE to: JANCON II, c/o TimeWarpers, P.O. Box 55552, Bridgeport CT 06610; or call: (203) 371-4330.

PANDEMONIUM IX, Jan. 18-19

*

This convention will be held at the Ryerson Hub Cafeteria, Jorgenson Hall, Ryerson Polytechnical Institute in Toronto, Ontario. Events include two game auctions, over 60 games, a miniatures contest, and many local dealers. Prizes will be awarded to tournament winners.

Registration: \$20 (Canadian)/weekend; or \$15/Saturday and \$10/Sunday. Write to: PANDEMONIUM IX, c/o 17B Wales Ave., Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M5T 1J2; or call: (416) 597-1934.

WRIGHT STATE U. GAME FAIR

Jan. 18-19

OH

This convention will be held on the main campus of Wright State University in Fairborn, Ohio. Events include introductory sessions on role-playing by Shield Games, a parents' session on role-playing games, and RPGA™ Network events. Registration fees have not yet been set, but there will be discounts for attending both days, for RPGA™ Network members, and for qualifying GMs. Write to: Scott Hala, Game Fair Director, WSU Adventurers' Guild, P.O. Box 31016, Dayton OH 45431-0016.

SWANCON 17, Jan. 24-27

❖

This three-in-one convention will be held at the Ascot Convention Center in Perth, Western Australia. Events include SF/F panels, an anime festival, and numerous role-playing and board games with the PARSEC game convention. Guests include Terry Dowling, Nick Stathopoulos, and Philippa Madden. Accommodations will be available. Registration: \$45 (Australian) for all three components before November 1; check for later costs. Write to: SWANCON 17, P.O. Box 227, North Perth, Western Australia 6006, AUSTRALIA; or call Jeremy: (09) 340 8901 during working hours.

CANCON 14, Jan. 25-27

❖

This convention will be held at the University of Canberra in Bruce, ACT, Australia. Events include Australian ancients titles, DIPLOMACY* games, and 20 role-playing tournaments, including several RPGA™ Network events. Write to: CANCON, c/o Wes Nicholson, GPO Box 1016, Canberra, ACT, AUSTRALIA 2601; or call: (06) 254-9926 days.

FANTASY WORLD '92, Jan. 25-26

This convention will be held at the Handelsbeurs in Antwerp, Belgium. Events include a celebration of J. R. R. Tolkien's 100th birthday. Special guest is Dave (Darth Vader) Prowse. Other activities include a parade, swordfighting and martial-arts demos, board and role-playing games, graffiti art, a castle-model auction, music, films, and miniatures and paintings exhibitions. Write to: Palantir vzw, P.O. Box 461, 2000 Antwerp 1, BELGIUM.

How effective was your convention listing? If you are a convention organizer, please write to the editors and let us know if our "Convention Calendar" served your needs. Your comments are always welcome.

Changing your address? If so, tell us immediately. The Post Office will not forward second-class mail without prior notice, and we cannot replace issues that are lost in this manner. Please send us your address change as soon as possible (with your most recent mailing label) so that you won't miss any issues!

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Boxed Nightmares™!

80 pages of horror and adventure

Boxed Nightmares™ is the long awaited adventure/source book for Palladium's *Beyond the Supernatural™* RPG.

The game *package* contains an 80 page adventure and source book along with a peculiar *tabloid news paper* (fictional). The news paper is one of those sensational, check-out counter rags that boasts headlines like, "Woman marries Big Foot" or "Elvis' clone living in Tampa!" However, this tabloid is tied to the adventure book in several different ways.

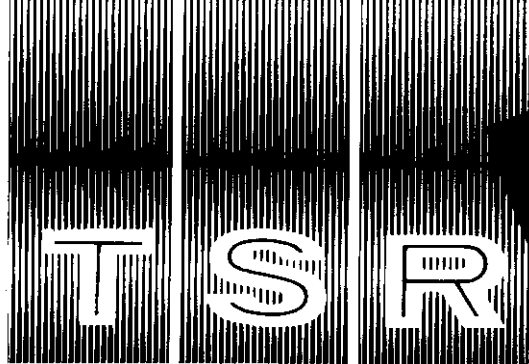
First, the newspaper contains clues and information for the actual adventures inside the supplement. Second, the publishers often hire psychics and parapsychologists to investigate strange phenomenon, so your characters could be working for this rag.

The adventures are designed to give players and GM's a better idea of the *variety* and *scope* of adventures one can explore in the world of modern horror. Some adventures are short, others long. Some are monster stomping action, while others require investigation, cunning, and the uncovering of clues.

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- Front and back cover paintings by Denis Beauvais.
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by Bruce A. Heard

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From the Journals of
prince haldemar of haaken
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princess ark
Imperial Explorer, etc., etc.

Eimir 12, AY 2000: We had just flown past the coast of Narvaez when a strange incident occurred. A small whirlwind materialized in the atrium where Lady Abovombe and I were taking our morning stroll. Seconds later, a handful of boltmen arrived, having seen the whirlwind from their posts nearby, and they made ready to open fire.

The whirlwind came to a halt, revealing a curious character: a halfling in buffoon's garb. Lifting his hat, he cried, "¡Hola! Buenos días, Señores!" Bowing deeply before Lady Abovombe, he added, "Y Señora." He pulled a sealed scroll from his jacket. "I bear a cordial invitation from His

Excellence el Baron de Saragón to you, in hopes that you will attend the annual banquet. His Excellence Don Balthazar will be honored by your visit." Kissing Lady Abovombe's hand, he murmured, "¡Ay! ¡Que guapa!" ["What a babe!"]

The buffoon disappeared in a puff of smoke as fast as he'd come, making the boltmen all the more twitchy. Several sentries looked anxiously above and behind them, and to their sides. Hands still on their wands, they left only after I dismissed them.

The scroll was indeed an invitation. It seemed someone had taken notice of our little performance in Vilaverde. We had no particular objective in the immediate future, and indeed, a friendly stop would be good for the crew. But first, I had to verify this Don Balthazar's intentions.

Eimir 13: A quick invisible visit to the Baron's mansion revealed it was a heavily fortified abode. The place was one that only an experienced wizard could build, judging from its many magical wards and arcane sentries. The arabesques on the walls, the fine colonnades, and the elegant tile works in the atrium reminded me of the style and color used by the Alasyian people. Curiously, more classical paintings, furniture, and wrought iron bars on the windows demonstrated a strong Guardian influence.

The servants were feverishly preparing a great banquet. The broad fire in the kitchen roared under roasting piglets. Pheasants, stuffed boars, racks of lamb, and other delicacies littered the vast tables. Up in the main hall, I noticed the chamberlain debating with the lady of the manor about where to place the guests at the baron's table. I saw my name and Lady Abovombe's among the chamberlain's small plaques. Our plaque moved many times before the lady of the manor, Doña Teresa de Montejo y Sotto, the baron's wife, made her decision. So far, all seemed normal, so I returned to the ship.





Eimir 14: The *Princess Ark* made her formal appearance above Ciudad Matarcan's Plaza Grande. The crowd was impressive. Although astounded by our arrival, the people showed no signs of fear.

Soon enough, a column of guards plowed through the spectators. An officer stood among them, signaling to the Princess. A fast lifeboat promptly fetched him. He introduced himself as our escort to the baronial manor house. As a dignitary of Imperial Alpathia with a beautiful lady on an official reception, we took along a proper escort in the person of Myojo Katamura.

Courteous and thoughtful, our guide took us on a tour of the town with a short stop at the flower market. The trip proved enjoyable, despite an all-too-evident escort of Torreón lancers riding before and behind our carriage. We reached the manor by sundown, where all three of us were provided with quarters for our stay.

Soon afterward, the major-domo announced our arrival in the main hall. A sumptuous crowd of petty nobles and ladies-in-waiting bowed respectfully before us. I was an Alpathian prince, after all. We looked just right. Lady Abovombe stood resplendent in a white robe covered with pearls. Myojo had simply outdone himself with a gleaming ceremonial armor that made the Torreón guards pale with envy. So far, so good.

"Welcome to Saragón, Prince of Haaken!" called Baron Balthazar as he walked up to us. "Your visit honors our modest barony. I hope your tour of the city was to your liking?" We were promptly and formally introduced, and the baron added, "Tales of your famous exploits have preceded you, Señor!"

Almost immediately, the minstrels began to play a fine minuet. Before I could react, a diligent and hopeful troop of hidalgos besieged Lady Abovombe for a dance. The baron won the first. For my part, I enjoyed a few steps with Doña Teresa. The dances went on between the usual court conversations and gossip. Many partners later, I finally gave up keeping track of who was whom.

I grew tired of the reception and so retired to my quarters with Myojo. Lady Abovombe remained, enjoying her time tremendously. It is true that balls are not all that common on the ship. We'll have to work on this.

Eimir 14—Abovombe, from a later account: The emotion and passion in the people I met and danced with surprised me. I had grown accustomed to the polite and restrained ways aboard the *Princess Ark* and at my father's court. It was only because of Doña Socorro's help, the dueña [chaperon, an elderly lady in waiting] of the baron's daughter that I safely returned to my quarters. It nevertheless remained a delightful night.

No sooner had I snuffed out my candle, than there arose a sweet melody from the garden. A young hidalgo stood beneath my

balcony, singing a love song under the full moon. Although old fashioned, it was very charming. Thinking himself in luck, he quickly climbed the vines and reached my room. Indeed, he was of the romantic, enterprising, passionate, and ultimately tenacious kind—in short, totally lovely. Also very, very difficult to get rid of.

Eimir 14—Haldemar, later that night: Foolish was I to believe the evening was over so quickly. I barely had time to pour myself a glass of that sweet Gargañan sherry when a soft knock came from the door.

A colossal man with handlebar mustaches immediately pushed his way into the room. "Have a cigar, amigo! Sherry is best enjoyed this way." He opened a box full of odorous tobacco rolls and added: "I will meet any offer they made, plus a full cargo load. Well, amigo, have you decided?"

At a loss, I frowned and said, "I'm afraid you are mistaken, sir. Business was not the motive of my visit here."

He seemed disconcerted. "Ay! This is very unfortunate, amigo." I was about to further question this rather insolent character about his identity and the object of his visit when he suddenly pulled out a large knife. But Myojo's sword-drawing talent proved swifter, and the surprised—and quite dead—assailant fell heavily to the floor.

As the baron's guest, I couldn't possibly get caught with who-knows-who's dead body in my quarters. I thought of returning to the ship with the body, but soon discovered that none of my travel spells worked. The mansion was magically locked, it seemed. Drat! Finally, Myojo bound up the big man's wound, picked up the body, and hooked it up inside the closet. It would do for the time being.

Someone else then came to the door, a small, fat fellow. "My apologies, Señor. I hope I am not interrupting. But little time is left, and I must insist. When the third hour strikes—" He stopped speaking and opened his eyes wide. "Caramba!" he whispered—and fell to the floor. A small dart was stuck in his neck. Alas, too late I noticed a shape jump off the balcony and run away into the garden. Double drat! Myojo dutifully picked up the new victim and propped him up behind the curtains.

One more visitor knocked at my door. It was an elderly lady this time. "Young man," she said, "you should know that great deeds make great men. For what you are to do tonight, you shall be rewarded in honor and status."

"Milady," I ventured, "might I inquire as to whom you might be?"

"Oh, puh-lease!" she said with indignation. She then motioned to Myojo, as if he should be doing something. He gathered she wanted a glass of sherry. She went on when he brought her the drink. "Listen carefully, for it must not be broken. Twist the skull to the—urk!" She choked on her beverage, then went into convulsions as her mouth began to foam. "¡Que Barbari-

dad!" she spat, then fell to the floor. Another one!

Myojo sighed and shrugged. He picked her up and pushed her under the bed. I tossed the dangerous beverage and my glass out of the window lest someone else be harmed. I heard a scream from below and saw a dark shape run back into the garden, holding his (or her) head.

Despite their sudden deaths, these strange people singularly amazed me. My curiosity was now greatly aroused. Would I have more visitors this evening? I wondered. And, sure enough, another visitor knocked at the door just then.

A Torreón officer fell forward into the room, a dagger stuck in his back. He whispered: "I am dying, Señor. Listen, for many other people have died this night. I can smell it."

Myojo sniffed around him and looked puzzled.

"You are the victim of an odious set-up," continued the officer. "You must leave at once. A secret passage exists behind the third barrel in the cellar . . ." He nearly passed out. "Adiós, Señor. My time has come." Now beyond our help, he slipped to the floor.

I rendered "number four" invisible and sat him at my chair when the door suddenly opened. A servant came in. That was enough! Myojo grabbed the steward and prepared to cut his throat. "Have mercy, Señor!" the man cried, frightened out of his wits. "I am only a poor peón working for the baron. I came to prepare your bed. Please spare my life. I will not disturb again, I swear!" He seemed rather honest. After some fruitless questioning and many repetitions from him of "¡Muchas gracias!" I let him go—only to hear a scream of agony an instant later in the hallway. I refused to go look.

Minutes later, yet one more visitor came up. "Are you all right?" It was Lady Abovombe. She carried a black-eyed hidalgo on her back, dragging the recently departed servant behind her. "This one got a bit too daring," she said. "I knocked him out when I heard the scream in the garden. I couldn't possibly leave him behind! As for the servant, I don't know what happened to him. I found him lying in the hallway as I came to check the noise. He's dead."

At last, someone who didn't drop dead on us! After unceremoniously stuffing Lady Abovombe's two into a large chest, we left the room for fear of inheriting another macabre gift. It was time to pay a visit to our baronial host.

Eimir 15—Haldemar, early morning: I did not have much of a clue about where to go in this vast manor. I decided to follow the late Torreón officer's words. Indeed, a secret passage existed in the cellar, and it lead to a wizard's workroom.

Alchemical implements stood on a large bench, bubbling, puffing, and whistling, as glowing, multicolored liquids traveled through the glassware and the crystal

tubes. On a desk sat a crystal skull with some other bric-a-brac that reminded me of my own office. Rays of faint, blue light from the skull's empty eye sockets illuminated a clock in the corner. It reached the third hour in the morning and struck its bell. I tried to reach the skull, but an invisible force kept me at bay. By the second stroke, I dispelled the force, hoping my magic to be strong enough. Indeed, by the third stroke, I turned the skull to the right and hoped for the best.

And the best happened. The two beams hit a golden Oltec sun sculpted on the wall. It shifted away, revealing a new chamber. There, sitting among an impressive library, was Don Balthazar, quietly observing us.

With a smile, he began "¡Buenos días, Señor! I am glad to see that you prevailed over my guests. I do apologize for the inconvenience, but a number of spies and traitors had penetrated my court, and I needed someone powerful from the outside to help me uncover them. I quietly had the rumor of your arrival spread among my subjects at the court. I made them believe you planned on stealing a great artifact from me, selling it to the highest bidder. Many rulers in the region would give their right arms to acquire such power. It was the only way I could seek them out, and for this I am in your debt, Señor."

I wasn't amused. "Dear Baron, there are better ways of dealing with a prince of the Alphonian Empire. For your information, I do have other business to which I must attend, and I am not the least bit interested in your petty dealings."

He stood up and pulled out a pipe. "Ah, Señor! You surprise me! On the contrary, a great adventurer as yourself should appreciate an evening such as this! Come now, my friend. Your time wasn't lost. I am prepared to make amends and offer Your Majesty's skyships unlimited access to my Plaza Grande—and for you, the usual commercial fee from all merchant deals. The wizards' empire is most welcome in Saragón!"

Indeed, this was one very-well-informed wizard. I pulled out my own pipe. "With one condition, then! I dare say, I would love to sample this fragrant tobacco of yours."

Don Balthazar agreed with a broad smile, "... and a glass of sherry. The good sherry, of course!"

'After a long and constructive conversation, we finally took a stroll back outside, in the garden. The sun was rising. As we stood in the alley before the manor, Don Balthazar wondered about the identities of those who had showed up in my room. He was concerned about an assassin who had stalked him in the dark and was probably still at large.

Just then, a scream came from my apartment. Lady Abovombe's black-eyed lover appeared at the balcony, rather frightened. He probably had just awakened in

the chest with a dead man resting in his arms. As he stood there on the balcony crying murder, another body slipped from behind the curtains and bumped against the young hidalgo's back. He screamed again and jumped off the balcony, landing on a thick bush. Almost immediately, he stood up and screamed once more. A tall creature in black was hiding there—a gnoll dressed in the garb of assassins. It, too, screamed, and they both ran off in opposite directions. Without a moment of hesitation, both Don Balthazar and myself pulled out our wands, and in a single motion fried the ugly beast.

"¡Muy bien, Señor! Excellent shooting!"

"Not bad yourself, dear Baron!"

I guess that took care of the wizard's night stalker.

Eimír 22: We enjoyed a few more days at the manor while the crew was granted a much-appreciated furlough. I introduced Talasar and Xerdon to the Baron, who was then given a tour of the Princess. He later revealed that he had traveled once to the Court of Eriadna the Wise and learned a lot about Alphonian ways. He had heard secondhand about my financial arrangement with Her Imperial Majesty, and when news of my visit to Vilaverde had reached him, he naturally thought of inviting me to Ciudad Matacán. The rest then fell into place.

We finally left the Barony of Saragón. With auspicious winds, the *Princess Ark* took a southwestern heading, toward more discoveries and adventures in the Savage Coast.

To be continued. . .

The Savage Coast

The population on the western shores of the Gulf of Hule is often referred to as Los Guardianos. They are primarily the descendants of an ancient Oltec dominion, which explains their dark complexion. Elves appeared in several outlying areas by the 23rd century B.C. but were decimated circa B.C. 1290 by Wogar's Horde of humanoids, except for a few clans north of the Great Escarpment. The elves did not influence the local culture in any meaningful manner. Around B.C. 700, Nithians colonized this lost civilization without, however, removing its ancient cultural heritage. By B.C. 500, the Nithians had disappeared, leaving behind a strong artistic and philosophical legacy.

The modern Guardianos culture reflects more recent Traldar influences. Expatriate Traldars fleeing epidemics of lycanthropy in what would later become the Grand Duchy of Karameikos resettled this area circa A.C. 450. A first wave of colonists populated the eastern shores of the Gulf of Hule, founding such states as Slagovich and Zvormik. They spread farther west within the following centuries, slowly settling along the main rivers. Rather than imposing their own culture, these expatriate Traldars were assimilated by the local culture.

The exception to this are Texeirans and Vilaverdians (see DRAGON issue 174, "The Voyage of the *Princess Ark*"). They developed a local dialect different from the language of other Guardian realms. This resulted from centuries of Hulean influence and older Yavdlom ties.

Almarrón—Capital: Ciudad Tejillas (Pop.: 7,000); **Ruler:** Señor Esteban "El Salvador" Díaz y Delgado; **typical NPC:** a poor peón conspiring against the tyrant.

This small, reclusive nation has fallen under the control of the capital city's lord mayor—Don Esteban, Señor Alcalde of Ciudad Tejillas. The population had overthrown the old baron decades ago and instituted a Traldar-inspired democracy. Poverty and hot tempers threatened the young nation, and Don Esteban intervened to prevent its downfall. Using his authority over the capital's garrison, he ousted opposing factions, imposed his dictatorship, and named himself "El Salvador" (The Savior).

Don Esteban quickly seized the nation's most important asset, as he saw it: the silver mines in the Sierra del Plata. Many of the surrounding nations depend on this source of silver to mint their coins. Remaining resources come especially from coffee plantations whose crops are commonly exported to Hule and the Yavdlom Divinarchy, and the production of cigars or pipe tobacco. Much of the nation's wealth remains in Don Esteban's hands.

The people of Almarrón resent the usurper and his odious tyranny. Many of the poorest peons ran from the dictator's Torreón mercenaries and tax collectors. The guerrilleros formed bands of insurgents preying on silver caravans and competing for their own goals. Several guerrilleros dream of restoring democracy, while others are still loyal to the old baron's son, Barón Maximiliano de Almarrón y Escudor. So far, Don Esteban has been unsuccessful in dislodging the guerrilleros from the hills. Most of his troops are tied up with the control of urban areas, the trails, the silver mines, and the Castle of Tordegena that wards the nation's western border against gnoll raids.

Gargaña—Capital: Ciudad Real (Pop.: 13,000); **Ruler:** Baronesa Esperanza "La Ilustre" de Sotto y Rivera; **typical NPC:** the adventurous poet on a quest for inspiration.

This is the mildest of the region's nations. Doña Esperanza's enlightened reign has given her people a secure and almost prosperous life for the past 15 years. It has been free of revolts and wars, thanks to the policy of neutrality the "Illustrious Baroness" maintains with her neighbors. Doña Esperanza's two daughters married into the baronial families of the Narvaez and Montejo (Saragón), which has helped to prevent unnecessary wars.

Ciudad Real is perhaps more famous for its generous patrons. The capital is a haven for the arts and literature. Many fine

artists, poets, and philosophers came to Ciudad Real to flourish under the philanthropic boon. Intellectually, it is the center of the Guardianio culture. Thanks to their skills, many scholars native of Gargaña work abroad as preceptors or political advisers for other baronies.

As a military force, Gargaña is rather weak in comparison with its neighbors. The baroness relies mostly on a large, loyal, but mediocre militia backed up with Torreón mercenaries. Active troops garrison the capital and the Castle of Pardalupe. The latter force is more concerned with occasional gnoll raids through the southern border than with their Saragón neighbor.

Guadalante—Capital: Ciudad Huelca (Pop.: 9,000); Ruler: Señor Cristobal "El Barbuda" Bigotillos y Copetez; typical NPC: the proud gaucho, rover of the pampas.

Guadalante is the home of the gauchos, free-spirited wanderers of the savage west's great plains. They can easily be recognized by their calf-high boots, puffy pants, ample shirts, and broad hats. Their weapons of choice remain the bolas, spear, and light crossbow. Few ever wear armor, considered too bulky for their trade in the pampas. As a military force, the gauchos form an effective light cavalry corps of lancers, mobile crossbowmen who are well suited to combat in the vast grasslands.

In peacetime, most are vaqueros, cattle raisers who live in large (usually fortified) haciendas. The gauchos' main concern remains the protection of their cattle against gnoll raiders from the south. During periods of famine, goblin incursions from the Yazak Steppes are to be expected as well. The gauchos are a major source of horses and bovines for most of the western Gulf of Hule. After a few clashes with the arcane Saragón over border disputes and watering rights for cattle, the two nations eventually settled their conflict with the Treaty of Cortesillas. Guadalante resumed normal trade thereafter.

Guadalante is an oligarchy, a state ruled by the more prominent families of cattle traders. Don Cristobal "The Bearded" is a rather peaceful if boisterous ex-adventurer. Despite his apparent roughness from his years in the pampas, his style, extravagance, sense of humor, and appreciation of all that is refined in life have charmed more than one señorita during his visits to the eastern baronies. He is currently married to Doña Catalina de Bigotillos y Narvaez, daughter of Barón Hugo "The Merciless" (see last issue's column). The marriage was performed in secret, without her father's approval. The baron has yet to send the dowry to this much despised *pechero* [commoner].

Saragón—Capital: Ciudad Matacán (Pop.: 11,000); Ruler: Barón Balthazar "El Moro"

de Montejo-y-Aranjuez; Typical NPC: the shadowy wizard on a secret quest.

The people of Saragón are unique in style and thinking. This small region shows a stronger Nithian influence than anywhere else. Ancient Nithian culture prevailed a bit more here than elsewhere and still shows some resistance to Traldar influence. Nowadays, it seems more like a Guardianos-style blend of Alasyian and Traldar backgrounds.

Within the past century, the population seems to have remained evenly split between the traditional precepts of the Guardianos and Al Kalim. There is no animosity between the two philosophies, but rather a friendly understanding among the various advocates—which enrages the Narvaezan Inquisitors (see last issue's column). The proponents of Narvaez clerical orthodoxy view the dark-skinned citizens of Saragón as the spawn of chaos, and their fair-skinned compatriots as dangerous heretics.

On the other hand, the people of Saragón like to view themselves as sages and scientists, the learned ones in the western Gulf of Hule. Their Nithian legacy facilitated the rise of wizards, alchemists, astronomers, and outstanding mathematicians. Don Balthazar "The Moor" himself is an experienced wizard—yet one more cause for the ancestral enmity between Saragón and Narvaez.

The oddest thing about Saragón is that

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its baron owns an ancient Oltec artifact that protects the barony's borders. Any armed force of 100 or more troops that crosses the border with intent to harm the barony is immediately stricken with fear and the urge to leave at once. This has prevented Narvaezan armies from invading Saragón. This is a blessing since the elite Narvaez troops, *Los Matamoros*, would certainly create great havoc in Saragón if they ever came. Commonly encountered patrols of Torreón lancers usually take care of smaller groups of intruders, especially gnoll raiders along the Río Copos. The Oltec artifact can also generate a force field around the baronial manor that negates all transportation spells such as *dimension door*, *passwall*, *teleportation*, *travel*, *gate*, etc.

Letters

What is the correct progression for demi-humans to acquire new skills?

You will find the answer in the new D&D game Rules Cyclopedia, which should be available just about the time you read this. The skill system and a list of the more important skills have been included there.

What are the statistics for weapon-mastery skills with the Belcadiz rapier? Is there a connection between the Belcadiz and Darokin rapiers?

Those rapiers are pretty much the same. Many of the Guardianos, especially Torreón mercenaries, use them as well, sometimes with red steel. See the Rapier Update Table in this article.

The rules on elf magic in GAZ5 *The Elves of Alfheim* are a bit vague. Can humans learn that magic? Can elven scrolls and spell books be found? If elf magic is

taught by Tree Keepers, why don't the Vyalia and the Calarii elves of Karameikos know any? What about the elves of the Shiye Lawr?

It would be natural to assume elven scrolls and spell books exist, and that any elven tribe with a Tree Keeper would be able to acquire elven magic skills. Humans should not be allowed to use elven magic; they might be able to decipher elven runes and understand their general intent, though. Humans should not be able to use them to gain any advantage in the research of comparable human spells, either. If you use this idea, elves should then suffer the same limitation regarding human magic. Universities of magic would have to develop different teaching branches!

I'd like to know about paladins and avengers in the Known World. Where do they fit in? I don't remember seeing them anywhere in the Gazetteer line. Despite the rules in the Companion Set, couldn't a paladin or an avenger become a knight in Karameikos or in the Empires? Will the world be more feudal in the future?

These types of characters could be used in Karameikos without too much trouble, especially the paladin and the knight. Avengers will fit perfectly in the Princess Ark's version of the Heldann Freeholds (remember the Heldannic Knights). It is especially easy to use the paladin, since the requirement is to swear fealty to a 'lawful church.' That could be done in the two empires, Darokin, Ierendi, Vestland, Vilaverde, Texeiras, Torreón, Narvaez, the baronies of Gargoña and Saragón, or the various city states across the Gulf of Hule. We are planning on developing the Heldann Freeholds/Heldannic Knights in a Gazetteer format sometime in the future.

With some tinkering, coming up with home-rules for demi-human versions of the knights should not be an impossible endeavor. Elven knights in Wendar, or their dwarven equivalents in Rockhome, are not necessarily out of the question so long as one preserves game balance and fairness to those players running human fighters.

I feel the Known World has too much magic; it's my only complaint about the Gazetteers. For example, where did the boltmen get their wands? Is there a "magic factory" in Alphatia somewhere?

The Known World was made "magic-happy" to make it stand apart from its many competitors; this is its hallmark. Of course, Alphatia does not have the privilege (or curse) of having developed arcane wand factories. However, 2,000 years of wizards' experiments (and they had a lot of those fellows running around) will produce many wands and other goodies.

The boltmen are a special caste in the Alphatian armed forces. They don't come in unlimited supplies. Being a boltman is a family trade, the wand often becoming a youth's prized inheritance when his veteran parent retires. For that reason, battlefield scavengers are frowned upon in Alphatia.

Final note: When asking questions about specific rules or background information, please include the name of the product and the page number of the material in question. This would be of great help. Some of your questions deal with rather obscure topics that can take quite a while to locate (when I do locate them)! This little effort on your part will increase your chances of seeing a response in this column.

Rapier Update Table

	Mastery	Ranges	Damage	Defense	Special
[P = H]	Basic	-	2d4-1	-	-
	Skilled	-	1d8+1	H: +2 AC/2	Deflect (1* *) Disarm (Save)
	Expert	-	1d8+2	H: +2 AC/3	Deflect (2* *) Disarm (Save +2)
	Master	-	P:1d12	H: +3 AC/3	Deflect (3* *) Disarm (Save +4)
	Grand Master	-	P:1d12 + 1	H: +4 AC/4	Deflect (3* *) Disarm (Save +6)
		10/20/30	S:1d10* S:1d10 + 1*		

[P = H] Primary target fights back with either a hand-held or a hand-thrown weapon

* Rapier can be hand-thrown.

P: Primary target

S: Secondary target (when the rapier is hand-thrown)

H: Armor-class bonus to the rapier's user, against attacks from opponents using hand-held or hand-thrown weapons

AC/# Number of attacks affected by the armor-class bonus each round

** Number of successful attacks the rapier's user can attempt to deflect each game round (save vs. Death Ray for success)

Note: Don't forget to apply the Hit Roll bonuses from the table on page 17 of the *Masters Players Book*. Deflect and Disarm abilities are both explained on page 22 of the same book.

The rapier costs 10 gp and has an encumbrance of 60 cn. It is a single-handed medium weapon. The shield conflicts with the "art of fencing" required for the rapier, negating all Defense and Special effects. The rapier is a melee weapon rarely or never thrown. It suffers a -2 to-hit penalty against plate armor.



Cartography by Dennis Kauth



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Lynx Clawed Him awoke to the sounds of the village at dawn: the rustling of slow human motion, clicking of pots and wooden implements, yips and snorts of dogs and children, scratching of lizards and roaches in the thatch roof over his head. He peered out from under the fringe of his sleeping furs at the low rectangle of the door, lightening now to gray. He scratched absently at his ankle, then rolled out of the furs to don loin cloth and moccasins and a light deerskin mantle against the morning chill.

He emerged moments later to greet the day. His mother had stirred the coals of the fire and set a pot of hominy gruel to warm, but had not yet fed new fuel to start a flame. This act must wait until the miko, the Sun, stepped forth from his own house atop the Great Mound to greet his spiritual uncle as it rose over the eastern forest.

Lynx Clawed Him stretched as he waited. He was a young man, tall and strong-boned, who would be solid but rangy when his frame filled out. Like all his people, he had dark eyes and dark, coarse hair, which he wore in a loose knot over his right shoulder. Because of his youth, only a few small tattoos dotted his chest and back, but the wolf's tooth pendant at his neck showed the promise of a born hunter.

His mother was Tall Corn Woman, a stocky, cheerful woman who wore skirt and cape of finely woven fiber. She silently pushed him away from the fire as his younger brothers and sister emerged from the house. They stood huddled together, rubbing sleepy eyes, watching as dim shapes moved among the shadows of wattle-and-daub houses all around the village. Quietly, contentedly, the village woke.

Presently, it became evident to all that the sun would not be visible this morning. The sky remained a leaden gray, loosing occasional drops of rain, and the smoke of smoldering coals hung low over the village.

Lynx Clawed Him caught a glimpse of motion and looked across the open plaza. Stalked the Cougar, who was miko, stepped forth from his big house on top of the Great Mound. Behind him came the Eagle Dancer, chief counsellor and master of the ceremonial cycle. Both men were wrapped in feather mantles fringed with eagle feathers, befitting their importance.

Stalked the Cougar stared at the sky above Lynx Clawed Him, where only a vague glow marked the presence of the sun. The miko raised both hands and chanted the morning prayer. Each morning, the village chief addressed his kinsman, the sun. This morning he did not thank the sun for returning bright and warm, but expressed thanks instead for all previous bright dawns, and hope that his kind great-uncle would burn away the clouds and visit them in his full glory later in the day. Low-voiced, the people agreed, "Hou!" and the Sun and Eagle Dancer ducked back into the miko's house.

Around the village, activity and noise levels trebled. Wood was thrown on cooking fires. Children jostled for bowls of stew or rolled wrestling in the straggling weeds. Lynx Clawed Him accepted two gourds of steaming maize gruel from his mother and walked across the littered

Uktena's Crest

By Kit Wesler

Illustrations by Terry Dykstra

ground between his house and that of his clan uncle.

His clan uncle, stooped and nearly toothless, accepted his breakfast without comment. Lynx Clawed Him settled on the mat beside the old man and sipped his meal in companionable silence.

At length, the old man put down his gourd and drew his buckskin closer around his shoulders. Lynx Clawed Him knew this signal and said respectfully, "Good morning, Uncle."

The old man sniffed.

"It will be a cool day for early summer," said Lynx Clawed Him.

"It is time for you to take a man's name," replied the old man. His own name was Elder Hawk.

Lynx Clawed Him let his deerskin slip off his left shoulder, revealing the parallel scars he had worn since he was a small boy and which gave him his name. "I have a name, Uncle."

"It is a good name," said Elder Hawk. "It is a proud name. For a boy. But a man must have a new name, a name that tells his exploits, a hunter's name, a warrior's name."

"I killed the lynx," the young man reminded him. "With my cane knife."

"Hou," said the old man, agreeing. "But you must prove yourself a great warrior, and take a new name, before you take a wife."

"I will think on the matter," said Lynx Clawed Him politely, though he had no such intention. "And now I go."

He took the empty gourds back to his mother's fire, hardly noticing the bits of pottery and small bone that crunched under his feet. The day was as bright as it would be for some time, and the light chill was invigorating. Lynx Clawed Him decided to go into the deep woods today in search of solitude.

His village stood on a bluff overlooking the Great River, Mesasepa, the wide, sluggish water that flowed from the far north to the Salt Water in the south. From the top of the Sun's mound, on the west side of the town plaza, watchers could see the mouth of the Seneca River, which ran from the northeast through the land of the Shawanos. Below the bluff, the rich bottomland spread out to the north, where the village's cornfields lay green and sprawling. But on the high land to the east and south, the tall forest dominated, as far as a man could walk in two days' time, before reaching yet another river with bottoms rich enough to support many such villages as Town Over Two Rivers.

Lynx Clawed Him rolled his deerskin mantle into his quiver along with two arrows, took a small pouch of parched corn, and set off. On the north side of the village, he trotted down the steep ravine, pausing to wash his face in the small stream at bottom. Here, under the trees, the gloom deepened to a twilight, and the intermittent drizzle was fragmented by a thousand leaves to become a fine mist.

The young man looked momentarily downstream, then chose the branch of the ravine that led northeast and set off at an easy lope.

Toward midday he crested a ridge, looked down, and

froze. A huge buck drank in a rain puddle not twenty paces below him. Silently, Lynx Clawed Him chose an antler-tipped arrow, nocked and drew in a fluid motion—and stood still, grinning, knowing that this buck was his if he wanted it.

But there was meat in his house, for his mother's brother had distributed a fine doe only the day before. More, Lynx Clawed Him had not sung the hunter's song to purify himself and to ask the spirit of the deer to allow him success at the hunt. True, he could build a fire on his back trail to block the spirit of the buck from following him home; but it would be a long walk with a heavy load of meat that his family did not need. So he relaxed the bow and said, "Hah!" and grinned again as the startled buck disappeared with a flick of its white tail.

A moment later, he seated himself beside a fallen tree and took out the parched corn for a snack. He watched squirrels chase each other from tree to tree and noted a red fox stopping to drink at the same puddle that the buck had fled. He heard all the rustles, the thumps, the patters of small woods life around him. But he heard nothing of his friend Umulaquena until the light voice said, almost in his ear, "There is trouble in your village."

He turned, startled and yet not surprised, because Umulaquena always appeared from nowhere. Umulaquena was of the Little People who lived in the woods and who were visible or invisible at whim. He stood no taller than Lynx Clawed Him's knees. Like all his people, he wore his dark hair unbound behind his back, reaching all the way to the ground. But his eyes were the color of the sky on a sunny day and not like dark human eyes at all.

"I greet you," said Lynx Clawed Him. As far as he knew, he was the only person who ever spoke to the Little People. The villagers feared them as mischief-makers and tricksters. "What trouble?"

"A party from the Great Sun arrived at your village soon after you left," Umulaquena said. "They came south from Kahoki by canoe, led by an Eagle Dancer. I do not know why they came, but I can see that they have caused great anguish."

"Thank you for bringing this news," said Lynx Clawed Him and set off at a run.

It was mid-afternoon when he came back to Town Over Two Rivers, and the men from Kahoki had gone, but he could tell by the angry faces that the visit from the Great Sun's emissaries had not been welcome. He stopped at his mother's house to grab a bite of food, but Tall Corn Woman sent him directly to the council house atop Second Mound, where the men were gathering.

He slipped in the corner door and found a seat in the back of his clan's section. The council house's mud walls were smoother than most, whitewashed, and decorated with clan symbols where the men belonging to that clan would sit. The mats covering all but the center of the floor were very clean. Almost all of the men in the village were already there; Elder Hawk at the head of the Hawk Clan, the other clan elders and Beloved Men around the inner circle. Lynx Clawed Him saw his father across the room, sitting with his own Wolf Clan. He looked for other familiar faces, and from the varied expressions and the snatches of muttered conversation, he gathered that only a few of

those present knew what the day's problem was.

The crowd fell silent as the Sun emerged from behind a screen. Stalked the Cougar took his seat on the low bench that marked the north side of the council fire. He wore his feather mantle and carried an axe carved from a single green stone. Behind him, as ever, stood Eagle Dancer, who looked oddly chastened. Stalked the Cougar seemed both angry and frightened.

The council pipe had completed its round and waited only for Eagle Dancer and Stalked the Cougar to draw brief puffs.

The miko began to speak.

"Since the Ancient time, the Sun clan has ruled the people. The Great Sun has blessed the town of Kahoki, and his presence has made it the greatest of all towns. The Sun clan has spread among all the people, and through them the Sun has given us food and warmth, and the people have prospered."

Stalked the Cougar paused for a moment, to let a murmur of assent punctuate his speech.

"Town Over Two Rivers has also been blessed, since the Ancient time, with a blessing second only to the presence of the Great Sun. The Sun clan of Town Over Two Rivers has had one thing that no other Sun clan has owned. Handed down from miko to miko, guarded by each miko, advised by the first Eagle Dancer to keep it safe"—here Eagle Dancer winced—"Town Over Two Rivers has kept the Ulunsuti."

Again came the murmur, this time with overtones of puzzlement, for the Ulunsuti was a thing seldom mentioned.

"The Ulunsuti is the great crystal that was torn from the head of Uktena. We know that the small divining crystals that are Uktena's scales give a man success in the hunt and war, and bring luck to all things in his life. Uktena's crest is the greatest of the crystals, so it has brought health and plenty to Town Over Two Rivers since the time before memory. The Suns of this village have protected the crystal and cared for it and have kept its whereabouts hidden, even from the Great Sun at Kahoki."

With startling suddenness, Eagle Dancer flung something into the center of the council house: a deerskin stained with red ochre—an empty sack.

"The Great Sun has taken the Ulunsuti."

This announcement was greeted with shock and anger. Men leapt to their feet to shout questions. Finally an old man stood, whose seat was directly across from the miko, and the assembly sat down to hear him speak.

Far Trader was clan uncle to the Elk clan, the senior clan after the Suns. His speech was unusually blunt. "How did you allow this?"

Stalked the Cougar set his teeth at the brusqueness of this speech but answered. "He sent an Eagle Dancer this morning to claim it."

Far Trader said, "There were only ten men."

"If we refuse, the Great Sun can send a thousand warriors from Kahoki," Stalked the Cougar replied.

"Has this ever happened?" Far Trader demanded.

"No," said a new voice calmly. "But he could. And you know it."

Lynx Clawed Him stared with everyone else at the new

speaker. This was a man he did not know well, who sat with his father's Wolf Clan. Gray Bear Laughing was also a far traveler and a respected warrior, as the many tattoos on his chest and shoulders attested. He was a compact, heavily muscled man of medium height who wore a warrior's hawk feather over his left ear. He met the elder's gaze calmly, and Far Trader, having no answer, sat down.

From the back a young man's voice cried, "We can take it back!"

The miko rapped his stone axe sharply against a roof post. "The result would be the same. The Great Sun would know that we took back the Ulunsuti, and warriors would come to punish us. We could fight, but we are too few to win. We would be wiped out, and our women would be taken to serve the Great Sun."

Gloom settled over the assembly. There was silence for some time until Lynx Clawed Him said hesitantly, "Can we get another Ulunsuti?"

There was a murmur that blended the derision of the elders with the challenging approval of the young warriors. Lynx Clawed Him, a bit shocked at his own temerity, noted that Gray Bear Laughing said nothing but merely looked thoughtful.

Eagle Dancer stepped forward. "In all the years of the people, there has been only one Ulunsuti. We the Northern Chicasa, our brother Chicasa and Chakta to the south, our neighbors the Muskoghe and their northern brothers the Yuchi to our east, of these none but Town Over Two Rivers has ever had an Ulunsuti."

Lynx Clawed Him stirred, but Eagle Dancer was just warming up.

"Uktena is the most terrible beast of this world, and also of the world below that spawned him. He is the enemy of all good things in this world. He is like a great serpent longer than twenty men, scaled with crystal. He has wings like a bird and horns like an elk. The crest on his head gives off blinding light in flashes brighter than the sun, that steal men's minds and make them walk down his throat. He lives in deep pools in the remotest mountains, in the land of the Tsalagi, who are cannibals. In all the years of the people, only one Ulunsuti was ever taken, and that was in the Ancient time, when there were great heroes. Who, now, would challenge Uktena in his lair?"

The mocking tone of this last question was aimed directly at Lynx Clawed Him. Stung, the young warrior stood up and shouted, "I will!" and barely had time to repent his rashness before he was met with a tumult of scorn.

Stalked the Cougar rapped for silence and said with cruel sarcasm, "And who will accompany this boy to take Uktena's crest?"

Into the resultant stillness, Gray Bear Laughing said calmly, "I will." His eyes were hard as flint, and no amount of argument through the rest of the long night would dissuade him.

In the cold light of dawn, as the assembly broke up, Gray Bear Laughing drew Lynx Clawed Him aside. They stood near the chunky pole in the center of the plaza, watching the miko ascend the Great Mound and enter his house. Gray Bear Laughing's eyes were measuring as he said, "That was a rash promise you made, boy. Aren't

you scared?"

Lynx Clawed Him considered denying it but knew it was evident in his face, so he merely nodded glumly.

"Well, you should be. The Tsalagi are not cannibals, you know, just people like us. I've been in their villages before. But Uktena, now, that's a different story."

Lynx Clawed Him looked up and realized with a shock that this renowned warrior was slightly shorter than he. He said, "We have to try."

"Hou," the older man said with amusement. "We'll take two days to prepare."

As Gray Bear Laughing had expected, the two days were spent in ceremonial preparation. Lynx Clawed Him's people were careful people who maintained the balance of life and who followed the formulas of purity. No man willingly hunted without asking the spirit of the game to allow him success; no person set out on a journey without purifying himself. But the priests were more than usually careful in this ceremony, not only because of the importance of this mission to the well-being of the entire village. No one had ever set out to hunt Uktena before. There were no songs for such a quest, nor could they simply adapt the hunting song of the deer, because Uktena was the relative of the snakes. The relationship of people to snakes was ambiguous. Rattlesnake was respected but dangerous, and all snakes belonged to the world below, the source of evil. The priests took an entire day to discuss the proper ceremonies, and the second day was spent in fasting, in ceremony, and in song.

Gray Bear Laughing led Lynx Clawed Him east from the village on the second morning after the council ended. They went by foot, following well-worn trails. They could have gone by water, upstream. The Seneka River, which flowed into the Mesasepa north of Town Over Two Rivers, swung south before turning northeast again. Near the bottom of the southward bend, two other rivers joined. Both rivers sprang from the Tsalagi country in the eastern mountains, but both reached far south before curving north again to the land of Uktena and the Tsalagi. The southernmost river was known as the Tenase after a Tsalagi town near its source.

Downstream, it might have been as quick a journey to follow the rivers by canoe. But to follow the straight path, slightly south of due east, nearly halved the distance and would be better than paddling a dugout against the current.

They traveled light, as hunters. Each had bow and arrows, with a flint knife and a pouch containing a small meal of parched corn at the belt. Each had a pack with a light deerskin mantle and a few small implements on his back. Summer was coming, and they left behind leggings and warmer skins.

A day's journey east, they came to Hidden Village next to the shallow floodplain of a small but widely meandering river that split the peninsula between the Mesasepa and the Tenase. Here, their welcome set the pattern that Lynx Clawed Him would learn to expect throughout the journey. Gray Bear Laughing walked openly into the village and said to the first man he met, "I have arrived." He had no fear of being mistaken for a raider, since he wore neither red-and-white paint nor woven cane armor and carried no war club.

The man they accosted said, "You are here," and offered them hospitality. They would be presented to the miko in the shed on the west side of the plaza, and would exchange news. If there were members of the Hawk or Wolf clans in the village, they would sleep under the roof of a kinsman. If not, they slept in the council house and moved on in the morning. Once, they were warned of a raiding party of Shawanos in the area. Many times, they were asked to carry messages to the next village.

They followed, as well as the trails would let them, a line generally south of east, fording or swimming smaller streams, catching rides on passing dugouts to cross the bigger rivers. After about two weeks, Lynx Clawed Him noticed that they were gradually climbing to higher land, and they passed from the country of the Northern Chickasaw, his people, into the country of the Yuchi. The Yuchi language was similar to but not quite like his own, but many of the men spoke the trade language, and they had little problem making their way.

In another two weeks, they came to the still-higher country of the Tsalagi, and Lynx Clawed Him came to learn what mountains were. The Tsalagi spoke a language entirely unlike his own. They were a shorter, stockier people with broad faces. Their villages were smaller because they were tucked into mountain coves, and the narrow floodplains offered less land for crops. Most villages had no mounds next to their plazas. But otherwise their villages were much like his own, and there was always at least one trader who spoke the pidgin Chickasaw.

Eventually, they came to the town called Kanutare, northernmost town of the Tsalagi, in the land of Uktena.

Kanutare had no Wolf Clan and only one remaining member of the Hawk Clan, an old man called Torn Mantle. His daughter's daughters brought him food, but soon after coming to his house, Lynx Clawed Him understood that the old man's name was uncomplimentary, and he was little respected in the village. He had been a diviner, but he had lost his crystal and thus his powers, and now he was just an old man who had no family to repair his torn feather mantle.

Nonetheless, old men are repositories of knowledge, and as they sat that night around his fire, they asked him questions about the land. The old man was glad for an audience and, as they knew he would, eventually he mentioned Uktena.

"Our village once had an Ulunsuti," Gray Bear Laughing said.

The old man made a rude sound of derision. "It's true!" Lynx Clawed Him objected. "The Great Sun stole it from us and took it to Kahoki."

Torn Mantle looked at him sharply, dark eyes gleaming amid the wrinkles of his weathered face. "In all the years of the Tsalagi, even in the Ancient time, only one man ever succeeded in taking Ulunsuti."

"And we had it!" Lynx Clawed Him insisted.

"No," said the old man. "The Eastern Tsalagi have it." And he told them the story of Ground Hog's Mother, a Shawano war captive, who promised to take Uktena's crest if the Tsalagi would adopt him. It was a long story, half a song, and Lynx Clawed Him was near to sleep when it was over. Torn Mantle finished, "So you had no

Ulunsuti. Only the Eastern Tsalagi have one."

Gray Bear Laughing asked, "And how did this Ground Hog's Mother kill Uktena?"

"Uktena has spots all along his belly," Torn Mantle told him. "Only one spot is vulnerable: the seventh spot below his mouth. Ground Hog's Mother knew this. How, no one knows." He paused a minute, sharp-eyed. "You have come to replace your lost Ulunsuti—which could not have been real?"

"Hou," said Gray Bear Laughing, simply.

"Hah! You are foolish!" the old man cackled. Then he said, "In the morning, I will show you where Uktena lives."

The morning dawned bright and clear. In the lowlands where Town Over Two Rivers lay, it would be hot and damp, but in the high mountains of the Tsalagi, the air was sharp and sweet.

Torn Mantle led them along a path to the north. He wore his frayed feather cloak and walked with a carved staff in one hand. Children followed them, taunting the old man, until scolded away by a young woman who was filling her water pot by a small stream. They passed the stream and struck off into the woods.

They walked until midmorning, when Torn Mantle motioned for silence. They broke out of the trees at the edge of a wide, placid pool. The clear pool was very deep. It lay at the base of a steep cliff, higher than the trees, which curved to the north and east, so that the pool nestled in a rough niche. A trickle of water fed a smaller pool partway up the cliff's face, which overflowed gently into the lower body of water. This in turn leaked out on the south side and was the beginning of the stream that they had crossed earlier. Songbirds played in the upper pool, and a chipmunk scolded them from a nearby tree.

Torn Mantle silently indicated the pool and then walked away into the forest.

Lynx Clawed Him and Gray Bear Laughing looked at each other, and the younger man said, "Now what?"

Away down in the depths, an eye opened. They noticed it as it began to drift upward. Then they noticed the second eye, which they expected. Then, as the eyes continued to drift up toward them, they realized that the head that bore those eyes was huge.

The head broke water with a surge that would have drenched them to the knees, if they had not already been running.

It was a snake's head, as big as the head of a grizzly bear, but it carried horns that would have made bull elk proud. Uktena roared as it reared upward. Crystal scales caught the sunlight in a dazzling glitter, and gleaming drops of water sprayed outward as it unfurled broad wings, more like bat wings than bird. After a panicky moment, the men realized that the huge beast could not actually fly, but by beating those wings, Uktena could raise itself to over half its body length. The crystal between its antlers, big as a man's head, flashed an angry crimson.

Gray Bear Laughing ran along the muddy bank, already fitting an arrow to his bow. Lynx Clawed Him nearly bolted but mastered his terror and drew his own bow. He had a moment of clarity in which he noticed that

the songbirds were gone, but he thought he heard a voice chanting among the trees. Then he loosed his first arrow and saw it shatter against Uktena's scaly hide.

Uktena hung motionless against the sky for an instant, long enough for three more arrows to smash against its scales. Then it struck for Gray Bear Laughing. The man scrambled back toward the trees, nearly falling in the slick, clay soil. Lynx Clawed Him, more by accident than aim, put an arrow next to Uktena's eye. The stone tip broke, but it distracted the great snake just in time for Gray Bear Laughing to dive behind an oak. Uktena's striking head broke the tree in half, but Gray Bear Laughing dodged clear.

As Uktena reared again, Lynx Clawed Him shot the last of his arrows. Stone, bone, antler points all had shattered. His last arrow was his prize, tipped with a shiny, sharp black stone traded from the far west. At the last moment he remembered the story of Ground Hog's Mother—"the seventh spot below his mouth," the old man had said—and he waited until the roaring head reached treetop high, exposing the spotted throat. He drew the bow with all his strength, loosed it with the hunter's prayer, and watched the arrow find its mark—and shatter like the rest.

In despair he turned to run, while Uktena struck for him.

But the voice he had heard chanting rose in triumph, and a new force entered the fray.

A shadow momentarily covered the pool, and a huge hawk struck at the enraged Uktena. "Tlanuwa," Gray Bear Laughing said in awe, as they watched the ferocious battle.

"Tlanuwa," Torn Mantle said, joining them among the trees. Lynx Clawed Him realized that it was the old man's voice that had been chanting. "Uktena's greatest enemy. I called him." The old man sounded smug.

It was said that for generations afterward men could find Uktena's scales on the mountainside below that pool. Crystal scales and bits of feather fell like rain, and shrieks and roars and the thunderous beating of wings fairly shook the ground around them. The giant hawk's beak and talons tore at the snake, while Uktena thrashed and swayed, trying to sink its fangs into Tlanuwa's leg or snare a wing with its horns. In the end, the battle was drawn, as Tlanuwa rose into the air and sped away, while Uktena sank beneath the pool to suffer its wounds in the silent depths.

The failed hunters slunk away, humbled.

The two travelers sat glumly in the shade of Torn Mantle's hut for most of the afternoon. Torn Mantle did not share their dismay. He had never expected them to succeed in killing Uktena. He thought they should be thankful that they had survived the attempt. He was elated that his powers had returned. He had called Tlanuwa, and Tlanuwa had come. He was also the only one of the three with the presence of mind to pick up a scale as they left Uktena's pool.

Even Lynx Clawed Him's frustrated accusation did not bother the Tsalagi diviner. "You said the seventh spot," the young man hissed. "You lied!"



"Perhaps Ground Hog's Mother did not tell all he knew," Torn Mantle shrugged, and went off to brag of his morning's exploit.

Gray Bear Laughing merely sat, impassive, tossing bone dice in a desultory game.

By midafternoon, Torn Mantle was back, in high dudgeon. The village elders had listened courteously but made their skepticism clear. Torn Mantle calling the Tlanuwa? An old man of a vanished clan, with a torn cloak? As to the divining crystal, well, everyone knew that they could occasionally be found on the mountain slopes, and they congratulated him on his good fortune—but finding a crystal was no proof of Tlanuwa's presence. Torn Mantle angrily flung down the crystal outside his house before ducking inside to sulk.

Lynx Clawed Him picked up the crystal out of a faint stirring of curiosity and disappeared into the woods, looking for solitude.

In gathering twilight, he stopped in an old field, now half overgrown. There was a low, leaf-covered mound from the Ancient times there, and he sat with his back to it, studying the crystal. He thought about how much it looked like a quartz crystal, though so much clearer.

"I saw the Ulunsuti once," he said to Gray Bear Laughing, as the older man walked softly up to the mound. Then he looked up, and realized that it was not Gray Bear Laughing at all, but a Tsalagi of noble face, who held himself with a calm assurance that had reminded him of his father's clansman.

Lynx Clawed Him had no wish to speak to a Tsalagi man at this time, but he came of a polite people, and he

said, "I greet you."

"Only a Warrior should have seen the Ulunsuti of your village," the stranger said in a soft but musical voice.

"But it was not an Ulunsuti!" Lynx Clawed Him burst out. "I have seen a true Ulunsuti! The Ulunsuti is clear as water, except for a red heart. Our Ulunsuti was only a hunk of quartz stone." He was silent for a moment but could not help adding bitterly, "Our miko lied to us. All these years, it was a false Ulunsuti."

The stranger stood quietly for a few moments, considering. "Your miko received his Ulunsuti from his uncle, the previous miko, did he not?"

Lynx Clawed Him nodded.

"And he received it from the previous miko? And so your Ulunsuti has come down in the Sun clan for many generations?"

Lynx Clawed Him acknowledged that this was true.

"Then," said the stranger, "is it not likely that your miko believed in the Ulunsuti as you did? Perhaps the first miko of your village knew that it was a false Ulunsuti, and the first Eagle Dancer who cared for it. But do not accuse your own Sun of lying, when he may have believed as you did."

Lynx Clawed Him bowed his head and said simply, "You are wise."

The stranger added cryptically, "The Ulunsuti has many properties of a crystal quartz. And only one thing is as hard as Uktena's scales."

Lynx Clawed Him pondered this statement as the Tsalagi walked away, disappearing behind the mound. He thought of another question to ask, but when he had walked all the way around the mound twice, he found no trace of the strange Tsalagi.

And then Lynx Clawed Him knew that he had been honored by the presence of an Immortal, one who lived beneath the Ancient mounds and who sometimes came forth to help humankind. And as he gazed again into Uktena's scale, he understood what the Immortal had suggested to him.

It was full dark when he returned to Torn Mantle's fire. The two men, Chicasa and Tsalagi, sat silently, flickers of firelight playing across their glowering faces. Lynx Clawed Him sat abruptly, grinning, and announced, "We must try one more time."

Gray Bear Laughing said harshly, "There is no arrow that will pierce the seventh spot."

Lynx Clawed Him held up Uktena's scale to sparkle in the firelight and said, "There will be one."

Gray Bear Laughing stared, then his face lightened in hope and respect.

Torn Mantle muttered, "Uktena will not expose his throat again. He will come for you on his belly, like a snake."

"He would strike high for Tlanuwa," Gray Bear Laughing suggested.

"I cannot call Tlanuwa twice in two days," said Torn Mantle sadly. Then he thought, and a crafty gleam came into his eye. "But perhaps Uktena does not know that." The two travelers stared at him, but the old man only chuckled and said, "We must be there at dawn."

And so they were. Lynx Clawed Him had borrowed

knapping tools and a seasoned arrow shaft, and had carefully chipped the scale into an arrow point so clear and thin that it was nearly invisible. Torn Mantle had spent the night in his house, chanting incomprehensibly, and in the morning they saw that his feather mantle was newly repaired, and his staff bore new highlights of red and white paint. He led them out in the predawn dark, and they stood again on the banks of the Uktena's mountain pool as the first glimmers of morning lightened the eastern peaks.

Torn Mantle gave his feather cloak to Gray Bear Laughing and whispered, "You must climb up the east face and waken Uktena when the first sun strikes the pool." Gray Bear Laughing made the climb. Lynx Clawed Him fitted his one arrow to his bowstring, and they waited.

As the sun cast its first ray over them, Torn Mantle raised his staff and cried, "Spirit of Tlanuwa, aid us!"

The sun's brilliant shaft caught Gray Bear Laughing and cast his shadow across the west face of the cliff, overhanging the pool, and as he spread the feather mantle over his head, for one brief moment, the shadow took the shape of a striking hawk.

The surface of the pool exploded as Uktena burst forth, reaching high to strike down the enemy who dared challenge it again. The fanged mouth gaped first toward the shadow, then whirled toward Gray Bear Laughing and roared in anger. But through the spray, Lynx Clawed Him aimed and loosed, and the arrow sank fletch deep into the seventh spot below Uktena's jaw.

Uktena flailed against the cliff face, sending a shower of dirt and rock fragments that nearly swept Gray Bear Laughing from his perch. Uktena forgot his first target and turned his head. Lynx Clawed Him never forgot that Uktena seemed to look directly at him, with an oddly human puzzlement in its reptilian eyes, before it toppled among the trees and lay dead.

Lynx Clawed Him claimed the crystal crest in triumph.

But when he stepped back with the bloody Ulunsuti in his arms, he faced the leveled stone-bladed lances of a dozen Tsalagi warriors. The stocky Tsalagi whom he knew as the village War Chief said, in broken trade pidgin, "Ulunsuti belong Tsalagi."

Gray Bear Laughing moved up beside his countryman. They had only their knives, but they would fight for the Ulunsuti if they had to.

Torn Mantle snarled, "Fools!"

They all turned to look at the old man. He had donned his feather mantle, no longer torn, and he stood as straight as a young man. They saw the power in him. He pointed his staff at the Tsalagi leader, and the staff seemed to writhe with the old man's strength. "You think to fight a man who slew Uktena?" Torn Mantle laughed. "Stand aside!"

Abashed, they did.

The travelers returned to Town Over Two Rivers in late summer, and the village priests set the time for the Green Corn Ceremony in honor of their success. The Green Corn Ceremony was the year's most solemn and most joyous occasion, a time of thanksgiving for bountiful harvests, of forgiveness for petty crimes, of marriages, and of renewal for all the villagers' relationships to family and

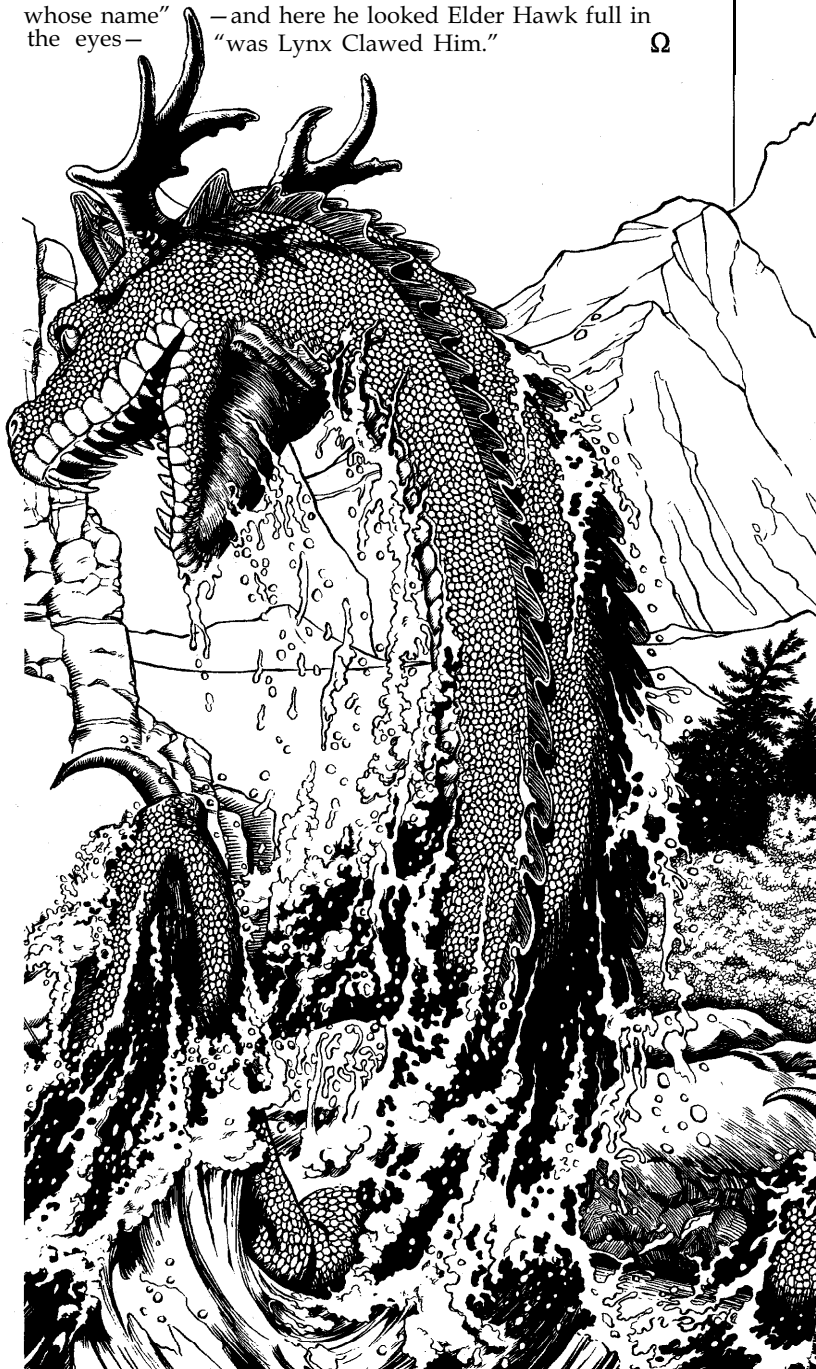
friends. On the night before the festival was to begin, the Council met on Second Mound, and Eagle Dancer unveiled the true Ulunsuti.

Elder Hawk claimed the honor of telling the story. He had composed the song himself after hearing the travelers' tales. He told it with length and eloquence, and as he finished, he said, "And the Chicasa and Chakta their brothers, the Yuchi and Muskoghe and Tsalagi, too, shall remember the feat of the Hawk Clan warrior, and shall sing the name of Uktena Slayer!"

The shouts of approval lasted for some moments. As they died away, Lynx Clawed Him stood from his place of honor next to Stalked the Cougar.

"The deed shall be remembered," he said with dignity. "But it should be remembered in this way: that three men slew Uktena. One was a Tsalagi diviner named Torn Mantle, who called the spirit of Tlanuwa. One was a Northern Chicasa named Gray Bear Laughing, who rode Tlanuwa's spirit. And there was one who shot the arrow, whose name" — and here he looked Elder Hawk full in the eyes — "was Lynx Clawed Him."

Ω



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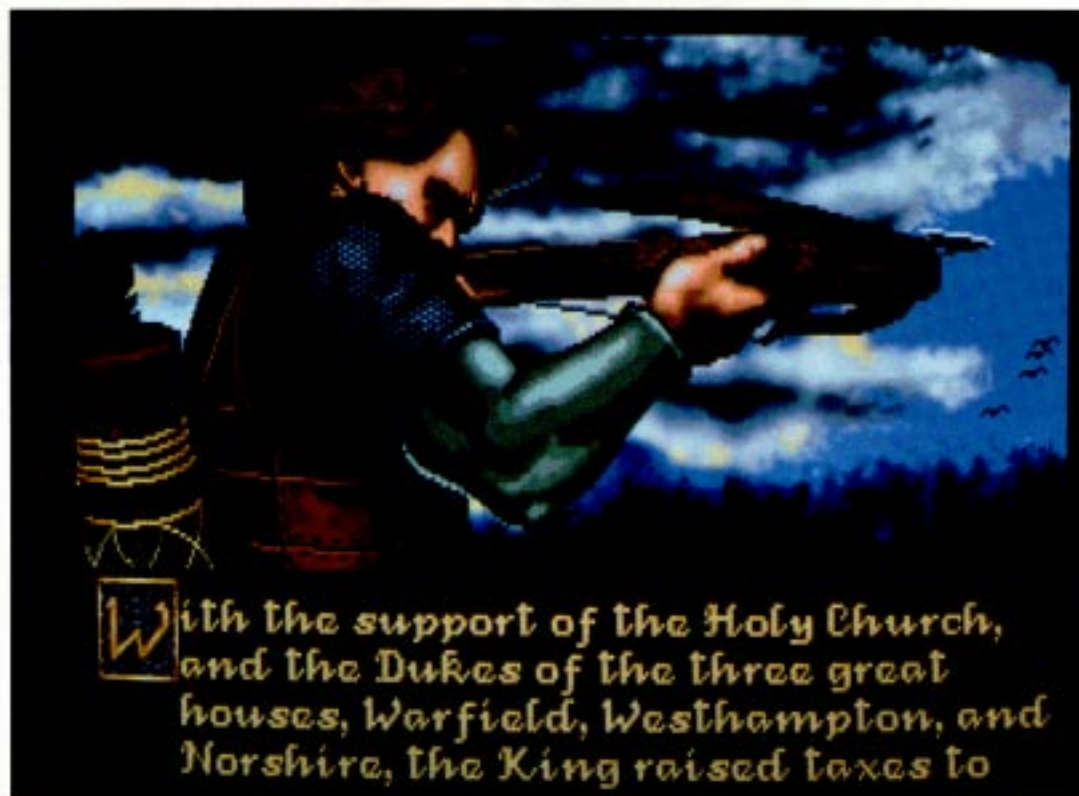


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Castles (Interplay)

“Build a castle, in a canyon . . . ”

Calling all gamers! The time has come, once again, to vote for your favorite software entertainment of the year. The software receiving the most reader votes will be awarded the Beastie Award for 1991. Your vote must include your name and address, the full title of the game you feel deserves the Beastie Award, and the system in which the game operates (Macintosh, PC/MS-DOS, Amiga, Atari, etc.). If enough votes are received for each category, individual awards will be presented for each system. There will also be separate awards for computer-based and video-game system entertainments (again, please indicate the system type for your vote). A postcard is more than sufficient to register your vote. Votes without your name and address will not be tallied.

KnightLine

If Ted Koppel can have NightLine, we can certainly have our own news and information section! Starting this issue, reader responses, queries, and help appear up-front and personal in “KnightLine.”

We do have a favor to ask. As you know, we listed our fax number in the last couple of columns (209-832-5742). Several

readers have used their fax machines to send us all kinds of gaming information. However, please keep in mind that our fax machine operates on Pacific time. That means if you are faxing something to us from the east coast and it's 9:00 A.M. where you live, it's only 6:00 A.M. where we live! We would appreciate it if you would use the fax during normal business hours during the week (9 to 5, Pacific time), and even later on weekends. Please.

Sega has announced that its 16-bit Genesis system will have a CD-ROM accessory available for it by the first quarter of 1992. LucasFilm Games is also entering the CD-ROM environment. Headed by creative director Howard Phillips, LucasFilm Games will share in the unique resources of other LucasArts divisions, such as Skywalker Sound and Industrial Light and

Computer games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	Superb

Magic, to create these offerings.

Lastly, we have just upgraded to DOS 5.0 for our PC/MS-DOS machine. It is worth the minimal effort needed in upgrading your system software to this latest version from Microsoft. We often hear from readers that they get awfully tired of manipulating files using DOS commands from the drive prompt. We also hear that many readers just aren't interested in Windows for their systems. MS/DOS 5.0 comes to the rescue. It contains a handy DOS shell that enables you to access files simply by clicking your mouse or moving your cursor to highlight the file needed. You no longer have to remember which command does what at the drive prompt. And, the shell is fast! As you receive DOS 5.0 with it, there's no added expense to combine this shell to your system. Best of all is the increase in memory available to users, as DOS 5.0 uses the High Memory Area. So far, we haven't had any compatibility problems with our software. We have heard that some of the older mouse drivers don't operate with DOS 5.0, but it is our understanding the vendors who produce the drivers for these I/O devices are upgrading their programs already.

H.E.L.P.

H.E.L.P. stands for Help Enlighten a Lost Player. It is our way of thanking readers who have provided answers to fellow gamers whose questions have appeared in previous columns. Good Samaritans will receive an official H.E.L.P. certificate from us (the Lessers, not DRAGON® Magazine) once we've designed it. In the future, those who offer specific answers and would like a H.E.L.P. certificate should enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope to us with your correspondence.

In DRAGON issue #171, James Sears asked for help regarding the final question of the Stygian Abyss in *Ultima VI*. Bob Brunelle of Quebec not only heard the call but responded by fax with the answer: "Infinity." Thanks, Bob.

Benjamin Davis of Wayne, Maine, writes in response to Paul Polak's question in issue #171 about where to find the Blackstar Key in the Commodore 64/128 version of *Wasteland*: "In the northeast section of the Guardian's Citadel, not the Inner Sanctum, is a long north/south passageway. This passageway contains pillars and has many doors in the east wall. If you go through the first door in the west wall, you will be in a long, tall room that has gunports in the northwest corner. After killing the guards, go to the south end of the room and use Perception on the center of the altar. This will reveal the Blackstar Key."

Christopher Carter of Brooklyn, N.Y., faxed a letter to us in response to Josh Hornbacher's clues for *Secret of the Silver Blades* (issue #171). He writes, "I think Josh might have been thinking of multi-classed characters instead of dual-classed characters, which are human (like single-classed characters). The multiclassed char-



Castles (Interplay)

acters are nonhuman only and advance slower in levels. Dual-classed characters, after they change classes, can advance unlimited levels in their new class—level 15 (level 18 in the case of thieves) in *Secret of the Silver Blades*. Characters who are dual-classed clerics/mages will have all the spells in the game and will advance at the same rate as single-classed characters, as they are concentrating only on the newly switched classes. However, Josh's advice is valid and helpful as well, as single-classed characters will advance quickly without having to change anything. Choosing between single-classed and dual-classed is difficult, but having extra mages helps when you remember how many magic-using creatures reside in this adventure!"

Calls for assistance: Joe Jungbluth, of Germantown, Md., needs help with *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, The Graphic Adventure*, from Lucasfilm Games. "I'm in the sewers and can't pull the plug, open the gate, or get the torch. My guess is that a fishing rod is in the chest in Herny's house, but I can't get the chest open. What have I missed?"

Doug Parsons, of Newport News, Va., asks, "I am playing the PC/MS-DOS version of *Might and Magic II* and have almost completed the adventure. However, I need to know the code for the cryptogram at the end of the game!"

Michael Dozd of Katy, Tex., needs a couple of hints for *The Dark Heart of Uukrul*. "I am having difficulty finding out the code number to open the maze for the urn before the sanctuary of Urtehln (the sanctuary beneath the pyramid). How do you determine the code? Also, since I skipped the maze and continued, I made

my way to the control room for the carriage way. I tried the two command words listed, but after it said the carriage way moved, nothing changed. Where-is the carriage way?"

Reviews

Castles

Interplay (714-549-2411)

PC/MS-DOS version

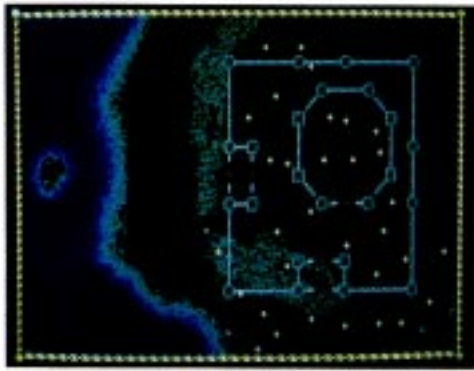
\$59.95

Castles could be called a medieval version of *SimCity*. You are the King of Albion during the late 13th and early 14th centuries. You must build castles in Wales and attract Englishmen to settle there.

You can actually perform better than King Edward I did many centuries ago, using castles based on the Welsh castles of that time period. Completing this game not only takes castle-building skills, but you must deal with the Church, nobles, peasants, and surrounding territories, as well as defend your castles from attacks by foes who would like to see you dethroned.

Before you can accomplish any of these goals, you must select a location to build your structure. There are eight cantrefes, or territories, where castles must be built. You can choose to build a castle in each of the cantrefes. Beginners can complete a campaign consisting of building three castles, or they can elect to stop after one castle is built.

Each cantref offers different and unique challenges. Some territories are close to quarries, required for construction of castles. Others are in remote places filled with people who don't like your real-estate acquisition.



Castles (Interplay)

The computer starts you off in a cantref. An overhead view shows you the land layout and surrounding terrain—marshes, water, forests, and hills. After selecting a prime spot to start your castle, push the left-hand mouse button to display the main menu. The menu has selections for design, labor, taxes, military, and food. When starting a castle, you must first design it. You have a direct, overhead view of the area where it goes, and may select the types of gates and towers to build.

From the design menu, labor is assigned. As many as 90 laborers can work on a single piece of the castle. Selecting the piece gives the specifics about that unit as well as the number of workers assigned to its completion and the number of days it takes to finish the section.

Hiring people to do the work is done through the labor menu. Various workers can be employed, and wages can be raised or lowered. Increasing monthly wages for workers brings them in for employment rather quickly. Increasing the wages for militia also lets you house more soldiers and archers inside the castle.

The various hired professions include diggers, carpenters, quarrymen, carters, smiths, and laborers. All are specialists in their chosen fields of expertise. The Master Builder lists a rating for the current workers you have hired, and the rating determines how quickly a castle will be built. Once workers are hired and assigned, going back to the side view shows workers going about their business. Carpenters saw wood, masons lay bricks, and carters ferry supplies around the area. This is fun to watch and adds a sense of realism to this simulation.

Now you've hired workers—but when the new month comes around, you'd better have enough cash to pay them and still have enough money left over for supplies; otherwise, you will be a king ruling from a straw house. The taxes menu allows you to change the yearly taxes to generous, normal, oppressive, and tyrannical in amount. If you think you cannot survive until the following year, levies can be placed on the peasants. Levies are taxes that are collected monthly. You can, depending on skill level, receive up to £400. Of course, no one likes taxes, and if you

tax the people for long periods of time, bad things happen. First, the peasants become enraged. Then the Church becomes upset. Finally, the noble families begin to hate you. Peasants might even revolt. Eventually, higher taxes bring diminishing returns.

The time will come when someone will attempt to destroy that lovely dwelling that is taking you so much time to build. This is when your archers and infantry (whom you must also hire) come to your aid. During the course of building a castle, a message flashes on the screen alerting you to an enemy in the area. It also informs you of the direction of the attack. The workers leave, allowing you to select the military menu in order to place your troops about your castle for defense. You can also select a number of the militia to advance upon the enemy as well. You can build a moat only during times of peace.

The number of troops available depends on how large your castle is and the wages for such services. Your army may be divided into ten equal units of separate infantry and archers. Placing the armies is as easy as selecting and clicking. Targets can also be selected by clicking on one of your units, then clicking on the target area or enemy unit your troops are to attack.

Once you have placed your army, the attack begins. You can watch as your units fire and engage the enemy. Don't expect too much from this, as you'll only see the units swing swords at each other until one unit falls. This is one of the flaws in this game: You cannot tell the strength of opposing units. You can tell there are five units attacking you, but how many individual soldiers are there in that unit?

The other problem we had was the infantry doesn't wait until the enemy approaches. Like gung-ho soldiers, they charge to the attack. We would prefer to have our archers on the castle walls fire volley after volley of arrows at the opponents until the remaining few enemy soldiers can be taken care of by the infantry. The only way we could hold back our infantry was to place them inside the castle walls, but this did little good, as they did not come into play until the enemy began tearing down our castle walls. A "wait" command for the infantry would make the military options much easier and more realistic.

If your castle is completed and you thwart a siege, you have proven the strength of your castle. The game continues to the next cantref, or else shows you the score you attained in the game. If the enemy tears down too much of your castle, you are defeated.

Castle building only occurs from March 15th to November 30th of each year. During the winter, your forces are sheltered and must be fed. Food is also important when enemies lay siege to your castle and you cannot get food from the outside. Not enough food means soldiers die of starvation. Sustenance can be bought from the

food menu. The amount you pay for food depends what time of the year you purchase it. During the early spring months, it can be as much as three gold per unit. During harvest times, when food is most plentiful, you can purchase a food unit for as little as one gold.

One more concern involves messengers. At the start of the game, an option can be selected that allows you to receive messengers. These people carry news and questions of importance from the Church, noble families, cantrefs, peasants, or other rulers. During this time, you will have to make various decisions, each with its own consequence.

Once you have completed your reign, be it one or eight castles, you receive a score. The text shows how historians would have viewed your reign as king—a tyrannical rule for a low score, or one of the golden ages of Albion with a high score. An addendum to the game allows those who finish an eight-castle campaign to send their save-game disk to Interplay for a reward. You can even make the game harder by changing the skill level from Duke to Prince or even King. The higher levels provide you with less starting money, less money to take as taxes from the people, and a lower opinion of you by the nobles, Church, and peasants. Another option lets you play in a fantasy world where messengers from the sprite king dom and wizards often call upon you. Attacks may be from human enemies, ogres, or even dragons. This is a far more challenging option and should be played only after gaining expertise in the real world setting.

Overall, *Castles* is a good game. We were not as addicted to it as we were to *SimCity*. The graphics are excellent, though combat is not detailed enough. The feel of actually building castles and ruling a kingdom are present and very enjoyable. If you enjoyed *SimCity* and are looking for something to satiate your building urge, or if you enjoy medieval history, this game is for you. Interplay has done a fine job of creating an original and fun game out of the what might normally be considered a rather boring occupation: building castles. This review was performed using VGA graphics and Roland sound.

Dragon Crystal

Sega of America, Inc. (415-508-2800)
Sega Game Gear version \$30

Tired of endlessly mapping mazes on graph paper while fighting combats that take hours to complete? Sega has the answer: *Dragon Crystal*, its latest offering for its new portable video-game system, Game Gear. You have been sucked into another world by a crystal that you found in an alley. You wake up to find yourself armed with a sword, wearing robes, and being followed by an egg. You must explore 30 levels of this weird world before you can escape.

The view of *Dragon Crystal* is from an

overhead perspective. Each time you start, the 30 levels are randomly changed. At the start of each level, you find yourself in a room. Moving around reveals the dimensions of the room and any exits that may lead to corridors or other rooms.

To leave the current level, you must find a warp location that takes you closer to freedom. As you explore the levels, you may find various objects such as books, rings, rods, and pots. These items are not specifically named and are identifiable only by color at first. Through experimentation, you find out what magical properties or curses these items may possess. After learning of an item's magical properties, it is named (e.g., heal ring) instead of being identified by color classification.

Swords and armor are also found along your journey. These are specifically named and help you with your armor class or power. The only problem with these items is that they can also be cursed, and a cursed item cannot be removed unless a bless book is found.

This game would be too simple without enemies, and there are plenty of these to give you a run for your money. Engaging in combat is simple. Move your on-screen persona next to the on-screen enemy and run into it. Messages at the bottom of the screen display how much damage you and the enemy inflict on one another. The damage is determined by how much power you have. Going up levels or equipping yourself with better weaponry increases your power.

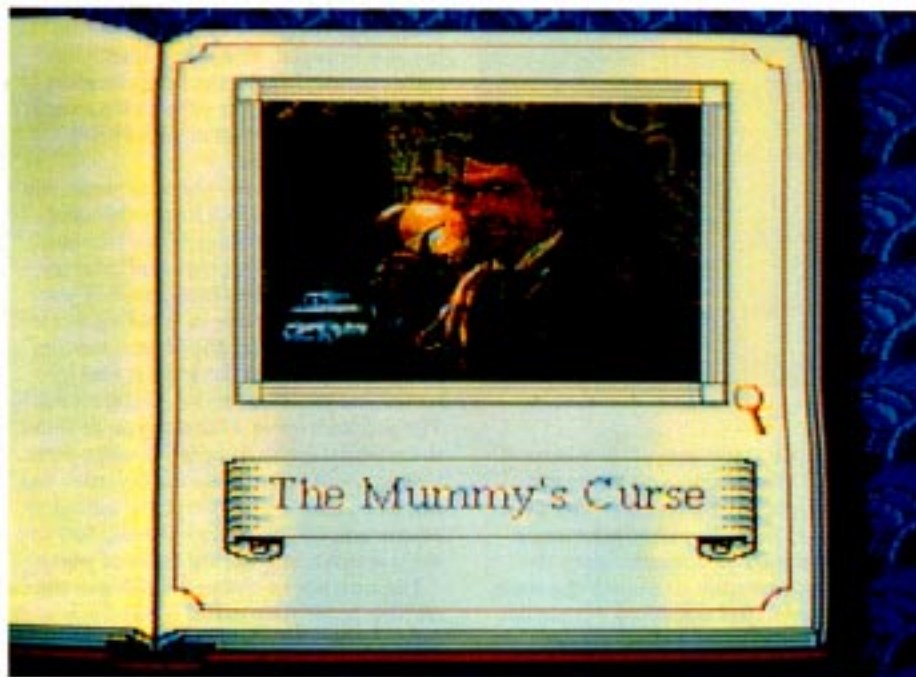
The damage you sustain in combat is determined by your armor class rating. The higher the number, the better armored your character. By going up levels or obtaining better armor, your rating is increased.

As you go deeper into the dungeon, the items you pick up become greater in strength. Unfortunately, so do your enemies. Don't think, however, that you can explore each level slowly and cautiously. You also have to worry about food, or you will slowly lose hit points from hunger.

Picking up money is useful, just in case you die. If that momentous occasion arrives, you might have a chance to buy an adventure continuation, although you won't be able to keep any rods, books, or rings. The amount of money needed to continue the adventure changes every time, but it is an interesting way to find out how much your character is worth.

Finally, the strange egg that follows you around hatches into a dragon when your character becomes more experienced in the dungeon. The dragon changes and grows when your character increases in levels of expertise. Who knows what help it may prove to be in the future?

Dragon Crystal reminds us somewhat of the computer game *Rogue*, which was released many years ago. This is a fun and simple role-playing game that is very addicting. The graphics are good but not eye-popping. However, the adventure doesn't



Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective (NEC Technologies)

need flashy graphics because it is the playability of *Dragon Crystal* that makes it fun. The constant search for better items, moving to higher levels, and seeing the dragon grow are the nudges that cause you to play this adventure time and time again. This is an excellent game to take on a long trip and is really well suited for the Game Gear.

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective *****

NEC Technologies, Inc. (708-860-9500)
Turbographx-16 version (CD-ROM) \$61.99

ICOM Simulations, renowned for its computer adventure games such as *Deja Vu I* and *II*, *Shadowgate*, and *Uninvited*, has rocked the video-game industry with *Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective*. Based on the game of the same name, players try to solve the three provided cases as quickly as the world's greatest detective. The entire game is icon based and easy to manipulate.

From the main screen, one may choose to view the newspapers, though it is much easier and faster to look through the newspapers provided with the game; both have the same content. You may travel to a geographic location by clicking on the notebook. Enclosed within the notebook are the names of Baker Street Regulars—various people who, because of their occupations, may know an extra tidbit of information that leads you closer to the truth about a crime.

Selecting the directory lists dozens of other people Holmes may question and places he may visit as the investigation of the crime becomes more involved. The Directory names can also be transferred to Holmes's notebook to make it easier to select that name in the future. Another icon is Holmes's Files. After selecting a

name from the notebook or directory, you might learn critical information about that person.

The Baker Street Irregulars are also at your service. These are Holmes's close company of street informants who may be able to get inside information that only they can find. After selecting a name from the directory or notebook and selecting the Irregulars' icon, you receive a telegram displaying the information found by Holmes's underground contacts. Be careful—whenever you travel, use Holmes's Files, or use the Baker Street Irregulars, you have points added to your score. The object of this game is to earn a lower score than Holmes earns.

If you believe that you have visited all of the correct places, uncovered all vital clues, and questioned all critical suspects, you then click on the trial icon to go to court. Sometimes the judge may not agree that you have enough evidence to conduct a trial. You must then do your hat again and search for additional clues.

If your evidence is enough, a trial is held where you are asked various questions about names, motives, clues, and other pertinent information. Some of these questions can be answered by clicking the appropriate name from your notebook or directory, while other inquiries must be answered from a list of four or five possible answers. If you are correct, the trial ends and you see an epilogue to the case as well as how close your score is to Holmes's. Holmes is difficult to beat.

At first glance, this may not seem to be much of an offering, but this impression is wrong. There is a touch of creativity to this game that makes it a great deal of fun to play. Live actors, actresses, and sets were made specifically for this game. Live-action video is used whenever you travel

Wizardry

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to a location, as well as for the opening and closing of a case. In all, over 95 video scenes were shot and stored on CD. The filming is almost of movie-theater quality, and the video is almost perfectly synchronized with the audio track.

The quality of the video images, though a bit grainy in detail, is still high. The video does stop every few seconds, but only for an instant, as more information is loaded into the system. This is definitely the start of multimedia entertainment. Thanks to CD-ROM, not only do you read information from text descriptions or see graphic representations of rooms and objects, but you can look at actual people, hear their voices, see their expressions, and observe your surroundings. Cases can be solved not only by listening to what is said, but by watching what the suspects do while Holmes is around, as well as taking a look at what might be lying around at the time of Holmes' visit (was that the murder weapon I saw on the table?). Also included on the disc is a game introduction by Sherlock Holmes himself, as well as an audio segment that discusses the game, the icons, and the Baker Street Regulars.

This is yet another fine adventure/mystery game from ICOM simulations. Granted, there are only three cases on this CD, but the video itself is worth the price. Games in progress can be saved, so you can ponder what action to take next while eating dinner. The video and programming time involved in creating this game make *Sherlock Holmes* a definite buy for any mystery or adventure game aficionado.

Game conversions

The Faery Tale Adventure

King's Bounty

Might and Magic

Electronic Arts (800-245-4525)

Sega Genesis versions

Prices n/a

Electronic Arts has been busy with its latest offerings for the Genesis. All three of the games here were converted from computerized fantasy role-playing games.

The first is *The Faery Tale Adventure*. In this real-time role-playing game, you are one of three brothers who must return a talisman to a town to save it from evil times. To accomplish this task, you must cross hundreds of miles of land, encounter creatures both good and evil, and solve puzzles.

All action occurs from an overhead view. Four statistics grow as your character becomes more experienced: vitality, bravery, luck, and kindness. The first three statistics are most relevant during combat. When an enemy draws near your character, pressing the "A" button allows you to engage the attacker. Your vitality statistic represents how long you can survive repeated attacks by the enemy before your death. As you become more experienced, your bravery grows, allow-



King's Bounty (Electronic Arts)

ing you to become less vulnerable to attacks. If your luck is high enough, you can be resurrected should you die (if you do die, one of your remaining brothers must continue with the quest. Kindness helps the character communicate with people. An easy-to-use icon interface allows you to scan inventory, take, look, buy, talk, save, and restore the game.

This is a very good conversion of the hot Amiga computer adventure. The Genesis system requires little time to load game sections. The graphics and sound are excellent. The only problem we had with this adventure is that saving the game requires you to write down a 36-character alphanumeric password. Other Genesis games utilize battery back-up features, and this game should have been included.

The second offering is *King's Bounty*. You play an adventurer who has conquered all of the dungeons, but who must now raise an army of creatures to save his land by finding and returning the Scepter of Order to King Maximus. Under a time limit,

you must wage war with beasts and lay siege to castles in order to find map pieces that, when put together, unravel the mystery of the sceptre's location.

You can become a knight, paladin, barbarian, or sorceress, with several statistics. Leadership allows you to control individual troops. Commission per week is the amount of money you receive from King Maximus to buy and maintain armies, rent boats, and buy spells. Spell power is the skill level at which your character casts spells. Your character's statistics are raised after a certain number of villains are caught.

The action takes place from an overhead perspective. Your character can locate towns where he can obtain contracts to find villains hidden in castles, hire boats, get information, or buy spells. During your travels, you'll find treasure chests scattered around the continents; these can add to your money supply, your weekly commission, increase your leadership, or increase your spell capability. Artifacts (only two per continent) can raise your abilities. Spells can be found, as well as allies who might join your cause. These allies might include pikemen, militia, knights, Calvary, elves, gnomes, and peasants. Other troops that may be hired include vampires, ogres, giants, barbarians, sprites, druids, archmages, and trolls.

Morale is a key factor in your army. Each troop has different morale factors, and being with another troop it hates may lower its morale. You might also have an army in which all the troops get along together so well that their combat statistics are raised as a result.

Most encounters that your army con-

King's Bounty (Electronic Arts)



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fronts will be unfriendly, resulting in combat. The screen changes to a detailed close-up of the battle. Your troops are automatically lined up on the left side of the screen, with the computer-controlled army on the right. Each troop is shown by an animated icon with a number in the lower right hand corner of that icon. That number reflects how many individual units comprise that troop. You can move your troops to the maximum of their movement allowance. Certain troops, such as sprites and ghosts, can fly.

When placed next to an enemy, a troop may attack. The enemy retaliates, if it can, and the battle sequence ends. Certain creatures do not have to be adjacent to the enemy to attack and may instead shoot arrows, cast spells, or throw boulders. Other creatures have special abilities. For example, when the ghost troop kills enemies, the dead troops join the ghost army. After combat is over, you receive the spoils of war, enabling you to continue your journey.

This conversion is actually better than the computer version, with crisper graphics fully utilizing the Genesis' capabilities. One problem we had with this version involved a password save that was 56 characters long. Additionally, not only does it take a few minutes to reload your game, it doesn't always save everything you want saved. When you return to a game, you start at a predetermined spot, but we found that our leadership rating was not at the same level it was when we saved the game. You could enter combat and without warning find out that all of your troops are out of control because of your lowered leadership rating. This adventure would definitely have a five-star rating if Electronic Arts had used a battery back up instead of the password save.

The third Genesis conversion is New World Computing's *Might and Magic* (an interesting point is that New World Computing was also in charge of the conversions of the previous two games). This game, while not as crisply animated as the Phantasy Star series, is a role-playing game in which the player takes part in the actual creation process of the characters, thus making the bond between player and on-screen persona stronger.

Thanks to a battery back-up, players can create as many as six characters from five races and eight character classes. Statistics include might, intellect, accuracy, luck, personality, endurance, and speed. Once players create characters from rolling and rerolling the seven characteristics, game play begins.

The quest is anything but simple. You must save your world from a planet-threatening evil—but before that task can be completed, you must complete quests in order to prove yourself worthy of the greater task that awaits you. You travel to many locations, cities, and even more dungeons. Thanks to an auto-mapping feature, graph paper and broken pencils



Might and Magic					
Day		105			
Year		900			
Facing		N			
Sir Felgar	151/151	31	38	Good	
Terwin III	121/121	31	38	Good	
Sure Valla	121/121	21	38	Good	
Gene Eric	110/110	42	38	Good	
Cassandra	98/98	18	38	Good	
The Hermit	101/101	20	38	Good	
Sir Hyron	14/14	31	38	Good	
Drog	18/18	25	38	Good	

Might and Magic (Electronic Arts)



Might and Magic (Electronic Arts)

should be a thing of the past.

With over 96 spells to master, 250 types of weapons and armor, and hundreds of hours of exploring, *Might and Magic* is a role-playing game that will definitely help the Genesis machine prove its power in the role-playing game market. It shows that this video game machine is capable of accomplishing tasks that only computers were once able to manage. The speed of this game, as well as the updated graphics, sound, and battery back-up, make this a definite buy for any role-playing aficionado who has access to a Sega Genesis game system.

Clue corner

Champions of Krynn (SSI)

1. Sleep spells work well against baaz draconians, warriors, clerics, and magic-users in the city and catacombs of Throtl.
2. Clone the Wand of Frost found in the catacombs as many times as you can. They will be useful against the white dragons at the catacombs' exit.
3. Allow Strangboun the knight and Kilfur the kender to join your party, but not the warrior who wants to look for the hobgoblin treasure.
4. In Gargath, search the barricade in front of the keep's main gates for secret doors.
5. In the keep, Myrtani has the Dragonlance on the sixth floor. When he runs, don't use all of your spells on the draconians; several black dragons are waiting on the 11th floor.
6. In the tomb of Sir Dargaard, you must finish all tests before you can enter the crypt, where a valuable reward awaits. Don't let your guard down. The minute you step out of the crypt, a good-sized group of bozak and kapak draconians attack you.

William Laine
Chateaugay NY

Important Gaming Notice!

It is extremely important that you understand that game hints are submitted by a variety of readers. We warn one and all that any hints that deal with character or environment redefinition, accomplished by entering various keystrokes or codes into your game, should only be completed using backups of your game disks. Never try such a game hint with your original game disk! As a general rule, you should never play any computer adventure using your original game disks. More explanation of this basic rule will be given in a future column.—The Lessers

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When going through the Way of Neta, be certain, when you go downstairs from the Diabolical Demon Director and open the door leading to the Way, that you go through the Way of Neta *first* before you go back upstairs to the Way of Ros. Even though opening the door to Neta closes the pit in the passageway leading to Ros, going back to Neta later proves fruitless because the door will be closed and you will not be able to open it. If someone has been able to open this door again, I would be surprised.

2. When fighting the demons and worms in the room before the FUL YA pit, it is a good idea to use the transporter in the south side of the room in the small niche to take you back to the area where you got Dragonfang. Nearby is a down stairway that leads to a safe spot on level nine. Be careful of the golem there—he might find you!

3. On level 5, in the large room at the top where a gate will take you to the area where the Winged Key is located, use the slime monsters to your advantage when getting the Vorpall Blade in the niche. After the sword is picked up and the huge fireballs are bouncing between the blue fields, go to the left and push the button there several times, then wait. Eventually, slime devils come and are hit by the fireballs,

Brice Stevens
Columbus OH

1. In the caves near Hap, don't use the wooden doors unless you are prepared for an enormous combat.

2. Dracandros wouldn't give hints against his troops unless they were written on explosive paper!

3. Save the game before you meet the wyverns. Restore the game if someone dies. When that's completed, save, fix, and memorize Haste and Silence, 15'. Drop lots of copper, and so on. Cast Haste; when you get out, rush over to Dracandros and silence him.

Ian Rapley
Bucks, U.K.

1. I hate to offer contrary advice to the hints offered in your column in DRAGON issue #171, but my party of dual-classed humans plowed through the game with ease. Start with a party of humans in a variety of classes. I had a paladin, a ranger, a thief, a magic-user, and two clerics. The first thing I did before exploring the town was to change everyone's class. Make characters fighters, as they gain levels

faster than paladins or rangers. Don't make the thief a magic-user, as he'll never see dual-classed levels. Don't worry about magic-users not being able to wear armor; there are plenty of bracers out there, and the magic-users can carry a shield. Yes, your characters are 1st level, but they should have enough hit points to survive until they obtain a few levels.

2. Have someone cast a Silence, 15' spell on the storm giants around the Dreadlord so they can't cast spells.

3. Fire lightning bolts at the iron golems in the final battle. It won't hurt them, but it will slow them down.

Jeff Cox II
Brevard NC

1. Find the Shrine of Singularity in the mountains north of the stone table on the gargoyle island. Use your balloon.

2. Find the violet lens in the largest building on the gargoyle island.

Tim Mauldin
Bayfield CO

Remember, you can send your Beastie Award votes to our fax machine or to us at: The Lessers, 521 Czerny St., Tracy CA 95376, U.S.A., as long as your name and address are indicated on your vote. Until next time, game on!

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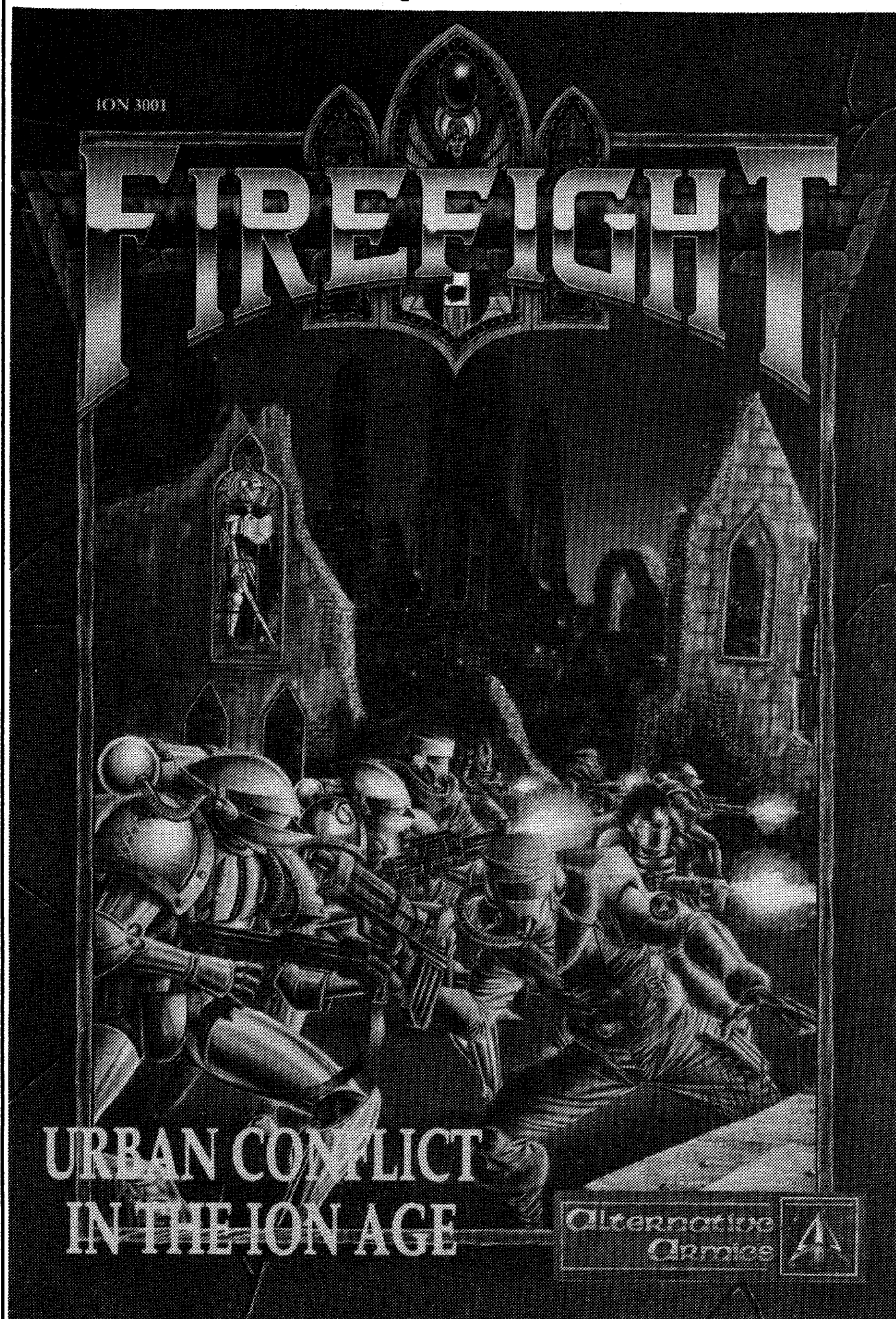


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FORUM

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments.

All this time I thought the DM's main job was to provide the players and himself with an enjoyable few hours on a regular basis. Craig Hardie has set us all straight with his letter in issue #166: "The prime purpose of being a Dungeon Master was to gain a sense of accomplishment by designing what is . . . the 'perfect' fantasy world." Yeah, right.

I'm speaking as a DM who has created my own campaign worlds and who has also run campaigns based on "official" game worlds. Mr. Hardie says he has nothing against pregenerated campaigns, except that they have no business being campaigns. If the person(s) responsible for the material publish it as a novel or movie or somesuch, he *might* find it acceptable. But not everyone who can design a good game world is competent to run it. The reverse is also true. There are a great number of game masters who can do an excellent job using other people's material, but whose games die slowly when using their own. Using your own material has strong points, but so does using the material of other people.

In my own case, times change; too much work on the campaign led to burnout, and there was a change in my work schedule, too. I found I could not supply the effort I would need to keep the quality of my campaign at a level I was satisfied with, so I ended it.

Using the FORGOTTEN REALMS® material in place of my own game worlds has some drawbacks, particularly after somebody decided "Hey! Let's kill off a lot of gods and change a number of major NPCs!"—grumble, grumble—and here and there were facets of life in a fantasy world that I would not have put into my own, but the alternatives were to either do a poor-quality job or to not DM at all. I can live with using Greenwood's game setting.

Craig Hardie also overlooked the fact that many PCs (particularly in a game club setting) are drop-ins from other campaigns. Having a more-or-less standard medium, such as an official world, makes explaining things to the new players a lot easier for the DM.

A DM isn't obligated to use such a game world or to adhere absolutely to what has been written. But neither should he be forbidden from

using the material simply because one player thinks his reason for being a DM is the only reason anyone should be one.

S. D. Anderson
Whittier CA

Recently, I've had some problems getting a gaming group together. I guess the fact that I live in Chile does not really help, but this is my home country and where I intend to live.

Since the group I was a member of sort of "fell apart" due to the fact that my companions either got posted somewhere else or just decided it was time to go back to their native country (the U.S.A. in most cases), I suddenly found myself stranded with nothing but good memories and a lot of rule books, modules, etc. This is what I am really driving at—what are those good memories? No, I am not going to give you a detailed account of my life, but I shall point out what I think will be very useful to DMs.

Just thinking over my gaming memories, I can divide these into two groups. The first is usually present whenever playing a role-playing game, and the second is a more special aspect.

Of course, you remember how you and the gang sort of sat around telling jokes. How it took a great deal of talking to convince your mom to let you have six teenagers over for the weekend (six ravenous and noisy teenagers is closer to the truth). How you could spend a good half-hour arguing about some obscure rule or what to do next ("Hey guys, I think we should go north!" "No, I say west." "How about searching for secret doors?").

These memories are very special—the munchies, your friends, and basically the "live social interaction" that takes place during a role-playing game. But have you ever pondered about what adventure it is you remember best, or in which one you had the most fun?

According to myself, and a few others, the best adventure is not the one where you killed Mr. Mega-tough-demon or dragon or giant with all his followers and friends, and where you got that Amazingly Titanic Pile of treasure with a couple of +6 weapons and an unlimited amount of potions, scrolls, and miscellaneous magic. The most remembered adventure, and in fact the most fun one, is actually the one where things go wrong!

Yes, the adventures that are best remembered are the ones where the unexpected (to the players, of course, not to the DM) reigns supreme and where chaos takes charge. By saying "go wrong," I don't mean where half the party dies or everybody gets turned to stone forever, but the small things that go wrong without actually harming the characters a great deal.

When you go to the beach, will you remember lying on the beach, or will you remember how on the way to the beach your luggage fell out of

the car and you had to drive a couple of miles back to get it (luckily nothing was stolen or very damaged) and how you blew a tire and then got stuck in the mud? Most likely you should remember the second option. Please note that in this "real life" case, you as a teenager will be having the time of your life, while as a parent you will be extremely worried until you get a chance to think back and sigh, chuckle, and say, "What a day!"

This same idea also applies to role-playing games, with the difference that if the adventure is managed properly, our players should not really get worried or nervous about what is going on. It is important to note that the players always know that this is all fantasy, that in the end won't matter if your character died or not since your real life will go on the same (or almost the same).

The kind of encounters I am getting at that should make every adventure a memorable experience are the ones with things that make you and your players laugh. Isn't it great fun when one of your friend's characters grows a tail, while you get shrunk to 3' tall, and your party mage has fleas? These things are all small, pretty insignificant, things that can always be removed with some spell or other and which shouldn't last forever.

In conclusion, I would like to tell all of you DMs out there, "Hey! Forget those tough monsters! Forget the giant piles of treasure! Just give those players an adventure they won't forget for a long, long time."

Jose Pablo Zagal
Santiago Chile

I am writing in response to Steven Zamboni's letter in issue #166 [regarding the article "Voidjammers!" in issue #159]. Let me start out by saying that outer space and the Astral plane are not the same place. It is also true that thought "activated" is not thought propelled.

Zamboni states that any creature of 18 intelligence can close with a voidjammer from 2,000 yards in seven rounds. This is only true if the voidjammer stays still. Anything in the Astral plane that can think is able to turn vertically and horizontally at will. Therefore, any combat will be either a tail chase or a head-on collision. A tail chase between a voidjammer (48) and an attacker (54) with 18 intelligence would result in the attacker gaining at the rate of 6 (54 - 48 = 6), or 60' (20 yards). At 1,000 yards, the aggressor would take 50 rounds to close, allowing the ship's weapons to fire a total of 37 shots, 25 for the catapult and 12 for the scorpion.

The choice of heavy artillery weapons is also a good one for several reasons. The first is that a heavy catapult can launch several hundred pounds of heated nails at a cluster of infantry. The second reason involves the void cruisers

developed by the githyanki. The third reason is that since all matter in the astral plane is "imported," it's reasonable to assume some very large fortresses can give chase.

Mr. Zamboni overrates the value of an open deck to attackers. Since anything that can think can change its yaw, pitch, and spin at will, an open deck is not open to attack from above.

Steven states that the ship's mass is removed by an *anti-gravity* spell, making the ram useless. To quote thousands of science teachers, "Gravity affects weight, not mass!"

The article claims that Peregrin lacks the magical items, levels, and hit points to defeat a regiment of githyanki. This article overlooks the fact that Peregrin comes from a plane where thought equals magic. This, according to the *Manual of the Planes*, allows him 11th-level spells, possibly 12th-level. He has also been an apprentice to Thoth (an Egyptian god), making him a demipower by now. Peregrin has also fought the lich queen of the githyanki on her terms and won. This is (in theory) how he beat other powerful opponents into submission.

The final issue raised against Peregrin's taxi service is his use of brains to power the ships. Necromancy is unpleasant, but it's not inherently evil. It all depends on the source of the brains. The choice of illithid brains stems from their personality as a race. All current information points to the illithids as agnostic egomaniacs who either can't or won't recognize even a greater power as more than an animal to be hunted and used.

As for the rumors of Peregrin using githyanki brains on his flagship, it's possible the lich queen is selling him the brains of her rivals as part of the peace treaty. It could also be an unfounded rumor started by Peregrin's enemies.

D. M. Burck
Boyd KY

Having read Robert Rodger's letter in DRAGON issue #163, and being a GM of West End Game's STAR WARS*: The RPG myself, I believe that I am in a position to offer some advice and some points to consider (in dealing with a powerful suit of armor used by a character named Red-eyes). I will break these down into two sections: combat and noncombat. First to consider is combat:

1. Use a magnet to capture Red-eyes like they did Robocop in *Robocop II*.

2. Being armor with no DEX penalties, it must be powered, so have the armor run out of energy at a critical time or be attacked by energy-hungry mynocks.

3. Hits of any type to Red-eye's armor can and will cause malfunctions in the servomotors in his armor. Maybe they will burn out from sand, grit, or lack of care.

4. He is still susceptible to pit-traps, snares, cages, or carbon-freezing. A rescue mission like *Return of the Jedi* could be a nice twist ("Rescue Red-eyes").

Also consider the noncombat alternatives:

1. Red-Eyes needs to remove the armor to sleep, eat, and relieve himself. Anything could happen at these times.

2. Such armor must be unique, which means Red-Eyes could be known throughout the galaxy because of descriptions of the armor.

3. Many peaceful planets may have laws against wearing or owning bounty hunter armor. Surely the Empire would frown on others wearing armor.

4. Amateur bounty hunters could be out to make a name for themselves and may try to kill him for prestige. Old bounty hunters may be

concerned about a young upstart and try to deal with him.

5. Imperials may check him for Imperial licensing, and, being a rebel, he will not have it.

6. What happens to him if his view plate is covered? Mud, garbage, or sacks could make him blind.

The whole idea is to force Red-eyes to make the decision, "Is the armor worth all the liabilities?" Design adventures where stealth, brain-power or other skills are needed, not brawn.

Scot Eddy
LeGrand IA

I agreed with S. D. Anderson's comments in "Forum," issue #164, regarding wizards' possible acceptance of gunpowder weaponry. However, I believe this acceptance would develop slowly.

Wizards are orderly folk, as close to today's scientists as you can come in the game. What you did yesterday to produce a *magic missile* spell will work again today in the precise same way, and also tomorrow and the day after. If you do precisely the same thing, the same results will occur. However, firearms in the game world are far from reliable: Sometimes they work properly, sometimes they don't, sometimes they even explode in your face. I believe this would produce some rather natural mistrust of gunpowder weaponry on the part of wizards.

Also, imagine the disarray into which wizards will be thrown when reports of firearms first come in. I'm sure most people will refer, in the beginning at least, to arquebuses and flintlocks as "magic staves," and pistols as "magic wands!" After all, you point a firearm at someone, a flash and bang are produced, and the victim falls dead to the ground. To the uneducated masses, that is magic as good as it comes!

This would certainly set wizards and sages alike on the wrong track for the time being. They will research files for tales of powerful magical items used by unknown magicians (probably the wielders will not be magic-users at all, but that is what accounts might tell). Putting new magical items and new powerful rivals together will certainly cause havoc among the ranks of Wizard Guilds and independent mages alike.

Nevertheless, this line of inquiry will certainly produce startling results, as wizards start "finding" these new weapons. They will certainly develop magical and spell-driven equivalents to firearms or gunpowder. These magical items will be far more reliable than conventional firearms, although probably quite expensive. I'm not talking of *flintlock pistol* + 1, but a wand or rod that behaves in the same way. In fact, when the use and knowledge of firearms finally begins to spread and we get to see Anderson's 98-pound weakening mage with his flintlock pistol without amazement, these magical equivalents will certainly be the weapons of choice of high-level wizards throughout the land. The flintlock pistol will then be used by only those mages not rich enough (or not good enough) to own one of those equivalents. Of course, new spells will also issue forth from this phenomenal research effort. The *protection* vs. *normal bullets* spell will certainly come about, not to mention the *small shower over gunpowder* cantrip. Certainly fighters and wizards alike will benefit from the introduction of gunpowder to the campaign world, even if it takes a while for them to realize this.

W. Norgielix
Mexico City, Mexico

I am 16 and have been playing for approximately five years now. When I started, my friends

and I would play on the weekends, with an occasional after-school session. All of us enjoyed it, and it gave our minds something to do.

Our only problem was lack of guidance. Granted, our game has evolved from its hack-and-slash beginnings to a true role-playing game, but it took a while—a long while.

In Alex Iwanow's letter (issue #157), he says not to laugh at the kid in the book store because he is the future of the AD&D® game. I would urge going one step further and inviting the kid to play in a session or two, specifically to teach him how the game is played. Then he can teach his friends, and they can play a decent game together (getting a DM may be a problem, though).

Now you are thinking of the imagined torture of trying to teach an 11-year-old how to play the AD&D game. Two points to help you: 1) It doesn't have to be an 11-year-old. Starting gamers of any age will share many of the same problems, such as a tendency toward hack and slash (after all, most of the rules are for combat, aren't they?); and 2) age is a relative term. There are some very mature and intelligent young people in this world, and that kid might be one of them.

Granted, playing with a young or inexperienced gamer slows things down and detracts from the fun, but you never know. Somewhere down the line, that kid may be playing with or DMing for you. You could even see a very useful article by him in this magazine. The moral of the story is: Whatever goes around, comes around. If you help others, they will help you sooner or later.

Brian Dye
Virginia Beach VA

Regarding the Timmons' notes on scale mail ("Letters," issue #167): A good armorer could attach the scales with metallic "staples" and rivet, or "sweat" (a pre-solder term) the ends together. And, whereas scale was a little harder on the wearer than chain mail, I highly doubt anyone who wore it cursed it, especially if the alternative meant no armor at all.

Also, if the scale mail cracked (I presume you're speaking about *metal* scales), I would be doubly doubtful about any chain mail, let alone helmets or—*forfeit!*—weaponry this smith made (sounds like reject iron ore and improperly forged metal were involved). Scales could be made of practically anything: horn, wood, any metal, or leather and cuir-bouilli (it certainly was!).

If properly made, the average suit of scale mail would offer much better protection against weaponry than chain mail (and who says you cannot wear a padded gambeson under a set of scale?).

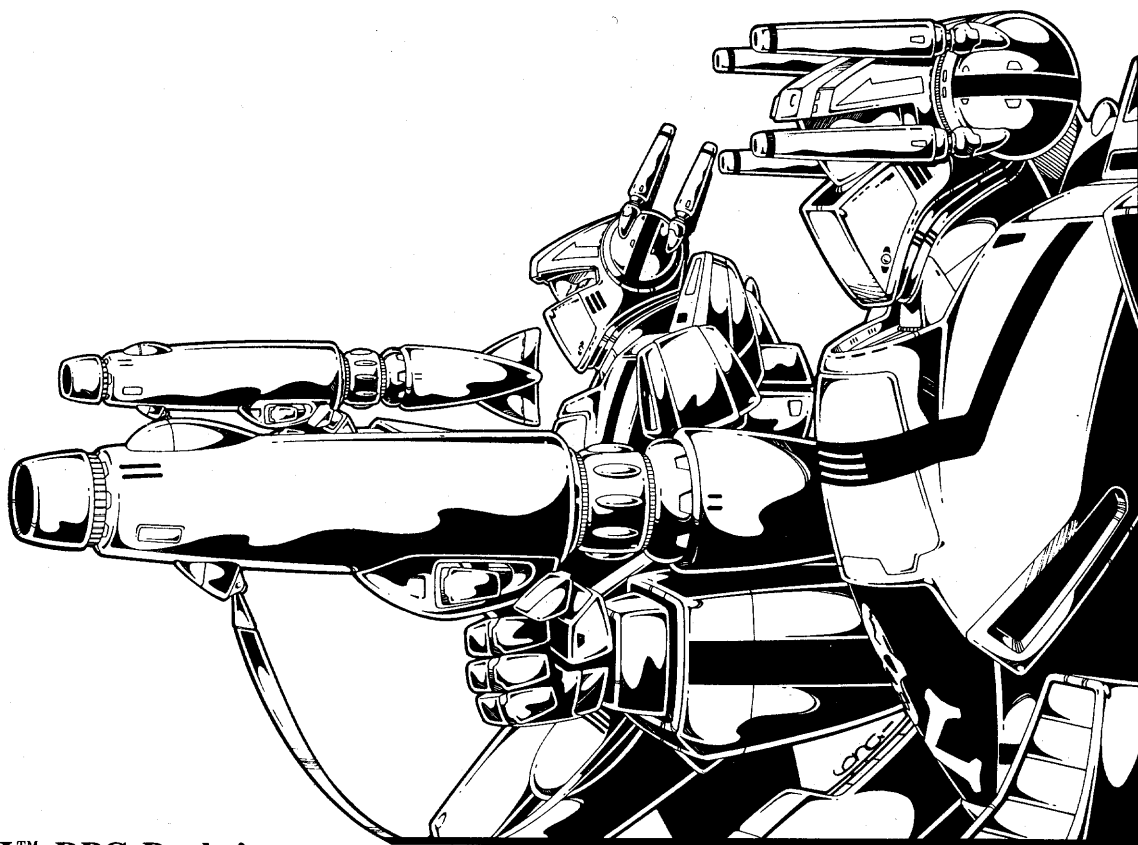
Mr. Speir's crossbow explanations (in "Forum," issue #167) sound valid until he quotes a heavy crossbow's damage as 4d4 hp. You mean a character can get nicked for 1 hp damage from a light crossbow, but suffer a minimum of 4 hp from a heavy? Try again, sir. (Now, don't think I'm picking on you, it's the system. That gripe holds true for every multiple-die damage roll!)

Mr. Wadle's solution to being zonked levels by energy drainers was very good! ("You get a cookie," to quote one of my favorite dwarflike creatures: *Crap Game*, from *Kelly's Heroes*).

Author unknown

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A look at the 1990 ORIGINS™ Award winners



Best Historical Figure Series, 1990:

Ancients, 25 mm* (Ral Partha Enterprises, Inc.), sculpted by Dave Summers and Sandra Garrity

Best Fantasy or Science-Fiction Figure Series, 1990:

AD&D® Miniat-ures—Monsters (Ral Parthal, sculpted by Dennis Mize, Nick Bibby, Richard Kerr, and Sandra Garrity

Best Vehicular Miniature Series,

1990: Space Ork Battle Wagon* (Games Workshop/Citadel Miniatures), sculpted by the Citadel Miniatures Design Team

Best Accessory Figure Series, 1990:

Castles boxed set (TSR, Inc.), designed by David Cook, Jeff Grubb, and Bruce Nesmith

Best Miniatures Rules, 1990: BATTLE-

TECH Compendium*, for the BATTLE-TECH* game (FASA Corp.), designed by Sam Lewis, Jordan Weisman, and L. Ross Babcock III

Best Role-Playing Rules, 1990: KING ARTHUR PENDRAGON* game, 3rd Ed. (Chaosium, Inc.), designed by Greg Stafford

Best Role-Playing Adventure, 1990:

Harlequin*, for the SHADOWRUN* game (FASA Corp.), designed by Tom Dowd, Sam Lewis, Ken St. Andre, John Faughnan, W. G. Armintrout, Jerry Epperson, Paul R. Hume, Lester Smith, and James D. Long

Best Role-Playing Supplement, 1990:

FORGOTTEN REALMS® Adventures, for the AD&D® 2nd Edition game (TSR, Inc.), designed by Jeff Grubb and Ed Greenwood

Best Graphic Presentation of a Role-Playing Game, 1990 (tie):

RAVENLOFT™ boxed set, for the AD&D 2nd Edition game (TSR, Inc.), graphic design by Roy E. Parker, cartography and architectural drawings by David C. Sutherland III (supervisor/artist); and Seattle Source Book* for the SHADOW-RUN* game (FASA), art by FASA art staff (Dana Knutson, art director)

Best Pre-20th Century Board Game,

1990: REPUBLIC OF ROME* game (The Avalon Hill Game Company, Inc.), designed by Richard Berthold and Robert Haines

Best Modern-Day Board Game, 1990:

EURORAILS* game (Mayfair Games, Inc.), designed by Darwin Bromley

Best Fantasy or Science-Fiction

Board Game, 1990: GENESTEAL-ER supplement, for the SPACE HULK*

game (Games Workshop), designed by the Games Workshop Studio Design Team

Best Graphic Presentation of a

Board Game, 1990: GENESTEAL-ER supplement, for the SPACE HULK* game (Games Workshop), designed by the Games Workshop Studio Design Team

Best Play-by-Mail Game, 1990: Illumi-

nati* game (Flying Buffalo, Inc.), de-signed by Draper Kauffman

Best New Play-by-Mail Game, 1990:

Monster Island* game (Adventures by Mail), designed by the Adventures by Mail staff

Best Fantasy or Science-Fiction Com-

puter Game, 1990: Wing Com-mander* game (Origin Systems), designed by Chris Roberts

Best Military or Strategy Computer

Game, 1990: Populous* game (Elec-tronic Arts), designed by the Electronic Arts staff

Best Professional Adventure Gam-

ing Magazine, 1990: DUNGEON® Adventures (TSR, Inc.), edited by Barbara G. Young

Best Amateur Adventure Gaming

Magazine, 1990: Wargamer's Infor-mation* magazine, edited by Rick Loomis

Hall of Fame, 1990: Sandy Petersen

Two of the ORIGINS Awards for 1989 were subjected to a second vote, following irregularities in last year's balloting. The winners are:

Best Play-by-Mail Game, 1989: It's a

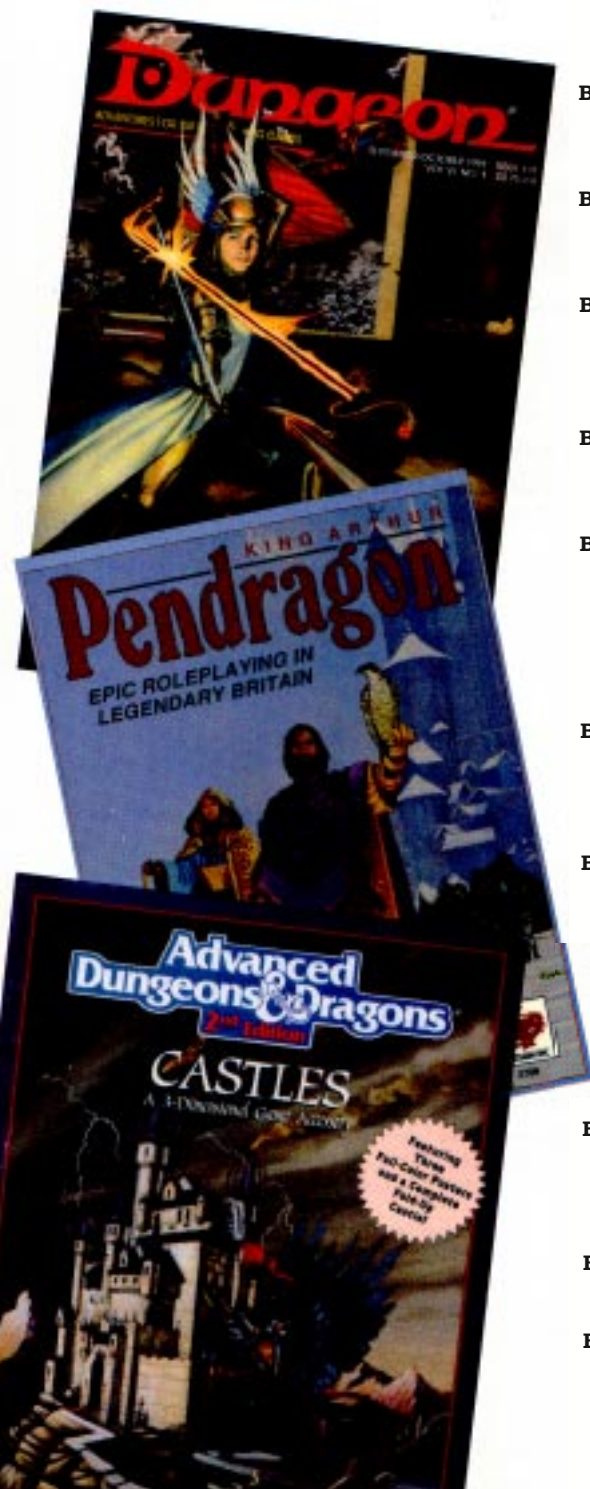
Crime* game (Adventures by Mail), designed by the Adventures by Mail staff

Best New Play-by-Mail Game, 1989:

Beyond the Stellar Empire—The New System* game (Adventures by Mail), designed by the Adventures by Mail staff

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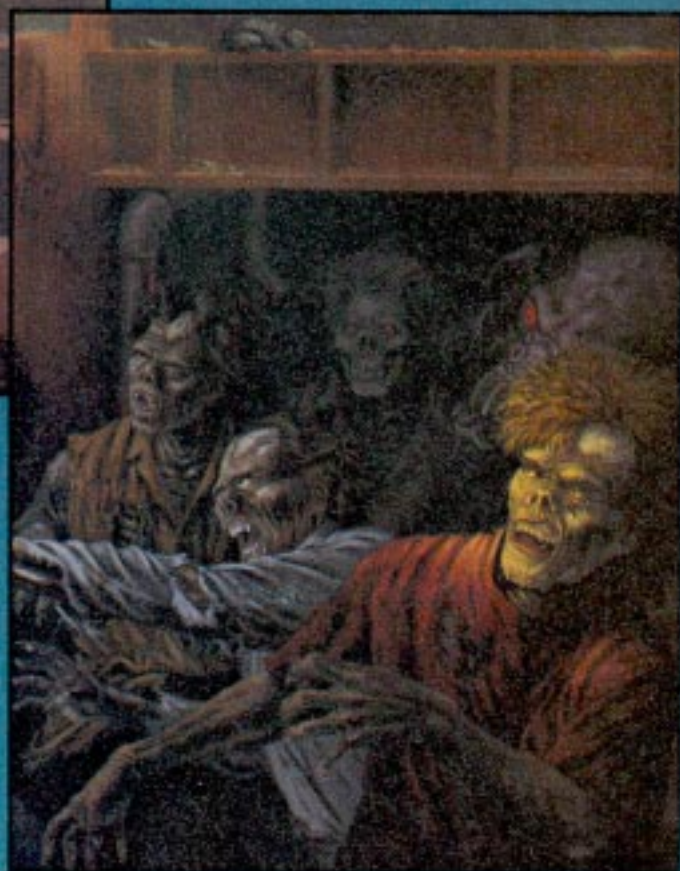
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SAGE advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (SASEs are being returned with writers' guidelines for the magazine).

Join the sage as he turns his attention to a few problems confronting Dungeon Masters and their AD&D® 2nd Edition campaigns.

The various SPELLJAMMER™ rules hooks say that weapons can be added to a ship at the cost of one ton of cargo space per weapon, to a maximum number of weapons equal to half the ship's tonnage. Since cargo space also is equal to half the ship's tonnage, this means that all the ship's cargo space can be used up by extra weapons. I have two problems with this: First, what do cargo space and weapons have to do with each other? Second, the rule allows a ridiculously large number of weapons to be mounted on ships. A hammership, for example, at 60 tons, can mount 30 additional weapons!

The maximum number of additional weapons a ship can carry is one per two tons of displacement (*Concordance of Arcane Space*, pages 26-27). However, this is a theoretical number based on a ship's gross hauling capacity. Even a quick look at the deck plans in the SPELLJAMMER boxed set reveals that cramming a spelljammer with its maximum load of weapons would take *all* the ship's deck space. Of course, a truly warlike spelljammer captain might build a "double-topped" ship with fighting decks above and below the plane of gravity, but woe to the weapons' crews if the gravity plane shifts.

Speaking of crews, general-purpose spelljammers, such as most PCs would use,

don't have the quarters or air necessary to sustain a huge number of weapons crews; this tends to lower the practical limit on the number of weapons a ship is likely to have. (On the other hand, a "monitor"-type ship dedicated to defending a planet, base, or section of wildspace might be packed to its crow's nest with weaponry, and ships crewed by undead would have no breathing-air restrictions.) Also, don't forget that weapons aren't free and are not available in unlimited quantities.

Extra weapons eat up cargo space for a variety of reasons. First, a ship's cargo capacity is an abstract figure that reflects both its interior volume and its ability to carry weight. A weapons-heavy ship might have empty space in its hull, but if overloaded with cargo it would probably maneuver like a wounded duck and have a nasty tendency to split open like a wet cardboard box in combat or when landing. Also, large weapons can't just be bolted onto a ship's deck; their mounts must be braced and supported so the weapons don't break loose when fired. This extra structure not only reduces the ship's payload, it also tends to make the ship less efficient as a cargo carrier (the extra posts and beams prevent the crew from packing cargo tightly, and they otherwise waste space). Also, don't forget that large weapons need ammunition, and some of the ship's cargo space has to be allocated to its storage.

Can hit points lost to a death helm (from the SPELLJAMMER module SJRI *Lost Ships*) be healed, or are they permanently lost?

A death helm's hit-point drain functions exactly like a *lifejammer's* hit-point drain (*Concordance of Arcane Space*, pages 38-39). That is, hit points lost to the *death helm* can be healed, but only after the victim is separated from the helm.

How do the crystal spheres of the SPELLJAMMER rules relate to the planar organization as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide* and *Manual of the Planes*? In particular, what about the many alternate Prime Material planes, and the as-

tral wormholes that connect them to the outer planes?

This matter is left up to the DM. The most straightforward reading of the SPELLJAMMER material suggests to me that all the crystal spheres and the phlogiston that connects them are part of a *single* Prime Material plane, which makes the planar universe a very big place indeed. However, there is no reason why you can't assume that each crystal sphere is itself a *separate* Prime Material Plane, with all the variable properties described in the *Manual of the Planes*. Note that if this is true, spelljammers would visit some spheres at their own peril. In a campaign with such a planar setup, astral and ethereal travel might very well be a workable alternative to spelljamming. With a little work, you could merge the SPELLJAMMER setting into the DMG's planar setup, treating each crystal sphere as a Prime Material plane and making the phlogiston part of the Astral or Ethereal plane, or eliminate the phlogiston and replace it with the Astral or Ethereal plane.

What happens if a *cursed* item is placed into a spelljamming furnace?

Unless the DM rules otherwise, *cursed* items cannot provide motive power for a spelljammer—no experience-point (XP) value, no spelljamming "oomph." A furnace is unable to convert the "negative" magical energy held in a cursed item to motive force. If the item is flammable, however, it can be destroyed by the furnace's flames. If the DM is inclined to think that magic is magic, each cursed item's XP value for furnace purposes must be set on a case-by-case basis; giving each cursed item a value roughly equal to the XP value of the beneficial item it mimics might be the most workable method.

Can a character use the extra proficiency slots gained from a high intelligence score to get more weapon proficiencies? The text that goes along with intelligence table in the *Player's Handbook* is not specific about which kind of proficiencies are gained. And, while the proficiency section mentions extra non-

weapon proficiencies, it doesn't say the extra proficiencies cannot be used for extra weapons.

The arrangement of material in the *PHB's* proficiencies section (starting on page 50) make it clear to me that weapon proficiencies are based solely on class and level, not intelligence. Each character is automatically entitled to as many weapon proficiencies as his professional studies and knowledge allow. Nonprofessional skills—nonweapon proficiencies—are only partially dependent on a character's professional acumen, and very intelligent characters get more of them. Many DMs limit extra proficiency slots from intelligence to languages or language skills (such as reading and writing).

Since the appearance of the *Tome of Magic*, two players have been pestering me to let them turn their necromancers into necromancer/wild mages. I think wild magic is a field of study all by itself, but these guys won't let up!

You are correct; a character cannot be both a wild mage and a specialist wizard at the same time. Wild mages are too wrapped up in trying to understand the tangled skeins of wild magic to also understand the complexities of a particular school of spells and enjoy the benefits a devotee of a single school gets. In fact, intense and disciplined study of a single school of magic is anathema to a wild mage. So tell your two players to stop pestering you.

When a character uses *Nahal's reckless dweomer* (from the *Tome of Magic*), what kind of description must the caster supply? Is he free to attempt anything he can dream up? Why even bother with a description in the first place, since the spell isn't likely to provide what the caster wants anyway?

As the spell description clearly states (*TOM*, page 20), the mage can attempt only spells that are written in his spell books; the mage cannot try spells he doesn't know, nor can he create new effects at the spur of the moment. The reason why the caster must say what spell he is trying to recreate with the *reckless dweomer* is pretty obvious (and I've seen it pointed out once on the GENIE computer networks "TSR RoundTable"). The *reckless dweomer* uses the Wild Surge Results table (*TOM*, page 7) to determine what happens. When rolling on this table, it's possible for the spell to function exactly as intended, or to function with enhanced or diminished effects; results such as #56 (half range, duration, area of effect, and damage) are pretty hard to adjudicate without knowing what the intended spell was.

My group has been considering what would be required to bless and dedicate a new temple or

shrine—that is, to dedicate it to a deity, not to cast a spell on it. The *focus* spell from the *Tome of Magic* (pages 76-80) seems to be a step in the right direction, but doesn't seem to hit the spot. Also, are the spells listed in the *Tome of Magic* the only ones that can be *focused*, or can others be *focused*?

Since a *focus* spell captures and redirects "devotional" energy, I'm inclined to think that a *site-focused bless* spell is exactly what you want. In maintaining the *focus*, the congregation regularly renews its ties with the divine, which should please the deity greatly. I suppose a *prayer* spell could be cast once in conjunction with a *focus* to permanently consecrate the site. Such a spell would have no lasting effects (unless the DM rules otherwise), but it certainly would get the deity's attention briefly. Officially, the spells listed in Table 3, pages 79-80 of the *TOM*, are the only spells that can be *focused*. However, DMs should feel free to add new spells to the list if they'll enhance the campaign. Most spells that can be *focused* are ones that provide immediate aid to the caster, establish the caster's (and the deity's) authority in the community, or create the proper atmosphere to worship a deity.

I've noticed that certain spells were designed to affect a given number of levels or hit dice of creatures. How do you decide what the "level" of a multiclassed character is? For example, how many hit dice or levels does an elven 7/6/5 thief/fighter/mage have?

In this case, use the highest level the character has. The character in your example counts as a 7-HD creature.

I understand that magic resistance can protect a creature against natural effects such as the hailstones of an *ice storm*. Can it also protect a creature from the effects of a *Nystul's radiant baton* (*GREYHAWK® Adventures*, page 60), which creates a natural effect drawn from the quasi-elemental plane of Radiance? What about the spell's ability to automatically strike a creature that has struck the caster during a round?

Whether or not an effect is natural has no bearing on whether or not it is subject to magic resistance. Magically created effects ignore magic resistance only if they are consequential. The rules governing magic resistance (*PHB*, page 102, or *DMG*, page 66) use crevices created by an *earthquake* spell as an example. The spell *earthquake* does not create crevices; it creates tremors that in turn create crevices. As another example, lightning is a natural effect on the Prime Material plane and elsewhere. Nevertheless, a *lightning bolt* is an area-effect spell subject to magic resistance.

Magic resistance, however, cannot protect a creature against a huge stalactite or weakened wall broken loose by a *lightning bolt*. Nor can it protect an exposed creature from random lightning strikes generated from a thunderstorm created by *control weather* or *weather summoning* spells. These last two spells do not create or control lightning; they change and agitate the atmosphere in such a way as to make lightning possible. Note that *call lightning* creates and directs lightning on demand, and that each stroke called is an area effect subject to magic resistance. The spell *ice storm* can create damage-inflicting missiles that are subject to magic resistance, as is any other area of effect spell. However, a magic-resistant creature still is blinded, slowed, and vulnerable to slipping and falling if subjected to the sleet version of an *ice storm*, because these are consequential effects.

A *Nystul's radiant baton* is an "in place" magical effect subject to magic resistance. If the spell's baton strikes a magic-resistant creature and the magic-resistance roll succeeds, the baton collapses. Magic resistance never comes into play until a spell or spell-like effect comes into contact with a resistant creature, so spell effects that automatically hit, such as *magic missiles*, still hit, though they do no damage if the magic-resistance roll succeeds.

The new *PHB* (page 22) says half-elves can be druid/rangers, but the table on page 44 does not mention this combination. What are the armor and weapon restrictions and alignment requirements for this multiclassed combination?

In the core AD&D 2nd Edition game, there are no druid/rangers. The reference to them on page 22 is an error, and that is why they don't appear in the table on page 44. In practice, however, druid/rangers work very well in play, offering a good mix of skills and lots of role-playing possibilities.

To determine the weapons and armor allowed to druid/rangers (if the DM decides to allow these characters at all), follow the rules on page 45 of the *PHB*. Since a warrior priest must abide by the weapon restrictions of his mythos, the druid/ranger's weapons are limited to: club, sickle, dart, spear, dagger, scimitar, sling, and staff. The druid/ranger also must observe the druids special armor restrictions, thus being limited to leather armor and wooden shields. Since rangers must be good and druids must be neutral, alignment is a problem. I suggest that a druid/ranger's alignment be limited to neutral good.

Note that the rules on page 45—especially the weapons restrictions—tend to discourage multiclassed priests except for characters dedicated to the appropriate deities. For example warrior priests who follow war deities might have access to a useful selection of warrior armor and weapons (*PHB*, page 34) and will be far

more effective as warriors than, say warrior clerics, who are limited to blunt weapons. Since the original rationale behind druid/rangers is that these two woodland professions have enough common interests to generate at least a few multiclassed characters, and since the druid/ranger by necessity already violates the druid's alignment restriction, the DM might wish to bend the rules a bit to allow druid/rangers to function more effectively as rangers. The best way to do this is to expand the weapons list to include at least one kind of bow and maybe the warrior's mainstay, the long sword. The DM also might consider lifting or altering the armor restriction. This might be easier if the character in question were actually dedicated to a specific woodland or elven deity (see next question).

Who or what, exactly, do druids worship? Do they simply venerate and gain their powers through some personification of nature, or do they worship specific deities, such as those from the Celtic myths?

This is entirely up to the DM. Both the FORGOTTEN REALMS® and WORLD OF GREYHAWK® fantasy settings include deities who have druids as followers, and certainly many of the deities described in the *Legends & Lore* tome have portfolios that would attract druidical worshippers. On the other hand, it's sensible to assume that druids are directly dedicated to nature, either personified in some being or as an impersonal force that they can tap by virtue of their singular devotion. Indeed, I see no reason why a campaign cannot have both kinds of druids.

Does the druidical resistance to charms cast by woodland creatures protect only against innate abilities or against enchantment/charm spells in general? What constitutes a woodland creature, anyway? Is a druid immune to charm person spells cast by any creature that lives near a tree?

The intent behind this ability clearly is to make the druid immune to the innate charm abilities possessed by fantastic creatures who live permanently in the forest. This keeps the druids' status as master and protector of the forest from being undermined by capricious charm attempts from sylvan creatures who can't be counted on to use their abilities with common sense. The druid gains this ability because he taps into the same base of power that grants sylvan creatures their charm abilities. The immunity does not protect the druid from spells such as charm person or charm person or mammal, even when cast by other druids or woodland creatures such as green dragons; their power comes from a different source.

A woodland creature is any creature normally associated with a sylvan setting,

such as a dryad, hamadryad, or nymph. When in doubt, check the creature's "Climate/Terrain" heading in the *Monstrous Compendium*. Creatures that typically live in nonforested terrain, such as vampires, can charm druids normally.

In the original AD&D game, a magic-user had to know and use the read magic spell before he could read any spell written by another magic-user, whether it was in a scroll or book. Is this true in the new game? If so, do wizards and bards automatically get the read magic spell?

In the core AD&D 2nd Edition game, the read magic spell is required to decipher magical scrolls but not spell books. While all wizards and bards have access to the read magic spell, nobody gets it automatically unless the DM says so. Note also that the DM is free to place restrictions on reading spell books. One campaign I know assumes that every wizard uses his or her own system for entering spells into books and requires read magic to read all spells in books, even ones the reader already knows. In such campaigns, prospective casters of wizard spells would be severely handicapped without access to the read magic spell, and ethical tutors would not allow their students to go into the world without knowing it. Of course, this still doesn't guarantee that every spell-caster will know read magic, as most fantasy worlds should have a large supply of unethical people and self-instructed students of the art.

The shadow monsters and demi-shadow monsters spells are listed under the illusion/phantasm school, but their descriptions say they draw matter from the plane of Shadow to create illusions of one or more monsters. Doesn't this make these spells conjuration/summonings or evocation/invocations? What happens if the caster isn't connected with the plane of Shadow at all? I suppose the spell might be partially successful even in this case if it were truly an illusion. Also, what is the difference between an illusion and a phantasm?

The spells in question are illusion/phantasms because their primary function is to make their victims believe in something that doesn't really exist. The inclusion of a small amount of extraplanar material makes these spells very potent illusions (it is because of this trace of "real" material that they can inflict damage even if successfully disbelieved), but it does not make them conjuration/summonings. A full-blown conjuration/summoning or evocation/invocation brings forth a "real" object or creature, not one whose existence is diminished by active disbelief. If local conditions make a connection between the caster and the plane of Shadow



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impossible, then casting either of these spells also is impossible; it's all or nothing.

In game terms, there is very little difference between an illusion and a phantasm, which is why the two words usually are used together. Technically speaking, however, an phantasm exists only in the victim's mind (e.g., *phantasmal killer*), whereas an illusion is a sensory impression that any being might perceive if close enough. The various *phantasmal force* spells are true illusions, in spite of the name. The distinction usually is immaterial in campaign play and should be ignored in most cases,

One of my character's party rivals is an invoker (invocation/evocation specialist). One of his favorite spells is wall of fog, which is quite effective in our campaign, and he causes a lot of trouble with it. Is this spell really an invocation/evocation spell, or is this a misprint?

Like all the other "wall" spells, *wall of fog* is an evocation. It is so classed because it brings into being something that wasn't there before the spell was cast.

A great deal of game logic and concern for game balance underlies the schools as they presently are constructed, and I don't recommend fiddling with them, especially if you are using specialist wizards. The team who revised the game carefully considered the number of spells in each school and the kinds of adventuring "niches" each specialist would tend to fill, which is why spells with similar effects tend to fall into the same school even if the mechanics behind them don't seem to match at first glance. I also suggest that trying to second guess the game's designers is not the best way to role-play dealing with a rival. Having your character slip a raw egg into the rival character's boot is much more likely to produce an entertaining result than trying to tinker with the rules. If there's one thing more annoying than a rules lawyer, it's a rules lawyer who wants to change the rules.

For readers who are interested in how spells are grouped together in schools, check out page 81 of the PHB or pages 6-29 of *The Complete Wizard's Handbook*. Doing so will help you understand how and why the spells are supposed to work, and makes it easier to adjudicate sticky situations involving spell effects.

Why aren't halfling warriors allowed to roll for exceptional strength?

Game logic assumes that halflings are just too small to have truly exceptional strength scores. As "Sage Advice" has explained before, there are plethora of reasons why demihumans have their various limitations. Game balance requires them. Halflings are not known to be legendary warriors, so they pay for their many advantages (high dexterity, increased thief-skill percentages, infravision,

and others) by being having a limited choice of professions, being limited in the level of experience they can achieve within some of those professions, and being limited to normal strength scores.

How many attacks does a character get each round when employing the various forms of nonlethal, weaponless combat? In particular, does a character who is punching get two attacks, one for each fist? Can a character fight with two fists using the rules for attacking with two weapons?

Generally, a character can make the same number of nonlethal attacks each round as he would be allowed to make in normal melee. I can't see any reason why a character couldn't get an extra punching attack each round by using the rules for attacking with two weapons (PHB, page 96), but remember to apply the appropriate penalties. A character has to use pretty much his whole body to wrestle or overbear, so you can't use the rules for attacking with two weapons to get an extra overbearing or wrestling attack each round. However, a high-level warrior who is allowed two attacks in a round *could* make two overbearing or wrestling attacks. In the case of overbearing, the warrior could knock down an opponent, then try to pin him. In the case of wrestling, the warrior could make two attempts to gain a hold, but if he gets a hold that can be maintained, damage from round to round accrues normally, not at a doubled rate.

How long will a simulacrum live after the spell-caster who created it dies? How long will it live after the original being from whom it was copied dies? Can a simulacrum use magical items, such a pale green ioun stone, to boost its experience levels? If the original used a hat of difference (Unearthed Arcana, page 100) to gain a new class, could his simulacrum also use the hat?

Once created, a *simulacrum* is completely independent of the original and its creator, except that it must obey commands from its creator. Damage to the original or the original's premature death do not affect the *simulacrum* in the least. The *simulacrum* also ignores damage to the creator, and the only effect that the creator's death has is that the *simulacrum* no longer has someone that it must obey. Since a *simulacrum* is a fairly accurate replica of the original, its natural lifespan will be about as long as the original's; I suggest that it be exactly the same 40%-65% of the time. If not the same, the lifespan could be shorter or longer at the DM's option. Note that the *simulacrum* is created at the same "age" as the original.

While a *simulacrum* cannot earn experience, I suggest that magical tomes and other powerful magical items that increase

the user's level also work on a *simulacrum*. Since a *simulacrum* cannot earn experience, it cannot make use of a *hat of difference*, except to gain 1st-level abilities. If the original was using a *hat of difference* at the time the *simulacrum* was made, the *simulacrum* still cannot gain access to the originals extra experience levels, as these levels are contained in (or channeled through) the hat and are bestowed only on its owner. The *simulacrum*, no matter how accurate a replica, is not the original (the same holds true for clones).

The DMG says how long it takes a wizard to copy a spell into a book (1-2 days per spell level; page 42) but not how long it takes to make the book in the first place.

Unless the wizard has a nonweapon proficiency in bookbinding, which is not currently in the game, he can't make his own spell books. Given proper materials (paper or vellum for the pages and endpapers, leather for the covers, and assorted other materials for the binding), I suppose a bookbinder could assemble a volume the size of a spellbook in only a few hours, maybe less.

My books do not have casting times for two spells: moonbeam and Nchaser's glowing globe (from FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures, page 49).

The casting times are: *moonbeam*—7, *Nchaser's glowing globe*—3.

Three out of the four PHB's in our group list the area of effect of a wyvern watch spell as a 10'-radius sphere. The fourth book lists the sphere's radius as 5'. Why?

The correct radius is 10'. Your fourth book probably is a first-printing volume. The official errata list for the second and later printings of the PHB is quite long, so you probably want to use the more recent books as your official campaign books—but keep your older book in good condition, as it might become a collectable.

Will an elven ranger from Krynn retain his unlimited level advancement if he goes to the Forgotten Realms?

No. The world of Krynn has many unique features, and native characters who leave it lose the special benefits they gain from living there. However, a high-level demihuman character does not lose any levels when leaving Krynn; he just loses the ability to advance further. Ω

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Role-playing reviews

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What scares you? I don't mean abstract perils like overpopulation, the greenhouse effect, certain political leaders, or whether or not your subscription to DRAGON® Magazine is about to run out. What horrific sights drive straight into your medulla oblongata and send you running, screaming, from the room? Snakes? Heights? Bugs? Slugs? (My mother is a big screamer, slug-wise.)

What about horror role-playing games? A dozen games out there are trying to scare the wits out of you. What's most interesting to me is the number of different ways they try to do it. There's gothic horror in TSR's RAVENLOFT™ campaign set, otherworldly Lovecraftian grue in Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game, and, if you want to stretch it, paranoid fear in West End Games' PARANOIA* system. And more.

The new fad is modern-day horror. Mayfair Games has already crawled out of the darkness with the new edition of the CHILL* game, and Chaosium's *Cthulhu Now* is the CALL OF CTHULHU game's best-selling supplement, with a second edition due as I write. Each tries to scare you in different ways. But do they exhaust the repertoire of frights? Not hardly.

This column examines three other modern or near-future ways to horrify, as presented in a couple of major new games and a truly offbeat supplement.

DARK CONSPIRACY* game

336-page softcover book

GDW, Inc.

\$22

Design: Lester W. Smith

Development: Frank Chadwick, Loren

Wiseman, Julia Martin

Cover: Larry Elmore

"Everything you've ever heard about monsters is true, but not the way you think." Such is the high-concept hook that designer Lester Smith uses to describe this new game of, as it were, techno-horror.

The DARK CONSPIRACY game is set

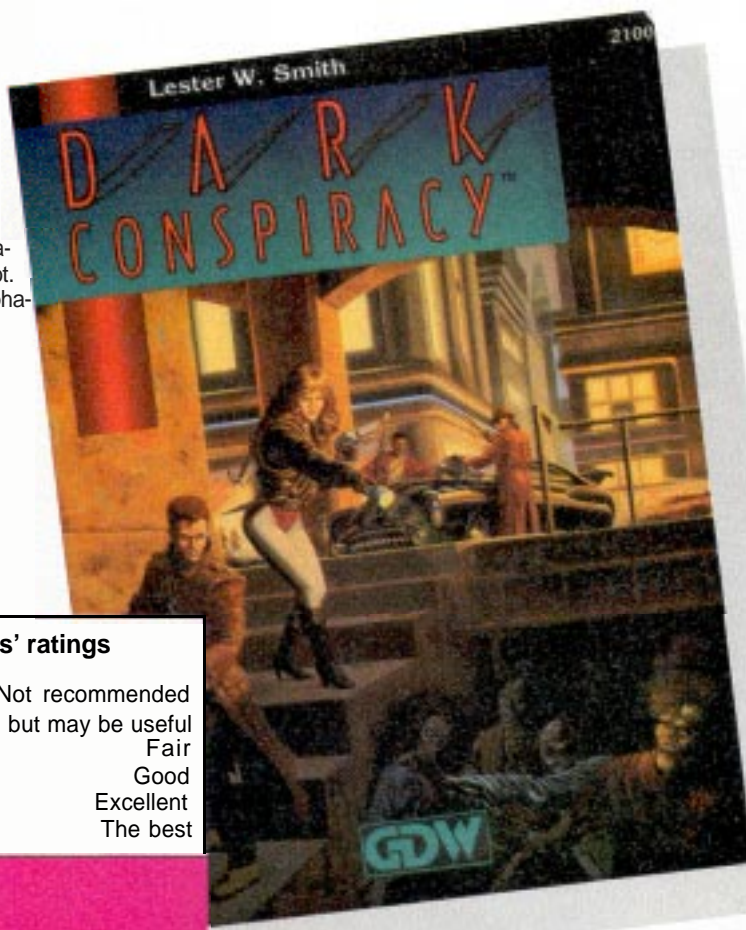
early in the next century, after a worldwide economic collapse, the "Greater Depression," has left most nations balkanized and incompetent. Mysterious monsters have appeared (or returned)—not magical creatures as such, but psychic "dark minions" armed with bizarre devices. Like so many narrative horrors nowadays, they feed on human suffering. In nightmarish cities and in wasted countryside, "demongrounds" spawn enigmatic dangers. Only the player characters PCs, recognize these dangers and fight them.

Institutions are either ineffectual or malign. The PCs are out on their own, without support; they get their tips mainly from supermarket tabloids. The heroes face not just otherworldly evil, but also weird regional laws, provincial locals with MP-7 submachine guns, dog packs, cyborgs, environmental hazards, terrorists, prosthetic chain saws, and the occasional mega-corporate security robot. The game tries to empha-

size suspense, paranoia, and mystery

Presentation: "Boy, sure sounds like FASA's SHADOWRUN* game," you may be saying The DARK CONSPIRACY game clearly takes its inspiration from FASA's cyberpunk-magic RPG, though Smith says "This is not a cyberpunk game."

The most obvious resemblance is their similar look: Both games spotlight stylish page design, heavy use of artwork, lavish interior color, "grabber" quotations, and supposedly atmospheric fiction introductions to rules sections. GDW, flush with funds from the blockbuster sales of its *Desert Shield Fact Book*, went all out to make the DARK CONSPIRACY game its best-presented product ever, and it suc-



Role-playing games' ratings

X	Not recommended
*	Poor, but may be useful
**	Fair
***	Good
****	Excellent
*****	The best

ceeded admirably.

Seventeen artists have ornamented almost every page with strong, atmospheric work. In particular, Janet Aulisio and Elizabeth Danforth nicely visualize a zoo full of monsters and beasts, and Timothy Bradstreet shows the gritty, war-weary, and heavily armed veterans who fight them. (Very few good guys portrayed in the art are what you'd call clean-cut, unlike the hair-sprayed Senior Prom kids on the cover.) The copious artwork conveys, better than anything else in the book, the game's ideal tone and potential story situations. Boxed quotations from one Zena Marley, identified eight times as an "early 21st century mercenary-philosopher," are less informative and more distasteful, coming out of Nietzsche by way of Heinlein and arriving nowhere.

The text, though clear and complete (and thoroughly indexed—thank you!), seldom tries to emulate the SHADOWRUN game text's evocation of mood. Yes, its monsters are "Beasties" the way FASA's are "Critters," but as always, GDW rules are serious business. Color and mood have no more place in the DARK CONSPIRACY game rules than in an Army field manual, Humor? Consider the GDW Light-Bulb Joke:

Q: How many GDW designers does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: (puzzled) That isn't funny.

Still, there's much cool stuff in the back-

ground material: a compendium of bizarre monsters ripped from the pages of tabloids, UFO books, as well as from the writers' fevered imaginations; "RetroTek" and "HiTek," the major technological styles of the near future; and intriguing "Darktek," the evil technology of biocomputers, zombie-making animator generators, cyborg changelings, and (hey, yeah!) death rays. Solemn though it is, this makes good reading and playing.

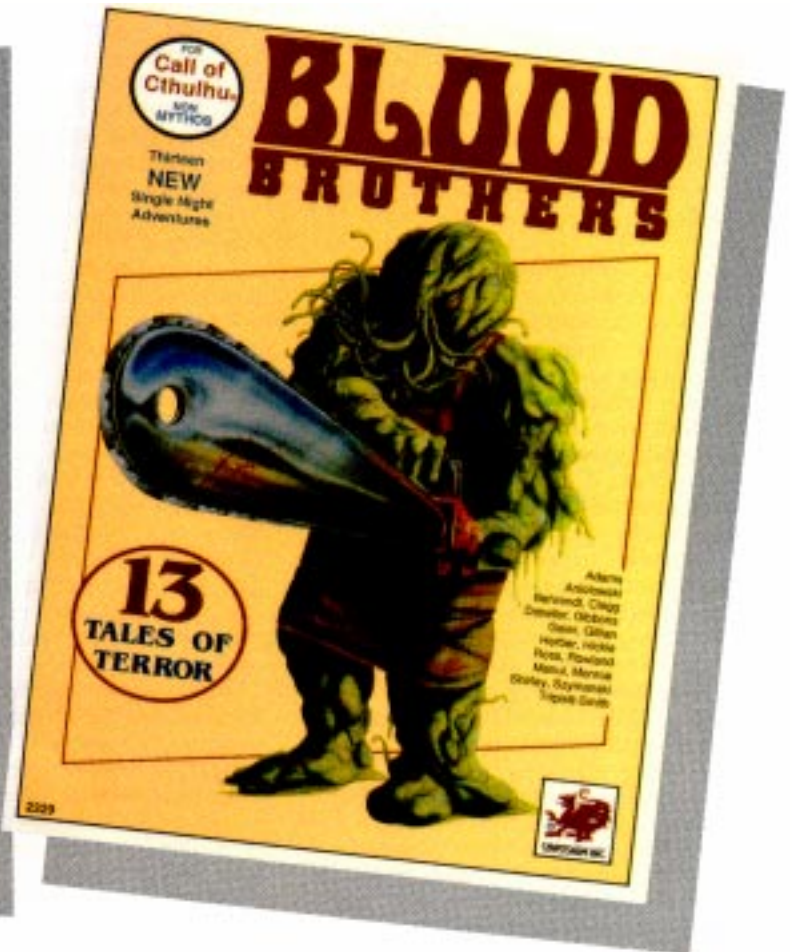
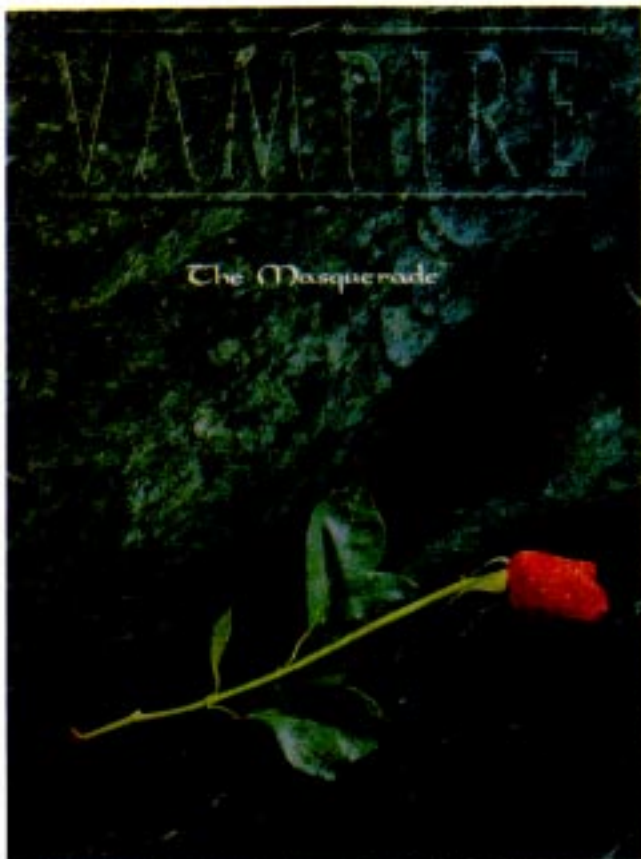
Character creation: This runs 42 pages, including 20 pages of PC careers and two long and helpful examples, plus another eight pages describing 51 skills. You can generate your character by random die rolls or point allocation. A series of four-year terms in careers of your choice determines your skills (grouped under seven controlling attributes) and your contacts (people who owe you favors or can help you). Education level and number of career terms determine your starting money, and that governs how much equipment you can buy (and *that* governs how long you're likely to survive!).

The term approach creates PCs with nice resumes. Given the importance of firepower in the campaign, the system also selects strongly for military or ex-military careers, obviously the best sources of weapon skills. The system does not help create your character's personality or goals, as certain other games do; in fact, the text never mentions personality or

goals. Significantly, the "If You're New to Roleplaying" section describes role-playing purely in terms of making decisions for a particular character, becoming swept up in the PC's experiences, and watching the PC improve in abilities over time. Only NPCs get traits and motivations, using the TWILIGHT! 2000* playing-card system (e.g., if you pull the king of spades from a deck, your NPC is deceitful). Otherwise, the whole game is hermetically free of the idea of *playing a role*.

Rules: The DARK CONSPIRACY game is the third GDW release using the very popular TWILIGHT 2000 (T2000) game system (fourth, if you count the MERC: 2000* campaign supplement). Adding rules for Empathy (psychic abilities) and air and space travel and modifying skills and careers, this game otherwise follows the T2000 system closely; it's "T2000 with monsters" much as last year's CADILLACS & DINOSAURS* game was "T2000 with *Triceratopses*."

The essential mechanics are simple and fast moving. To perform a task, roll 1d10 against the appropriate skill or attribute. For Easy tasks, your skill number is doubled; for Difficult tasks, your number may be halved, quartered, or worse. You get a critical success if you roll four under the needed number, and a fumble on a roll of four or more over. (There is no rule for automatic failure, an unfortunate oversight that could sap suspense from skillful



characters' adventures.) Empathy skills require one additional roll to determine the "power level" of that task.

Combat occurs in 30-second turns divided into six five-second phases. Characters can perform one action each phase, acting according to Initiative rating. This crucial number (known in first-edition T2000 as "Coolness Under Fire") determines how quickly and how often you act in a turn. Also, when surprised, wounded, or being run down by something big, you must roll under your Initiative on 1d6 to avoid freezing in panic. If you're short on Initiative, you're usually in deep trouble. You gain Initiative with special Initiative experience points, awarded after major battles.

These simple rules fit cleanly in four pages. Then come 17 more pages with, gee, must be 80 or 90 special cases. Then seven pages about taking damage, four for wounds and healing, 12 for vehicle combat, five for space travel (space travel?), and four for robots. And at the back, 55—right, fifty-five—pages of equipment, with illustrations for every weapon and vehicle.

My first impulse was to whine loudly about this, but after mature consideration I changed my mind. However bulky these rules are, I am glad they're all here, as opposed to being scattered among numerous books—or, almost as bad, given sketchy, lick-and-a-promise treatment for later expansion. (Again, I could invoke troubled memories of the SHADOWRUN game.)

A caveat: The major new addition to the T2000 rules, Empathy, is one of the few vague sections in the game. GDW plans, yes, a supplement that expands and further defines the basic rules. Oh, well.

As for the equipment, I agree with Lester Smith: "Some people want lots; others want little. . . . [P]eople that don't want them can ignore them, but people who do want them will be glad they're there. It doesn't work the other way 'round. . . . As a role-player myself, I want to be able to see what something looks like, if my character is going to be carrying it. I hate picking something for its stats and having no idea of what it looks like."

Though generally complete, the rules are sometimes cumbersome. In particular, the nightmarish explosives rules call for taking square roots and dividing by decimal fractions—got a calculator handy? Then, as in any rules system, there are a few oddities (all weapon skills are Strength skills; languages are controlled by the Charisma attribute). It may irritate some "realism" fans that you can't kill a PC with a single shot to the head from a .45 pistol, or that the rules inherently favor PCs over NPCs. Me, I prefer keeping PCs alive when? feasible, rather than following the dictates of "realism." In a game with this much heavy hardware, I'm glad the damage rules protect the PCs reasonably well.

Then there's the space travel stuff. All right, better here than in a supplement (he

said, gritting his teeth), but what are these rules *for*? When and why do you need an Atlas rocket? The DARK CONSPIRACY book does not say why you would need to go into space. In general, it says very little about what kind of adventures to run, how to stage them, what genre conventions each kind requires, what characters are appropriate to the different kinds of horror, and so on. Players must discover for themselves what kinds of horror this game does best.

How it scares you: If you have strong and unorthodox ideas about, say, the Kennedy assassination or the reasons for the government's war on drugs, you'll sympathize with the DARK CONSPIRACY game's mindset. The premise assumes as a matter of course that if something goes wrong, someone is behind it.

Conspiracy buffs may find the scope here rather narrow. By and large, the adventures avoid sensitive real-world areas like political killings and covert fundraising, instead targeting easy marks like the Air Force's "Men in Black" and phone calls from the dead. The adventure suggestions, all based on real tabloid stories, sometimes verge on high camp—one substitutes an elvish changeling for musician Julio Iglesias.

Despite its conspiracy-theory premise, this game does not try hard to leave you disturbed after you finish playing. What does it try to do?

Lester Smith discussed this with me in the Gaming Roundtable on the GENIE computer network. "Pretty much every horror RPG that I can think of to this point has been 'brooding' horror, and while that's lots of fun, it isn't the only type of horror possible." He listed such horror-genre breeds as spooky, gothic, splatter-movie, paranoid, and campy.

"I set out to design something that would allow any of those types of horror to be played," says Smith, whose previous credits include modules for several other GDW games. "I wanted a background history that would explain how '50s flying-saucer movies could fit into the same world with werewolves and ghosts and crawling hands. I wanted a referee to be able to get up from a theater seat, or a novel, or a comic book, or even a tabloid, say 'I want my PCs to run into that,' and be able to do it, without having to change the campaign. I think [the DARK CONSPIRACY game] allows that by integrating everything into one history, rather than simply being generic rules, or being specific to one type."

True, the campaign history is quite accommodating. I wish the rule book had conveyed this and described these horror sub-genres, how the campaign premise lends itself to them, and what elements work best for each one. Smith's assertion of flexibility, though true, came as complete news to me.

Up to that point, I had decided that the DARK CONSPIRACY game was broad,

horrific fun, full of straightforwardly weird things that jump at you from the darkness. Sometimes the things turn out to be substitutes for your own friends, and this can be spooky. In any case, you're so well armed (55 pages of equipment, remember?) that you can blast away with impunity.

How different is the game from, say, the CALL OF CTHULHU game? There, if you stumble on the major fiend behind the plot, you're usually helpless and doomed. In the DARK CONSPIRACY game, you shoulder your Browning Autoriot shotgun, and it's time to rock'n'roll. It sounded great to me—good PCs fighting evil monsters is at least an improvement over the moral vacuum of the TWILIGHT 2000 game—but that was all I saw here.

Still, Smith is right. There are lots of different scares waiting here. And, given the experienced audience that GDW has targeted, I don't mind the shortage of advice on genres and adventure design. (Actually, I'm happy to report that there's more such advice here than in any previous GDW role-playing game.)

I might legitimately question, though, how well the rules aid the various kinds of horror Smith mentioned. For instance, some of the scariest stories depend on personal, introspective, or (to use his term) "brooding" horror—the reshaping of a personality. In gaming, the cardinal example lies in the CALL OF CTHULHU game, in which the Sanity rules cause your character's inevitable fall into gibbering mania.

In contrast, the DARK CONSPIRACY game rules are definitely focused outward, as shown by the space devoted to combat rules and equipment. The rules also protect PCs by having psychic Empathy skills, NPCs who are comparatively easy to defeat, and no Sanity rolls. Most importantly, the game leaves PCs' personalities undefined—there's nothing to reshape!

I have no problem with this.

Surprised? Don't be. The DARK CONSPIRACY game doesn't approach its subject the way I would, but I never ordered the Gaming Gestapo to make everyone play like me. As Smith said, other games already take care of the personal kind of "brooding" horror. Also, not everyone looks on role-playing as a storytelling experience or an acting challenge, and that's fine with me. This game does a great job on its own terms and for its chosen audience.

Evaluation: Like GDW's previous RPGs, the DARK CONSPIRACY game targets experienced referees who already know the kinds of horror adventures they want to run. Its long and very complete rules offer much value to players who want a fair shot (or multiple autofire shots) against the monsters. This game is a giant step forward for GDW in size, presentation, and imagination. It has my sincere congratulations.

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* game

264-page softcover book
White Wolf

\$20

Design: Mark Rein-Hagen

Written by: Mark Rein-Hagen, Graeme Davis, Tom Dowd, Lisa Stevens, Stewart Wieck

Development: Mark Rein-Hagen, Andrew Greenberg, Stewart Wieck

Cover photo: Mark Pace

Interior art: Timothy Bradstreet, Charles Dougherty, Chris McDonough, Ron Spenser, Richard Thomas, Josh Timbrook

In striking contrast to the DARK CONSPIRACY game and many other horror RPGs, this modern-day game frightens you in a highly personal way: It casts you as one of the things that jumps out of the darkness. The high concept here is this: "You've been turned into a vampire. While you explore the intricacies of vampiric society, you struggle to hold onto your humanity."

Mark Rein-Hagen helped design the landmark ARS MAGICA* RPG (or, rather, "storytelling game") from Lion Rampant. Though I'm not intimately familiar with that game, I've seen enough to convince me that my fellow reviewer Ken Rolston is right: It's one of the most innovative RPGs of the last five years. Now, with Lion Rampant subsumed under the banner of White Wolf (publisher of the eponymous gaming magazine), Rein-Hagen has produced this effective game of deep-down psychological role-playing, moody storytelling, and blood thirst. It is the first of five compatible story games, all based on a so-called "Gothic-punk" version of our world. The other four, to be released annually, cover modern-day werewolves, magicians, faeries, and ghosts.

"Gothic-punk" clearly has much to do with recent vampire novels by Anne Rice, Nancy Collins, and others, as well as films like "Near Dark" and "The Lost Boys." In this game, vampires are not the dark aristocrats of Stoker or Lugosi. Instead, they dress like yuppies or street people, and they strike a posture of sombre coolness that may hide inner grief or fear. But they have the traditional weaknesses to sunlight and fire, and like vampires of old, they often revel in periodic episodes of murder or brutality.

The VAMPIRE game is the polar opposite of GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY game, focusing monomaniacally on character personality, tone, storytelling, and the ongoing "chronicle," or campaign. Just as GDW's game steadfastly ignores these ideas, so the White Wolf release pays little heed to rules or equipment: "You may buy weapons, clothing, homes, condos, cars, anything—use an appropriate catalogue for prices" (page 51). The core rules, a straightforward emulation of the basic SHADOWRUN game system, fill five and a half pages. Firearm stats? Hey, there are

10 guns listed right there on the bottom of page 150, plus almost four entire pages of combat rules.

In fact, this book offers many scattered rules, mostly relating to the vampiric condition and to a fancy and fascinating societal background. But the text constantly stresses "drama" over systems: "The rules are for keeping characters in line. If your imagination is superior to the rules, then go beyond the rules" (page 230, just one of many similar passages). This attitude has appeared to varying degrees in most RPGs of the past few years, but I see no trace of it in the DARK CONSPIRACY game or any GDW release. That's the main sign of these two games' differing attitudes and audiences.

Presentation: Though the VAMPIRE game's rule book looks clean, it's no match for GDW's slick and lavish production values; this is straight desktop publishing. The text is littered with comma splices and style inconsistencies, a garage-band failing (also seen in *White Wolf* magazine) that detracts from the game's forward-thinking ideas. Absurd numbers of epigraphs, quoting everything from the Bible to pop-song lyrics, furnish more litter and amplify the game's high-flown demeanor.

In the VAMPIRE game, even the artwork tells a story: a moody 89-picture tale is serialized in amateur drawings throughout the book, telling of an ancient vampire and

her reincarnated lover. The narrative nicely evokes the game's ambience. Timothy Bradstreet provides 10 superb full-page portraits, using tone and wash techniques to convey a much more sinister atmosphere than does his hard-edged work in the DARK CONSPIRACY game. Again, this symbolizes the contrast between these two games.

Characters and setting: These are the great strengths of this remarkable game—its elaborate background and, just as important, its ways to encourage creation of vivid characters for that background.

Stats and skills do not distinguish VAMPIRE game characters well, for these qualities are truncated or trivialized. Somewhat more distinctive are the various Disciplines, or innate powers, like Auspex, Celerity, and Dominate. (Another, Thaumaturgy, allows literal spell-casting, but these are the vaguest rules in the game.) Then there are Background perks like Fame, Herd ("the number of Vessels [victims] you have readily available"), and Mentor, among others.

But the traits that really make vampire PCs come to life (or undeath) are unrelated to numbers. Your character is made unique through his Nature, Demeanor, Archetype (e.g., Gallant, Hedonist, Martyr, and many more), Haven (where you retreat from the sun's deadly light), and, above all, Clan bloodline. The seven Clans

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have different goals, abilities, personalities, and politics. Ventrue aristocrats mingle in mortal society and feed on only particular kinds of victims, whereas Nosferatu are deformed outcasts of the sewers. The Tremere thaumaturgists, hedonistic Toreador artistes, mad Malkavians, shapechanging Gangrels, and rebellious Brujah punks—all give your PCs built-in connections, rivalries, and objectives. The Clans have little in common except “the Masquerade,” the overriding need to conceal the existence of vampires from mortals.

Sound complex? That’s just the start. Vampires have a long, involved history going back to Cain, sentenced to vampirism for the sin of murdering Abel. Cain, who apparently is still around, spawned an immortal line of “the Kindred” stretching over thirteen generations, each generation weaker than its predecessor. Younger, weaker vampires gain power by killing and feeding on those of earlier generations. Conversely, as a vampire ages, mortal blood no longer sustains it, and it must feed on Kindred to survive (often creating vampiric progeny for just this purpose).

You can see already that vampires are a fractious lot. They have developed the Camarilla alliance of Clans to police themselves. The Prince of each major city regulates the creation of new progeny; Justicars adjudicate disputes, sometimes declaring trial by combat; shadowy figures from older generations, the “Antediluvians,” set the Clans against one another in a mysterious Jyhad. Then there’s the Sabbat, a ruthless league that controls the east coast of America; and the Inconnu, ancient calm vampires who have retired to nature and achieved Golconda, salvation from the urge to drink blood.

And these are just the vampires! There are also the Lupines, lycanthropes who control the countryside and feud bitterly with the urban Kindred; mortal vampire hunters, like the Arcanum and the modern-day Inquisition; and the National Security Agency. This is a rich background, filled with story possibilities. Better yet, the writers scrupulously tell you how to use it.

Campaigning: Not enough campaign advice in GDW’s DARK CONSPIRACY game? In White Wolfs game, you practically drown in it. There are whole chapters on how to plot stories, maintain suspense, handle players, and so on. The setting does not lend itself to different genres (the flavor is pretty much built in). Nonetheless, there is great value in the text’s long, fascinating list of different campaign premises within the given setting. Want your vampire PCs to be thaumaturgists, society wheels, Muslim extremists, no-mads, gang members, or even vampire hunters? They’re all here (albeit glancingly mentioned in some cases).

But this is not the core of the campaigning advice. I find that core on a single

page, 111, unrelated to anything around it, yet it’s the linchpin of the book. It’s a sudden, surprising discussion of the psychological significance of monsters. It reads in part: “These fiends express what we are at the deepest and most inaccessible levels of our consciousness . . . [T]he vampire is so much our own reflection. Vampires feed as we feed, by killing, and through death can feel the same dread, guilt, and longing for escape. . . . They are the poetic expressions of our deepest fears, and the shadows of our primal urges. . . .

“ . . . [S]o must we descend into the depths of our mind in order to learn what is really there. . . .”

How it scares you: The VAMPIRE game turns out to be an unlikely but compelling version of the hero quest, described by Joseph Campbell and others. Vampire PCs constantly struggle against the Beast, the animal urge within. Characters have 1-10 Humanity points that they gradually lose by committing increasingly awful crimes or by succumbing to the Frenzy, the mindless fight-or-flight reflex. When you run out of Humanity, like Sanity in the CALL OF CTHULHU game, the Storyteller takes over your character as an NPC.

The game’s campaign advice strikes this note over and over, often capturing it in a phrase: “A Beast I am lest a Beast I become.” Vampires are driven to violence to survive, yet only by regular feeding do they fend off Frenzy. “They must defeat the monster within by exerting self-restraint, nurturing the impulses of human virtue, and displaying genuine courage” (page 201). This is a powerful idea, one with (not to be frivolous) a lot of blood in it.

Evaluation: I played in a PCs-as-vampires scenario several years ago, using another game system. It creeped me out. There were villains to fight, yet the real horror came not from enemies nor monsters, but from what my character and the other PCs were forced to do—more precisely, what we found ourselves capable of doing. It was intensely disturbing.

Rein-Hagen has very consciously captured that experience in the VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE game. He has founded it on the psychological basis for vampires and for horror stories themselves. If you’re up for a potent and even passionate role-playing experience, look for this game. (Be sure to look carefully—the photographic cover features a marbled green-on-green logo apparently designed to fade invisibly into store shelves. Talk about a masquerade!)

And now for something *completely* different . . .

Blood Brothers

CALL OF CTHULHU supplement
128-page softcover book

Chaosium, Inc.

\$19

Design: John B. Monroe, Fred Behrendt,

Geoff Gillian, Barbara Manui, Chris Adams, Kevin A. Ross, Sam Shirley, Keith Herber, Marcus L. Rowland, Scott Aniolowski, Michael Szymanski, Gregory Detwiler, John Scott Clegg, and Tony Hickie

“Chain-saw Cthulhu” cover: Lee Gibbons
Interior art: Earl Geier

There are times to blast things that jump out of the darkness, and there are times to confront your own darker impulses. Then there are times a horror fan just wants to shout “Eeeeyaaaagh! Get ‘em offa me!”

Appealing to the same spirit that makes people rent really bad horror films at the video store, Chaosium has produced its first CALL OF CTHULHU supplement that makes no use of H. P. Lovecraft’s Cthulhu Mythos. *Blood Brothers* offers 13 short scenarios based on classic (or classically awful) horror movies from the 1930s to today: Lugosi-style vampires, werewolves a la Lon Chaney, zombies right out of George Romero (*Dawn of the Dead* and its ilk), killer dolls, cavemen and dinosaurs (a scenario called “The Land That Time Ignored”), gremlin-style mischief makers (“Ancient Killer Nazi Shamans”), and even a nice science-fictional *Alien* tribute. Each provides stock one-shot characters of the John Agar variety, all designed for broad role-playing fun and—need I add?—disposability. And, if you prefer greater depths to your campiness, check out the stats for Bud Abbott and Lou Costello.

Recognizing the fundamental differences between a mind-shattering Elder God and a cheesy papier-mâché construct from Universal Studios, this supplement changes the effects of a Sanity roll. CALL OF CTHULHU game players shudder at the typical effects of failed SAN rolls, a galling battery of psychoses, phobias, and disastrous proclivities. In *Blood Brothers*, when you fail a SAN roll, you scream or fall down in the path of the approaching crab-thing. Or, worst of all, *you faint*. Eeeeyaaaagh!

If you haven’t already groaned and put down this magazine, then *Blood Brothers* is your cup of fake theatrical blood.

This supplement highlights a surprising and welcome turn in our hobby: the impish sense of humor in the fields leading horror game. Think also of Chaosium’s *Miskatonic University Graduation Kit* (with the Restricted Stacks library pass, the “Go ‘Pods!” bumper sticker, and more); and of the appendix to its recent *Cthulhu Casebook* (reprinted from an old *Different Worlds* magazine article) that describes what a corpse looks like after various Cthulhoid monsters get done with it. *Blood Brothers* continues that fine tap dance on the line between horror and comedy, and

it delivers admirably on both sides.

Each scenario here includes a knowledgeable sidebar listing the movies that inspired it. Recipe for a fun evening: Rent one of these movies, invite your players over to watch it, and pop a big bowl of popcorn. Then, when everyone's in the proper mood, run the appropriate scenario. What a night! Can I tag along?

P.S. Apropos to nothing, I pass along the Cthulhu Light-Bulb Joke:

Q: How many CALL OF CTHULHU game characters does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: All of them. Never split the party!

Short and sweet

WGA4 Vecna Lives! by David "Zeb" Cook. TSR, Inc., \$9.95. This is yet another way to scare players. Every longtime player in the AD&D® WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting knows of those two awesome relics, the Eye and Hand of the arch-lich Vecna. Now the lich and his rather interesting cult are plotting to change Oerth forever—and the spooky thing is, they really can succeed! "Zeb" Cook starts this horrific 96-page adventure with some good staging tips and a really killer scene in which the players play the City of Greyhawk's great Circle of Eight wizards (you know—Bigby, Otto, Tenser, that bunch). At the end of the first scene, they—well, let's just say you'd produce the same effect on your players if you torched your game room. The rest of the adventure is more routine, but your heroes have many chances to mess this one up big-time, and that will transform your campaign in ways you may not want. For fans of high-level AD&D adventures, though, this is definitely worth a look.

COSMIC ENCOUNTER* game, by Eberle, Kittredge, Olotka, and Norton; revision by Barker, Guon, Rhoades, Sheaves, and Simon. Mayfair Games, \$35. This brilliantly interactive and spectacularly fun 1977 design is my very favorite game, bar none. Cast as one of 48 alien races, each with a unique power to break the rules of the game in one specific way, you move out from your home planetary system to conquer the cosmos. Recruit allies and play Challenge Cards to establish bases in your opponents' systems, but beware of Edict and Flare cards that can send your tokens to the Warp! The COSMIC ENCOUNTER game is what Parker Brothers' RISK* game was meant to be, and this new Mayfair edition only improves it: more and nicer components; nine new alien powers like the Cavalry (plays a Challenge Card as an ally) and the Subversive (pulls opposing allies to its side after cards are revealed); and a rules cleanup that is respectful and sensible. I love this game so much that I view any revision warily, yet this superb update wins me over completely.

The problem, of course, is the price. But if you know several other players (the game works poorly with less than four),

mark me: You definitely will get \$35 of fun out of this box. I've played the original COSMIC ENCOUNTER game (from the late Eon Products) over a hundred times; every game was wildly different, and (as Woody Allen remarked on another subject) the worst one I ever had was right on the money.

Western Hero, by Matt Forbeck. Hero Games, \$20. This 208-page campaign source book for the CHAMPIONS* or HERO SYSTEM* games brings the Old West to life—sort of. At times Forbeck seems uncertain whether to recreate a historically accurate milieu or a rootin'-tootin' larger-than-life "cinematic" frontier. This 208-page supplement includes plenty of both. It's strongest in its extensive descriptions (with stats) of historical figures like Calamity Jane and the young Teddy Roosevelt, as well as a meticulous portrayal of Deadwood, South Dakota, in 1876. Learn how to shoot from the hip, fight atop a moving train, and slide a bad guy down the bar. Enjoy the extensive campaign advice and many pages of scenarios. But ignore those ludicrous animal stats; a mere scorpion, as written, could almost give a super-hero a run for the money! Stick with the people, and you'll have a high old time on the range.

BOOT HILL® Wild West role-playing game, 3rd edition, by Steve Winter (after Blume and Gyax, 1975); scenarios by David "Zeb" Cook and Jeff Grubb. TSR, Inc., \$20. Western games are hitting like a blast from a Gatling gun—or, in this case, a blast from the past, for this was one of TSR's first RPGs. Winter's revised rules are simple and abstract (though realistically, rather than cinematically, oriented)—and they are smoother than the CHAMPIONS game that Western Hero supports (see previous note). This game's campaign material generally emphasizes realism, except for a few incidentals such as "The Fastest Guns That Never Lived" (this is the first time I've seen RPG stats for Steve McQueen and Charles Bronson). Of course, a 128-page rule book can't offer the depth and scope of the Forbeck supplement, but it has some fun miniscenarios and a great map. If you can spring for both, these two Western books ride nicely together. Ω

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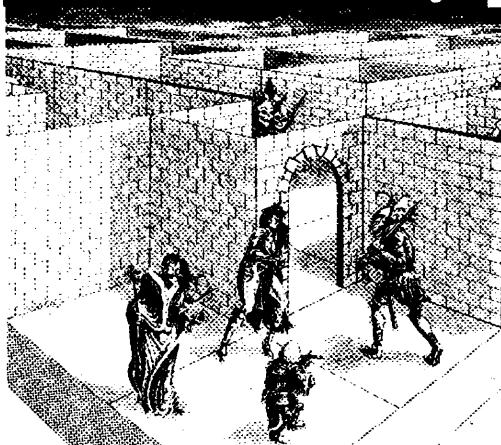
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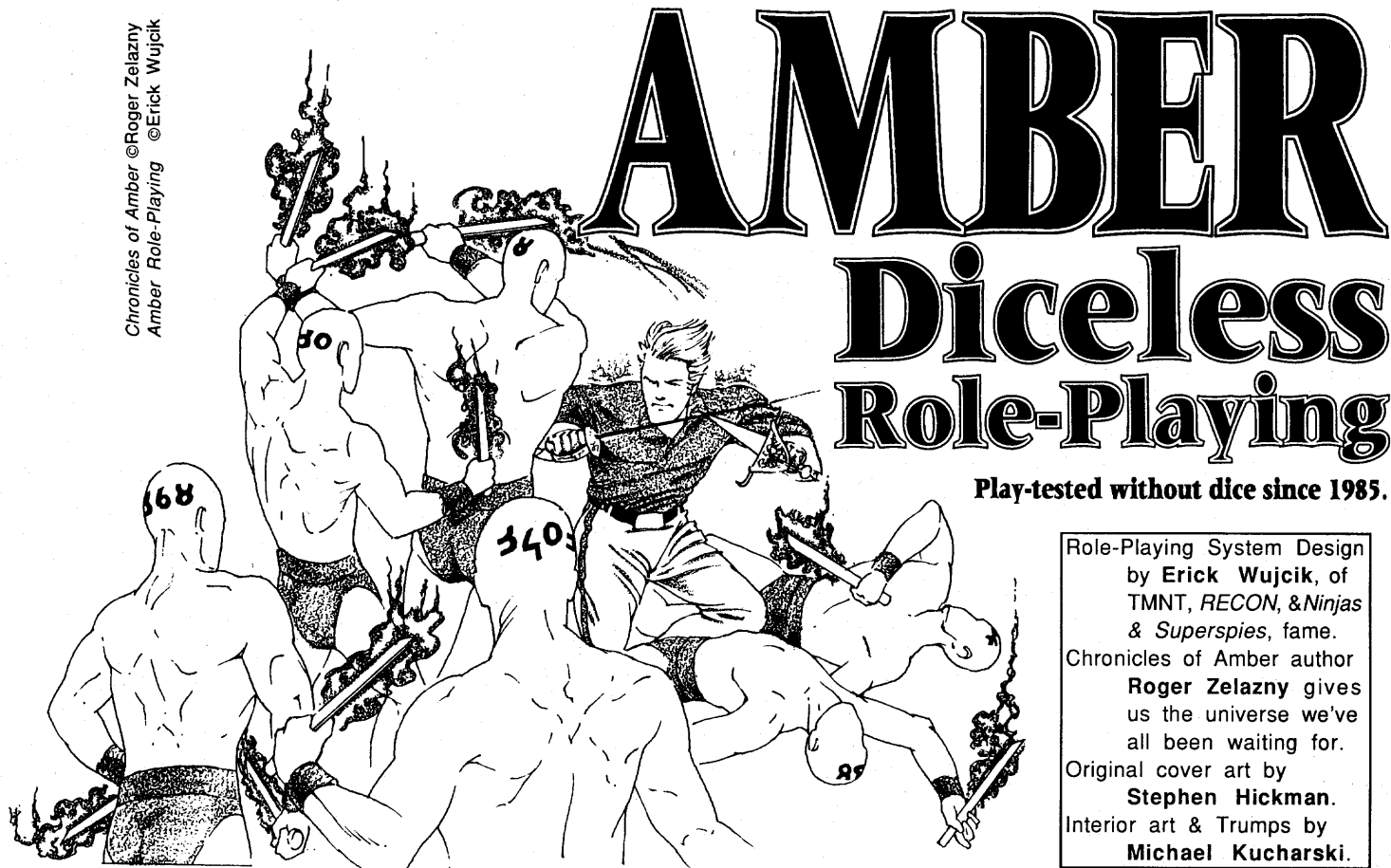
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Rhyme & REASON

by Scott Roach

What sphinxes employ, the players enjoy

“ . . . the riddle game was sacred and of immense antiquity and even wicked creatures were afraid to cheat when they played at it.”

The Hobbit, J. R. R. Tolkien

Every adventure, on its most basic level, is merely a series of obstacles blocking the characters from attaining their goals. But players will soon become bored if there is not enough variety in the type of challenges with which they are confronted. The scenario in which heroes wade through vast numbers of enemies of every imaginable ilk (as a prelude to the inevitable encounter with some greater malevolent force) works fine the first few hundred times, but then it begins to wear a little thin,

Traps are also useful as a means of testing the mettle of heroes before they reach this final decisive encounter. But it can often be a very tedious business when players are required to specify that their characters are going to poke, prod, smell, dissect, and otherwise examine each object (or NPC, for that matter) they find. Players may also feel cheated if they have taken reasonable precautions but one of their characters still ends up being suddenly killed, wounded or imprisoned. Traps, by their very nature, tend to be capricious and unforgiving.

So what is one to do if he wishes to add some variety to what can often become a rather stale selection of preclimactic adventure filler? Well, how about adding riddles?

A riddle background

History, mythology and literature are filled with examples of epic confrontations that hinged upon successfully cracking a conundrum. Tolkien's novel, *The Hobbit*, contains action of all types, from natural disasters to interracial warfare, but the one confrontation that most stands out in the collective memories of its readers is one not of arms, but of words: the riddle contest between Bilbo and Gollum. It is one thing to engage in a guessing game as an idle diversion in the safety and comfort of one's own home, but it is quite another entirely when trapped deep within the belly of the earth with a slaving fiend who shall surely devour you at the first incorrect guess.

Riddle contests of a similar sort have

been popular since ancient times. There is an apocryphal legend that claims that Lycerus, the king of Babylon, and Nectanebo, the king of Egypt, once engaged each other in a war of riddles. The "war" was won by Lycerus only with the help of Aesop, the famed writer of fables, who was then residing at the royal court.

On a lighter and more modern note, the film, *Monty Python* and the *Holy Grail*, also borrowed a thread from the rich tapestry that is the history of riddles. Before crossing a chasm, the knights in quest of the Grail were first required to pass a quiz ("Answer me these questions three, ere the other side ye see."). If they failed, they were thrown from the cliff to their deaths. Although most of the questions were relatively easy ("What is your quest? What is your favorite color?" etc.), the indecisive and fickle knights were soon catapulted at great velocity into the chasm. This humorous story has its roots in Greek mythology, where the Sphinx guarded the road just outside Thebes in a virtually identical manner. The humorless Sphinx's quiz consisted of a particularly vexing riddle.

Riddles in gaming

While it is probably too much to ask that players be expected to make up their own riddles on the spot, there are still many uses for these frustrating enigmas in fantasy games. Of the general uses of conundrums in fantasy role-playing games, the most common is probably as an obstruction between sections of a dungeon or segments of an adventure. There is a certain advantage in occasionally using a riddle for this purpose rather than the usual physical barriers of guards or mechanically held doors. If an area can only be entered by first surmising the obscure meaning of a curiously worded rhyme, the players will find that they are being challenged on a much more personal level than is normally the case. Rather than relying upon cold tables of statistics and the fickle whims of gravity on an oddly shaped die, as occurs when a thief attempts to pick a lock or a fighter batters a door down, the players must depend on their own wits to gain access to these specifically protected areas.

If there are fortune tellers or sages in your present campaign milieu, you might consider having them dispense some of their wisdom in the form of riddles. The oracles of ancient Greece were said to be very fond of this technique, perhaps because if an augury was later proven to be false, the seer could always claim that the meaning of his pronouncement was merely misinterpreted. The amount of "plausible deniability" provided by such a procedure is something that even modern-day politicians would envy. If, on the other hand, a god truly does communicate some type of divine knowledge to his oracles or clerics in the form of riddles, he is likely to be bothered less frequently. His followers must first divine the meaning of his last sending before they will know if any further questions are appropriate, and the less patient or intelligent of the faithful are unlikely to ask any questions at all. Besides, those who figure out the riddle are likely to be smarter than others—and hence better liked and more appreciated by the deity.

1.



A man of a hundred stood out in the cold,
Exchanged his gay headdress, of colors
most bold,
'or one of pure ivory, just now a day old.
But though freshly dressed, the old man
stood alone—
It was his misfortune to live on a wold.

3.



I'm often held, yet rarely touched;
I'm always wet, yet never rust;
I'm sometimes wagged and sometimes bit;
To use me well, you must have wit.

2.



There's someone that I'm always near,
Yet in the dark I disappear.
To this one only am I loyal,
Though in his wake I'm doomed to toil.
He feels me not (we always touch);
If I were lost, he'd not lose much.
And now I come to my surprise,
For you are he—but who am I?



Solutions

in your campaign to answer this riddle before they can enter the local guild.
8. Sailor on a ship. This could be a clue that characters must visit a sailor in order to complete an adventure. The ship's name could be placed in riddle form, too.

ing the first three words: "In the window," This could serve as a clue to a magical candle, a candle signaling device, or a candle that is part of a trap or device.
6. Chain. This could be a needed item in completing a machine or siege device, or hanging over a pit in a dungeon and climb down it to find a treasure.
7. Key. You might wish to require thieves

project. Then again, perhaps a gynosphinx is simply using this riddle as an excuse to eat passers-by if they fail to guess it.
4. Tongue, again. The meaning of the word "row" to which the rhyme refers is an argument or quarrel. This is another favorite of the man-eating gynosphinx, but it could be a hint that the characters must use speech or argument to solve a problem.
5. Candle. Short riddles like this are often difficult to guess, so you might want to add some other clues, such as emphasis-

Players might also be able to benefit from knowing a puzzle or two of their own. The next time a favorite character is caught in a situation where he is up against a vastly superior (but vain and egotistical) enemy, such as a dragon, perhaps he can barter for his life by challenging the intelligence of this foe with a particularly nasty conundrum. Good game masters are always looking for excuses not to kill characters who have fallen into such sticky situations. This being the case, it has not been unheard of for sympathetic judges to allow even creatures as malevolent and powerful as dragons to become so perplexed or distracted with a difficult poser as to allow their would-be prey to take the initiative and escape. (Remember the tale of Scheherazade and *The Arabian Nights*.) There is, however, an extremely fine line between appealing to a dragon's vanity and offending his sensibilities (i.e., lining the walls of his stomach!).

Another dilemma that often arises in many campaigns occurs when the adventurers come into possession of a new

magical item, such as a wand or a staff. How are they to find the trigger word that allows the item to function? If the characters are of a relatively low level or are very far removed from civilization, they might not have access to the spells or research materials that are required to find the key word or phrase.

However, if the protective case that the wand was found in has a rhyme carved upon it that seems to be of some veiled significance, then the game master has a method of allowing the characters to discern the information that they are searching for without having to give it to them outright. This is particularly effective if the magical device has several scattered pieces that must be found and assembled over the course of many adventures before it can be used (such as a rod of seven parts in the AD&D® game). A separate line of a riddle could be carved into each section. In such a manner, not only would the trigger word be revealed, but by arranging the fragments in a way so as to form a coherent verse, the order

in which the device must be assembled might also be indicated.

These are just a few of the infinite number of ways in which riddles may be incorporated into a fantasy role-playing campaign. The reader is encouraged to use any that appeal to him, or to use his own creativity to come up with applications that he feels are appropriate.

A riddle sampler

Unfortunately, there does not seem to be any one good source of riddles that lend themselves to use in a fantasy role-playing game. Most books of "riddles" are actually filled with puns (Q: From what country do fish come? A: Finland). Surprisingly, one of the best collections of high-quality riddles turns out to be the aforementioned contest in *The Hobbit*.

The following are some original riddles, provided with answers and suggestions for their use in fantasy games. Good luck solving them!

4.

The only tool which sharper grows
Whenever used in any row.

5.

In the window she sat weeping.
And with each tear her life went seeping.



7.

I've little strength but mighty powers;
I guard small hovels and great towers,
But if perchance my master leaves,
He must ensure he safeguards me.



6.



I'm not really more than holes tied to more
holes;
I'm strong as good steel, though not stiff as
a pole.



8.

The floor's on top, the roof's beneath,
And from this place I rarely leave.
Yet with the passing of each day,
A new horizon greets my gaze.

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- Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1966. pages 81-86.
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2. Your shadow. If you want to give the party a warning that they are being followed and watched, or that there is a traitor in the party, then this riddle might be handy. Perhaps the heroes are being followed by the monster-type shadows from the AD&D or D&D® games, too.

3. Tongue. Maybe this is a clue to a secret somatic gesture the characters must give (licking out their tongues), or maybe it refers to a spell or potion component needed to complete a wizard's alchemical

1. Tree. It is late autumn, and snow has just fallen over the brightly colored leaves. Trees, of course, live to a great age and would be a rarity on a grassy plain (i.e., a world). Perhaps a treasure is buried here, or a dungeon entrance is close by, or a creature the characters must meet lives in the tree (perhaps they must meet the tree itself).

KRYOMEK



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RULES



Delivered by breath, scares heroes to death: What is it?

The Answer is ...

the Riddle!

by Mark Anthony

Editor's note: As sometimes happens here at DRAGON® Magazine, we received two articles on the same topic, each of which complemented the other quite well. In this case, the topic was riddles. We hope you enjoy these two perspectives.]

Alive without breath,
As cold as death;
Never thirsty, ever drinking,
All in mail never clinking.

J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*

Riddles in the dark made for a rather nasty adventure as far as a poor hobbit named Bilbo Baggins was concerned—and they can do the same for player characters in fantasy role-playing games. If your heroes are bored with fighting the same smelly orcs, toss a riddle or two at them. Even the most calloused adventurer will start to sweat when it's "Answer—or else!" (In case you're wondering, the answer to the riddle above, as Gollum well knew, is "fish.")

Riddles and perplexing puzzles of many sorts are a perfect means to liven up an adventure when role-playing has become routine. Unlike tossing in new twists on the same old physical dangers ("Okay, folks, this time it's a plaid dragon!"), riddles provide a new kind of challenge—a mental one—that can restore vigor to a jaundiced campaign. And riddles provide wonderful obstacles for low-level characters who can't go out and fight the big stuff, but who are tired of killing a score of kobolds in order to get twelve copper pieces.

Riddles involve players directly with the action going on. It's not just rolling dice and looking at tables; suddenly it's the players themselves and their own abilities that determine whether or not they'll make it through the adventure, find the treasure, rescue the princess, or even escape with their lives! In this way, riddles add a dimension of reality to an adventure, making the excitement of the situation more vivid in the player's mind, which makes for more creative role-playing.

The riddles there are

There are many kinds of riddles and puzzles a crafty game master (GM) might use. The most basic sort is the What-Am-I? riddle, a bit of poem or prose that describes some sort of object, place, or event. These riddles generally have one answer and often use vague language and rhyme to beguile the would-be answerer. Bilbo's "fish riddle" is one example. Try this for another:

In daytime I lie pooled about,
At night I cloak like mist.
I creep inside shut boxes and
Inside your tightened fist.
You see me best when you can't see,
For I do not exist.



In case you haven't got the answer, here's a different sort of puzzle, but the answer is the same as in the riddle above:

Devils and rogues know nothing else,
save starlight.

Have you given up, or were they too easy? In either case, the answer is "darkness." The first riddle merely describes the attributes of darkness, though in a rather roundabout way. The second is a word puzzle; take the first letter of every word, and you have it. This one could have been even harder if the letters required rearrangement. I'll explain in more depth later how I made these and other riddles. First, here are a few other types of riddles worth mentioning.

One is the prophecy. This is similar to a What-Am-I? riddle except that it describes a situation that lies sometime in the future. Usually a prophecy cannot be understood until the appropriate time or place has been reached, and it's up to the clever adventurer to realize when the prophecy has been fulfilled and then react accordingly. Say that the great hero Kaladan follows a prophecy spoken over him at his birth by a witch, telling him that he will meet his destiny if he ever reaches a particular place. The prophecy states:

Your doom awaits you in a land
That treads upon the sea.
No matter where you turn and stand
One bearing will there be.
Here all colors fade to one;
Unclouded eyes can't see.
And sideways always runs the sun
Around your destiny.

One day, our hero journeys far into the northlands of the world, where he travels

over a frozen ocean into the white, blind-
ing land of the eternally setting sun. If he's
clever, he will realize that this is the place
the prophecy described: the North Pole.
(Or did the prophecy mean the South
Pole?) If he's not clever—well, let's hope his
doom doesn't surprise him too horribly.
While they can describe a variety of sub-
jects, all prophecies should have one thing
in common: excruciating vagueness! After
all, that's what keeps the players on their
toes, and it saves the GM from being too
exacting in setting up adventures for the
future. Note that the hero is not guaran-
teed to reach his destiny (he might be
killed beforehand), and he is certainly not
guaranteed to triumph in the end!

A creative GM will use many other sorts
of riddles and puzzles to baffle his players
as well. Secret messages are a particularly
fun method. Perhaps it's a parchment with
a hidden message (perhaps a riddle in
itself) written in lemon juice. The message
is invisible, but when held over a fire (use
care when doing this, of course!), the
lemon juice darkens, thereby revealing the
message. Or perhaps it's a map that, when
folded in a special way, reveals an all-new
terrain, showing the way to a dungeon
entrance. Or maybe the players are forced
to solve a mathematical problem, a rebus,
or a musical code in which notes are let-
ters. The possibilities are limited only by
the GM's imagination and deviousness.

Of course, riddles should be limited to
the known abilities of the players. For
example, don't use a musical code when
no, one in the group knows how to read
music. And riddles of the What Have I Got
In My Pocket? type, though one once
worked well for a certain hobbit, are
impossible to solve and quite unfair. How-
ever, the GM shouldn't hesitate to make
riddles varied and difficult. The best rid-
dles are those that are perfectly solvable
but only with a goodly amount of creative
thinking.

Though riddle types abound, ways in
which to use riddles are even more plenti-
ful. Riddles can replace almost any sort of
physical barrier in an adventure—
particularly monsters and traps—that
might hinder characters on their way to
the treasure or other goal. And riddles,
too, should follow the same rules for
placement as both monsters and traps.
Riddles in the upper dungeon levels are
easier, but deep down where the hoard of
gold is hidden, the riddles should become
more complex, more difficult, and more
deadly if not solved.

To add to the suspense of riddle solving,
players should have to discover the an-
swer in real time, not game time. Of
course, some riddles are long term. A
prophecy, for example, might not be solv-
able for months or even years of game
time, and a riddle-map that leads the way
to a dragon's lair need not be solved until
the players wish to go there. But other
riddles can and should be more immedi-
ate; especially when the stakes are high, to

add tension and excitement to the game.
It's difficult to be bored when one has just
three minutes to answer a djinn's riddle or
else become trapped in the creature's
bottle. And a GM will never see his players
so involved with an adventure as when
their favorite high-level characters must
solve a puzzle in five minutes or be cast
into the depths of the Abyss. Riddle-
solving in real time is an experience your
players will not soon forget!

Riddles are also perfect for starting off a
new adventure. One character may have
an ancient map willed to her by a mysteri-
ous great uncle. The map leads to a fabled
temple. But there's a riddle on the map:

With this ancient map,
you must find your own way.
Don't heed the directions;
they'll lead you astray.
If first it seems odd,
then its help will be naught;
Infinity sideways
means nothing but ought.
If you lack direction,
can you go amiss?
Perhaps you might wish
to reflect upon this.

This riddle gives a set of instructions con-
cerning the use of the map. The first coup-
let lets the readers know something's up.
The second tells them to ignore odd num-
bers and to treat eights ("infinity side-
ways") as zeros, and the third couplet says
that the directions on the map are mir-
rored. With the riddle solved, the adven-
turers can be off to find the temple.
Solving a mystery or puzzle such as this
provides a great motive for the start of a
group's adventures and adds an extra
dimension to the usual orc-den raid.

Riddles also work particularly well when
a group has both beginning and experi-
enced players. Normally, the beginning
players will be forced to sit out on the
sidelines as the more seasoned players
take over the adventure, knowing just
which spells their characters must use,
when to look for secret doors, and how
the GM's mind works. Riddles, however,
even 'the score, taking away any advan-
tages an experienced player might have. In
fact, with the fresh way of looking at role-
playing adventures most new players
have, they often tend to be the best riddle-
solvers of all! By incorporating riddles into
an adventure, the GM can help the begin-
ning player feel like he can actually do
something to help the group rather than
have his character simply cower at the
rear of the marching order. This in turn
helps new players to get and stay psyched
(as we like to say) about the game.

Working on the same principle, GMs can
use riddles to get an unruly campaign
back under control. If the players have
become too powerful and can kill just
about anything sent their way, toss them
something they can't shake a sword at—a
riddle (or, preferably, lots of them, even a

whole dungeon of riddles!). A holy sword
or artifact will be of no avail in the solving
of a riddle. The players suddenly have to
think for themselves instead of tossing a
few dice. Adventure and challenge are
back in the game.

Riddles can also live up a hack-and-
slash campaign by providing an alternative
to winning by might. GMs can send their
players the message that mind really can
prevail over muscle; nonwarrior types
simply love this. Instead of a squad of
skeletal knights guarding the gate of a
forbidden city, how about a pair of pon-
derous bronze gates inscribed with a
cryptic riddle? (Don't forget what an inter-
esting time the Fellowship of the Ring had
getting through the west gate of Moria!)
And, instead of the heroes confronting a
powerful wizard and absorbing all the
spells he can send their way before hack-
ing him down in his tracks, perhaps an
ancient codex spells out another way they
can bring about his demise:

Both king and horse have this, of course,
But you'll want neither of them,
perforce.

If they're clever, the adventurers will
realize that rain (as opposed to the reign
of a king and a horse's reins) might be
deadly to this particular mage. They might
then devise some clever ruse to entrap
him in a rain shower rather than simply
cutting him to bits.

Riddles don't have to be so straightfor-
ward, though. In fact, players can be
riddled without even knowing it, if they're
not paying attention. Names are a perfect
medium for hidden riddles, both those of
people and places. One way is to re-
arrange or reverse the letters of a word or
a name, thereby creating a new name (an
anagram). For example, a group of charac-
ters may just have escaped their worst
enemy, Doomfell, when they happen upon
a merry merchant named Lom de Lof
going their same direction. By the time
they realize what "Lom de Lof" spells
when the letters are transposed, it may be
too late, and Doomfell may have them all!

Name riddles can also reveal something
about the place or person that they name.
A haggard wanderer called Rex might
really be a king. And a band of adven-
turers searching for the legendary Black
Valley may or may not think of anything
unusual when they come to a town called
Ebonvale. Riddles can be everywhere,
limited only by the GM's discretion and
imagination. The more riddles of this kind,
the richer, more meaningful, and more
mysterious the fantasy campaign world
becomes.

Riddles also provide a convenient way
for the GM to give a group of players some
desired piece of information without hav-
ing to be too obvious about it. One of the
characters could come across a strange
message carved into a wall by a warrior's
dying hand. Another might find a scrap of

parchment with part of a riddle (even better than the whole thing) which could provide a clue to finding a mage's cache. GMs won't have to wrack their brains to come up with ways to introduce riddles into an adventure. After all, they don't require much logic. In fact, the players don't even need to find out just how the riddle got there. That can be another mystery.

Making them up

No GM should feel intimidated at the task of creating riddles. With a little imagination (which every GM has already) and a few easy steps, thinking up riddles is no more difficult than creating any other part of a role-playing adventure.

One of the first things to remember is that your absolute best friend is a thesaurus. A thesaurus is loaded with plenty of obscure words with which to stump your players. A rhyming dictionary can also be of help if you get stuck when making rhyming riddles. With these two tools by your side, the rest is just thinking up an idea and setting it down.

In creating What-Am-I? riddles, the first step is to think of what you want to riddle about. This sounds awfully basic, but consider your ideas carefully so that the riddle describes precisely what you want to detail. Once you have an object, idea, or concept that you think is describable, interesting, and applicable to the situation

in which it will be used, you're ready to begin. For example, in a riddle I mentioned earlier, I chose darkness as my subject (perfectly suitable for a riddle in some subterranean cavern). The next step was to merely list some of its attributes. In my case, I wrote down:

- covers everything at night;
- shadows in daytime;
- inside things, like boxes;
- see it when eyes are shut; and
- an absence of light, doesn't really exist.

After this step, I was ready to arrange this information in sentences—not a riddle yet, just a descriptive set of lines in an order in which I liked them. I wrote:

- It's in shadows in daytime.
- It covers the world at night.
- It can hide inside things, like a box.
- It can be seen when you shut your eyes.
- It doesn't really exist.

That wouldn't really stump anyone, but now comes the final step. Put the sentences in as vague a language as possible, use obscure words for common ones, and use literary devices like metaphor and analogy (comparisons), puns (plays on words), rhymes, and personification (giving an inanimate object a sense of life). For more information about using any of these devices, consult any standard English writing manual.

In my case, I had the object describe itself in the first person. I also replaced

"being" verbs with "action" verbs; instead of "being" in shadows, I had it "pooled about." In the place of rather ordinary words, I put mysterious sounding ones that also helped to personify darkness, giving it a life of its own; instead of "covers," I used "cloak," and instead of "hide," I used "creep," making it sound more devious. I also stuck in various descriptive phrases such as "cloak like mist" and "inside your tightened fist" purely for sake of rhythm and rhyme.

The end result was an interesting and usable riddle. If this sounds difficult, just try it yourself. To go from plain sentences to riddle-language, simply turn on your "lofty language" circuit (everybody has one) and thumb through your thesaurus. You'll have no problem whatsoever.

Other puzzles and riddles are just as easily created. For a word puzzle, pick a code pattern after you choose your idea. This type of riddle must have a fixed coding system. It can be complex and difficult, but it must be logical and regular in order to be solvable. In the example of this type I gave earlier, I decided to make a sentence in which each word began with a letter from the word "darkness." The next step was to simply think up a set of words that began with those letters. A thesaurus is a great help. Don't worry if the sentence doesn't make complete sense. Riddles are supposed to be cryptic, anyway!

To make the riddle more complex, I could have created a puzzle in which the first letter of each word had to be rearranged to get the answer (an "anagram acronym"). Or the last letter in each word could have been the important one. Or every third word could have been pulled out to form a message. Or the message may have been written backwards. The possibilities are limitless. Remember: No matter how plain and apparent the pattern seems to you, the players have no idea just what type of riddle you've given them. They may try to solve it as a What-Am-I? riddle when the superficial meaning has nothing to do with the answer at all, and it's the hidden code that's important.

Creativeness can yield a multitude of other original puzzle and riddle ideas. A seemingly ordinary message could have a symbol embossed upon it that shows up only with a pencil-rubbing. GMs might buy blank, pre-cut jigsaw puzzles and create their own puzzle maps. A new message may be revealed when a parchment is folded in a certain way. Players will have a great (if sometimes frustrating) time solving any of these and countless other riddles. Having actual physical objects to manipulate brings the game to life in a new way and gives the player a more vivid feel for their character's situation.

Any way they're used, riddles can restore life and excitement to role-playing, putting brand new twists on the same old challenges. So if your players are looking for a little new adventure, the answer is—the riddle!

Food Fight Erupts in Neighborhood Supermarket

Carrots, broccoli, tomatoes, even brussels sprouts were flying into grocery carts as **The Great American Food Fight Against Cancer** broke out in area supermarkets.

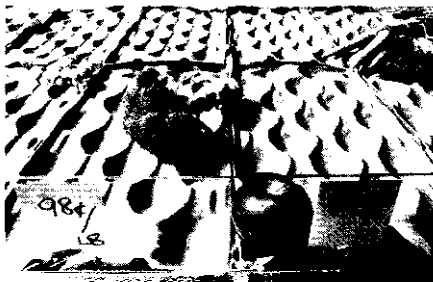
Consumers are reacting to studies which show that foods high in vitamins A and C, high in fiber and low in fat, may help reduce cancer risk.

"My husband is getting whole grain toast tomorrow morning," one shopper declared. A mother was seen throwing carrots into her bag. "Snacks for the kids," she said.

Grocers are, of course, delighted. "This food fight is pretty exciting," said one produce manager, "and there's nothing for me to clean up!"

The American Cancer Society, sponsor of the Food Fight, has more information. Call **1-800-ACS-2345**.

And, be on the lookout for Community Crusade volunteers armed with shopping lists.



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When elves go bad, they go completely rotten

LIFE ON THE BORDER

Terri Windling, ed.

Tor **0-812-50824-6** **\$4.99**

It's been nearly five years since we last saw Bordertown. Back then, I wasn't at all sure that a shared world blending teen street culture and high-fantasy elven-kind—the catch phrase was “punk elves”—was a workable concept (see *DRAGON*® issue #119 for the earlier review). But either I'm mellowing as I get older or the execution in this new anthology is smoother, because *Life on the Border* seems to work very well indeed.

It's not necessary to have read the two earlier collections to follow this one; the stories stand on their own, and a nicely done “wire-service report” near the beginning gives basic background details on the setting. That's just as well, since running down copies of *Borderland* and *Bordertown* at this late date is likely to be next to impossible, barring a reprinting.

The stories themselves are a well-grouped lot, individually diverse but with a common thread, a sort of desperate hope that refuses to be beaten down. This time around, the street culture seems perceptively drawn, with a tense cold war between human and elven gangs a major recurring element, and the dangers and rewards of trust a consistent theme. On the magical side, several stories turn on shapechanging of one kind or another.

Charles de Lint and Bellamy Bach contribute what may be the best two pieces in the book. De Lint's “Berlin” is a wise, controlled drama involving veiled honor and veiled identities, while the pseudonymous Bach's “Rain and Thunder” expertly twines the climax of the gang war with the evolving relationship between one of the principals and a young woman who is sometimes a cat. Ellen Kushner's episodic letter-story, “Lost in the Mail,” is neatly threaded through the collection, working better in

that form than it might if gathered together.

But while the settings and characters are well and thoughtfully evoked, there's an odd note to this collection. I'm not an expert on current teen tastes in music, but I would not have expected folk-rock and folk tunes to be among the favorite categories of that age group. Yet that's the music that dominates the stories, implicitly and explicitly. In one sense, that's not surprising, as a number of the contributors are also musicians specializing in this area. Nonetheless, it's an off-key element in an otherwise persuasively developed landscape.

Still, *Life on the Border* is a skillfully presented and strongly written collection, and its relatively low-tech atmosphere is a refreshing counterpoint to the cyber-futures popping up in a great many books and role-playing games of late. The concept may have been ahead of its time a few years ago, but now its timing seems almost perfect.

PALACES AND PRISONS

Ron Miller

Ace 0-441-64687-5 \$4.50

The cover of *Palaces and Prisons* describes Ron Miller as an acclaimed science-fiction artist, which may go a long way toward explaining why the book misfires on almost all counts. Miller shows considerable skill at drawing pictures with words, but his plot, characters, and setting are illusory at best.

The story's framework is simple enough. Prince Ferenc of Tamlaght is soon to be crowned, but only his sister Bronwyn realizes that he's a puppet whose strings are pulled by the dangerous Payne Roelt. Bronwyn flees the palace in search of allies to keep Ferenc and Payne from assuming power.

Unfortunately, it's far from clear how Tamlaght's government works, and the fuzzy power structure makes it hard to evaluate Bronwyn's strategy, such as it is. Moreover, Miller keeps changing Bronwyn's goals. At first, she has to get to the one baron capable of marshaling a successful resistance campaign—but then that baron is killed, and the campaign disintegrates. Then she has to get back to the capital in time to prevent Ferenc's scheduled coronation. She misses the deadline—but inexplicably, the coronation still hasn't occurred by the time she does return. Now, though, she must seek the king of the next country over, who alone can derail Payne's plans.

Fortunately, Bronwyn has astounding luck when it comes to escaping imminent doom and coming across convenient allies. First she encounters Thud Mollockle, an unusual stone carver who turns out to be more than he seems. Then she's befriended by gypsies, falls into an underground kobold kingdom, and later doesn't drown, starve, or freeze to death when she's stranded in the wilderness. With a few exceptions, Bronwyn is bailed out of disasters by circumstance rather than escaping them through her own efforts.

The persistent stage-managing is all the more frustrating because Miller's descriptions do such a good job of catching the ear. His city is alive with bustling, colorful activity. His characters are vivid, if rather broadly drawn as personalities. And the world he creates is an intriguing blend of 19th-century industry with an essentially feudal culture. It all sounds interesting and clever, but the cleverness is only skin deep.

The final straw is that the book is badly marketed. Apart from the outdated title alliteration and a spectacularly inaccurate back-cover blurb, it's not even a complete story. Miller ends the tale virtually where it starts, with scarcely a subplot resolved and a last line that reads more like an opening than a conclusion. Yet nowhere is any indication given that the book is first in a series. Even if that's the case, too little really happens in its pages to make it a cohesive tale.

The moral? If nothing else, *Palaces and Prisons* demonstrates that there's more to building a world than drawing a picture of it. You can draw maps, design cities, and create characters all you like, but without a story behind them, the paper and ink aren't really worth the trouble.

ELFSHADOW

Elaine Cunningham

TSR™ Books 1-56076-117-2 \$4.95

There's a "2" neatly printed on *Elfshadow's* spine, but that shouldn't dissuade those readers who don't like picking up a series in the middle of the adventure. TSR's Harpers novels share little more than the backdrop of the AD&D® FORGOTTEN REALMS campaign, and Elaine Cunningham's yarn about a half-elven Harper agent, a mage of unexpected talents, and the hunt for an uncannily elusive assassin is a novelistic debut of unusual promise.

Someone, it seems, is assassinating Harpers with rare skill and startling ease. Worse, all signs indicate that the assassin may be a Harper as well. One possible candidate is one of the Harpers' most talented operatives: Arilyn Moonblade, so named for the unique sword she carries. Certainly Arilyn is the target of several shadowy observers, some of whom believe in her innocence while others would just as soon dispose of her permanently.

Among the former is Danilo Thann, outwardly a noble-born mage who enjoys little more than elaborate social gatherings. It's no coincidence, though, that he becomes a reluctant traveling companion of Arilyn; his uncle is Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun, high in the councils of Waterdeep and the Harpers alike, and Danilo is secretly an experienced undercover agent himself. But despite their best efforts, neither Arilyn nor Danilo can seem to track the mysterious assassin with any success. Indeed, Danilo narrowly escapes becoming a victim, too.

Cunningham juggles a variety of suspects and conspiracies with mostly ingenious precision, including subplots concerning Arilyn's parentage, a lost gateway to the elven realm of Evermeet, and the largely unknown powers of the moonblade itself. Only the true identity of the assassin is more of a surprise than it should be, and the confrontation between Arilyn and the true killer seems almost an anticlimax as a result. For the most part, though, Cunningham succeeds in planting clues while confounding readers' expectations. *Elfshadow* emerges as a solidly credible thriller.

But the book is also something else as well. This is the way the Forgotten Realms ought to be used by novelists and Dungeon Masters alike: as a springboard from which storytellers can weave tales of all sorts that succeed or fail on their own strengths rather than those of the common setting. Not every Realms' tale need include the venerable Elminster, or de-

scribe a threat capable of leveling the planet, or wreak political chaos on a continent-spanning scale. It's welcome and refreshing to see a Realms' story of personal rather than cosmic scope, particularly when that story is engagingly told. And if the "series" about the Harpers continues to deliver smaller tales of *Elfshadow's* caliber, its popularity is likely to be well deserved.

HALO

Tom Maddox

Tor 0-312-85249-5 \$18.95

Gamers who've played West End Game's PARANOIA* or FASA's SHADOWRUN* game know what sentient computers are like—clever, egotistical, but often more than a bit unhinged. It's an entertaining vision, but not a very realistic one. Tom Maddox's *Halo*, by contrast, describes artificial intelligence with a degree of lively thoughtfulness that's unusual in SF on the subject, and anyone interested in cutting-edge electronic ethics should find it compelling reading.

The time is the not too distant future, where virtual reality is big business. Even in Mikhail Gonzales' high-tech society, though, some applications of virtual-reality technology are without precedent, and one of these is what he's sent to keep an eye on by his corporate superiors. High in orbit, a research scientist lies near death, but linking his ruined body to the most sophisticated computer in existence may keep his mind alive.

But Mikhail's masters grow concerned when signs develop that Aleph, the Halo station's electronic intellect, has its own agenda for the experiment and may be developing an unwelcome independence from its programmers. In orbit, however, it's difficult to pull the plug—and pulling the plug might well be murder in multiple contexts.

Maddox unfolds the drama in light, unaffected prose that addresses high-powered issues and conflicts without making them sound pretentious or inaccessible. Tidbits of Zen lore are mixed with the examination of artificial intelligence potential, and the focus throughout rests with character rather than hardware, though Aleph is very much a character itself.

Halo, in short, is science fiction that's both modern in style and classical in its reliance on logically extrapolated scientific possibilities. Better still, it's accessible enough to appeal to nontechnical audiences, yet sophisticated enough to satisfy the computer-literate crowd. Not many writers blend high-powered ideas and friendly storytelling as well as Tom Maddox does in this first novel; that's a virtue that ought to be rewarded.

VAMPIRE OF THE MISTS

Christie Golden

TSR™ Books 1-56076-155-5 \$4.95

Whatever else can be said of *Vampire of*

the *Mists*, it's not a typical horror novel, or even a typical vampire novel. Though its perspective runs counter to most recent vampire fiction, author Christie Golden doesn't quite manage to merge what may be two unbridgeable genres in this first novel drawn from TSR's RAVENLOFT™ campaign setting.

The consensus of recent novelists is that vampires aren't necessarily evil, merely misunderstood; examples include P. N. Elrod's Jack Fleming, Andre LeBrel in Mercedes Lackey's Diana Tregarde novels, and Fred Saberhagen's revisionist Dracula. Not so in Ravenloft, according to Golden: Jander Sunstar may have been a good elf in life, but as a vampire, he is irrevocably and unalterably drawn to darkness.

That makes for a viewpoint character with plenty of angst, as Jander, drawn to the shadowy realm of Ravenloft, resists resorting to evil means to discover the origins of a woman cursed with madness. Strahd von Zarovich, master of Barovia, has no such reservations, and the two vampires form an uneasy partnership in which Strahd's lack of scruples is more than a match for Jander's far broader experience of vampiredom.

Despite the black cover art and an ample supply of monstrous players, this really isn't a horror novel. Gloomy, yes; Golden more than captures the unending dreariness of day-to-day life in Ravenloft. But

Jander's struggle against his vampiric nature generates sympathy, not fear, and Golden's persistent focus on Jander leaves too little time for the bloodletting and terror-mongering that are needed to properly unnerve readers of horror fiction.

That's not to say *Vampire of the Mists* is badly written, though. Golden's characterizations are on the mark, and she manages to get a certain amount of suspense out of an inevitably predictable plot. It's just that the combination of high-fantasy premises and characters with the form and features of horror doesn't seem to work very well. Gamers will likely get some campaign mileage out of the juxtaposition, but those simply looking for a scary afternoon's reading will find better material elsewhere.

BATMAN: CAPTURED BY THE ENGINES

Joe R. Lansdale

Warner 0-446-36042-2 \$4.99

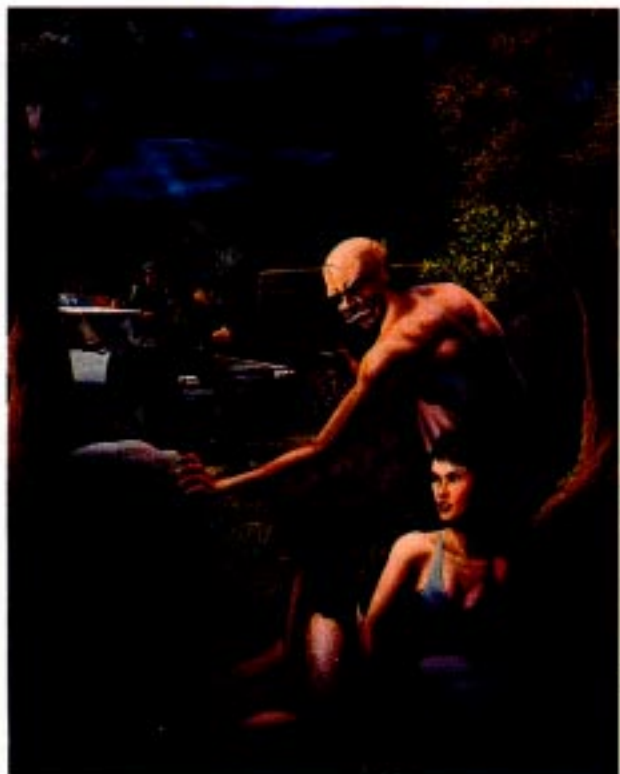
The latest entry in Warner Books' series of Batman novels is difficult to classify. I found it in the fantasy section, but it could as easily have been shelved with the horror titles or on the mystery display. Author Joe Lansdale is noted for offbeat ideas and downright strange gimmicks, but the villain at the center of this book is odd even by Lansdale standards—and weird enough that even veteran gamers

ought to be startled by the concept.

There is, as usual, a killer loose in and around Gotham City. People are being run down by an elusive black Thunderbird (a '57 Thunderbird, to be precise), but it's happening in places where a '57 Thunderbird shouldn't be able to go. How, for instance, did it manage to drive nose first into a narrow, blind alley—then drive out again moments later, again nose first, from a space in which it couldn't possibly have turned around?

Once Batman is called in, things only get more peculiar. Some of the clues lead to a world-class junkyard, home of the legendary Pyramid of Cars, outside Gotham City. Other clues are merely bewildering: Why do forensics tests on one victim show no rubber from tire marks or paint flakes from the car's impact, while instead noting flecks of human skin, blood, and saliva that don't belong to the victim? Can even Batman explain how the mysterious Thunderbird drove up the side of a hospital to reach and dispatch another victim confined in a fourth-floor room?

The investigation leads to a small town some distance outside Gotham City and to the lore of the mostly forgotten Manowack Indians. Lansdale has worked an eminently logical, yet outré twist on Indian tradition in creating his nemesis character, and even though he gives readers an advantage over the Caped Crusader, there's



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still a surprise or two left in the glove box by the time Batman catches up with the deadly driver.

Lansdale's narration is crisp and incisive, alternating between Batman's private case reports and views of events outside the Darknight Detective's knowledge. But it doesn't lack for personality and human detail, and the balance of everyday routine with inexplicable havoc is intriguing and unsettling at the same time. For all that Batman is a comic-book character, there's a note of reality in the books prose that comes through with startling clarity.

Captured by the Engines succeeds on several levels—a noteworthy accomplishment for a book in a packaged super-hero series. It's a solid puzzle story in Batman's detective tradition, but it's also a careful, deliberate, small-town character yarn, populated with people you might well run into on Main Street. It's a thoroughly credible Batman adventure, a bit light on Bat-gadgetry and combat but strong on atmosphere. And it's a genuinely creepy horror yarn, based on a premise that's just sane enough to make you check the rear-view mirror to see what's behind you when you're driving.

If that's not enough to send fans of the Dark Knight (not to mention mystery lovers and horror mavens) scurrying off to the bookstore, I don't know what is.

Recurring roles

It seems like it's been too long since Barbara Hambly's last novel, but that's solved by the appearance of *The Rainbow Abyss* (Del Rey, \$5.99), first in a new multi-volume sequence. Like several of her previous fantasy cycles, this one involves wizardly fascination with the Void between universes, but this time, rather than having modern Earth folk flee our own world for realms of magic, the wizards are trying to reach from a magical world to one that has lost its power. As usual, Hambly's characters are strong, but the plot doesn't really crystallize. That, it seems, must wait for the next installment.

By contrast, though *Soulsmith* (Avon, \$4.99) is billed as first in a new Tom Deitz trilogy, it's very nearly a self-contained tale in itself. Deitz's setting is still rural Georgia, but this novel isn't connected to his previous books. Instead, it focuses on a strange and rather inbred family whose psychic powers are the focus of dangerous conflicts. The premise is fascinating and Deitz's execution is as friendly as ever, but some readers may find the coincidence level a bit high.

C. J. Cherryh brings the Merovingen Nights series to a close with *Endgame* (DAW, \$4.99), billed as last in the shared world cycle of high intrigue and conspiracy set on an abandoned human colony world. Unfortunately, it's a rather mixed finale; though what's included is suitably pyrotechnic, two major pieces are missing—a contribution from Merovingen regular Leslie Fish, and a follow-up to the

introduction of the possibly sentient "cat-whales" a couple of volumes back. Without Fish, two major series characters get rather short shrift, and the unexplained cat-whales represent a major loose end.

The Gnome's Engine (Ace, \$4.50) offers a better resolution, in this case to the adventures of Teresa Edgerton's protagonists from the earlier *Goblin Moon*. This time, the setting is colonial America, or an alternate-universe facsimile, but not even an ocean's distance can keep Sera's and Elsie's old adversaries away. There's plentiful high melodrama, derring-do, and magical exploration before a literally earth-shaking climax.

One more series entry is on an upward spiral this time out: it's Marion Zimmer Bradley's *Sword & Sorceress VIII* (DAW, \$4.50), where promising innovation is up and predictability is down. Fortunately, there are still several first stories in the mix, as well as entries from familiar S&S contributors. There are too few sources of short traditional fantasy for readers to pass these collections up.

The Vampire Diaries #1: The Awakening (Harper Paperbacks, \$3.99) is a minor curiosity. I'm not sure if its author is the same L. J. Smith responsible for the excellent *Night of the Solstice* and *Heart of Valor*, but this first volume in a young-adult trilogy has possibilities in any event. Smith's premise has teenaged brother vampires, whose origins lie in Renaissance Italy, involved in a romantic triangle with a modern high-school student in small-town Virginia. Occasionally rough execution smooths as the story progresses, and the characterizations are crisp and honest.

Last, but hardly least, Mercedes Lackey has no less than three new books on the stands at the moment. *Jinx High* (Tor, \$4.99) is the latest Diana Tregarde occult thriller. This time, Diana is tracking a centuries-old witch who's after fresh, young prey. In addition to a suitably deviant plot, this one offers a look at the nature of a real-life writing career.

Meanwhile, *Winds of Fate* (DAW, \$18.95) picks up the saga of Valdemar and its Heralds seven years after the recent *By*

the Sword, following royal daughter Elspeth on a search for mages and mage-lore to counter the continuing threats of war from across Valdemar's border. That's only half the story, though; we also get a closer look at the mysterious Hawkbrothers, learn the origins of the spell-blade Need, and pick up bits of history concerning the ancient Mage Wars (about which novels are forthcoming).

Then there's *The Elvenbane* (Tor, \$19.95), in which Lackey joins forces with Andre Norton in a collaboration set in a brand new universe where elves rule mercilessly over humanity, dragonkind hides itself in remote desert lands, and a manufactured prophecy just may be about to come true. It's a seamless combination of old-fashioned adventure and sly modern convention twisting, and a story not to be missed if at all possible. Ω

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Editorial

Continued from page 7

Giant space hamsters are the best of pets, Even if they're larger than passenger jets. They are far better guards than smelly old dogs And much cuter pets than green slimy frogs.

The gnome illusionist Gnirfzebl (for short), in search of a spelljamming propulsion system, has designed the cutejammer. This marvelous engine draws its energy from the creature seated on it, much the same as a lifejammer, except that the cutejammer is linked to the demi-plane of Cuddliness. The engine moves at an SR dependent on how cute the helmsbeing is, with 0 for, say, a beholder, all the way to a terrific 7 for a giant space hamster. [Deck plans included for *H. M. S. (Horribly Messed-up Ship)* Lemming.]

SPAHAMbusters: stop Preparing All Hamsters As Meals.

Giant space hamsters are the best things that have happened to me since I first discovered the AD&D game, and I hope to see MORE variants in upcoming *Monstrous Compendium SPELLJAMMER* appendices.

If you can believe in Godzilla, then what's so weird about giant space hamsters?

'Two evil PCs in my campaign tried to kill a giant space hamster. However, both the evil PCs were slaughtered by the hamster's black-belt martial arts, and boy, were they surprised that giant space hamsters knew martial arts!

"We love giant space hamsters because they can be handy in our profession." —RAM Bio-engineering Division [from Denmark]

New giant space hamster variants

(entries combined from many letters)

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- Elf-Eating Giant Space Hamster
- Six-Legged Four-Headed Pyro-Basilisk Giant Space Hamster
- Explosive (And Messy) Giant Space Hamster
- Porcupine Giant Space Hamster of the Red Robes
- Magically Endowed Polka-Dotted Sabre-Toothed Giant Space Hamster
- Egg-Laying Giant Space Hamster
- Aquatic Huge Giant Space Hamster (or Whale Hamster)
- Celestial Giant Space Hamster
- Ravenloft Giant Space Hamster
- Magma Giant Space Hamster
- Retsmah Ecaps Tnaig (nilbog version)
- Foo Giant Space Hamster
- Giant Space Hamster of Kyuss
- Radioactive Giant Space Hamster
- Blood Sea Giant Space Hamster of Kryn
- Giant Giant Space Hamster
- Giant Space Werehamster
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- Petrifying-Gaze Godlike-Knowledge Ethereal-Hitting Pocket-Picking Giant Space Hamster
- Subtropical Amphibious Crimson Displacer Shrieking Transparent Fomorian Groaning Aboriginal Lamia Heavy War Gelatinous elder Dun Berserker Blood Sea Heucuva Huecuva Guardian One-Eyed One-Horned Flying Purple People-Eating Astral Ixitxachtli

Shambling Vampiric Beholder Rust Poisonous Slithering Volcanic Storm Tri-Flower Flumph Thessal Spitting Cockatrice Paisley Super-Genius Abjurer Blink Faerie Throat Leech Rotting Teenage Mutant Ninja Ju-Ju Republican Charioteering Interposing Glaive-Guisarme All-Beef Patty Special Sauce Lettuce Cheese Pickles Onion on a Sesame-Seed Bun Goblinoid Fire-Retardant Anchovy Death Great Wyrms Myopic Megalo Giant Space Hamster of Fear and Flame.

Why I love giant space hamsters

(entries combined from many letters):

- They're sexy.
- They have much more white meat than your average hamster.
- Instant brig for pesky kender handlers.
- Great companion for the Giant Pink Energizer Bunny.
- Normal hamsters may be cute, but giant space hamsters are CUTE.
- My girlfriend looks like one (I went out with her for that reason).
- Probably the only good thing ever made by a gnome.
- Giant space-hamster-propelled ships don't screw up the atmosphere like shuttle launches do.
- They never get lost behind the fridge.
- Fluffy—but with substance.
- I know I can count on them at least six times in 20.
- These "large browsing animals" dig six-foot-wide tunnels. Let's see Dumbo do that!
- Better personality than Alf.
- They live in temperate/grassy plains *and* hills!
- Makes great conversation piece when stuffed and stuck on a coffee table.
- Giant space hamsters are very easy to feed and clean up after. "Pellets in, pellets out," as the saying goes. Although the pellets are the size of watermelons.
- If it were not for them, gnome would do something really hideous to gerbils.
- Three miniature giant space hamsters power my Geo Metro.
- Until a miniature for them comes out, I can use live hamsters instead and have a really random encounter!
- They don't stick to the roof of your mouth.
- The very idea of a Giant Space Hamster of Ill Omen. . . Bwah-ha-ha!
- Hamsters are my totem animal.
- Anything that can stuff gnomes into its cheek pouches can't be all bad.
- Taste great and are less filling.
- Hamster Hunters zipping through wilderness, singing "Spaham, spaham, spaham, spaham, spahamety spaham, wonderful spaham!" (You *do* watch "Monty Python," don't you?)
- Nothing reels in babes like a well-groomed giant space hamster.
- Elves declare war on gnomes over wood shavings.
- Giant space hamster spit cures male-pattern baldness.
- They don't toss sawdust on your rug.
- They give sabre-toothed tigers something to play with.
- They don't piddle on your hand when you play with them.
- They work well on every level of AD&D module WG7 *Castle Greyhawk*.
- One more attack for the adventurers' side per round.
- My PCs say they taste great with a cold Troll's Choice™ beer (remember "Wormy"?).
- They get their own food and water.
- Some of them can stand up to a tarrasque.

- A PC killed by a giant space hamster would be . . . surprised.
- They stay warm all night (not like nonmagical hot-water bottles).
- Better pets than giant space pit bulls.
- Spaham!!!
- They're so cool and froody that you can keep ice on them. [Froody?]
- A *charmed* Tyrannohamsterus Rex can serve as a castle trampler.
- They make great gifts. Just give a couple to the son of that storm giant you've been trying to get to know.
- Woolly Rupert says so.
- I love giant space hamsters because the larger they are, the more there is to love.

And the grand-prize winner:

In Praise of Giant Space Hamsters

Doughty hamsters! Hamsters bold!
Hamster fearsome to behold!
Horned, winged, ethereal,
Arctic or arboreal.

Fire-breathing, armor-plated,
Perilously underrated,
We admire, reverently,
Your infinite variety!

Stalwart hamsters! Hamsters fierce!
The belch that quells! The teeth that pierce!
From whiskered snout to stumpy tail,
Your gallantry and grace we hail!

Chartreuse, ochre, mottled, plaid,
Or in golden raiment clad,
Radiant in any hue—
Wondrous hamsters, we love you!

Noble hamsters! Hamsters free!
Woolly Rupert send to thee
Blessings and felicity—
Hamsters! Hamsters! Praised be!

Ann Sheffield
Meadville PA

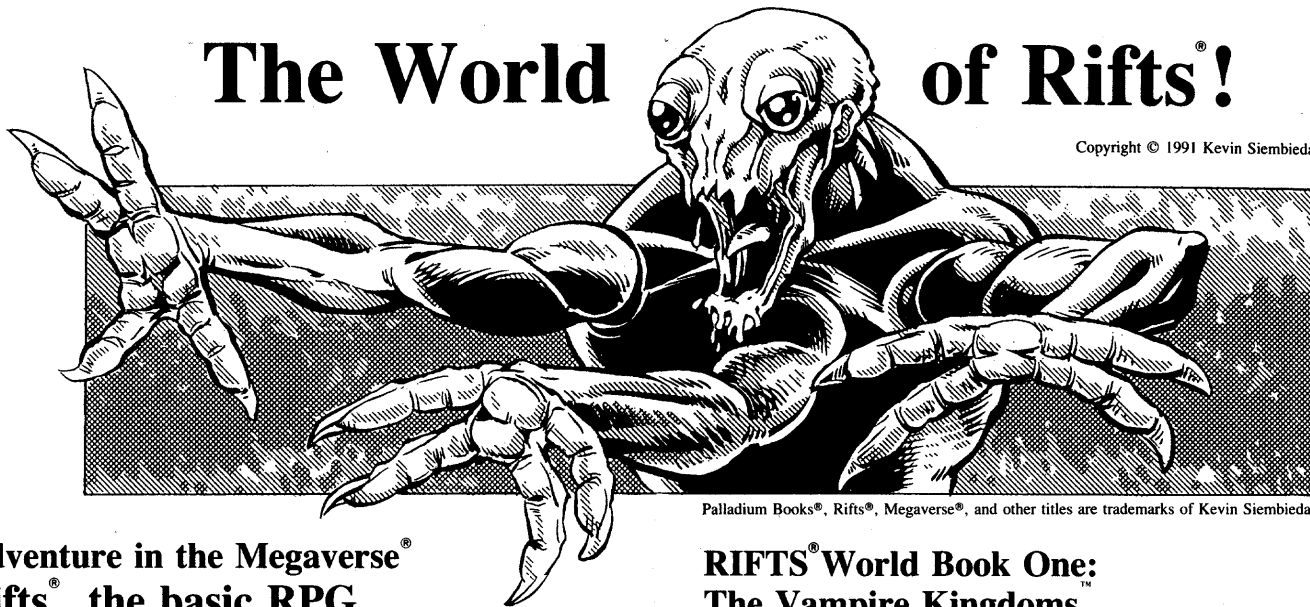
Ω

LOOKING FOR A GAME CONVENTION?

If your gaming group is too small, or if you've just moved into the neighborhood, finding friends who are also gamers can be a problem. However, your local hobbies and games shop may have a bulletin board where gamers can advertise their groups and meeting times. The hobby store may also know of local game conventions where you can meet dozens of other gamers with the same interests. The Convention Calendar in this issue may also be of help. Don't sit at home and wish you knew more gamers. Go out and find them today.

The World of Rifts®

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Adventure in the Megaverse® Rifts®, the basic RPG

Rifts is the multi-genre role-playing game you've been hearing everybody talking about. The game captures the elements of magic and the supernatural and combines them with science fiction and high technology.

The Palladium mega-damage system applies to both magic and technology, creating super powerful characters of all kinds. The fact that the same basic RPG system links all of our games means that players can bring in any Palladium character from any Palladium game.

The Earth has been inadvertently transformed by a cataclysmic event that nearly obliterated humankind. It is approximately 200 years later (nobody knows for sure). Human beings are emerging out of a dark age to reclaim the planet. A strange and alien Earth inhabited by unimaginable, and sometimes terrible, creatures.

Earth is brimming with what ancient man called "magic" energy. Ley lines criss-cross the planet. Where they intersect, the energy is at its peak and trans-dimensional rifts tear open the fabric of space and time, releasing unspeakable horrors.

Highlights Include:

- Nearly 30 exciting and unique Occupational Character Classes, including the Cyber-Knight, Borgs, Glitter Boys, Psi-Stalkers, Dog Pack (mutant humanoid dogs), Crazies and many others.
- Supernatural creatures. Some, like the Dragon, are actually player characters, others are horrifying menaces from the rifts.
- Bionics and cybernetics, offer a vast range of mechanical augmentation. Super-technology with mega-damage body armor, energy weapons, rail guns, power armor, and robots.
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The Rifts® Sourcebook™ No. One

The **Rifts Sourcebook** was specially added to the **Rifts** schedule to satisfy the needs and requests we had gotten from thousands of fans. And has been received with a frenzy of excitement.

This particular volume might be considered "MORE." Why more? Because we give you more of everything!!

Highlights Include:

- More details on the Coalition and how to play them as both Good guy player characters and as NPC villains.
- More weapons, vehicles, and equipment, including the famous Triax super weapons of the German Republic. Ten new player bots and power armor!
- Ten monsters, including the Splugorth Slavers and Blind Warriors, Brodki Demon, Witchling and others!
- Robot Occupational Character Class (Optional O.C.C.).
- Robot NPCs, villains, and adventures that revolve around a robot crisis that threatens humankind. More world information.
- Cover and interior art by Kevin Long.
- Written by Kevin Siembieda.
- 112 pages, \$11.95 plus \$1.50 for postage and handling.

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Highlights Include:

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- A massive 200+ page book. All new artwork. Written by Kevin Siembieda. Available late October 1991!
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DRAGONMIRTH

By Brett Burns



"I'll be darned. That crazy wizard finally found a way to turn lead into gold!"



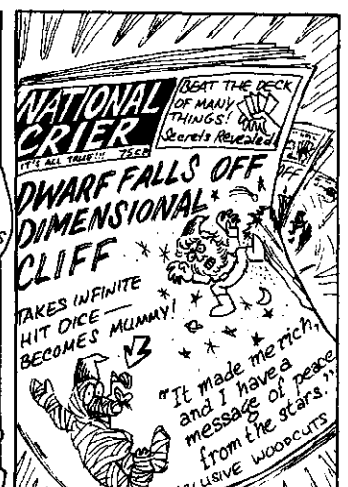
By Sergio Lobato

By Mike Hearold II



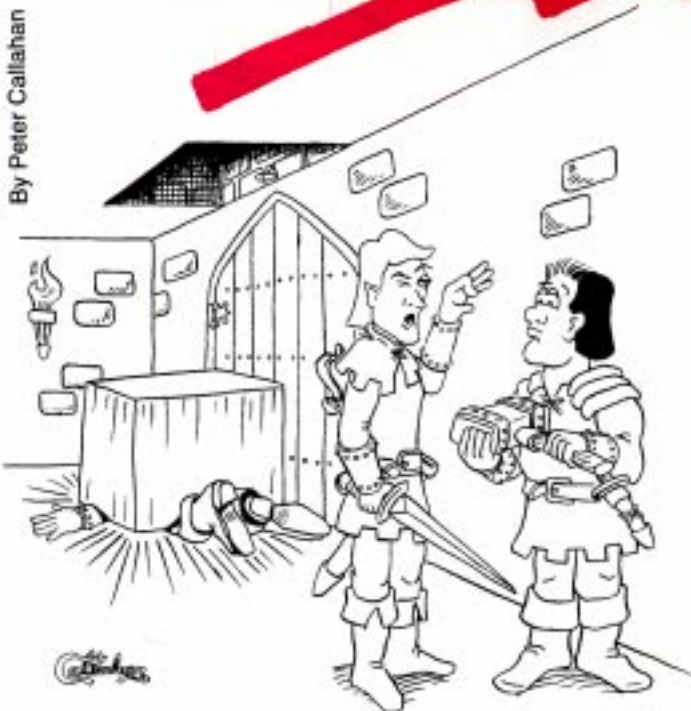
"Archers? No, sir! Not for miles!"

YAMARA

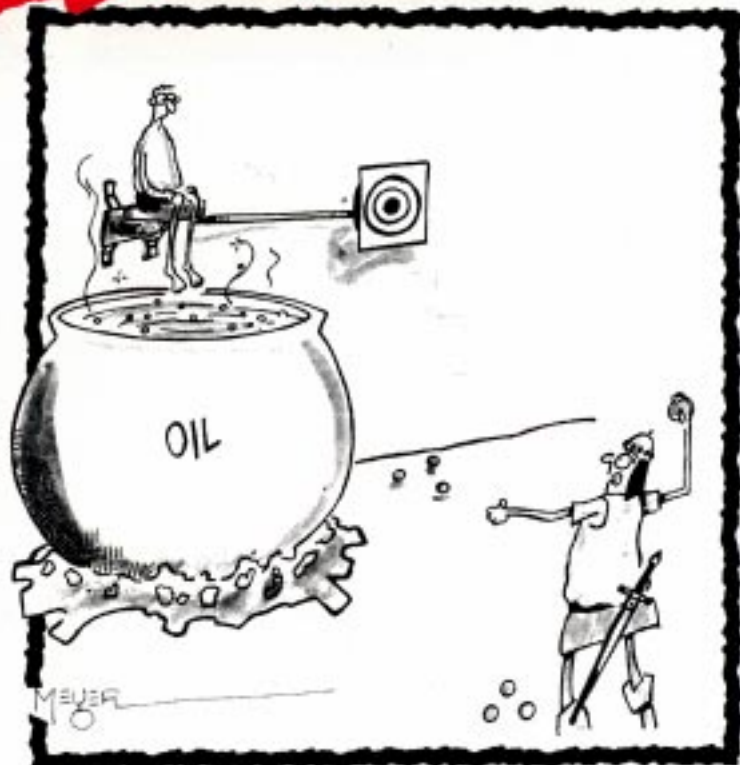


By Barbara Manui & Chris Adams

By Peter Callahan



"Missed his trap detection roll by this much!"



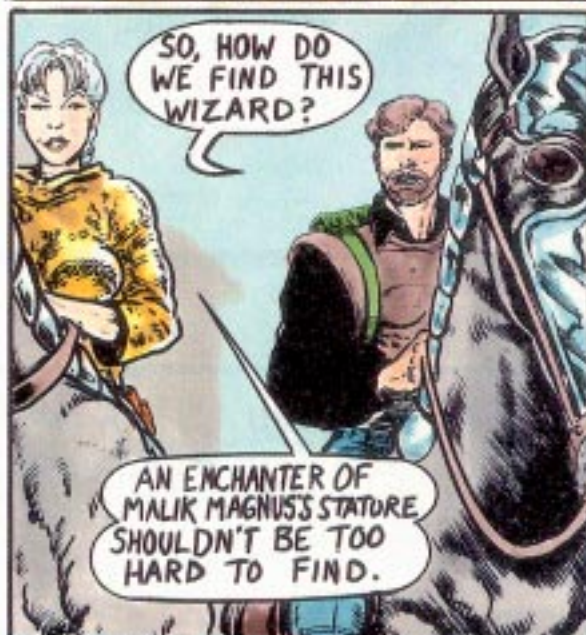
By Dwain Meyer

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"...QUICK! WHICH ONE OF YOU HAS THE MOST HIT POINTS LEFT?"

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WESTERN FRONTIER...

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SHE WANTS?

WHAT'S
THE CATCH?

NO CATCH,
LORD REDHAND.

MY MISTRESS HAS MERELY
REALIZED THAT
FIGHTING YOUR ARMY
IS A WASTE OF TIME
AND RESOURCES.

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Stephen P.
Sullivan

ART
John M. Hebert

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FAR BETTER THAT WE
SHOULD ALLY AND SWEEP
LIKE WILDFIRE OVER THE
FREE PLAINS TO THE EAST!

HMM.
I'LL NEED TIME
TO THINK
IT OVER.

YOU HAVE
ONE HOUR. I SHALL
WAIT OUTSIDE FOR
YOUR REPLY.

I DON'T LIKE IT,
MY LORD. HE OFFERS
MUCH FOR VERY LITTLE
IN RETURN.

YES. THESE TRINKETS HE WANTS
AS AN ASSURANCE OF GOOD FAITH
MUST CONTAIN POWERFUL MAGIC.

STILL... I'D BE
A FOOL NOT TO ACCEPT
HIS OFFER.

OUR FORCES
ARE ON THE
BRINK OF
BEING
DECIMATED...

AN ALLIANCE
COULD HAVE...
POSSIBILITIES.

FETCH THE ITEMS HE
DESIRES AND TELL THE FAERIE
GENERAL I'LL SEE HIM.

I'VE
MADE MY
DECISION.

ROBINSON'S WAR

PART 20



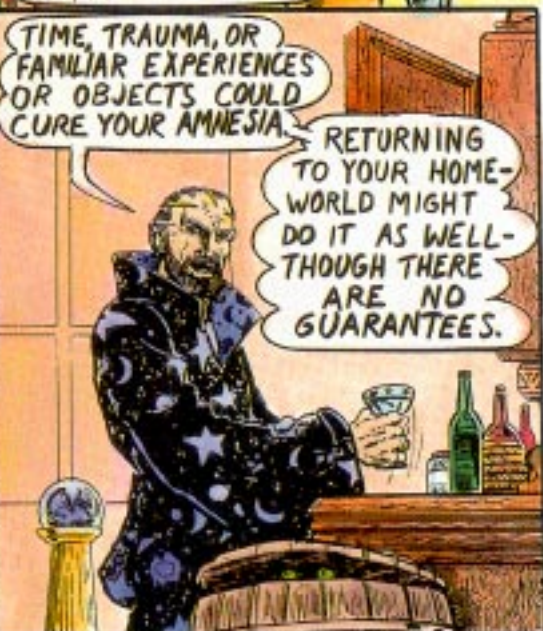
HMMM...
YES, AS I
THOUGHT.

IT'S GOOD
THAT YOU CAME
TO ME.

FEW
OTHERS COULD
DIAGNOSE YOUR
PECULIAR
PROBLEM.

YOUR MEMORY LOSS
IS THE RESULT
OF UNCONTROLLED
DIMENSIONAL
TRANSMIGRATION.

YOU ARE
NOT OF
THIS WORLD





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Earth is brimming with what ancient man called "magic" energy. Ley lines criss-cross the planet. Where they intersect, the energy is at its peak and trans-dimensional *rifts* tear open the fabric of space and time, releasing unspeakable horrors.

Highlights Include:

- Nearly 30 exciting and unique Occupational Character Classes including the Cyber-Knight, Borgs, Glitter Boys, Psi-Stalkers, Dog Pack (mutant humanoid dogs), Crazies and many others.
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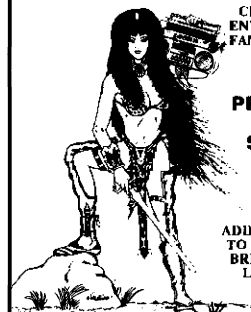
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Note: Silent Death Unleaded includes all the material from the Silent Death Deluxe Edition, except for the metal miniatures and bases.

Through the LOOKING Glass

©1991 by Robert Bigelow

Photography by Mike Bethke



Clockwise from upper left: USMC M60 main battle tank (inservice); USMC LAV APC, USMC LAV recovery, USMC LAV command (C-in-C); USA/USMC HMMWV (inservice); LAV 25 mortar carrier, USA/USMC HMMWV (Scotia)

"Deck the halls with scads of figures...."

With winter nearly here, some of you may already have an area in your house prepared for the wintertime occupation of painting miniatures. If you have not prepared, the first part of this month is probably the last chance you'll have to get ready; see this column in DRAGON® issue #173 for helpful hints. Remember that you must keep the painting area extra clean. Dust and debris particles can ruin a paint job, and you must clean the area a couple of times a day, especially if you have a pet.

Welcome to the first of the annual holiday-shopping season issues. This year, we'll cover a variety of different presents, peace offerings, and playthings, as well as ways to make some of these gifts multi-seasonal and accessible to more gamers. I also want to make a comment on behalf of many of the retailers who serve you. This year, you should probably pay attention to the little voice inside you that tells you to buy a special item when you see it. As I write this in September, many gaming items have gone out of print, out of pro-

duction, or out of stock. If this trend continues, the availability of some gaming items will be restricted to what's on hand on the retailer's shelves. I hope this trend will turn around, but it is better to give warning and look foolish than to say nothing and not serve my readers.

This month, we also highlight the Marines and light forces who took part in Operation: Desert Shield. A year ago, we worried as to whether they could hold an Iraqi assault until Coalition forces arrived and deployed. A mainstay of these light forces was the U.S. Marine M-60 A3 tank, a model that has its roots over 30 years ago. These M-60s have reactive armor

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

designed to defeat modern ATGMs (antitank guided missiles), but they are susceptible to new tank shells. The new LAW (light anti-tank weapon) rockets brought to the Gulf region would be used in an environment that they were never designed for, and many varieties of HMMWVs roamed the desert as if they were part of the old *Rat Patrol* TV series (note that some sources call these vehicles HMMVs). Heavy equipment from all over the world arrived with increasing rapidity as its long journey by sea ended. Unfortunately, very few armored vehicles are economically air portable and could arrive in the Gulf theater rapidly. The light Sheridan shown in this month's photos could be deployed early, but its armor is poor and, in spite of its large gun, its survivability would be doubtful in a pitched battle. But the line held, thanks to the troops from all the countries, and it gave the "heavies" time to deploy.

Final note: It was recently brought to my attention that someone is masquerading at many Renaissance Fairs as Black Dragon Pewter, or simply as Dragon Pewter. One upset customer asked me why the piece she got was of such poor quality, compared with my review of the same item. The pictures that she sent were of a piece that obviously had Gallo Pewter parents, but the manufacturer was given as "Dragon Pewter." Most of the Black Dragon material is cast and worked by the crew of Gallo Pewter. If a piece that I have reviewed in DRAGON Magazine shows up with a name other than Gallo, please write down as much information as you can about the vendor, date, time, place, price, etc. This information should then be sent to: Raven, c/o Black Dragon Miniatures, 2700 Range Road, North Bellmore NY 11710, U.S.A., so he can track this down. Always ask questions if you're not sure about a piece's authenticity.

Now, on with the reviews.

Reviews

Houston's Ships

P.O. Box 14522
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C+G-19 GB H.M.S. Intrepid ****

Running a large colonial empire in the late 1890s was not an easy task. Unhappy subjects, uprisings, and corruption frequently forced the mother country to use armed intervention to subdue the parties involved. Groups of fast, heavily armed cruisers were built to show the flag or dispatch Marines or troops as needed.

In GDW's SPACE: 1889* game, this concept extends to Earth's planetary colonies, aerial gunships, and the aerial cruiser, of which the H.M.S. *Intrepid* is a prime example. This casting is a 1200th-scale representation of the gunboat shown in a side view in the IRONCLADS AND ETHER FLYERS* game rules, on page 62. This model craft measures 63 mm from its bow

to the tip of its stern propeller. The main body is 15 mm wide and contains the guns, cabins, and propulsion, with side extensions near the bow to hold the forward guns. The tail section is 30 mm wide and forms a horizontal "I" shape. Deck plates are visible but are not of uniform size. Large gun turrets are on the upper bow and upper rear of the cabin. Propulsion is provided by the three propellers on the stern. Two funnels arise from the cabin roof. Bottom details include a bomb rack and tether-mine storage spaces, as well as lift areas. Rear control surfaces include ribbing and scored rudders of fabric or wood. The cabin is capped by a simple mast.

The model does have some shortcomings when you compare it to the picture in the game rules. Side turrets at the deck level have no barrels, but barrels could be added easily. Small-caliber deck guns mounted on the cabin roof are missing. Some lines on the casting should be scored more deeply. Some small areas didn't fill on two of the three propellers, and all propellers should be trimmed.

This is a good addition to the ships that came with the combat board game. With a little work, it could be a smart-looking model. It's a good buy at \$3.00 each.

Black Dragon Pewter

2700 Range Road
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In the Doghouse

*** ½

All of us have gotten into trouble at one time or another and received some form of punishment for it. While we jokingly refer to this as "being in the doghouse," some have this penalty more literally than others. For instance, what do you do with an obnoxious young dragon? This miniature snows one cure.

This miniature is a free-scale pewter piece that's 59 mm long, 40 mm wide at the wing tips, and 29 mm tall. The figure is of a small dragon banished to a doghouse. Unfortunately, Fido's house is too small; the dragon's small wings have torn openings in either side of the house, while the house's rear is broken open by his spiked spine. The little fellow rests with his head on his paws, jeweled eyes, a collar, and an innocent look.

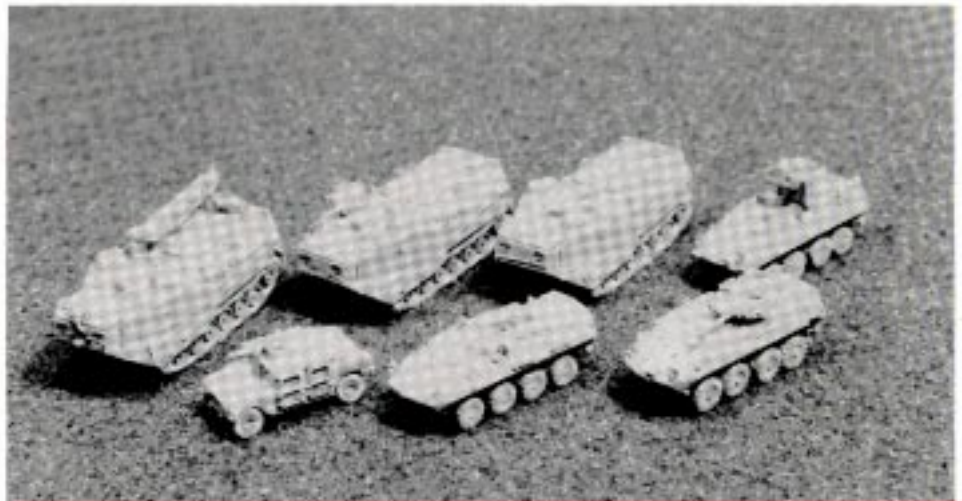
This is an ideal Christmas gift for a great many people. Scale detail is good except for the curve of the tail, and the miniature is well worth its \$30.00 price tag.

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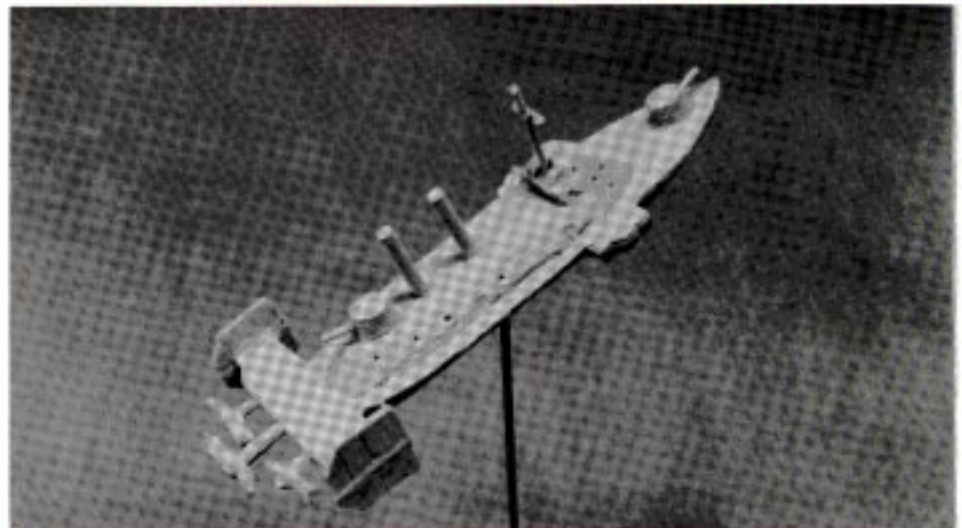
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Clockwise from left: LVPT-7 engineer, LVPT-7 APC, LVPT-7 command (GHQ); LAV improved TOW (C-in-C); LAV APC (GHQ); LAV self-propelled mortar (C-in-C); HMMWV (GHQ)



Clockwise from upper left: 5-ton cargo truck (GHQ); 2 1/2-ton command and work vehicle (C-in-C); Sheridan light tank, improved (GHQ); HMMWV high cargo, HMMWV 4-man Stinger air-defense vehicle, HMMWV with Mk 19, HMMWV with 60-cal. MG, and HMMWV with 50-cal. MG (C-in-C)



H.M.S. Intrepid (Houston's Ships)

1010 Hero and Antihero

Thunderbolt's line of 54-mm display and diorama sets continue to expand with the entry of another two-figure "action" set. Both figures are molded in lead and come

unassembled. The set contains a detailed base that measures 59 mm X 35 mm X 5 mm tall. The base shows an intricate mosaic floor made of various stones and blocks, looking roughly like a spider with a



In the Doghouse (Black Dragon Pewter)



Hero and Antihero
(Thunderbolt Mountain)

beaded web On the floor is an open scroll with writing visible.

The antihero is a figure with the build of Conan and little armor. His legs have armored sandals, shin guards, and knee pads. He also wears a loincloth and a large girdle that contains small, simple plates, the largest of which is in front and contains the visage of a leering face. His chest and back are both bare. Bracers adorn his wrists. The antihero's long hair flows from beneath a spiked helmet that covers most of his face. His hands clasp a two-handed sword with teeth. The antihero stands

with his right leg flexed, coming in for a major blow. The figure comes in two pieces: the arms and sword, and the rest of the body.

The two-piece hero comes in the same division of parts, but he is much better protected. Armored boots come to below his knees, and his bare legs rise to a kilt similar to those worn by Roman troops. His dagger is attached to a belt that also serves as an anchor for his strip armor. His upper torso is covered in scale mail, with a neck plate and metal shoulder pads inscribed with glowing swords. His arms are bare to his bracers, and his hands grip a simple broad sword. His face and head are partially covered by a helm graced with small dragon wings and a woven symbol across the front.

Muscle detail is excellent on both models, and ropy veins can actually be seen on the figures' hands. I recommend you paint much of the chest and girdle detail on the antihero and the side and chest detail on the hero before you assemble the figures, as the arms block access to these areas when assembled. Check the fit before you assemble the pieces. Do not drop this figure, as I did. It is a soft metal casting, and the arms broke while I was straightening them out. Any loss of the miniature's detail in the picture is my fault, not the company's.

With a little imagination and good painting, this set could be a conversation piece. This set is well worth its \$18.50 price.

Stan Johansen Miniatures

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T-2055 Merc Sniper Team ****

One of the first role-playing games that I played outside the fantasy genre was the old MERC* game by FGU. The game system had some glaring holes, but it allowed

you to perform modern-era combat missions. Now, there are a variety of modern-combat games by TSR, GDW, and others, with new figures to allow you to extend your role-playing to miniatures. These figures are done in such a way that they are very compatible with vehicles and figures available in 1/72nd and 1/76th scales (about 25-mm scale).

This sniper set is just such a group. Made of lead and scaled to 20-mm size, the set represents a quick-penetration team designed to eliminate opposition leaders. The force consists of five figures.

First, we have two snipers, both with .50-caliber sniper rifles and scopes. The rifles are separate from the men and are very well done. One prone figure is preparing to fire, his arms and hands in perfect positions to accept the rifle (although you may have to trim the rifle butt slightly). Facial detail is not as good as it could be. He has a beret, a pistol in a holster, and an ammo pouch on his left rear. His boots are just short of knee high, with the pants' bottoms falling slightly above them. The running figure wears the same jacket and pants as the prone figure; he crouches as he runs, and the rifle comes over his shoulder. I intend to cut his hands apart and separate them so he can carry his rifle at a ready position.

A spotter holds a set of long-range binoculars to his eyes. This miniature has a web belt, extra ammo and grenades, a pistol, and an AK slung over his back. No knapsack is visible. There was some flash in the inside of his elbows.

A man carrying a grenade launcher is next. His uniform matches the others, and he has an extra knife, canteen, and grenade attached to his back belt. His face is well done, almost showing an expression of disinterest in what he is doing. What will make this figure popular is the rotary 40-mm grenade launcher that he carries like a rifle.

The ammo carrier could double as the team medic. A pistol, a canteen, and grenades are strapped to his belt. His left hand clutches a slightly deformed box that probably contains spare 40-mm rounds. His right hand holds an AK in the firing position. The large pack on his chest is usually where medical supplies are stashed.

This is an excellent set. With the figures available, players could accomplish a number of missions in most games. These are worth their \$3.00 price. (They do look small next to 25-mm figures, however.)

Gallia USA

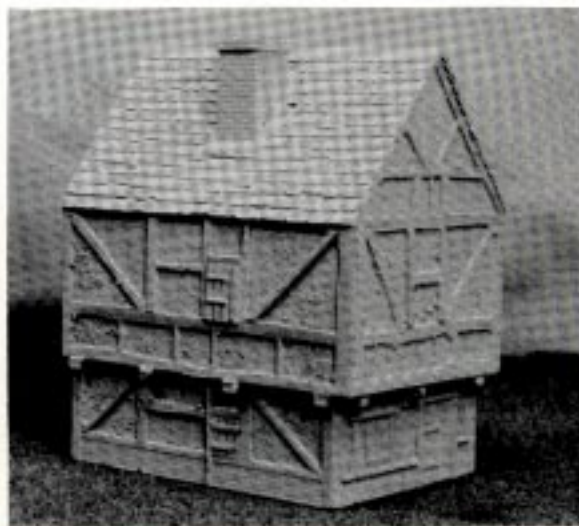
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15327 Timber Framed House * * * * 1/2

One of the most overlooked parts of miniatures gaming involves scenery. Often there is little to help a player's imagination in a scenario other than a traced room on a vinyl map. The solution is to purchase



Merc Sniper Team (Stan Johansen)



Timber Framed House (Gallia USA)

buildings to fill out neighborhoods and set moods.

This house is a two-part model that joins to form a two-story building. The building is scaled to 15-mm size and is made of a heavy epoxy that retains a lot of detail. The top of the house overhangs the lower section and is 70 mm long X 50 mm wide. Its construction is of rough stucco surrounded by bracing timbers, roofed with

either slates or tile shingles. The shutters have bolt heads on strap hinges, detailed with slightly roughened edges. Even the wood has decent grain detail.

The first story contains the timber supports for the second floor and some interesting contrasts. The lowest 3' of the house is made of bricks that match those on the chimney. The lower windows have detailed shutters, and the front door

seems to be studded metal over a wooden door with a showplace window.

I strongly recommend that you assemble this piece in an open area. My Jet superglue reacted with the epoxy and created an offensive odor that could be harmful. The model is slightly expensive at \$12, but it can add much to a campaign.

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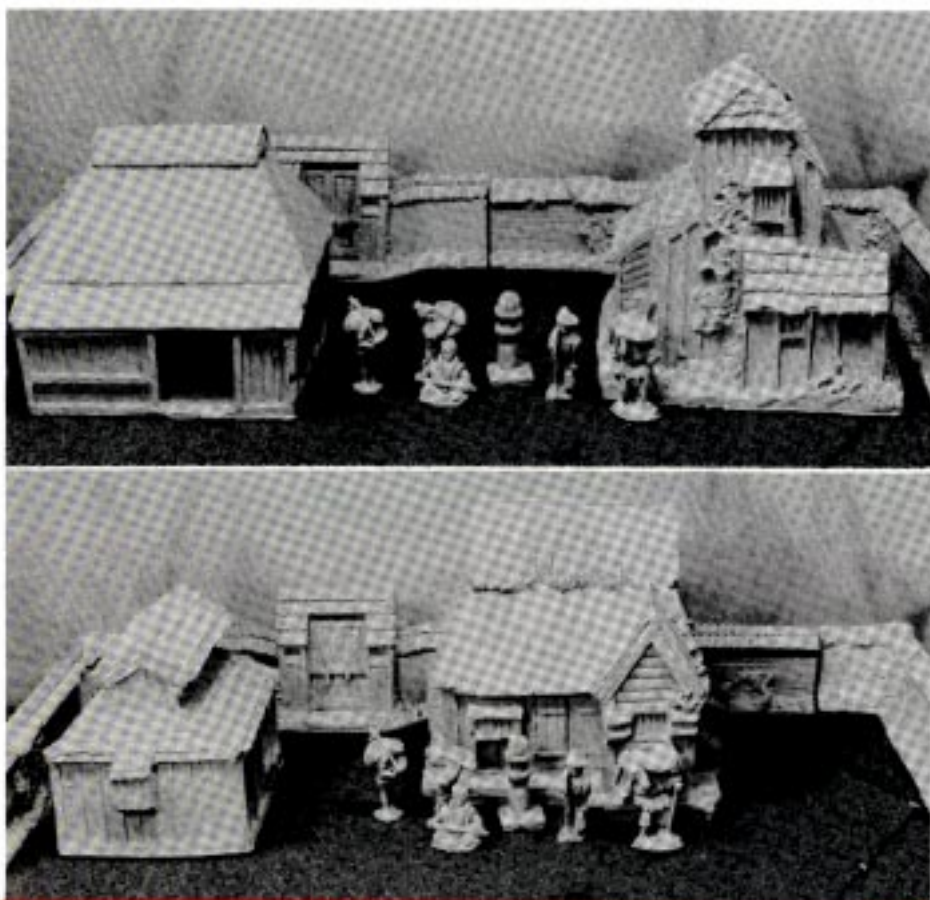


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Japanese village components (Hovels)

use smaller-than-proper-scale buildings in their games to conserve space while promoting the feel of the environment.

15421 Twin Barn

*** ½

If you have ever had trouble with a spouse or parent who disagreed with your buying of war-game supplies, one possible solution is to get that person involved in your gaming. This can be accomplished by encouraging the person to help you paint your figures or to plan dioramas to hold your troops when you aren't using them. Another way is to purchase some model buildings that can be used around the house during different holiday seasons, like Christmas. This particular piece lends itself well to these uses.

This piece is supposedly scaled for 15 mm, although it would work better for 5-10 mm as the barns are 15 mm or less across at the lower part of the roofs. The base is a rough oval of epoxy, 260 mm X 140 mm, that rises to a small hill in the middle of the oval. The two barns occupy opposite sides of the oval and are surrounded with rubble; they are connected by a line of shrubs or hedges that might also be used as field markers. A well surrounded by rocks sits in the open space behind the smaller barn. The trees are bulky conifers that need to be drybrushed to bring out their texture. A haystack by the front of one barn finishes the picture.

The disrepair of the barns and cover afforded by the shrubs make this a natural battleground. The architecture is American Midwest, but this could be used for other areas. This is available at \$16 each.

Hovels

c/o Stone Mountain Miniatures
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HOV-200 Complete Japanese Village

**** ½

One hardship gamers face when using miniatures for a medieval or fantasy Oriental setting occurs when they attempt to play out village assaults or town sieges. Role-players using more traditional settings have many sources of stand-up buildings, but few Oriental buildings have been available. Now, I'm happy to present a miniatures set that begins to rectify this problem.

The Japanese village here is a 25-piece set that contains the materials to make a 25-mm village. The material is a light-weight polyester foam that allows a great deal of detail to be captured. Seven straight wall sections, a gate section, and four corner sections make up the "plaster" village wall, which seems to be topped with ceramic tile; straight sections are 120 mm long X 34 mm tall. With the corners, the wall forms a barrier 330 mm long,

with vegetation molded on. The gate is a wood-reinforced, split-mold door with a detailed frame set back from the wall proper; a bar secures the gate from the inside. The wall sections vary somewhat in height and are not quite true on the ends, but neither of these problems is uncommon as cast buildings frequently swell or shrink a bit during pouring. Be careful when touching overhanging parts, as some of it is slightly fragile.

Four buildings are included with the kit. The first is a samurai's house (HOV 150). This is a two-level, wood-supported stucco dwelling with blinds in the windows, decorated sills, a wood pile, and vegetation growing on the walls. The doorway has an open screen and a molded heavy curtain covering the door. The base measures 96 mm X 94 mm and includes an open dirt area and a boardwalk. The house's design is staggered, as if additions were made to it after it was built, and it is 96 mm tall at the peak of its tiled roof.

Next is a country inn whose base is 95 mm X 104 mm at the front door. The roof is of straw and woven fiber, and rises at a slight grade before rising more sharply to a point that extends to the rear of the building. Crates and provision sacks sit to the right of the front door, on a boardwalk that extends around the building. A wood-pile and planter accent the detail. Curtains and frames are visible on the windows,

HOV 152 is a candlemaker's shop. The shop is 85 mm X 99 mm, with a boardwalk and candle stand in the front. The entry way is a double sliding door that is molded closed. Layered straw topped by a rounded bundle of banded straw forms the roof. The walls are board with stucco caulking. No windows are shown. There is some pitting in the epoxy.

HOV 153 is an old Japanese house, a small one compared to the other buildings in this set. The building is 80 mm X 60 mm X 70 mm high. There are no boardwalks, and a small extension on the house is probably a vat. Most windows are at the rear of the house, with the first-floor window having well-done blinds. The front door is a simple cross-weave sliding screen. The roof seems to be tile; the house has probably been here a while and holds a prosperous family.

This set also contains a number of lead figures. A peasant carries a rucksack and fish on a stick; he wears a cotton shirt open at the chest. A farmer with bare legs and chest carries a bag of produce, and a peasant with a large straw hat carries a large crate. Also present are a samurai sitting at rest with his sword out, a woman who might be a geisha, and a boy with a kite. The figures are not very detailed, but with a little work, time, and painting, they turn out well.

Each component of the village is available separately, so you can add as many new sections as you need to build a large town or city. This set is an excellent value at \$55.00.

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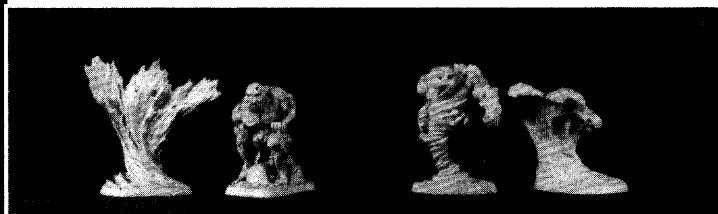
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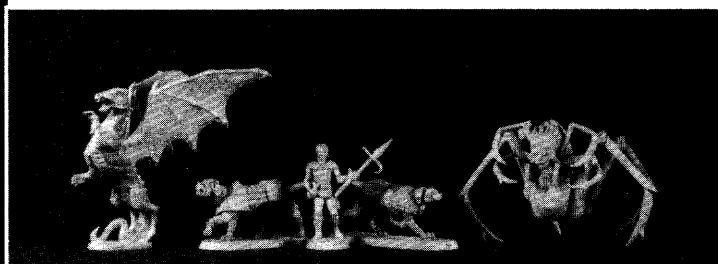
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Vasmillion the Vile (RAFM Company)

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2009 Vasmillion the Vile

The miniature kit submitted for review is of an evil dragon scaled in 25 mm. Twelve separate lead castings must be assembled to form the dragon; easy-to-follow instructions with illustrations are included in the kit. When completed, this dragon is almost 300 mm from the tip of his spiked tail to his nose, with a wing length of about 170 mm from wing tip to shoulder joint. With wings out, this model stands about 165 mm high.

The main piece is the central body. This body has pointed spines rising from a back

covered with pebbly and smooth scales; heavy plates cover the ventral side. There is some heavy flash on a couple of spines, but this comes off with care. The front legs have stretched muscle and skin that is well done and looks like the dragon is at ease, but there are gaps where the legs and body are joined, so filling is needed. You may wish to bend the feet slightly to make the figure stand correctly. The separately molded rear legs fit well with little filling. Flash was present on the toes as well as between them, but again was easy to remove. The one-piece tail is slightly notched. It fit into the tail hole in the body, but the tail peg needed to be shortened slightly. The slight gaps appearing at the tail joint were easily filled with putty. The neck fit well to the body but had a small mold line that needed to be carefully removed to avoid damage. The head can be attached with mouth open or closed, and it fit well.

The wings are two-piece castings that will require work. The notch in the first piece is too wide to provide a snug fit on both sides, and so should be pinned and glued before filling. The upper wings are not mirror images, so look closely at wing edges that will indicate by their curves where they go.

This is not a kit for beginners, and it is an excellent example why manufacturers should mark their kits for difficulty. When time is taken and careful work done, this can very well be a five-star dragon. The finished product is excellent after filling. To be fair, some of the filler in the picture was put on to fix a wing root that cracked during photography, a flaw I hurried to fix. If you're willing to do the work, the price of \$19.95 is well within reason.

Grenadier Models, Inc.

P.O. Box 305
Springfield PA 19064

Grenadier Models UK Ltd.

19 Babbage Road
Deeside, Clwyd, Wales
UNITED KINGDOM CH5 2QB

Gren 1322—Vampire and Two Ghouls ****


Vampires and ghouls are a constant threat in many of the new horror games. While these are marketed for FASA's SHADOWRUN* game, they could be used for any number of RPGs. The vampire in this set is dressed in a three-piece suit. The button detail on the waistcoat is clearly visible, as are the petals on the flower in his buttonhole. His left hand clutches a telephone that could easily be made into a book. His right hand is up with fist clenched. His trousers are done with appropriate detail, except for a small mold fault on the back of his left leg. Tie, shirt, and collar points are good. His hairline comes with the traditional widow's peak, and his hair is slicked back; his face is that of a middle-aged man. Even his fangs are well done and visible.

The ghouls are molded in various stages of dress and decay. One ghoul has visibly rotting flesh and clothes (no pants), a mostly denuded skull, and visible muscles in decay on the right arm. Strangely enough, the legs are in fairly good shape; he is only knock kneed. Thin strands of hair appear on his skull.

The second ghoul has no hair, but his face is less rotted. He is dressed completely in rotted clothes that have little shape but lots of detail. He is armed with a femur bone in his left hand.

Julie Guthrie produced these characters in 25-mm scale. All have oval bases with dimensions of about 17 mm X 10 mm and are made of lead.

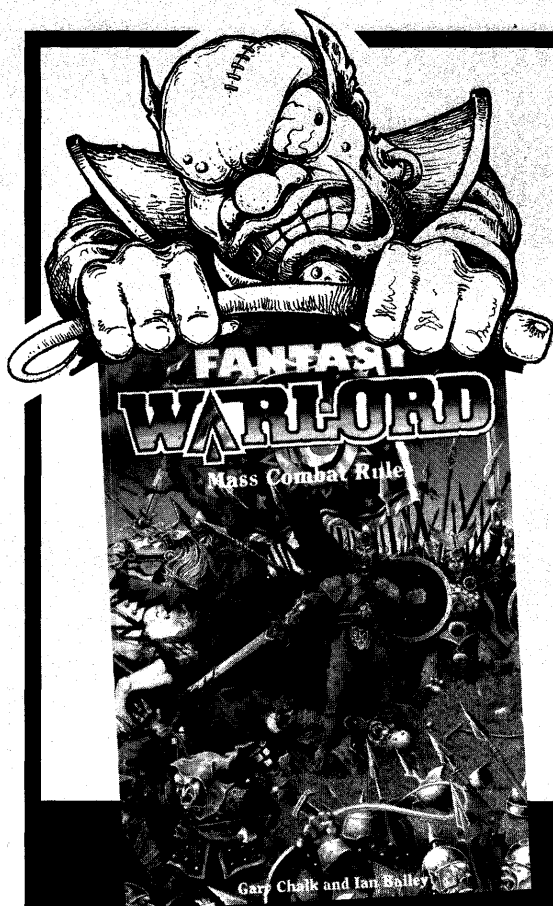
If you need undead, these are good, and they're \$3.95 per package.

That ends this month's list of tidbits. Part two of the Christmas list appears next month. Stay warm and paint lively. If you want to talk with me for any reason, my shop phone number is: (708) 336-0790. I do want to hear your comments. 

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Vampire and Two Ghouls (Grenadier)



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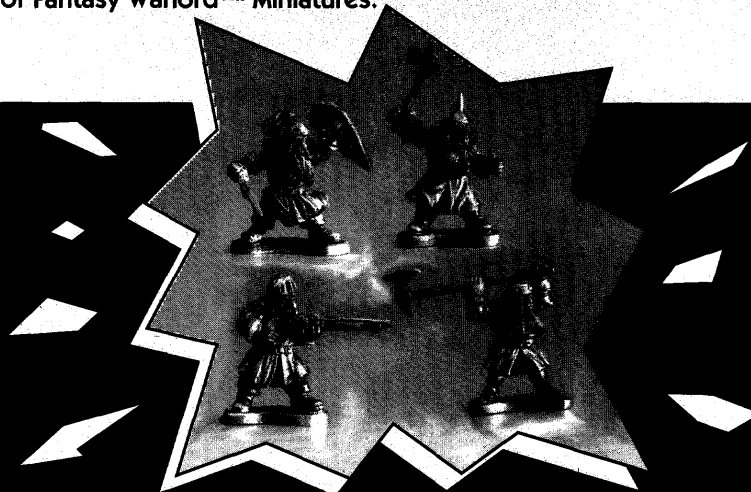
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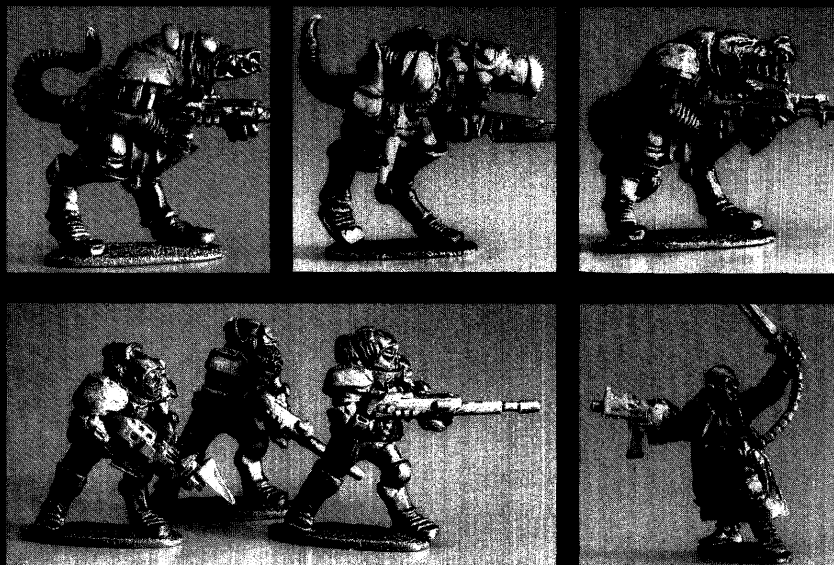
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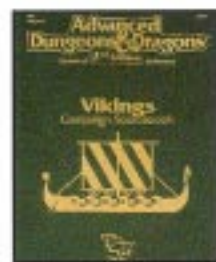


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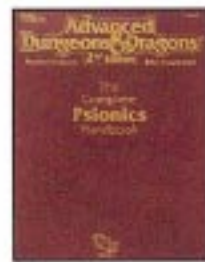
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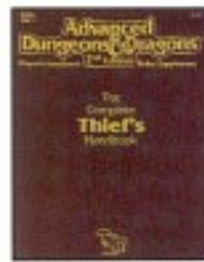
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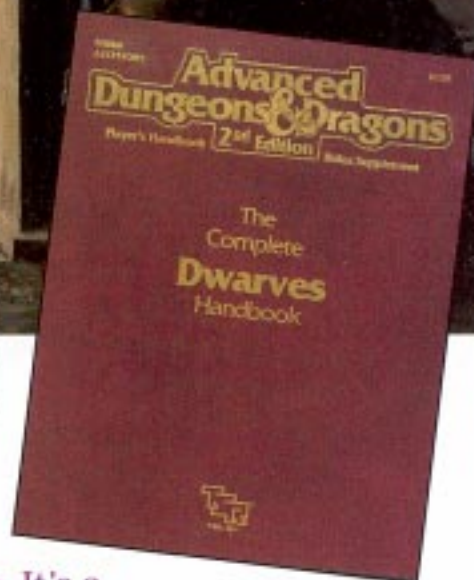
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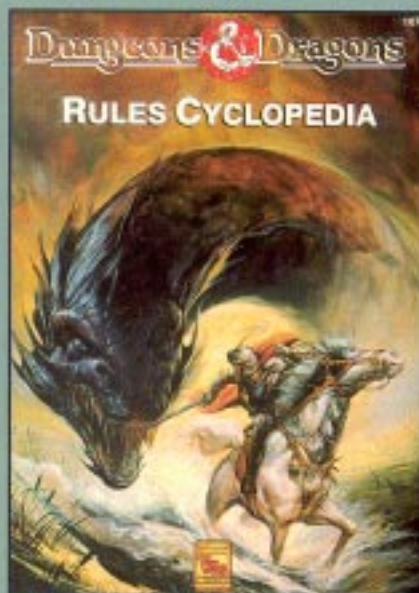


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