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COVER

Larry Elmore's cover painting is actually the second in a series of works that began with the cover painting of issue #163. That issue was for autumn; this one, of course, is for winter. The lady's advice to adventurers? "Don't bother me."

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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.

Fritz Leiber—we remember him well

Dear Dragon,

With sadness, I noted the passing of Fritz Leiber [on September 5, 1992]. Fritz Leiber's fantasy adventure characters, Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser, brought entertainment to readers and inspiration to gamers everywhere. I ask that some small tribute appear to him in the pages of DRAGON Magazine.

Perhaps a fitting tribute would be to examine the gaming products and DRAGON articles based on Leiber's work. With a little research, I found several: TSR's boxed LANKHMAR™ game, the articles on that game by Dr. MacKnight in early DRAGON Magazine issues, the NPC descriptions of Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser in DRAGON issue #27, Leiber's entry in Appendix N ("inspirational reading") in the 1st Edition *Dungeon Masters Guide*, the Nehwon mythos in the old *Deities & Demigods* and *Legends & Lore*, and the AD&D® game products based on Leiber's works. I hope you are able to use my suggestion.

Rex V. Settle
Okemos MI

We at TSR were also sad to hear of the death of Fritz R. Leiber, Jr, at age 81. He was a masterful writer of science fiction, horror, and fantasy who won over 30 awards, including four Nebulas and seven Hugos. Fritz Leiber created the popular term "sword and sorcery" in the 1960s to describe the swordsmen vs. wizards brand of fantasy tales. His impact on modern fiction was very great, and the ripples of his work have been felt across every medium, from role-playing games to television (the TV show Bewitched was loosely based upon his 1943 novel Conjure Wife, which Locus magazine states was "the cornerstone of the modern horror novel").

Fritz Leiber was a great guy, and he will be deeply missed. Without him, we probably wouldn't be here, either.

Spies' demise

Dear Dragon,

I love your magazine, and I am an avid TOP SECRET/S.I.™ game player and administrator. Do you know if TSR, Inc. plans on releasing any-

thing new for the TOP SECRET/S.I. game? If so, could you give me a preview? Also, how about a few more articles on this game? It is an excellent espionage game!

Todd Derby
Preston MN

Although espionage role-playing games have their atom-hearted fans, the results of the survey we ran in the April issue of DRAGON Magazine (#180) indicated that few readers want to see material on these games in our pages. In fact, they were the least-liked of all role-playing games. TSR has discontinued support for the TOP SECRET/S.I. game, and no further articles on that game are planned in this magazine. We might someday see an espionage-game article that we love too much to turn away; we've had some outstanding articles on this genre in the past. Still, we won't have anything in the works until reader support for these games returns

Old fogeys with dice

Dear Dragon,

By making the highest age group in your surveys "23 +" [in "Pen Power II," in issue #182], you make us thirty-somethings and forty-somethings feel unwelcome.

I know there are a lot of older players out there; you see us at conventions and in gaming stores everywhere, and since about every third player you meet says he or she started playing in the 1970s with TSR's CHAINMAIL supplement, a little math will prove we couldn't all be too old. I think if you really surveyed for age (instead of limiting your interest to 23 and under), you'd find you have a much broader audience than you're assuming.

We old fogeys fully intend to take our dice and *Monster Manuals* to the nursing home with us, and be slaying dragons when we're 90.

23 +, forsooth!

Rebekah McClure
Salt Lake City UT

I, your editor, am 37 myself, so I am probably every bit as much of an old fogey as you are (if not more so). If you knew the ages of some of the other editors, writers, and designers here at TSR, you'd probably be shocked (we ain't all kids). However, the questionnaire was being used for a special marketing survey on designing games for young people; it was in no way designed to show disrespect for those with more life experience. We aim to get gamers into the hobby when they're young as well as when they're older; the marketing department needs the information to make it work.

As a side note, the idea of an Old Gamers' Home has been tossed around at TSR for years. We're still deciding how to set it up; we'll probably just move our belongings into the TSR building and turn it into a commune or something. We'll let you know.

Thendar hunt

Dear Dragon,

I have been playing DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® games for about 13 years now, and in all that time I have never experienced a situation like this before: total and complete memory loss.

My problem is this: I remember (vaguely) a race of beings called the Thendar. At one point in time, I knew enough about them to create a nonplayer character who was a Thendar. Now, I can't even find where the heck I got all this information on them. I know that it was not a race I created. I've spent tireless hours searching through every book and old module I have ever owned, but have come up empty.

I would greatly appreciate it if you could assist my search for this well-hidden race, and send me a note telling where I can find it. Thank you very much.

Brian Wilson
Evanston IL

You've stumped the Game Lizards. After racking our brains, we've not been able to come up with anything like a Thendar, though we did find a Thundar (it's the name of a D&D game sea dragon—see DRAGON issue #171, page 11). We also found the Traldar, who are human tribesmen found on the D&D game's Known World (see AC9 Creature Catalogue, page 41). If anyone else has an idea, we'll let you know! ☐



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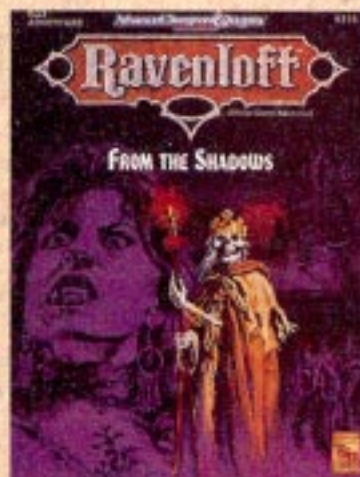
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EDITORIAL

Make my life easier

Even as I write this, the staff of DRAGON® Magazine is revising and reformatting our submission guidelines. They are being re-organized to include all our current guidelines—for articles, fiction, artwork, and cartoons—plus a standard disclosure form. This will speed the process of getting our guidelines out to prospective authors (and will make my life easier). The revised guidelines will be available after the first of the year.

There will not be any major changes made to the content of the guidelines, so aspiring authors need not request the new version if you already have a copy of our old guidelines. The only changes of note are: a) We now request that an author send us a query letter for every article he or she intends to submit *before* submitting the piece. If we're not interested, we can tell you so when you query us. This will save time both for the author and for us (and will make my life easier); b) After we accept an article, we will ask the author if the piece is available on computer disk. The types of disks we can now accept are 5¼" and 3½" IBM or IBM-compatible disks, and 3½" Macintosh disks,

If you don't have our guidelines, send a business-sized, self-addressed, stamped envelope (SASE) to: Writer's Guidelines, DRAGON Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Get your hands on a copy of our guidelines *before* you send us anything. If you don't, you're only wasting your postage and time.

Our guidelines answer most of the basic questions and concerns of aspiring writers, but apparently some things need to be restated. I know this because I'm the person who first sees the articles submitted to DRAGON Magazine. I'm the person who has to deal with the authors who *don't* follow our guidelines. The following suggestions should clear up the confusion on certain points and will provide hints and tips that aren't in our guidelines. Following these suggestions and tips will improve your article's chances for acceptance (and will make my life easier),

Included in our guidelines package is a TSR Standard Disclosure Form, A completed, signed copy of this form *must* accompany each article you submit. Prospective authors may make as many copies of this form as necessary. If you submit an article without one of these forms, your piece will be returned to you unread—provided you included an SASE large

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SASEs are very important. Without one, I cannot respond to you regarding your submission. A good rule to remember is to include an SASE no smaller than the envelope in which you mailed your submission to us. That will ensure I can return your entire submission to you if I need to (this will make my life easier). Those of you interested in saving postage who state you don't want your article back if it's not accepted should remember that we occasionally ask for a revision of an article. When that happens, notes for the author are written in the margins of the piece. How can I return your article for revision if you include an SASE that's too small for your article?

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Don't ask us to assign an article topic to you. The collective brain power of you, our prospective authors, far exceeds that of the magazine's staff (especially on Mondays).

Now that I've talked about how to submit articles, it's time to talk about *what* and *what not* to submit. It's easier to talk about what not to do, so I'll start there. The following is a list of topics we are not interested in seeing now. Why we aren't interested varies with the topic, and there's no room here to discuss them all. Just take my word for it. We are not interested in publishing computer programs, generic NPCs; "new" monk or paladin

variants; hit-location or critical-hit systems or charts; articles aimed specifically at the AD&D® original edition game; single magical items, spells, or monsters; magical items that duplicate spells or vice versa; articles on the theory of magic or other fantasy elements; or adventure modules (these should go to our sister publication, DUNGEON® Adventures, after you get *that* magazine's guidelines). Also, do not send us school research papers that have no direct gaming applications, and don't send us anything that is currently being considered by any other publisher. Avoiding these topics will save you time and money (and will make my life easier).

Now, what do we want to see? We want to see: query letters before you send us your articles; articles that accentuate or heighten the role-playing aspects of gaming, rather than the roll-playing (dice-oriented) aspects; articles on whole gaming genres (SF, fantasy, horror, etc.); articles on non-TSR games (see my editorial in issue #166 for possibilities); new character kits for the AD&D 2nd Edition game (like campaign-specific kits for the RAVENLOFT® setting, etc.); more "Ecology" articles; articles on new interrelated magical items, spells, and monsters in *Monstrous Compendium* format; articles on how to be a better Dungeon Master or player; articles on how to set up campaigns or adventures; and articles on all the ideas and topics that aren't covered in the "don't do" list above. Also, read the editorial in issue #184 pertaining to our survey's results. There you'll learn what the readers of this magazine want.

Another way you can improve the chances of your article being accepted is to browse our back issues. There's no better way to learn what articles we accept than by studying the articles we've accepted. Find as many back issues as you can and study them to see what kinds of articles we publish, then ask yourself if your article is of one of those types,

Always take some time away from your writing before sending in a submission. Finish your article, then set it aside for two or three days. Then, go back and read it; mistakes will leap off the page. Also have someone else proofread your writing. Two or three sets of eyes can catch many mistakes your own eyes will miss. (As an example, Roger, Wolfgang,

Continued on page 119

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But what if you're disappointed? Say you see your first issue of FLAGSHIP, and you hate it. You send your coupon in for a free setup in a game, and you don't like the look of that either. Haven't you wasted your money?

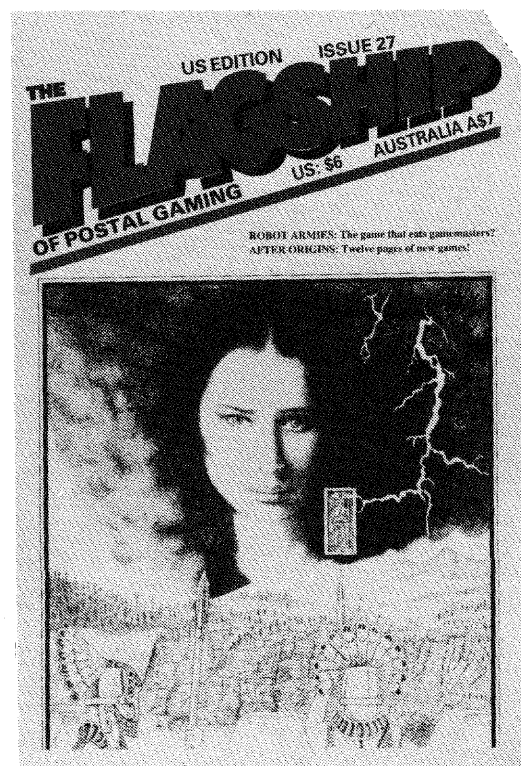
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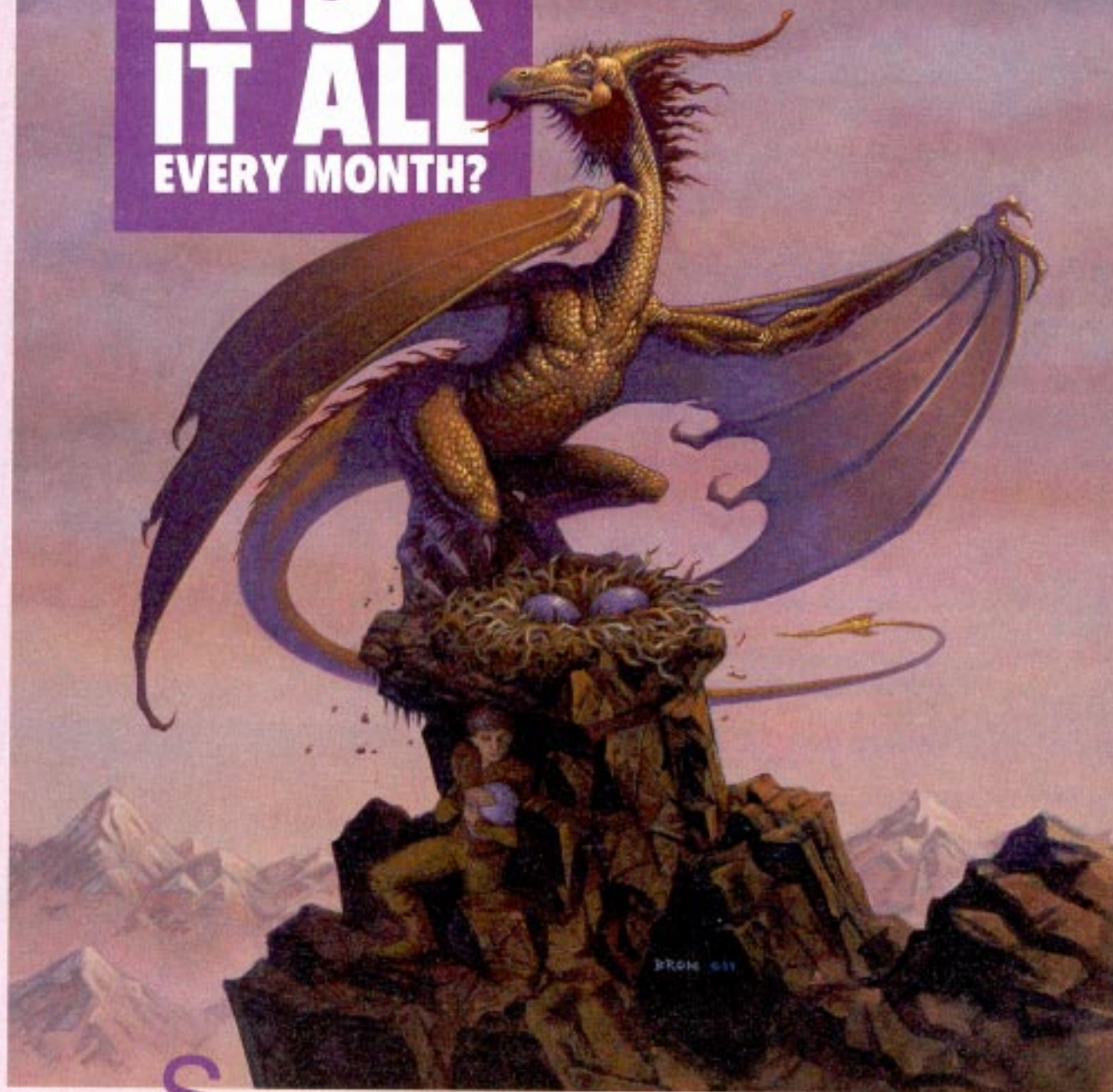
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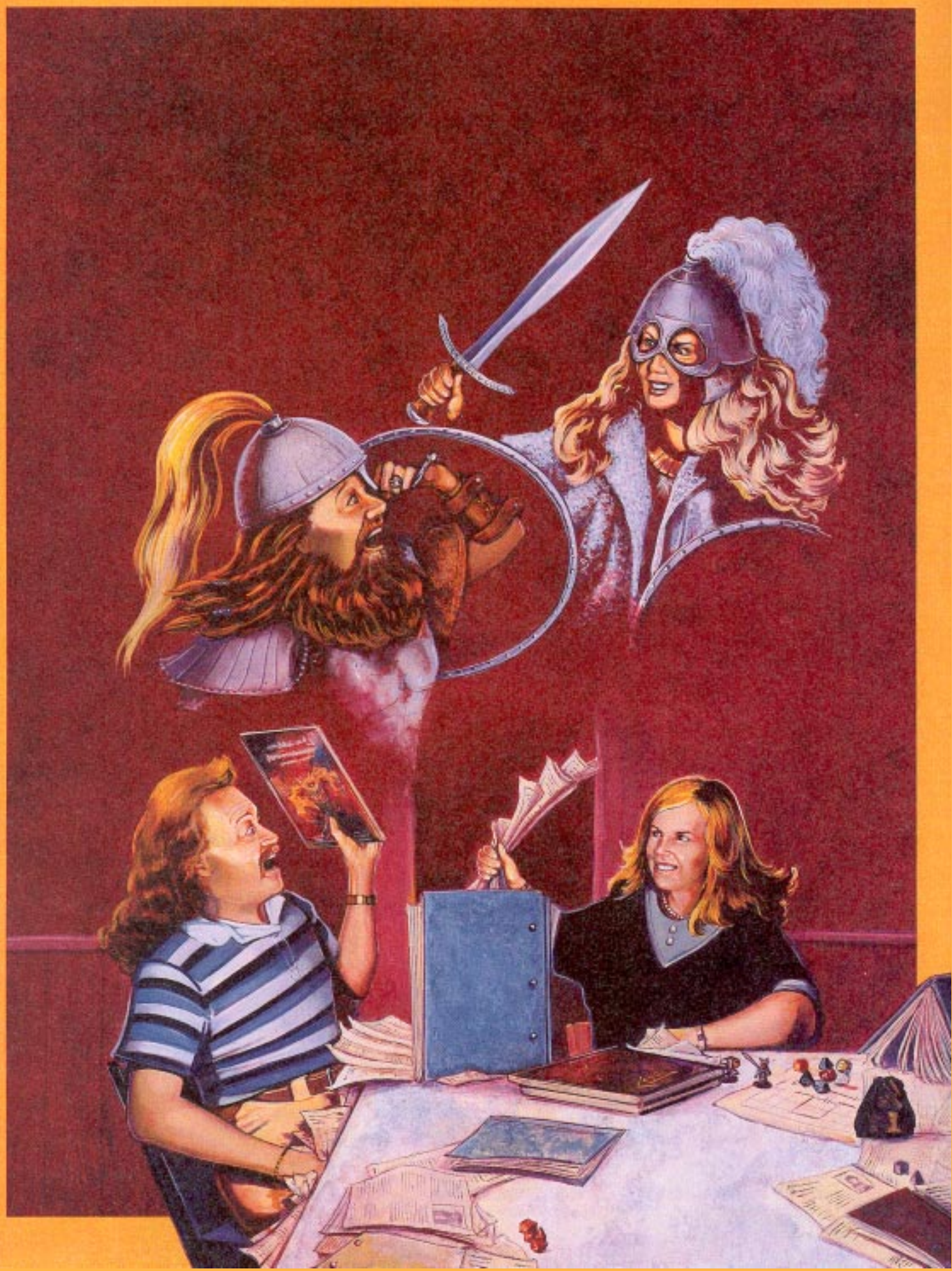
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Artwork by Eric Cornett



That's "Role," Not "Roll"!

Put more "oomph" in your role-playing—and have more fun

by **George T. Young**

Artwork by Lissane Lake

TSR's D&D® and AD&D® systems are role-playing games. Unfortunately, no dictionary gives "role-playing" the definition that gamers expect of it: It's an activity designed to be fun, with the participants thinking creatively and using their imagination. There are numerous articles about new nonplayer characters, magical items, and so on, but few guidelines have been presented on how to become better role-players. This article, though by no means exhaustive, provides a few ideas about how to get more out of your gaming through more effective role-playing.

Put the stress on role

I once asked a player in one of my campaigns, "Why do you think they call it 'role-playing,' anyway?" His answer was: "Because of the dice." I regret to say that he was serious. Gaming, as he knew it (and as too many of us know it), is the juggling of statistics and scores for the purpose of making a powerful character. Most of us begin playing this way, and for a while it is entertaining. But, as one horde of despicable monsters after another falls to the heroes' swinging swords, the excitement wears off. Soon no one is interested in how many 20s you roll or even how many orcs you killed that day. This is the point where most casual players quit the game, leaving only the hard-core players determined to enjoy themselves.

Around this time, the remaining group begins to develop the art of role-playing until everyone participates in it to some degree. Role-playing is fundamental to the AD&D and D&D games; no one plays because he or she likes keeping records and memorizing charts. The idea behind

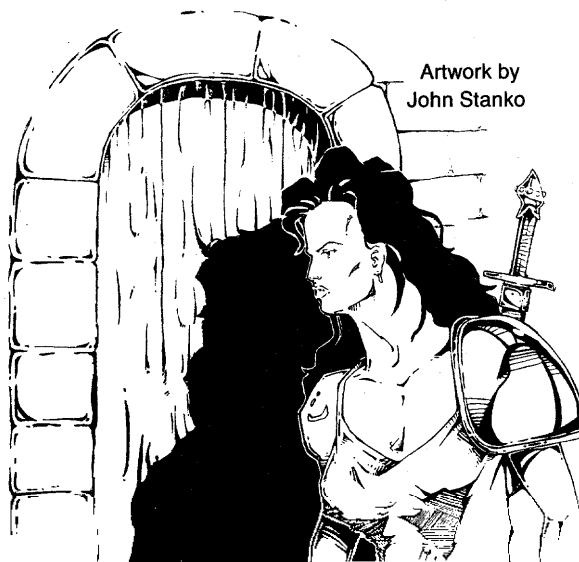
role-playing is very clear: It is pure escapism, pretending to be a person you clearly are not. How, exactly, do we go about this? What tables are there for it in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*? There are no rules for role-playing; there are, however, certain guidelines that will help you become better "role-ers."

The obvious question that comes to mind then is also the most important one: Why should we attempt to be better role-players anyway? For one thing, role-playing is a skill that can be developed and improved; as with any other skill, the better you are at it, the more fun it becomes. The whole idea of role-playing is being someone else, playing out someone's dangerous and exciting (if not always glamorous) life. Role-playing allows you all the fun of being someone who lives close to the edge without any of the risks. The game is, above all, completely safe. Your character can take 17 hp damage from a blow, fall into a pit of acid, or get swallowed whole, but none of it affects you. We all grow to value our characters over time, and we don't like to see them killed, but we don't actually lose anything.

There is a flip side to role-playing: Like most things, you get out of it only what you put in. If you play a shallow, cardboardlike character, you are far less likely to enjoy yourself as much as you would playing a character with a personality and "reality" about him. Whether you're playing an 800-year-old elven wizard or an 80-year-old human beggar, your character should be believable. Actors on stage "get into character" and play their parts; they step away from who they are and become who they are not.

In the same way, gamers need to develop personas for their characters. Once you know what your character is like, it should be easier to assume the mind-frame that allows you to imagine yourself in his shoes. Perhaps your character is completely unlike you, so much so that you would act quite differently than your PC, given a change in circumstances. There are many things you can do to encourage role-playing. It is always more fun to role-play if the whole group is participating; it's hard to get into character when everyone else is interested only in getting the most treasure and being the best rules lawyers they can.

A certain mood also needs to be set for good playing as well, for the mood in



Artwork by
John Stanko

gaming is comparable to the setting in theater. Above anything else, creativity is absolutely necessary. That's okay, though, because role-playing gamers are all creative; if they weren't, they wouldn't be gaming. When a group of people role-play well, their imaginations are in high gear, and the whole group has fun. *That* is the goal of role-playing, after all: having fun.

Participation

DM: "In our last game, when we left off, you were just about to fight Serpentyne, the ancient red dragon that you have been stalking for months, and—"

Player 1: "What? Where are we?"

Player 2: "Did we kill it? Where's my share of the treasure?"

Player 3: "Which character was I playing?"

In the example above, the players have no idea what is going on. The time spent between gaming sessions has dulled their appetite for role-playing; they are not involved in the situation. At the end of the last session, the group was tense and ready for the encounter. Now, they are so removed from the scenario that they will unthinkingly go through the motions of playing for the next 45 minutes to get back into the mood: imagining what they are doing, planning, and slowly starting to have fun again.

The best way to avoid this problem and the wasted time that goes with it is to get the players (and the DM) ready to play *before* you begin. The way people get warmed up for role-playing is the same way people ready themselves for sports: with warm-up exercises. These exercises should be fun and should help get the players back into the role-playing frame of mind. To start, ask a player to tell you what color the local tavern is painted. Ask another player how his character celebrates his birthdays, and whether or not he kissed anyone on his last birthday (if the PC did, ask who it was and have him explain the circumstances). When the player comes up with a suitably creative answer, move on to the next person, asking more off the wall and unexpected questions to force him to be imaginative. Don't ask him any questions to which he already knows the answers—make him think. The best way to get everyone warmed up is to fire as many questions at the players as you can; when they get the hang of it, they are ready. It's as simple as that. From the warm-ups, you can move directly into the adventure, knowing that the group is well prepared to play.

Go with the flow

DM: "The bugbears have, uh, thirty gold pieces on them."

Player 1: "Gee, that's a lot. I wonder why they're carrying so much."

Player 2: "And we never encountered bugbears this far south before."

Player 3: "That jerk the baron has a lot of money, so . . ."

Player 2: "My friends, I smell a conspiracy. I think we should pay the good baron a little visit—unannounced, of course."

What you as the DM meant to say was thirty silver pieces. Do you correct yourself, or let the players get the wrong idea? If you have any sense at all as a DM, you leave the players in the dark. The more a DM allows the party to choose their own paths in an adventure, the more the group will participate as a whole. If the party overestimates the importance or role of an NPC, as in the example, work with their mistake. Obviously the idea is intriguing to them, so follow their lead. They will ask you later in the adventure if you thought they would catch on to the baron's schemes so quickly. This is a good thing! The players will feel that they have accomplished something with their clever deductions, and if you alter the plot so that their suspicions turn out to be true, they will be rewarded for the good role-playing they have done. In the future, they will be even more interested in thinking through their actions.

Planned scenarios are fine as long as the planning that went into them does not make them restrictive. The players need to feel that they are interacting with the campaign world, not just following a set of tracks carved in stone. Perhaps, in the course of an adventure, the major NPC villain that you wanted to use is left out entirely. It doesn't matter in the end, because the NPC can always be used later. If you introduce a variety of different villains to the PCs over the course of a few adventures, you can watch the players' reactions to their enemies. Whichever NPC is the one the party hates the most or is the most interested in should become their arch-nemesis. In this way, you don't saddle the PCs with an enemy they are bored with.

The game is designed to be free-form, and co-managing your campaign with your players is an excellent way to bring them into the fun. Too often, DMs fall into the trap of assuming that they create their campaigns by themselves and the players have no input. This type of thinking needs to be avoided at all costs, for it is the DM's gaming *with* the players that shapes his world and gives it a unique flavor. A good DM should pay as much attention to the things his group likes about the campaign world as the things they dislike. When the players feel that they have some control over their own destinies, they take part in the game more often and use more creativity in play as they try to carve a place

for themselves in the milieu. Use *their* imaginations to spark your own; the results will be astounding.

The impossible situation

DM: "The room heats up as the rest of the house catches fire. Smoke is billowing up the staircase."

Player 1: "Whoa, somebody get a rope and—who's got rope?"

Player 2: "We left it behind when we used it to climb that cliff. What do we do?"

DM: "You begin to understand the meaning of the phrase 'smoke inhalation.'"

The Impossible Situation occurs when there is no easy solution to a problem that the party has to deal with: monsters that cannot be fought head-to-head, death traps, clever NPCs, and colossally poor planning prior to a disaster (as in the example). These situations are not necessarily bad ones; on the contrary, they provide the best gaming opportunities because the players must work together and use clever thinking to escape. A truly impossible situation cannot be solved through the use of brute force or magical items; only inspiration and downright craftiness can save the party. It is a measure of a group's mettle as well; a good group of players will work to find a solution, while poor role-players generally begin complaining or consulting the rules for technicalities with which to prove that the DM "can't do that."

It is in these tense moments, when the players are racking their brains for ideas, that the most memorable and fun playing time is to be had. The time the party bluffed its way into an orcish stronghold and attacked the tribe's leader, a large troll with an unpleasant temper, will always be one of the players' favorite stories to tell. The players felt challenged by the situation; afterward, they feel rightfully proud to have succeeded against unthinkable odds. Player characters are adventurers first and foremost, and they have every right to accomplish daring and unusual feats as long as they have found ways to pull them off.

This is not to say, however, that the DM should come up with insanely difficult puzzles that require hours to solve, challenges that have only one solution, and futile battles. The key to using the Impossible Situation is using it sparingly and refereeing it effectively. How realistic is it when the PCs escape certain death four times a day? Even Indiana Jones would feel hard-pressed to do that.

To referee these scenarios properly, the DM must give the PCs the sense that their hard-won victory is real, and the dangers they faced could have killed them. The game is more exciting when everyone knows that something is at stake besides a

few more hit points. One word of caution: Sometimes, Impossible Situations backfire. The party comes up with a good plan and uses it well, but for reasons unknown to them, the plan must fail. Perhaps the giant wears a ring of *spell absorption*, the door to the armory opens the wrong way, or whatever. In these cases, where the party is going to be slaughtered because of some minor detail that has no significant affect on the adventure, the DM must use his final and most powerful option: He must cheat.

The DM is a referee, but he is impartial for the sole purpose of providing an entertaining milieu to adventure in, not to cause bad feelings in the group. The DM should not bow to party members' wishes merely because they argue loudly; only in dire circumstances should the DM alter the outcome. Change a statistic, eliminate an extra trap, cancel the wandering monster that was rolled up. The point is, the party shouldn't be wiped out by one bad die roll or overplanned death-trap. If you let the PCs live (with low hit points or after using up most of their magical items), they will feel that they have accomplished something wonderful—they survived and beat the unbeatable.

One last word on cheating: If you must cheat for some reason, *never let the players know*. After the first time they catch you cheating, they will always suspect that the tasks they achieved had a built-in safety net, and much of the fun of playing will be spoiled. Use the Impossible Situation with caution. Cheat if you have to, but make sure that the whole group's needs are served when you do. Remember that being creative is as fun for players as it is for the DM; encourage your group's imaginations, and you will open up new possibilities for adventure.

Creativity and uniqueness

DM: "A short, grubby halfling wearing leather armor approaches you, and—"

Player: "I bash him in the face with my axe, take his pouch, and go directly to the nearest jeweller. How much gold do I get?"

Creativity is the most necessary element for players and DMs in a role-playing game, since the game is played almost entirely in the imagination. However, too few players use their imagination as well as they might. In the example, the player believes that he is faced with a thief and no actual interaction is necessary, since the player is looking only for a little treasure. The DM is also at fault, for he has presented an encounter with a cliched, uninteresting NPC, and the player is only responding to what he has been given.

For players and DMs both, the use of stereotypical characters is a serious mistake. How many times have players run

into jolly tavern-keepers, pretentious elves, and obnoxious barbarians? People expect that all dwarves are dour and taciturn because it says so in the rule books. Gamers all too often choose character classes and races because of the statistical advantages each type exhibits, instead of picking a profession because it would offer a lot of role-playing possibilities.

DMs should always give personalities to the NPCs the party meets, realistic identities that the players can relate to. No one feels tempted to have a conversation with another generic character. The players recognize the dwarf who always speaks with an Arnold Schwarzenegger accent and who plays practical jokes on everyone, but they seem to forget the dwarf who is greedy, likes only other dwarves, and who makes friends very slowly (if you're lucky, by the time everyone reaches 10th level).

Throw out the stereotypes! Considering the fact that everyone in the real world is unique, it follows that the campaign world should have individuals as well. Players especially should beware of creating "no-personality" characters. The PC who refers to himself as "the cleric" is probably not role-playing. If the DM were to ask what "the cleric's" name was, the player would doubtless have to look on his character sheet. As a rule, when creating a new character, players should think of something unique about the PC, some trait

or piece of his past that sets him apart from other characters. By doing this, the character will have a more realistic quality and be more fun to play. Don't let your magical items and strength scores make your character!

Good role-players will also think of some bit of personal information concerning the character's past that allows for plot tie-ins; they provide information that the DM can use to make the adventure more personal. Perhaps your mage character carries a sword that is the only clue to his master's disappearance. Small tidbits such as this not only make the character more distinctive, they also make him easier to play. Maybe the adventure's villain recognizes the sword. Does the PC attack with special fervor, assuming that the villain must be responsible for the foul play involving his mentor? Does the PC attempt to bargain with him, trying to get more information? The possibilities are endless.

Another good example of this type of tie-in is demonstrated well by Tanis, from the DRAGONLANCE® saga. When he faced the Dragonlord Kitiara, he had to deal with the woman he loved, not some nameless foe! Leave openings for your DM to work with. Once you know a little bit about your character, go on to create a personal history. Where is your PC from, and why did he start adventuring? Detail his family and personality quirks, and get some idea

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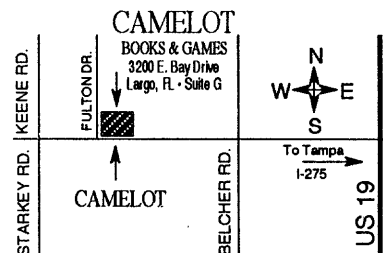
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of how he thinks. It is vital to know where a character is coming from if you want to know where he is going. To use the example of Tanis again, think about what made him different from the other heroes. He was a man torn between two worlds and two loves: knowing both, belonging to neither. He had a developed background and real motivations that caused him to act the way he did. Above all, he had a recognizable personality. These are the things that make some characters better than others. Take as much care making the PCs as you do in keeping them alive!

Suspension of disbelief

DM: "Since you do not react when the kobolds pour three barrels of oil on you from their high vantage point, their leader chuckles ominously as he drops the torch he is holding."

Players (in unison): "That's not fair! You can't do that! I can't believe you're doing this to us!"

Whenever a DM does something fiendishly clever or uses a carefully worked-out plan, the players inevitably scream bloody murder. The worst possible tactic a DM can have NPCs use against the party is the same tactic they use against every single monster they encounter: thinking. But

DMs should make intelligent decisions for the NPCs and monsters they run; no one would argue that the party should play dumb when faced with a nasty situation. Yet most DMs fail to run their characters as well as they could, for they know that the players will complain (and with much feeling) if they do. The only reason the players do this, however, is because they have not learned how to suspend disbelief. In most entertainment-oriented experiences, the audience willingly suspends disbelief in order to participate. No one stands up in the middle of Hamlet and yells at the actors because they are just "pretending" to be Danish nobility.

Role-playing is very much the same, in that the players need to accept the DM's premises for the whole thing to work. If a rules dispute arises, it is perfectly reasonable for the players and DM to discuss the problem and work for a solution. When the players attempt to second-guess the DM, real problems occur. A good player tries to work within the situation given him, while a poor player generally tries to argue his way out ("I don't think he'd shoot at me, I'm only a cleric" or "Those orcs aren't smart enough to do that. They only have 'low' intelligence."). The players who stop the game to argue over such things are being immature by refusing to accept the DM's storytelling and refereeing because things are not going their way.

When someone does this, it brings the whole group out of the role-playing mood and the fun of gaming. The way good role-players handle these situations is to direct their frustrations at the NPC or monster causing the trouble instead of the referee. If an enemy sorcerer casts a *magic missile* spell at your thief, blame the sorcerer, not the DM. Always react to the DM as a referee; that is his role in the game. The DM handles disputes and makes rulings; he does not cause the party harm out of ill will. It may sound silly, but the truth is that DMs are the best friends players have; without them, there wouldn't be any gaming.

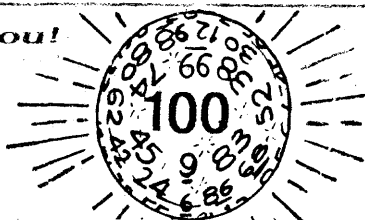
A final word

Role-playing, like anything else, can be overdone. When your party insists on role-playing the purchasing of torches, the idea has probably gone too far. Use common sense. If the adventure is getting bogged down by too much dilly-dallying on the part of the players, simply trim the role-playing back until it is at an acceptable level. Not *everything* has to be role-played, after all.

Player: "You know, Mr. Blacksmith, I think that this is perhaps the *best* horseshoe I have ever seen." Ω

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by Stewart Robertson

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Why fight
the one
who's running
the game?



There have been several articles and letters in DRAGON® Magazine on how a Dungeon Master can make his AD&D® or D&D® campaign more entertaining for his players, but how many players consider what they can do to make the game more fun and easier to run for the DM? After all, the DM has to do a fair amount of work before every game to insure the enjoyment of the players. It's only right for the players to take part of the responsibility as well. Good manners and a little consideration before, during, and after the game can make the experience more enjoyable for everyone in the group and make the role of DM much more rewarding. Here are some tips for the thoughtful player.

An experienced DM tries to create an adventure that suits the abilities and interests of the player characters. Part of an adventure might revolve around a certain item a character wishes to obtain, or a trap might be designed knowing one of the characters has a skill or magical item that will free the group. An important part of a game session could be left out if the wrong person is missing. In one game I was running, the characters spent weeks fighting their way to the lowest planes of Hades. The last night of the adventure, the final "Do or Die," was shot to pieces when two PCs, one wielding a *sword of fiend slaying* and the other wearing an *amulet of protection from evil*, decided not to show up.

A lesser disruption to the balance of the game is the player who only shows up occasionally. The DM who has carefully laid out the monsters, puzzles, magic, and treasures of a night's game can have all his work waylaid when this occasional player unexpectedly shows up for one night.

If you are a regular in someone's game and you have to miss a session, let the DM know as soon as possible. You could suggest what your character is doing to keep him away from the rest of the party for that time. You should also phone ahead if you plan to show up for a game you infrequently attend. Give the DM some advance warning so he can work any changes into the game and keep the game enjoyable for everybody.

Arrive on time

This is simple manners. If you are an hour late for a game, one of two things



happens Either the other players wait for you, which cuts down the amount of time they have to play, or they start without you, so when you do show up they must stop playing to let you catch up with them. If you absolutely can't avoid being tardy, call the DM and let him know how late you'll be Then he can decide whether to delay the start of the game or let your PC catch up when you arrive. Some DMs might even find a way to work the character's absence into the game. ("As you enter the dungeon, Grunt the Warlord is suddenly encased in a trap—an impenetrable globe of magic!")

Know the rules

Most players of D&D and AD&D games don't buy the rule books until after their first game Instead, they have their friends and the DM explain the rules as they go along. It's expected that a first-time player won't have a full working knowledge of the game.

Still, it's a good idea if the player does everything he can to learn the rules as soon as possible—not just the rules in the book, but exactly *which* rules the DM uses from the book plus his own house rules. When playing for the first time or joining a game with a different DM, ask if you can meet with him before the game to generate your character and discuss how he prefers to run his game. Find out what rules he uses and any particulars of his game. If you've never gamed before, then buy a rule book as soon as possible or at least try to borrow a copy. Now the other players won't need to wait until the DM explains everything to you and you can get right into the fun.

Offer to help

Running a game is a lot of work, especially if the DM is running it in her own home. Before a game, someone has to clean the room, sweep the floors, clear the tables, and all the other chores your parents always want you to do. After the game, a house can be a nightmare of note slips, scrap paper, soda bottles, pizza cartons, and the cheese balls Russell threw at the miniatures to represent his character's *fireball* spells. I'm sure nobody likes to do housework, but it wouldn't hurt to volunteer to show up early or stay after to help clean up. A half-hour of "hard labor" is little enough to give up for your fun, and it may keep the DM's parents from closing the game down because of the mess.

Help create the world

In addition to the more mundane chores of housekeeping, there are other jobs a player can do to ease the DM's burden. In any large campaign world, there are a multitude of tasks to be done. Castles need to be created, cities laid out, NPCs put together, areas mapped, pictures drawn, and dozens of things photocopied. Offer to take some of this work upon yourself. Freed from these details, the DM will have

more time to put his adventures together and give you more of a feeling that this is your game world.

If your DM doesn't wish to share the work of creating the next adventure, ask if you can create the village or city your character came from. After all, the character had to come from somewhere, and someday he and the party might visit there. With the DM's approval, you can map out the village and write up some brief descriptions of a dozen or so people who would be important to the character. The DM can then put "your" village somewhere on his map for all the world to see. He might even decide to run an adventure there some day.

Food & munchies

It never fails. You've got your dice and notes laid out and you're ready for some serious role playing, when suddenly someone on the other side of the table announces that she wants some soda, chips, pizza, or whatever. Now everybody has to wait while she goes to the store.

People enjoy their munchies, and during a long game they can be a necessity of life. But let's make sure they don't subtract from game time. There are several ways to handle this. Everyone could simply bring their own, or the players could all agree to take turns buying the food. In my current game, the first person who shows up is sent out to buy pop and chips, paying for them with money from a common pot

that everyone chips into each week. No matter how it is done, the food should be ready before the game starts. Don't ignore the healthy snacks—carrots and celery taste great with a little chip dip.

Less gab, more play

Even the most serious players interrupt the game now and then. Jokes and side stories are a common happening in any friendly group and help to make the game more enjoyable Still, constantly interrupting the game with jokes or stories about previous adventures can be a source of aggravation for other players. I've known players who would give a complete description of an entire campaign at the least opportunity. Equally annoying are the people who constantly make jokes about the game at hand. I find it distracting to have someone poking fun at everything the DM or other players say and do. Feel free to make jokes or comments when they are appropriate, but don't stray too far from the game you're playing. Most of all, know when to quit.

Pay attention

Not everyone's characters are going to be directly involved at all times. Some PCs might be split away from the main group for a while, have a *sleep* spell thrown on them, or fall in a trap everyone else missed. Whatever the case, you should try to pay attention to what is happening. Eventually your "absent" character will be



back into the action.

Some players don't have the patience to sit quietly and listen. They start talking to whomever is sitting next to them or begin going through any gaming books sitting nearby. I've even seen players leave the game table to turn on the television or play games on the computer. When their PCs were finally back into the action, the game had to stop while they were brought up to date. It's better to pay attention so things won't need repeating.

Wait your turn

During the game, especially in combat, there will be times when all players want their characters to react. But, if everyone talks at the same time, no one can clearly hear what is going on. Some DMs go around the table and ask each person in turn what their characters are doing, while others have the players roll dice for initiative. Either way, wait until you're called upon before speaking out. Whatever you do, don't interrupt someone else.

Another type of interruption is note-passing. Notes can be very important in a game, but if they aren't used sparingly they can be another form of "talking" out of turn. Unless what you are doing is supposed to be a secret from the other PCs, leave the note paper alone.

Listen to the DM™

This is another case of speaking out of turn: The DM is trying to describe something, but the players interrupt with questions before she is finished. I've run games in which I would be giving the players the dimensions to a room their characters have entered when someone interrupted to ask if there were any monsters present. My description of the monsters was then interrupted by someone asking about what kind of treasures there are in the room. By now I'm having trouble remembering what I've already told the players, while the person doing the mapping is still waiting to find out the size of the room. Let the DM finish talking before you start asking questions.

Plan ahead

Players can really get into combat. You'd think some people were actually fighting these imaginary battles. Unfortunately, nothing destroys the excitement faster than a break in the momentum. Someone who can't make up his mind on what his PC is doing or who asks a dozen questions before declaring his actions destroys the illusion the DM has created. If you need to ask a question, keep it short. Otherwise, just announce your PC's actions and roll the dice as needed. Since I feel my players are trustworthy, I prefer to have them make their die rolls at the beginning of the turn, then call their names and have them

tell me just tell me how much damage the characters did. The important thing is to keep combat moving swiftly.

Stay organized

Every new PC begins "life" with a fresh character sheet that contains the name, statistics, and starting possessions of the player's persona. Soon it will be detailed with his experience totals, new hit points, and lists of abilities and magical items. After a short time, this clean character sheet is a mess of altered statistics, party treasure, new magical items, and erased information.

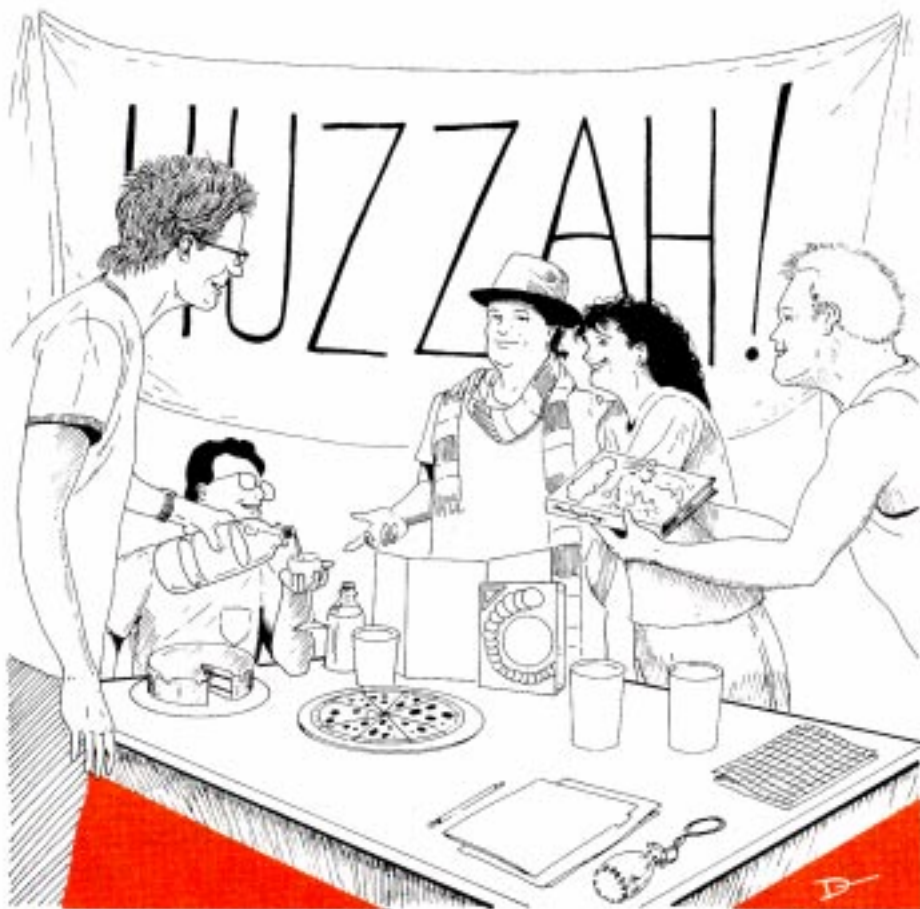
Troubles can arise when a player or DM needs specific information about the character. Nobody likes to wait for someone to read through her notes, looking for one small piece of knowledge buried in the mess. At the same time, one particular possession or magical item can mean the difference between succeeding, failing, or dying for your band of brave adventurers.

In one game I played in our characters were in the middle of a dungeon when they were attacked by a medusa with six troglodyte henchmen. She petrified one wizard, then began using her serpents' bites while her troglodytes hacked away at the party. After five minutes of melee, the player of the "stoned" mage noticed on his character sheet a *medallion of gaze reflection* he had completely forgotten about (it was listed on his sheet under "Camping Supplies"). The DM then had to make a difficult choice: He could ignore the forgotten medallion and continue the combat, or he could pull the game back to the beginning of the battle and hope everybody could remember how many hit points they had already lost and how many charges they had used from their magical items. As it was, nobody was pleased with the player of the mage.

When you add information to your character sheet, try to keep everything as organized as possible. Write down the character's magical items on one side of the page and the party treasure lists on the other. Write everything in pencil. If there's something that you need to remove, erase it instead of crossing it out. If the paper starts to get worn out or disorganized, get a fresh character sheet and recopy the current information. Above all else, keep your character organized.

Character stability

Long-time role-players enjoy creating a new character every now and then. It allows them to play different roles and can add a little life to the game. But take it easy! I have seen players who want to play new characters or different classes every other game session. Experimentation is well and good, but how can the DM build any consistency into his world if the players insist upon popping different PCs in and out without any warning? It also doesn't make much sense for one person to disappear and someone new to show up





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without reason in the middle of a dungeon. Finally, what happens if the player of a key character suddenly decides to run someone new at a critical point of the planned adventure?

If you wish to create a new character, discuss it with your DM. He can then find a good point to retire one character and introduce another into the game.

The style of play

There are as many ways to play D&D or AD&D games as there are DMs. While one DM likes a little thought-provoking mystery, another prefers nothing but hack-and-slash fighting, and a third uses little or no combat at all. Many enjoy running the interaction of the characters while others consider such things boring. One has no magic in his game, and another has magic around every turn.

There's nothing wrong with any of these styles of play, but different people prefer different kinds of role playing. If your DM doesn't run the type of game you like, you should find a DM who does. It may take a bit of looking, but somewhere out there is a game to fit your preference. If you can't find one, consider running your own game. Whatever you do, don't try to force the present group to play the way you want them to.

Don't ignore the obvious

Despite rumors, DMs are not gods. No matter how hard they try, they cannot create an exciting adventure for every direction a party of adventurers might want to take. Nor is it their job to herd the PCs into their next adventure as if they were cattle. Instead, a good DM will put some obvious signposts in her games to suggest one of several possible adventures. She might tell the players about a legend of lost treasure, present a person or group who needs help, or just land the characters at the front door of the nearest dungeon.

Pay attention to these subtle and not-so-subtle hints. While the DM isn't trying to lead the characters by the hand, she still needs to inform them where the next possible adventure will take place. When the players insist on ignoring everything the DM has planned, then she has no choice but to run random encounters, create something on the spot, or resort to forcing the characters into their next adventure.

It is your choice as a player whether or not you wish to have your character go on any particular quest. This makes you ultimately responsible for how much action your character sees. If the DM gives you three possible directions, don't go the fourth way. If you do choose to run away from the planned adventure, don't be

disappointed if nothing exciting happens to your character that night. It's difficult to run a good campaign, but it's impossible to have any enjoyable gaming if the players constantly try to go the wrong way.

Future directions

A good DM likes to run adventures the players are interested in, so he wants to hear the opinions and suggestions of the players. This is important when a major expedition has ended and the next game starts a new adventure. Are there some loose ends from a previous adventure the characters would like to explore? Is there some great task they wish to set for themselves? Is there some city or unknown country they'd like to visit? Tell the DM! The characters' interests could wind up being the focal point of the next game. Telling the DM the characters' plans for the next game session also cures the "wrong way" syndrome mentioned in the last section, since he now knows which way the characters are planning to go and is able to concentrate on those directions.

Making life easier doesn't require a lot of effort. All it takes is a little forethought and consideration. By removing the distractions and bothersome holdups from the game, role-playing games will be far more enjoyable experiences for the other players as well as the DM. Ω

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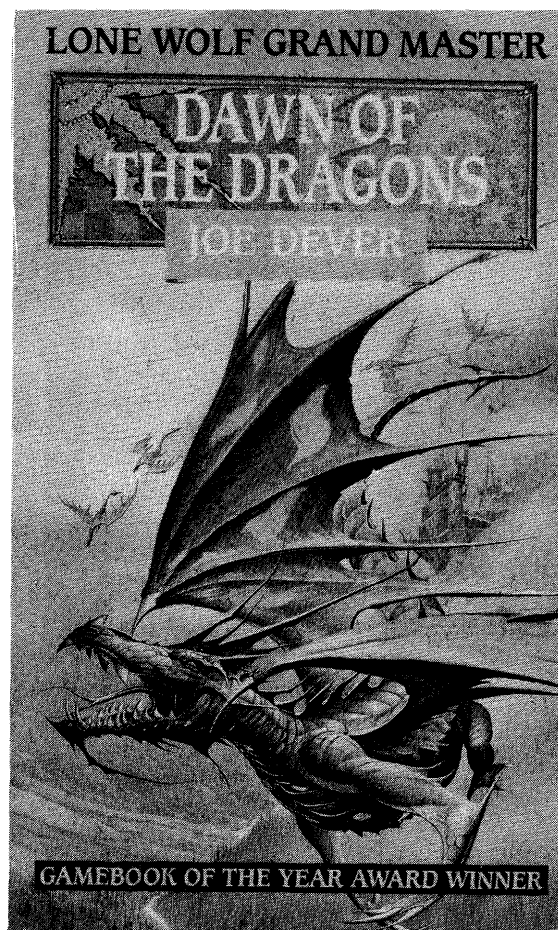
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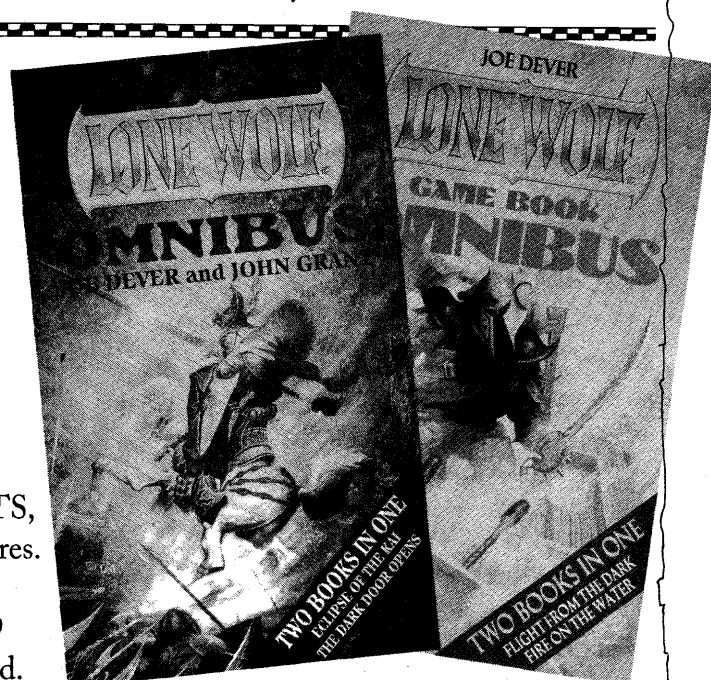
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ROLES

Take some of the referee's burden and speed up your game



FOR ROLE-PLAYERS

by David Wilder

Artwork by David Zenz

When playing a role-playing system like the D&D® or AD&D® game, there are several roles the players can perform during the playing session that can make the game more exciting. These roles help playability by taking some tasks from the Dungeon Master and letting players assist in running the game. Using the abilities of the players to help create the world in which their characters live can make gaming sessions more exciting for everyone. Here are some suggestions.

Where are we?

The Map Keeper is in charge of creating visual aides from descriptions given by the DM. If a player character is actually mapping, the map and any other drawings may be kept by the players and noted or referenced in the chronicle (see later). If no PC is mapping, then any written descriptions should be given to the DM when the PCs leave that area.

The player performing this mapping role need not be an artist, though he should have graph paper and several pencils with good erasers. This person primarily does the mapping for the group and creates the floor plans in important areas, such as areas where melee takes place. The setting-up of any other visual aides, such as PC and monster miniatures and 3-D displays of walls, doors, and other terrain features, are an optional responsibility of the Map Keeper (with appropriate help from the DM).

When was that?

During melee, a chase, or other time-sensitive situations, the Timekeeper helps the DM and the players ensure that all actions are timed properly. At the end of each round, the Timekeeper records the passage of time, working with the DM and other players to see that attacks, spells, etc. are timed correctly. The Timekeeper also keeps track of the current date, assists the Chronicler (see later) in calendar keeping, and announces PC hit points regained through rest. The Timekeeper also keeps track of when the characters have eaten, how much food and drink are still available, whether food has gone bad or not, and any other time-activated concerns of the party. This role is especially important in timed adventures and encounters.

Who's in charge?

The Speaker designates the marching order and coordinates the strategy of the group with the input of the other players. This player is the main speaker for the group to the DM, and it is recommended that his character be the main speaker for the party to all nonplayer characters (this makes it much easier to determine who is speaking within the game context). Of course other characters should feel free to interact, but the Speaker should be the player in charge of the verbal communication for the group. This role is best handled by the player who controls the PC with the highest Charisma rating, though a well-spoken and clever player may take the role if her character has a reasonable Charisma. The Speaker must be very familiar with the names, classes, and personalities of all the characters in the group.

What went on?

The Chronicler keeps track of the story, the goals of the PCs, major NPCs encountered, important actions taken by the party as well as by individual characters, and other pertinent information. This is an important role for solving puzzles and is often critical for survival; thus, everyone should keep appraised of what is in the chronicle being kept, checking for corrections as necessary. If a module takes several gaming sessions, the Chronicler begins each session by reading the important events from the chronicle. Between gaming sessions, the notes taken for the chronicle should be organized, and the actions and events listed with their time and date. The DM should consider using the chronicle to assist in experience-point determination and in creating spin-off adventures.

The player-NPC

Situations frequently arise in which players could run alternate characters. Perhaps the party gets split up, a character becomes paralyzed or unconscious, or a PC is killed. Few things are more distracting to game play than a DM and a player trying to roll up a character on the side while the game is going on. Rather than leaving the player out of the game, allowing him to play an NPC can keep everyone interested and involved in the adventure.

For example, Tom (a player) is running a mage who suffered a *feeblemind* attack during investigations into the properties of a newly acquired magical item. In order to help the mage, the remainder of the party went on a quest. Instead of sending Tom away, the DM can brief Tom on a group of orc guards in the passages that the characters will need to explore. When the party encounters these orc guards, Tom helps bring the battle to life by giving the orcs names and personalities, adding tactics, and making the appropriate dice rolls. No matter how good a DM's repertoire of battle cries and death yells, it can be a pleasant change for everyone to hear a different voice. This gives the DM much-needed time to prepare for future events or simply enjoy watching the players run the game, and it also helps develop the players' ability to role-play.

Obviously, a player can throw the game out of balance by treating such privileges without respect. Referees should ensure that players do not take advantage of situations by making life too easy or hard for the PCs. Nevertheless, a game referee is just that: a referee. He need not control the entire game. Generally, the more freedom players have, the more they enjoy playing, but game balance must be maintained by the DM.



One important note on the player-NPC: It is not a good idea to allow players to run major NPCs (the master villain, the good high priest who sent the party, etc.). Not only does this make it much too easy for players to destroy game balance, but it is essentially playing with two DMs. While the "team DM" concept can work, it takes a lot of planning and practice.

Players can also assist the DM by running combat procedures and giving ideas toward overall campaign development. The idea is to increase the interaction of the players within the game and to allow players to use their imaginative talents to further create the fantasy world in which their characters live. Of course, the DM must act as a campaign editor to modify or eliminate suggested developments that would destroy playability. Still, increased interaction of the players with the DM makes AD&D and D&D games come alive, adding creative angles that would otherwise be lost. Remember that if you are a DM, these roles train your players to be DMs so that you can play, too! Ω



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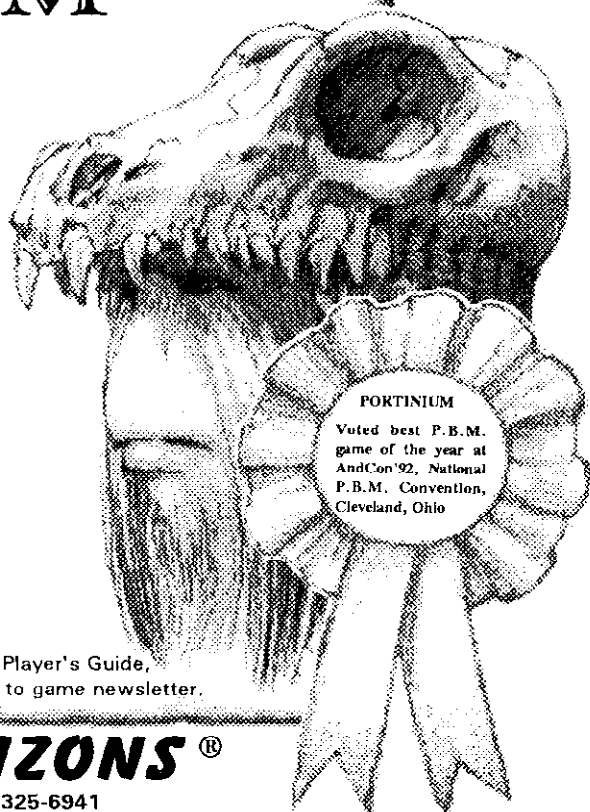
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The Wizards Three

Sorcery from three worlds:
Dalamar the Dark joins Elminster and Mordenkainen!

by Ed Greenwood

Artwork by Dan Burr

As Elminster helped me into the armor, I was even more excited than last time. If all went well this evening, I'd lay eyes on the Head of the Order of Black Robes, one of the most powerful sorcerers on all Krynn—the Fell One, Dalamar the Dark.

I swallowed my fear and decided to ask one last time. "Are you sure I should—I mean, isn't this too . . . dangerous?"

Elminster regarded me levelly. "He who dares not, lives not," he said, lowering the helm over my head. "And think of thy privileged vantage point," he added placidly, as he sat down and puffed on his pipe. "Many mages, on three worlds at least, would give much to be here tonight, hearing what you will."

Smoke curled up around his head. "Now belt up," he added tartly, "'tis time."

And it was. An instant later, the crackling fire rose into roaring flames and spat out eight tiny balls of flame. They formed an upright circle in midair, spun briefly, then sank down into the flames again. As the fire returned to its lazy snapping and

smoldering, Mordenkainen, Lord Mage of Greyhawk, appeared in his accustomed seat, across the table from Elminster of Shadowdale.

More than before, Mordenkainen's frowning face resembled that of a hawk, waiting for the proper moment to strike. Something had happened, and its awfulness was reflected in his dark expression. I swallowed in the close darkness.

Elminster nodded as if nothing was amiss. A large drinking-jack drifted smoothly over to Mordenkainen. He took it without a word, sniffed, sipped—then drained it in a single long quaff, sighing and letting it fall when he was done.

The jack halted an inch above the table. "Another?" Elminster murmured. Mordenkainen nodded, sharply. As the jack sailed past me, I smelled hot leek and chicken soup.

Mordenkainen stared across the table. "You know what has befallen." It was a statement, not a question.

Elminster nodded. "Will the Circle form again, in years to come?"

Mordenkainen shrugged and said grimly,

"They all had clones in preparation, I have heard. They wisely confided little to anyone, though perhaps a little more in me. Ask me in years to come, I suppose."

"Vecna is no more?"

Mordenkainen sighed—then sighed again, gratefully, as the refilled jack of soup warmed his hands. "I believe so. Even with all my magic, I cannot be entirely sure . . . but whether the lich-lord is gone or not, the cost!"

He stared unseeing at the far wall for a moment, then said slowly, "They were my oldest, dearest friends, El. Fellows in magic—comrade-mages I could trust, and you know how rare *those* are." Mordenkainen took a deep drink, then raised his eyes almost accusingly. "This has more than soup in it."

Elminster spread his hand. "Ye seemed to need it," he said softly.

Mordenkainen stared at him for a dark instant, then nodded. "Yes," he said slowly. "Yes, I did. My thanks. I fear I am poor company, this night."

Elminster nodded. "Ye must grieve, aye," he said. "Yet ye must put it behind ye,

when the time is right, or be twisted forever. The time to let it go is not yet, and as ye say, the Circle may yet appear again . . . but see if ye can set it aside for a time; ye'll be the better for it. Besides—tonight, the lad has agreed to come."

Mordenkainen sighed again. "I just wish more of these young, ambitious magelings could see how close death lurks, and how years of lore and learning and good works can be lost, swept away in an instant. I tire of their yapping and posturing."

Elminster nodded, through spreading rings of smoke. "They speak and act so because they think none can touch them. The good ones, when young, still get excited about saving the world, before they discover it's a task they must work at every day, and do right at every turn, with no room for mistakes at all."

Mordenkainen nodded again, seeing painful memories. Then he stirred and said, "Yes—and so our tutors said, and their tutors before them, before we were born, yet alone cast our first spells. Enough—I'll talk no more of such things tonight. I live still. The worlds unfold as before. Tell me of lighter deeds and—"

He fell silent, suddenly. Elminster was calmly pointing, with the stem of his pipe, at the empty chair between them. A darkness had gathered above it, a gloom that was darkening swiftly and steadily. It was a listening darkness that had grown eyes.

Dark and lively with intelligence were those brown eyes. Very suddenly, their owner was present. Dalamar of Krynn was in my study, sitting lightly at the table. He wore a simple, unadorned black robe. At his back the fire danced, reflecting off his hair, his pointed ears, and his slim lips. He looked very cool and very dangerous.

"Greetings," he said in a soft voice. "I have come, at your calling. What news?"

Elminster smiled slightly. "Beyond what ye've heard already, in all the time ere ye bothered to show thyself?"

Dalamar shot him a cold glare. "Have a care, old man. I'm not one to be laughed at."

"I've many cares already, thanks, young elf," Elminster replied mildly. "If ye cannot laugh and take joy in thy Art, why wield it?"

Dalamar's eyes widened. "Why?" he asked, amused. "Why, for power, of course. Why ask me, Mage of Shadowdale? You may be almost as many things as I have heard said of you, but I doubt 'simple' is one of them."

Mordenkainen sighed again, eyes turning away in disgust. "Power. Of course. How many times have I heard that answer, and from how many apprentices, down the years?" He waved a hand. His empty jack set off for the kitchen.

Elminster wagged a finger. A heavy goblet that I'd never seen around my study before settled out of nowhere, in front of Dalamar.

The elf regarded it as one might a coiling serpent. "You both obviously think me simple—by your words, and by offering

me drink I'd be very foolish to trust you enough to touch."

Mordenkainen's face reddened with anger as he turned slowly to lock gazes with the newcomer. "If you think to last long in the world of magic by insulting everyone you meet with, you *are* simple."

"And, if ye cannot learn trust of others," Elminster added mildly, "ye are indeed a fool as well."

Dalamar snarled and rose. I cringed in the armor. "I can go elsewhere to hear clever words tossed about by those who think themselves mighty in true power!"

Elminster's eyebrows rose, eyes sharp. "Do ye think," he said to Mordenkainen, "our guest thought on all these barbed phrases beforehand—or fall they naturally from his lips?"

Mordenkainen gratefully intercepted his returning jack, and drank. "I fear I'm not in the best of humor to hear such words, whate'er his motives," he said shortly.

Dalamar snorted. "Downcast, because the weak have fallen? So the famous Circle of Eight is no more. What is the loss in that?"

Mordenkainen caught his breath. His hand tightened around the jack. Metal squealed in sudden protest as it crumpled in his fingers like paper. After a moment, Mordenkainen released his grip and stared at its ruin in cold silence.

Elminster addressed the ceiling, in a soft, considering voice. "Few of us have so many true friends, in any world, that we can afford to lose several at one time and not count any cost."

He brought his eyes down suddenly to meet Dalamar's. I swear Elminster's eyes flamed. "Fewer still," he added in that soft, gentle voice, "are the archmages of any age who appreciate an attempt by anyone to establish superiority over-them. Better, by far, to come as an equal."

Dalamar's eyes met his for a long moment, then the elf nodded. "As equals, then," he said. He looked to Mordenkainen, his face now calm. "My apologies. I . . . see things differently than you, and am not accustomed to gentle words in the Conclave."

Mordenkainen sat unmoving for a long moment. Very slowly, he turned his head and looked at Dalamar the Dark. His voice, when it came, was calm but deeper than I'd ever heard it. "I'll forgive you—as many an apprentice is forgiven his ignorance, once or twice. Let it, please, be just once. This once."

Dalamar's brown eyes flashed. "Don't patronize me. I have bound lichs to my service and lead the Black Robes of Krynn. I am among the most powerful of all sorcerers of my world."

"Yes," Mordenkainen agreed, sounding both old and tired. "I know. Well, it's doubtful that I'm the most powerful mage of Oerth, highly doubtful—yet if it came to a test of magic between us, I know who would prevail." He paused, then added, "If you set aside your pride long enough to think about it, so do you."

Dalamar's eyes burned into his, as I held my breath. After an eternity passed, Dalamar nodded—once—but he did not look away. I wondered whom he saw as the victor.

Elminster's voice was almost teasing. "If ye're not thirsty, lad, I'll drain that goblet of thine. Will you eat, perhaps?"

Dalamar's slim fingers went out smoothly and closed around the goblet. "Your message," he said calmly, "promised talk of magic. I will drink and dine, but speak: Why have you invited me?"

Mordenkainen shifted in his chair, then spoke as though no hard words had been said. "Elminster and I came to agree that sharing lore about the magic we wield, and the doings of all who work it in our various worlds, would be of common benefit—and even entertainment. After what has befallen the Circle, I see the need for the former more, and feel a strong present need for the latter."

Dalamar leaned forward, his manner precise. "Yes?"

Mordenkainen looked to Elminster. The Old Mage gestured for him to continue. "The rules," said Mordenkainen, "such as they are, run as follows: We take turns trading news of magic, intrigues, and beings who travel from world to world. All of us can hold back what we deem best kept secret. We speak of light things and mighty, as we feel moved."

Dalamar nodded. "Begin, then. I am here and will give you both lore in my turn."

Mordenkainen inclined his head. "Well, then—from our last meeting, I owe Elminster rather more information than he does me. So I'll begin."

He watched as his drinking-jack slowly unfolded with a squeaking of metal, stretching back into its proper shape, then nodded thanks to Elminster. I saw Dalamar raise his hand, just for a moment, but he let it fall again without comment.

The Mage of Greyhawk cleared his throat. "There is a certain wizard who mastered the ways between the worlds, and the art of shape-shifting, while I was still an apprentice. He walks both Oerth and Toril, and perhaps Krynn as well. These days, he goes by the name of Daunskul, though I knew him long ago as Iliphar Firemaster, and before that as Ilighar of Teflamm. He is"—the mage hesitated a fraction of a second, glancing at Dalamar—"not principled."

"What I would call a Black Robe?" Dalamar's voice was carefully neutral. "Or is he merely . . . disordered?"

Mordenkainen shrugged. "He is evil, and he does as his magical might allows him. I know not if he would accept the concept of order that you do, in Krynn. A rene-gade wizard, 'tis best to call him."

Dalamar raised a many-ringed hand. A bottle rose from a shelf nearby, drifted under his gaze for a moment, then moved over to Mordenkainen's battered drinking-jack and tipped to pour. The Lord Mage of Greyhawk thanked him with a nod and

continued.

"This Daunskul, whatever his nature, has in recent days taken to calling himself the Lord High Necromancer. He's mastered most of the more useful and dramatic undead-related spells of Faerun—'imbue undead with spell ability' and the like, to make false lichens—and I've recently heard of a few wrinkles he's come up with that you might find entertaining."

Elminster and Dalamar looked on with interest. Mordenkainen traced a cracked metal seam on the drinking-jack with a finger, then watched it melt together again, now whole, with some satisfaction. "One thing he's done is to animate skeletons that are a little more the usual walking bones."

"Like baneguards?" Elminster and Dalamar spoke together—then traded surprised looks. Then, the younger one more slowly than the other, they smiled.

"Not so magical in powers," Mordenkainen replied. "He calls them champions, I believe. They reflect back all spells cast at them, and when destroyed they rise up and re-form to fight again, a set number of times."

"Nasty to common folk and simple sword-swingers," said Elminster.

Mordenkainen nodded. "There's more. He's come up with something called a 'double spell' that creates two zombies from the remains of one you've just felled."

Elminster nodded. "A very old trick; the Zhentarim still use it from time to time. I've never heard of it working on anything more powerful than the minor mage-made undead, the skeletons and zombies. I am surprised it hasn't faded from use."

Dalamar seemed thoughtful. "Small magic, yet I can see where it would be useful to some, soon to be discarded for more . . . efficient magic. It could prove amusing at the right time."

The Old Mage continued. "My turn—and I've something even smaller in Art. The Zhentarim, again, are the source."

Mordenkainen grinned. "Of course."

Elminster set down his glass to reach for the pipe floating beside his nose. "Picture a warehouse," he said lightly, "or a strong-cellar, or the vestibule of a lowly wizard's tower. In it stands a guard—a zombie."

Dalamar nodded, his interest sparked. "I've seen such."

Mordenkainen also nodded. "A trap?"

"Aye. The zombie fights and is so placed as to block passage onward—it must be fought and bested. It is too confined to be turned, for it cannot move away. Yet if it is struck of harm, or dispelled by a priest of might, the trap is sprung: The zombie's torso explodes, and a keg-worth of nails within is hurled all about."

Dalamar attempted to suppress a dark smile. "No doubt, when the survivors get through the door it was guarding, or into the next area, they'll see another zombie . . ."

Elminster grinned back, nodding. "And, trapped or not, it makes them think twice. The lazy-cudgels and the sneak-thieves

usually depart about then, in search of easier loot."

Dalamar looked thoughtful. "I've seen something along that road," he said. "Many wizards among the Black Robes animate skeletal hands—crawling claws, you call them in the Realms—to guard a chest or vault." He sipped from the goblet, sighed with approval, and sipped again. "There's even a mage of Krynn whose skeletal hands fly about, swarming to the attack as stinging insects do."

He stopped; both Elminster and Mordenkainen were nodding. "Not news?" His voice betrayed mild surprise.

Mordenkainen chuckled and pointed at Elminster. "You're looking at one such mage whose guardian claws can fly about."

Elminster wiggled a finger at a far corner of the room. In response, a slipper—one of my slippers!—moved slightly, then was borne across the floor by a scuttling, bony thing half-hidden beneath it. A moment later, it glided aloft—and out of view behind a chair.

"That was one of mine," the Old Mage of Shadowdale announced, "ere I gave it to the young lad whose dwelling this is—as a pet, of course. Most of its powers I removed, to avoid giving him nasty surprises."

A pet, eh? In the darkness of the armor I began to sweat, as I could only wonder what other surprises Elminster had thoughtfully bestowed upon me—surprises I hadn't found as yet!

Mordenkainen picked up the discourse. "A rather hostile mage who raised his tower in the Pomarj—his greatest mistake; it's gone now, of course—had his claws fire 'magic missiles' at intruders. 'Flying fingers,' he called them, and I've also heard the term in Faerun, in Waterdeep; I believe the mages I overheard were speaking of their appearance in Undermountain."

Dalamar cocked his head. "Would you call one that passed on a 'chill touch' spell a 'frost fingers,' then?"

Elminster winced and looked pained; Mordenkainen groaned. "That's a spell by itself," the Lord Mage of Greyhawk said. "I wonder if a claw could be enspelled to take a 'finger of death' spell?"

Dalamar betrayed no expression at this, though his mind seemed aflame. "I have," he said carefully, "heard of mages who tipped the finger bones of claws—ones they were sealing up in chests or tombs as guardians, away from the air—with contact poison?"

Elminster grunted. "A simple thing, though rarely considered. While we're on the subject of magical hands, I hear Manshoon—or an apprentice now beyond his reach—has released the secrets of a spell that he devised some years ago. Many of the Zhentarim now use it. It causes xornlike, clutching hands to rise out of a stone floor after ye've stepped on it, as a surprise."

"Manshoon," Dalamar said thoughtfully. "He can't be such a fool as the few tales I've heard hint, or he'd not rule the Zhen-

tarim still. Getting that spell, though, might not be hard, if half the buffoons in Zhentil Keep command it." He raised his eyes challengingly. "Would you try to stop me if I came to Toril in search of it?"

Elminster shrugged. "No need. I'll give ye the spell this evening, before ye leave."

Dalamar's eyes widened. "You would—" he started to say, but his voice faded out.

"Trust you that much?" Elminster's voice was quiet. "Yes. That's what this meeting is all about, isn't it?"

Mordenkainen nodded silently—then looked sharply up as something large and dark sailed over his shoulder.

It was my cookie jar from the kitchen, a large ceramic thing I'd bought because it looked like some sort of haunted medieval castle. I didn't keep cookies in it, despite the scrolled legend across its double doors, because it didn't keep the air out and everything would go stale. As far as I knew, it contained only a little dust—but I had a strong feeling I was about to be surprised again.

The jar stopped over the table, tilted over, and its lid spun away through the air to orbit the room. Two rolled parchments slid out and offered themselves to Mordenkainen and Dalamar.

"Please accept my apologies for the pottery," Elminster said dryly. "I hid these in it because of a saying in this world, something about bad boys often getting caught with their hands in the cookie jar."

Dalamar looked at Elminster sharply—then began to laugh easily. Mordenkainen's deep, rolling chuckles joined in.

Abruptly, bottles, trays, and fridge-shelves of food flew toward the table from all directions. There was a brief flurry of good-natured jockeying for air-space control, a chaos of cutting cheese, spearing pickles, and opening containers, and, in the end, a trio of satisfied sighs and chewing sounds.

After a time, Dalamar murmured appreciation of my mustard and said, "My turn. I've word of a spell brought to Krynn, only a few days past, by a sorceress who claimed to have been given it by a wizard of Faerun, in trade for a wand. Estel Raghara, her name is." He looked at Elminster, but the Old Mage shook his head. "The 'whip of pain,' she calls it."

Elminster nodded, slowly. "There is a priesthood in the Realms—it originated on *this* world, I believe, interestingly enough—that worships Loviatar, Maiden of Pain. They have such a spell. For a long time, the Zhentarim have been trying to devise a similar magick."

"Them again?" Mordenkainen said, around a cheese-and-turkey sandwich as thick as my forearm. "Busy folk."

Dalamar looked interested. "You think they mastered it—and she got it from a Zhentarim in need of a wand?"

"It sounds that way, indeed." Elminster smiled and shook his head. "Considering our backgrounds," he added, "magical ethics is a topic perhaps reserved for a

later gathering, when hearts are lighter and we are all more at ease. Yet consider that Brotherhood—for so they style themselves, and few women seem to rise far in their ranks, though I know of no formal impediment to female advancement—consider it as an influence in the Realms, armed with open and brutally wielded magic. A good case, I hold, for the view that those who wield Art in earnest are too dangerous to rule or act in concert without the fetters of restrictive rules and other powers set against their might, in balance.”

“Yes,” said Dalamar, eyeing the ceiling, “that is a topic best left until we know each other better. Yet I confess I would like to learn more of this band of wizards, if only to understand how they can be such dolts and still hold power.”

“The short answer, I think, is a talent for enthusiastic and ruthless persistence,” Mordenkainen said, “but I’ll bow to Elminster’s local expertise.”

“And I’ll tell ye both that the short answer we’ve just heard is correct, so far as it goes—and we’d best leave a full dismemberment of those unsavory sorcerers for another evening.” The Old Mage of Shadowdale waved his hands. Obediently, water ran in the kitchen, and a floating line of dirty plates and emptied wrappings rose from the table and started back down the hall.

Mordenkainen raised his head, sniffed, and bellowed suddenly, “Coffee!”

Dalamar raised his eyebrows. “Is that a drink? It sounds like an interesting subject, to be sure, but more so than the Zhentarim? They must be dull fellows.”

Both the older archmages chortled—then sighed, one after the other.

“I can see,” Elminster observed, as three steaming mugs came serenely down the hall, past the floating line of dirty dishes heading the other way, “that these evenings won’t have to be dull.” He looked to Dalamar. “I take it that you’ve not gained this whip spell, yet?”

The Black Robe wizard snorted gently. “No. I laid plans to acquire it—and anything else of note that Estel bore—but she, alas, outwitted me.”

“It happens to us all, lad,” Mordenkainen said gruffly. “So long as the experience is not fatal, escaping it’s a matter for thanks, not regret.”

There was a silence. “You miss your Circle of Eight,” Dalamar said softly. Mordenkainen nodded once after a pause, his gaze drifting away.

Dalamar kept his thoughts to himself. He sniffed his coffee, frowned, then murmured a word. The steam vanished as it rose from the mug, and the mug as well; now a crystal wineglass, frosted with cold, was lifted in his narrow fingers.

Elminster leaned back unconcernedly in his chair. “D’ye like ice cream, to finish up with?”

“You mean, to finish the food,” Mordenkainen said reprovingly, warming his

hands on his mug. “There’s plenty still to drink.”

“Aye, of course. They do wonderful things in this place with chocolate sweets, too.”

Dalamar relaxed as he sipped his wine. “I can wait for dessert. I seem to owe a measure of lore to you both. I’ve not told you anything new to your ears, yet.”

Two silent hands waved at him to continue, as the other mages slurped coffee in unison.

“This concerns an item of magic, not a spell,” said Dalamar. “It may have found its way to the Realms by now. The priest Ralamar Istrann, an Elder of Paladine, is one who wields it. He is a keen explorer of worlds other than my own, though I am not sure his fellows well appreciate his hobby. Several faiths in Kryn timer use such weapons now, and I suspect the gods sometimes bestow them on devout commoners, to further their ends.”

Mordenkainen set down his coffee. “This wouldn’t be a flail that sounds bells, would it?”

“Ah, it would.” Dalamar gave a faint, rueful smile.

“Good ideas make the rounds, you know,” the Lord Mage of Greyhawk said. “They’re never plentiful enough to be safely ignored, in matters of true magic.”

“Say on, Dalamar,” Elminster put in. “I’ve heard news from Impiltur about something like this, but no details. Say on.”

Dalamar nodded. “It’s called a ‘fleeting flail’ in Kryn timer. It strikes four times, each time with less of a magical assist, and thereafter shows no magic until new hands wield it.”

“Useful for temporary aid to thy worships,” Elminster said, nodding.

“Four peals of a bell are heard at its first and best magical blow,” Mordenkainen put in. “Then three, then two—marking by how much it is aiding the wielder’s attack.”

Dalamar nodded. “That’s it.” He hesitated, then added, “You’re no doubt both familiar with rings that allow one to read the thoughts of those around.”

“The ‘ring of ESP’?” Mordenkainen raised a finger to show a light patch. “I wear one myself—except when meeting wizards, when it might be considered impolite.”

Dalamar’s eyebrows rose, but his expression betrayed nothing. It was Elminster who chuckled.

“I’ve a simple little magical item to lay before ye both,” the Old Mage said. “It’s a ‘cloak of healing,’ used by many faiths in Faerun—just a normal cloak, but when donned it heals an injured mammal of any sort. Many of the larger temples and monasteries have some. A given cloak works only once for each being, and not many times in any event. I’ve been dragged back from near the grave a time or two by what looked like little more than a tattered old wrap discarded by a merchant in favor of a newer and better shoulder-rag.”

“Handy, Mordenkainen said. “Get me one.” His chuckle turned to a yawn, part

way through, and he added, “Forgive me. I’ve been through a lot these last few days.”

“It grows late,” Dalamar observed quietly, though he didn’t appear the slightest bit tired. “I’ve enjoyed our conversation and meal together. My thanks to you both.”

“Our thanks to you for taking the risk of coming,” Mordenkainen rumbled, and yawned again. “Sorry,” he added, when he was done.

Elminster yawned in turn. “A catching habit, I fear.” His warning eye turned my way, just for an instant—and the yawn building inside me died a quick, cold death.

Dalamar pushed back his chair and made as if to stand, then hesitated. “There’s one more thing I’m curious about.”

Two right-hand eyebrows rose, as one. “It concerns the Realms,” he went on. “A Black Robe of minor consequence recently returned from Undermountain, more or less intact but merely wiser rather than richer. My colleague encountered there what he thought was a beholder. It charged at his band of companions without using magic at all. The foremost warrior was white with fear, the Black Robe told me, but swung his blade nonetheless. At the blade’s touch, the thing split like a sliced grape. A swarm of tiny flying replicas came out and pounced on all there, drinking blood like stirges. He has the sucking wounds to prove it. Have you any idea what the thing was?”

“Ah.” Elminster looked old and wise. “It was a death kiss, a creature found in northern Faerun that looks like a beholder, but has no magic. Its eyestalks are actually sucking tentacles. It drinks blood; some folk even call it a ‘bleeder.’ Thy colleague met with one about to spawn. I’ve a paper, somewhere, written by an eminent member of the guild of naturalists, about death kiss spawn; I’ll bring it for ye, next time.”

“And that time will be—?” Dalamar asked smoothly.

In answer, Elminster’s fingers circled in the air, leaving trails of flames in their wake. Mordenkainen joined in, and Dalamar looked startled for an instant, then frowned a little and moved his own fingers. From what I could see, the three archmages appeared to be engaged in a brief flurry of silent signing that looked rather like children playing Scissors, Paper, Stone. Suddenly they all nodded, together. “Until next, then,” said Dalamar.

A moment later, the study was empty—leaving me trapped in the armor, hanging on the wall from at least two stout hooks that I couldn’t reach. I let out my breath after a few seconds in a very long sigh. I was exhausted and felt giddy. Sweat dripped from the end of my nose.

“Elminster,” I said pleasantly to the empty air. “About this armor . . .”

A chuckle answered me. “Etiquette, dear boy,” came a voice from the empty air

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nearby. "We must all leave together, ye see."

As he lifted off the helm, I raised my right eyebrow, just as I'd seen it done. He chuckled again and asked, "Hungry?"

For your campaign

Readers familiar with events in Oerth will note that this evening occurs shortly after the events of module WGA4 *Vecna Lives*, and well after the War of the Lance and the subsequent disappearance of Raistlin, in Krynn.

As usual, I have since wormed information enough out of Elminster to present the AD&D game rules covering the spells, magical items, and monsters mentioned in the mages' conversation.

Wizard spells

Blastbones

(Evocation, Necromancy)

Level: 2 Range: 40 yds.

Comp.: V,S,M Dur.: Special

CT: 2 ST: Special

AE: Bones, up to 3 cu. ft. total volume

This spell allows the caster to shatter bony material in a violent explosion. These bones may be either part of a simple undead skeleton or zombie, or inanimate skeletal remains, which can be any number of small, disconnected pieces. The spell can be cast to take effect immediately, or set to be triggered at any later time, at conditions governed by a verbal summary identical to that used in a magic mouth spell.

If acting immediately, the spell causes a skeleton, pile of bones, or the like to explode in a blast that affects a 20'-diameter spherical blast area. Beings in the area are allowed a saving throw vs. spells for half damage; if it fails, they take 2d4 hp damage from bone shards. If the skeleton is undead, it is destroyed in the explosion. Animated skeletons and zombies of humans, demihumans, humanoids, and animals are affected, but not those of giants or nonhuman monsters, or those that are part of more powerful magical beings like lichs or mummies.

If set as a trap, the spell causes an identical blast, but the damage may be augmented by other material placed deliberately to serve as shrapnel. A favorite trap use for this spell involves a zombie, set as a guardian. When it is attacked for a total of 6 hp or more damage, it explodes in shards of rotting flesh, bones, and nails (placed inside it before animation). Any beings within 30' are hit by 1d20 nails (no saving throw); each nail does 1 hp damage. Characters 31' to 45' distant must make two successful Dexterity checks to escape all damage; if one check succeeds, only 1d4 nails strike; if both checks fail, 2d8 nails strike.

In all cases, undead receive a saving throw against a *blastbones* spell; if the

save is successful, the spell works only as a small explosive puff, doing 1d4 + 1hp damage. If a delayed *blastbones* spell is cast on remains before they are animated as undead, no saving throw is granted, and the animation does not impair the future operation of the *blastbones*.

The material components for this spell are a drop of water, a fleck of dust, a pinch of ash, and the bones to be affected.

Double spell

(Necromancy)

Level: 3

Range: Touch

Comp.: V,S,M

Dur.: Special

CT: 1 rnd.

ST None

AE: Special

This rare spell affects only simple undead (basic zombies and skeletons from humans, demihumans, humanoids, and animals, but not the variants based on these body forms, such as crawling claws, ju-ju zombies, and baneguards). To take effect, this spell must be cast on newly created undead or remains that are to be immediately animated, within three rounds before or after the casting of the animate dead spell that creates the undead. It operates only if triggered, and the triggering can be one of two sorts, of which one must be chosen during casting.

The most commonly chosen trigger is magic. If any magic (including a dispel *magic* spell!) is cast on the undead or cast to include the undead in its area of effect, the undead vanishes, and two full-hit-point replacements appear in its place. Replacements appear at the beginning of the round after the one in which the original vanished. This is a one-time-only occurrence; multiple double *spells* won't work on the same undead, so 'doubling' can't be made an ongoing process.

A separate double *spell* is required for each undead to be affected. This spell only creates duplicates of the targeted undead, not other sorts of undead. Any equipment carried by the original undead vanishes, consumed by the activated spell, and is not duplicated for either of the replacements (magical items are *teleported* away to a random location' not destroyed).

The second trigger is clerical turning or disruption. When these are used against the guarded undead, it vanishes and is replaced by two full-hit-point, identical replacements that are immune to turning or disruption! (The same restrictions on undead type, occurrence, and equipment apply as for the spell's other triggering.)

The material components of this spell are a drop of blood, a small glass prism, two hairs (from any source) and the undead or remains to be affected.

Whip of pain

(Evocation)

Level: 3

Range: 0

Comp.: V,S,M

Dur.: 1 rnd./lvl.

CT: 3

ST! Special

AE: Special

This spell creates a whiplike, flexible line

of force, emanating from the fingertips of the caster's hand (or, for a caster lacking a hand, from the end of whatever is left of the caster's arm). This crackling, coiling line of purple sparks can be wielded as a lash in battle and strikes opponents up to 10' distant.

The *whip of pain* functions as a +2 magical weapon. If the wielder successfully strikes a target, there is a loud snapping sound, and the target must make a saving throw vs. spells and a Constitution check. If the save fails, 4d4 hp damage are suffered; if it succeeds, the target takes only half damage. If the check succeeds, the target feels only enough pain to suffer a -1 penalty to his very next attack roll. If it fails, the target is wracked by pain on that and the next round, which lowers his armor class by one, places a -2 penalty on attack rolls, and makes it impossible for him to concentrate enough to cast any spells.

Further spell-casting by the whip-wielder, the successful application of *dispel magic*, or the unconsciousness of the wielder will cause the *whip of pain* to disappear, ending the spell. (The wielder can trigger magical items like wands with his other hand without ending this spell.)

The material components of this spell are a drop of the caster's blood and one of the caster's hairs.

Manshoon's xorn talons

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 5

Range: 10'-70'

Comp.: V,S,M

AE: Special

CT: 5

ST: None

Duration: 1 trn. + 1 rnd./lvl.

This spell, also known as "stony hands" creates an invisible half-moon arc in front of the caster, set from 10' to 70' distant. To function at all, the spell must be cast on a solid, level surface, such as a floor, lawn, clearing, or flat roof (the surface can be covered by water, but it must be no more than a foot deep). The arc is 12' across at its center, and its curving "horns" are 20' apart; if solid, nonliving objects (such as walls, furniture, or stalagmites) are in the area of casting, or if the space is too small to permit the half-moon to fully form, the spell does not take effect and is wasted.

Any living being except the caster who enters any part of the crescent-shaped area of effect is instantly attacked by 2d4 stony taloned arms. These nonliving, unintelligent magical constructs resemble the upper limbs of living xorn. They erupt from the ground and grasp at any targets for 1-2 hp crushing damage each (THAC0 6); a successful hit means the clawed arm is holding its victim fast, inflicting no further damage on it. (Talons rise only where an intruder steps, not all across the half-moon, so the area of effect can be determined only by trial and error.)

Once they've grabbed victims, the arms simply hold on until the spell expires. Trapped victims cannot move beyond the stretch of their limbs. They suffer -2

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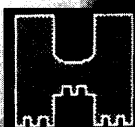
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penalties to all attack, damage, and saving-throw rolls, and lose all dexterity-related armor-class bonuses. The talons do no more damage, but a trapped victim who tries to tear free must make a successful open-doors roll; and each failed attempt does 1 hp damage to the victim.

The talons are AC 0, and each must be dealt 55 hp damage to shatter it. Spells that affect stone can be used against the talons (stone to *flesh* and *rock* to mud both affect the talons for 1d4 +2 rounds, lowering their effective AC to 7, and making them suffer double damage from all attacks), and a *passwall* spell destroys the talons in a pathway equal in extent to its usual area of effect. Spells such as *move earth*, which physically affect terrain, do not work against the talons. *Dispel magic* spells shorten the duration of talons by one round per spell, but have no apparent immediate effect—they do not cause talons to open, pause, or fade away. A *dispel magic* cast in an area cannot prevent this spell from functioning if the latter has not yet been cast, or if it has been cast but no talons have yet manifested. It does shorten the spell duration as noted if cast within nine turns of the casting of *Manshoon's xorn talons*.

The material component of this spell is a piece of xorn flesh; bone, talon, or hide.

Magical items

"XP Value" shows the experience points gained by a being who makes (enchants) such an item, not by one who merely comes to possess it. "GP Value" is the typical market price for the item in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, to a buyer who does not sense the seller is desperate for cash. PCs do not normally know the "going market rate" for any magical item.

Ring of ESP

This plain brass ring is a magical item that enables an intelligent wearer of any class or race to use *ESP* as per the wizard spell, up to three times per day, and up to one turn duration per time; it can be ended earlier by the mental command of the user. The wearer of such a ring gains a +1 bonus to all saving throws against enchantment/charm spells, whether or not the ring is active when the spell strikes.
XP Value: 2,000 **GP Value:** 16,500

Cloak of healing

This magical item can appear as any sort of ordinary cloak: leather, hide, black cotton, or tattered sheepskin. Placing a *cloak of healing* on any living mammal causes the cloak to pulse with a sudden, bright, rosy light. When the light fades, one round later, the being who donned it is instantly cured of any diseases, poisonings, lycanthropy, or *curses* (not including *geas* or *quest* spell effects), and all current hit-point damage.

Such cloaks function 2d4 + 1 times; at their last functioning, they fade into nothingness.

They function only on nonmagical mammals of any sort (including humans, demihumans, and humanoids of up to ogre size, and even including Pleistocene mammals such as mastodons, but excluding such magical, "unnatural" beasts as unicorns, pegasi, griffons). The cloak does not work on undead or already-dead persons, and it cannot *regenerate* lost limbs or organs.

XP Value: 400

GP Value: 6,000

Fleeting flail + 4

This weapon bears a special, limited-use enchantment. In any round in which a successful attack roll is made with it, the flail strikes before all other weapons and does its full possible damage. The first time it strikes, four rolling peals of an unseen bell will be heard; the second time it hits, three peals are audible; the third time the flail strikes, two peals are heard; and the fourth time it strikes, a bell tolls once. Thereafter, the weapon exhibits no magical properties until it is wielded by a new being, whereupon the cycle of four magically assisted strikes occurs again. No being—even if regaining a particular *fleeting flail* many years after first wielding it—can ever gain a second four-strike cycle. A wielder who loses possession of the flail before exhausting its magic, but later regains use of the same weapon, picks up at the point he had reached earlier in the flail's descending cycle of magic.

XP Value: 500

GP Value: 7,000

Monster notes

Flying fingers

These flying hands are specially enchanted crawling claws (from MC3, the first FORGOTTEN REALMS supplement to the *Monstrous Compendium*) that have been imbued with the power of flight. They are almost always (90%) encountered as guardians of a specific area or object, but their orders may allow them to pursue intruders or be freed to wander, usually attacking all living creatures they encounter. Their goal is invariably to attack whoever causes the removal or destruction of whatever the flying fingers guarded (if the wording of their orders during their creation was careful enough). They typically swoop to the attack, fighting until destroyed.

Flying fingers: INT non-; AL N; AC 7; MV 9, FI 14 (A); HD 1½; 4 hp each; THAC0 20; #AT 1; Dmg 1d4 (targets with AC 8 or better) or 1d6 (targets with AC 9 or 10); SD immune to turning and holy water, edged weapons do them only half damage (magical weapons do only "normal," nonmagical damage to them, though attack bonuses still apply); MR 100% (they will turn back all spells cast at them as a *ring of spell turning* does); SZ T (6" long or less); ML 20; XP 270; appear in the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set's adventures booklet ("Monster Guide" section).

Skeleton, champion

These rare undead are simply normal undead skeletons treated with secret necromantic spells so as to have extra powers. When "killed," champion skeletons collapse just as normal skeletons do—but unless a *dispel magic* is cast on their remains, or all of the bone shards are immersed in holy water, they will re-form and animate ("rise") 2d4 rounds later at their full hit points, then attack all living creatures (except their creator) in the vicinity. This rising up is accompanied by a pale-white, flickering burst of *faerie fire* radiance known as 'coldfire,' which lasts for one round. Any living thing that touches or attacks an undead emanating cold-fire suffers cold-based damage of 2d4 hp (this damage is not gained as hit points by the undead). Champion skeletons are enchanted to rise up three times each.

Champion skeleton: INT non-; AL N; AC 7; MV 12; HD 4; 25 hp each; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg: by weapon type or 1-2 hp when fighting unarmed; SA coldfire; SD immune to all cold-based attacks, all spells are *turned* 100% (as a *ring of spell turning*), edged or piercing weapons do only half damage; SZ M (6' tall); ML 20; XP 1,400; MC1. Holy water does 2d4 hp damage per vial to them.

Spawn, death kiss

In some cases, death kisses (see the *Ruins of Undermountain* boxed set, "Beholder-kin/Death Kiss") meet and mate without battling to the death. If such a "love match" occurs (one time in six), the two death kisses involved soon part to hunt again in solitary fashion. Inside their bodies, however, 5d10 buds develop, feeding on the bodies and blood of the parents—and driving the pregnant death kisses into a reckless feeding frenzy.

A month after mating, each parent has become a manic husk, hollowed out from within by its offspring. It continues feeding and fighting until it becomes so fragile that a single blow causes it to burst open, and its hungry, mobile young spill out, darting immediately to attack any living creatures they can find. These spawn, starved for blood, form a voracious swarm. Given spherical area of open air at least 10' in diameter around the target, up to 14 spawn can attack a single human-size target in a round.

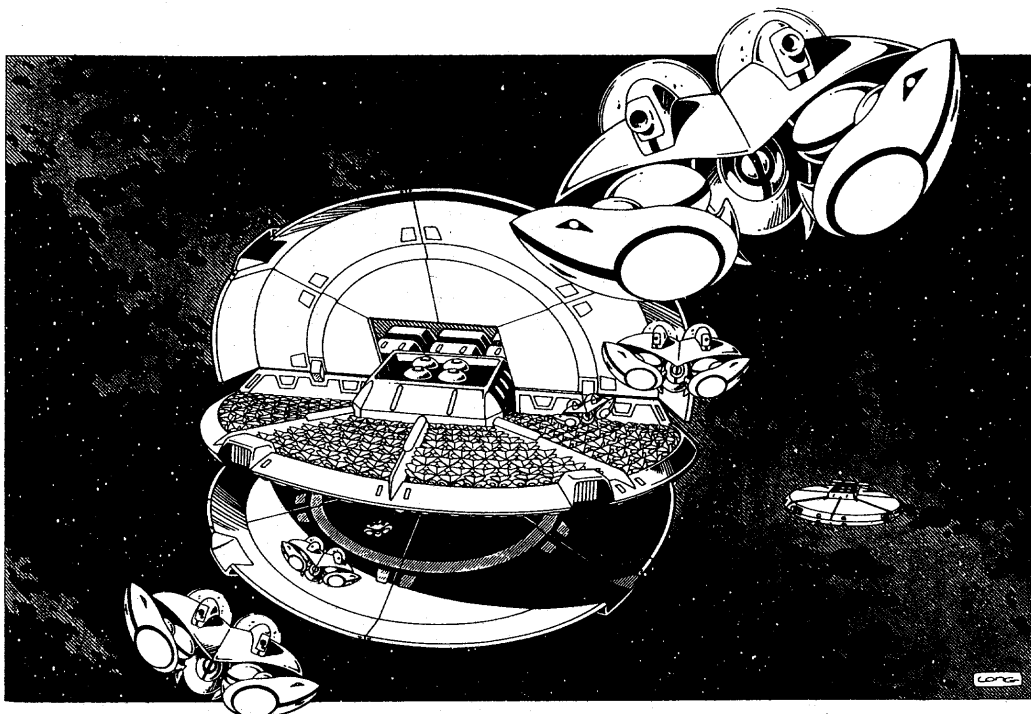
Death kiss spawn: INT average; AL NE; AC 8; MV FI 9 (C); HD 1; 5 hp each; THAC0 19; #AT 10; Dmg 1 (X 10); SA blood drain (automatic 1d4/round, beginning on the round after 1 hp damage attachment); SZ T (8" diameter, tentacles to 2' long); ML 19; XP 120. Ω

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FORUM

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I am writing in response to Victor Paraschiv's letter (issue #180) about the role of the fighter class in the AD&D® 2nd Edition game. In this letter, Mr. Paraschiv expressed the opinion that the fighter class is inferior and in danger of extinction. I could not disagree more.

First of all, I would like to refer Mr. Paraschiv to *The Complete Fighter's Handbook*. The use of these optional rules greatly enhances both the strength of the fighter class and its playability.

Since the publication of the 2nd Edition rules, I have participated in three separate campaigns. In these campaigns, I played a dwarven myrmidon, a human berserker, and a human gladiator. All of these characters were among the most powerful in their respective parties.

Fighters have a distinct advantage at low levels. First, they have more hit points and better armor classes, thus making them superior to other classes in survivability. Second, they are capable of doing far more damage than any other class. For example, a first-level mage is capable of casting one *magic missile* in combat, doing 1d4 + 1 hp damage. Compare this to a 1st-level berserker, who can do 2d4 + 11 hp damage three times every two rounds (assuming 18/00 Strength and specialization with the two-handed bastard sword). Clearly, fighters are essential to a low-level party.

At higher levels, with magical weapons, fighters retain their value by representing a reliable source of damage, each and every round. No chance of spell failure and no memorization limits—just a constant source of major damage to foes.

As to the issue of whether the ranger and paladin classes eclipse the need for fighters, take the example of my previously mentioned three characters. None of those characters could have held the ranger or paladin class, yet they were all viable and enjoyable characters.

Thus, I feel that Mr. Paraschiv was premature in his judgment. The AD&D 2nd Edition game's

fighter class is definitely worth a second look.

Steve De Young
Redlands CA

In issue #180, Mr. Paraschiv identified the fighter class as being "in danger of extinction." I would like to address this issue and to highlight two or three important points.

I have been playing fantasy role-playing games for six years now and have been playing AD&D 2nd Edition games for a considerable time. The campaign I am currently DMing has only served to emphasize Mr. Paraschiv's view. I strive to make magic a rarity; it is both enchanting and deadly when encountered. For this reason, there are not many player-character mages in the adventuring parties, so one should expect a great many fighters in the group. Sadly, this is not the case. Of the 24 different PCs that have dared to challenge my most nefarious adventures, three have been fighters and not one of these has managed to advance beyond 5th level. It is not just my campaign that is plagued in this way; many of the adventuring parties that I referee have the same lack of fighters. Though this is not a symptom of bad DMing, it is the DM's problem.

Naturally, I have tried to combat this by encouraging players to take up the fighter's role, yet it seems preferable to play rangers, paladins, or even thieves instead! The AD&D 2nd Edition game's fighter is sadly lacking in all important special abilities that players hunger for. Despite a fighter's freedom to choose any alignment, weapon, and armor, players are reluctant to play them. Even the advent of weapon specialization does not compensate for the fighter's ability deficiency. Let's face it, a +1 bonus to attack and a +2 to damage are not greatly appreciated when, for similar attribute scores and experience points, one can be blowing the hell out of the enemy with Melf's minute *meteors* and *fireball* as a mage—a much more exciting alternative. And why bother playing a fighter when one can play a cleric and cast spells, turn undead, and get priestly benefits, all for fewer experience points per level?

Once the fighter has struggled through the lower levels to arrive at name-level status, he finds his friends have greater powers. Perhaps he is daunted by the prospect of adventuring with these people or feels inferior to his cousins, the ranger and paladin.

Sadly, players don't realize the joys of role-playing the simple fighter—and make no mistake, fighters provide the best opportunities for good PCs. From the most valiant knight to the lowliest outlaw, from the simplest tribesman to the daring swashbuckler, from savage to nobleman—all are rewarding characters. Will the character fighter, whomever he may be,

continue to exist only as an inferior nonplayer character?

As to what can be done to make players pick up the challenge of being a fighter, I have independently arrived at three conclusions. As I have already mentioned, players need incentives to play characters, and each of my proposals deals with this aspect of player psychology.

First, I propose that the amount of experience points needed to achieve new levels be reduced by 20% per level for the fighter, making it necessary for a fighter to accumulate only 1,600 XP to reach 2nd level.

Second, instead of awarding fighters 1d10 hp per level, they should be awarded 1d12 or even 1d10 + 2.

Finally, if one or both of the above measures fail to make the fighter class more attractive to your players, simply increase or improve the followers that the 9th-level fighter receives. You could even do this to suit your campaign, having knights or Arabian camel-riders appear. Give fighters exciting followers, have them enter the service of a noble, or grant them noble titles. Fighters can be exciting with a little imagination—not every warrior comes from the local town! With a little creativity, the simple fighter will live on as a PC in the AD&D 2nd Edition game.

M. J. Simpson
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, U.K.

Victor Paraschiv brought up a good point in his letter to "Forum" in issue #180. Mr. Paraschiv stated that the fighter class in the AD&D 2nd Edition rules is still inferior to other classes, even though it has weapon specialization.

Even this is lost to them with the introduction of other classes in various campaigns, such as knights of Solamnia (in the DRAGONLANCE® campaign) and gladiators (in the DARK SUN® campaign). Both of these classes are able to specialize and gain even more abilities. When my group played in the DARK SUN campaign, it consisted of over 50% gladiators, and we all agreed that with these rules, no one in his right mind would play a fighter.

One way to make fighters at least a little better is to allow *only* fighters to have an exceptional strength rating and also allow *only* fighters to have a constitution bonus of +3 or greater. This still doesn't make fighters that much better, but it is a start. If anyone else has any more ideas, I would like to hear them.

Selman Halabi
Toronto, Ontario

I'd like to comment on Mr. Paraschiv's view of the fighter class. According to Mr. Paraschiv, fighters, especially humans, are the weakest of all classes.

However, if we compare the fighters with the other classes, it is obvious that the fighter is second to none when it comes to defeating the evil monsters attacking all those frail mages and thieves. Warriors do have a higher bonus for high constitution scores, have possible exceptional strength, have more attacks per round, and generally have more hit points than other classes. Only priests can hope to equal the fighter in a fair fight and they sometimes work under severe limitations imposed by their faith (unless you're a follower of Tempus).

Now, let's consider the other warrior classes the paladin and the ranger. True, a paladin has lots of benefits, but he has several limitations (no followers, only lawful-good henchmen, no followers at 9th level). The ranger does attract followers and can fight two-handed without restriction; still, he's more at ease in the woods,

and his benefits diminish in cities or dungeons. Rangers and paladins also have limited spell use, which gives them some advantage over normal fighters. Mr. Paraschiv states that even with weapon specialization, the fighter is still inferior to the paladin and the ranger. A beginning specialist fighter has the same number of attacks as a 7th- to 12th-level paladin or ranger, while those classes have no bonus on their attack (+1) and damage (+2) roll. A fighter specialized with a bow can fire before initiative is rolled if he has an arrow nocked and drawn, something I consider to be a great advantage.

Another point is the supposed advantage of multiclassed PCs. Multiclassed fighters cannot specialize and are limited in their choice of weapons and armor if they want to use their other classes effectively (there are also considerable level limitations).

One last remark: A couple of issues back, someone wrote about the weakness of the mage class in the AD&D game; now the fighter is a weakling, and next month the thief will be a wimp. Properly played, every PC, regardless of class, can become a powerful character—someone you wouldn't dare anger. If someone has any comments on this, please write to me.

William De Pretre
Weimanstraat 25
8377 Zuijkerker, Belgium

I think that Mr. Paraschiv (issue #180) is correct in stating that the fighter is weaker than the other character classes. However, I do not feel that this weakness in any way detracts from the attractiveness of the class.

By definition, a fighter is a hack-n'-slash battler—the most basic of any of the character classes. This is the source of both its weakness and its appeal. The role-playing options for a paladin are restricted—each one must adhere to strict rules in order to remain a paladin. Rangers are likewise limited in scope; their backgrounds and, to some extent, their personalities, are mapped out for the player. Both classes must be good-aligned and have inextricable ties to an outside force, either nature or religion.

It is not my purpose to put down either of these classes. Actually, I consider the challenge of role-playing a realistic paladin an exciting and formidable one—the paladin is one of my favorite characters. Instead, I would point out that fighters can be built from the ground up.

A fighter can be given depth by a good player; alignment, background, and code of living are all open for creation. The personality of the character is not limited by some set of guidelines. A fighter can be a barbarian plainsman, a swashbuckling pirate, or a shining knight. Or you can break away from the stereotypes and create a really unique character. The opportunities are just not as expansive for other characters. The mage is always in search of knowledge. The thief seeks either glory or wealth. The priest follows the edicts of religion.

In the fighter's simplicity lies both his bane and his fortune. It all depends on whether you're in the game to get somewhere or to challenge yourself.

John Duffin
Calgary, Alberta

I am writing in response to Mr. Paraschiv's letter in issue #180 in regard to the imminent extinction of the fighter class. I believe that statement to be very untrue.

The fighter, regardless of which edition of the AD&D game you're using, has always and ever will be one of the most versatile, exciting, and powerful character classes that the game has to

offer. I have been playing AD&D and other role-playing games now for close to seven years and have played every character class at least twice. I have been the DM for three different campaigns and have read all the worthy novels put out by TSR, and I still regard the fighter class with nobility because of its usefulness.

For starters, the fighter class is very versatile, meaning it can have any alignment, any weapon, and literally hundreds of different magical items. It does not have a restricting code of honor or some deity to follow and appease (unlike the ranger and paladin). A fighter can be of any origin, come from countless different backgrounds and societies, and have whatever faith he or she chooses.

Secondly, the fighter class is exciting. Historical heroes show that fighters were the generals and emperors. Sir Lancelot was a fighter, not a paladin; El Cid was a fighter with wise values, and Robin Hood was a fighter who knew how to use a bow and get around a forest without getting lost. Other examples in our very own AD&D universe could be the Heroes of the Lance, specifically Caramon and Sturm. Sturm, who everyone thought so diligently a knight, was really a fighter with etiquette and the longing to be a knight. Caramon, one of the most famous fighters, was not made because of a need for a kick-ass character, but because of a need to contrast Raistlin without killing him out of religious or ethical qualms (that is why a paladin was not chosen).

Lastly, a fighter is powerful. He can reach limitless levels and attain great superiority over most classes. Paladins and rangers can attain these levels, but who cares? So now you have a

30th-level paladin, yeah. A fighter can always have another quest in store for him, rule a country, or travel the dimensions and Astral plane with the help of magic and his wizard buddies. A paladin becomes boring when he achieves high levels and has no zest or appeal—by this time, all crusades are incredibly easy, and his magical and innate powers make him invincible. He cannot take the perilous trek into the lair of the drow to loot their treasure because: 1) it's unethical; and 2) he probably has too many magical items (and who needs gold now?).

To sum up, I have to say that the fighter will never be weak, boring, or pointless. He will always symbolize the epitome of AD&D games and the history behind them, and I'm pretty sure he won't die out.

Remember: Conan was a fighter.

Andre Costantini
St. Catharines, Ontario

It was with great sadness that I read your [the editor's] reply to Mr. Danielson's letter (issue #178), finalizing once and for all the question of weapon specialization. The problem caused is quite simply this: goodbye swashbuckler, goodbye to the truest of AD&D game combatants.

The swashbuckler kit (*The Complete Fighter's Handbook*, pages 34-35) specifies that a fighter character inclined toward the use of a light, rapid weapon and the wearing of brightly colored silk clothes (i.e., a swashbuckler) must "devote half of his weapon proficiency slots to those four weapons [from the fencing blades group: stiletto, main-gauche, rapier, and sabre]. Once he has achieved specialization in all four

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of those weapons, he may freely choose where the rest of his weapon proficiency slots go."

As the initial number of weapon proficiencies for a swashbuckler is six, the most outrageous character is created by spending these as follows: two for proficiency in the fencing blades group, one for specialization in a weapon from said group, and two more for two-weapon style and ambidexterity, leaving one slot free for variety's sake [see pages 58-60 of the *CFH*]. Using this system, the swashbuckler runs into trouble immediately upon reaching 3rd level, at which time his new slot must be spent on another specialization.

If the one-weapon specialization limit were to be enforced, we could say goodbye to swashbucklers higher than 2nd level. There is, of course, a simple modification that could make the required specialization possible without allowing other fighters too great an advantage. My proposition is that all single-class fighters alone should be allowed to specialize in as many weapons as they wish, with the limitation that all such weapons must be in same tight weapons group.

On the question of ranger/paladin weapon specialization, though, I can see the point in disallowing this. I do, however, have an alternative. After all, rangers are fabled masters of the bow and long sword, and paladins of the lance and long sword, yet (with the exception of elven rangers) they gain no advantage over normal fighters. Characters of these two classes could, if the DM agrees, be allowed to specialize in a single weapon only, but at the cost of two and three proficiency slots, respectively; bow specialization would cost three and five slots, respectively.

With that out of the way, there is still another optional use for weapon proficiency slots that I have devised primarily for swashbucklers: specialization in called shots (*CFH*, pages 65-69). These normally require a -1 penalty to initiative and a -4 to hit. Specialization in a specific maneuver, however, would cancel the initiative penalty and reduce the attack penalty to somewhere in the range of 0 to -2, at the DM's discretion. Note that specialization in Expert Disarm should not be possible, though Disarm specialization would allow the expert maneuver with -1 and -4/6 penalties. (Even if this kind of specialization is allowed and it cancels normal attack penalties, a -6 on the Expert Disarm would be advisable, given the sheer difficulty of the trick.)

Lastly, one final proficiency-related question remains. The level-related gains in proficiencies seems somewhat arbitrary and illogical. Would it not be more realistic to have proficiency gains related to the time a character spends specifically studying a given subject—this time being class-dependent, of course? After all, where do the normal people in the world (e.g., blacksmiths) get the levels to increase their non-weapon proficiency scores?

Any advice or comments on these subjects would be greatly appreciated.

Rick Tazzele
London, U.K.

I have a great deal of trouble with the way AD&D 2nd Edition game fighter subclasses are presented. If you are choosing a fighter subclass, there is no reason to take a ranger. Though the ranger is a popular class, the game mechanics as described clearly favor the paladin. The reasons are described below:

1. Rangers must be any good alignment, whereas paladins must be lawful good. In a group of good role-players, such restrictions do not have a terribly great impact; there are as

many interpretations of lawful good as there are lawful-good gods with paladins.

2. If a paladin ever performs a chaotic act, he must atone. If a paladin performs an evil act, he loses his character class, but so what. Most role-players are not going to foul up, and a good DM does not force no-win situations upon his players. If a ranger performs an evil act, he must atone but doesn't have to seek out a cleric. Again, so what. The only difference here is that if the paladin does something chaotic, he continues to gain experience. Rangers, on the other hand, stop advancement immediately. While the paladin does not gain experience while atoning, he can still gain experience while getting there.

3. The paladin has 10 special abilities; the ranger has five. What is listed as a special ability for the ranger is considered a disadvantage for the other. The paladin does not attract followers, but can build keeps. The ranger attracts followers and can build a keep, but cannot maintain the money necessary to build one, nor are more than 50% of their followers appropriate to staffing a keep. This is not an advantage, because people will flock to a paladin anyway because of his high charisma.

4. A paladin has unique special abilities that always work; only two of his abilities are in any way conditional (a paladin requires a special weapon to gain a circle-of power, and turning undead requires a die roll). By contrast, a ranger's thieving abilities, his tracking, and his animal empathy require a die roll of some kind. Furthermore, his armor restriction gives him an average AC 6 (studded leather + Dex 15). The paladin has an average AC 4 (banded mail). If the ranger wears banded mail, both the ranger and the paladin need to spend the same number of proficiency slots to buy off the off-hand weapon penalty.

5. Rangers gain priest spells up to third level and get two spheres (plant and animal). Paladins gain priest spells up to fourth level and get four spheres (combat, divination, healing, and protection). Rangers do get spells one level earlier, but when you're dealing with this many experience points, it's pretty much irrelevant.

6. Rangers cannot have hirelings, henchmen, or any servants until they reach 8th level. Paladins can hire as many as they want, but those must be lawful good. When a ranger can get hirelings, isn't he going to make sure that they are good as he is? (Remember, the minimum wisdom for this class is 14.)

7. Rangers require three statistics above 16 to gain a 10% XP bonus. Paladins require only two, and one of these they always have (charisma). I strongly believe, in my heart of hearts, that this is a typographical error and that the score you meant it to be was wisdom [*It wasn't. —The Editor*]. However, whether this is so or not, the ranger still loses.

8. A paladin must tithe 10% of all the treasure he gets to his religious institution. A ranger can't even carry, in a great many cases, the 10% the paladin must tithe. The ranger can convert it to a portable form, but this is not always possible and usually costs more than the 10% a paladin has to give away. However, paladins can keep ungodly sums, in excess of 500,000 gp, to build a structure of reasonable size using the *Castle Guide*.

9. A paladin may not possess more than 10 magical items. So what? Five out of 10 DMs do not consider potions to be full-fledged magical items. The other five don't give out much magic anyway.

10. These two classes take the same amount of experience to rise in levels. This is a major injustice.

11. It is more difficult to become a ranger than it is to become a paladin, because as the ranger you need a set of scores that are higher in average overall. The law of averages supports a wide range of scores, making it easier to support a paladin character in the first place.

There are several more discrepancies, that would make this letter altogether too long. I have been a DM for 12 years, and I can be pretty sure that this is a game balance foul-up. However, I have several ideas that might balance this out:

1. In the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, some rangers are specialty priests of Mielikki. If so, does this mean that they can use clerical magical items and scrolls? This would help to solve the problem, especially considering that, in certain areas of the Realms, a ranger's word in the wilderness is not just important, it's the law! Declare all rangers to be functioning priests, whether or not they can actually cast spells, and the problem is partially solved.

2. Give rangers the ability of weapon specialization. The only thing that compensates for a lower average armor class other than magical items is the ability to do more damage when you actually hit, not just the ability to swing more often. The fighting-with-two-weapons ability is just so much hokey.

3. Give rangers more dangerous followers. Twenty percent of all of a ranger's followers will be bears—how blasé (or unbearable). Roll 2d4 for follower level; this gives a ranger a chance to gain followers who will truly make some kind of difference, and maybe even make constructing a keep a worthwhile enterprise.

4. Give the ranger a damage bonus of +1 for every two levels against his species enemy. That way, when the ranger meets it (and trust me, this will not happen every few weeks unless the ranger picks an insignificant creature that he doesn't need the bonus to kill anyway), he will be able to do some serious damage to the creature. After all, he has spent a great deal of his life learning how to fight it.

5. Make the species enemy more general. Instead of a specific creature, make the species enemy based on general types. Instead of green dragon, dragons should be the character's species enemy; instead of drow, races of the underdark (including drow, driders, mind flayers, aboleth, and kuo-toa).

6. Give the rangers more clerical spells, up to fourth level, and the elemental and weather spheres.

I am certainly not suggesting that you do all of these, though it might be a good idea to see what works and what doesn't. Something must be done. The ranger is falling by the wayside in a great many campaigns because the AD&D 2nd Edition rules have paralyzed the character class.

Let it be noted that I have run a ranger in my own campaign for close to three years, and if it weren't for the fact that her statistics are positively miraculous, I would have had a corpse several times over. I also would like to say that I've run a paladin and observed its problems firsthand. These discrepancies are real, they hurt the AD&D 2nd Edition game, and they prevent people from playing the time-honored ranger class that many people associate with the essentials of fantasy gaming. If anyone has any solutions to this problem, please mail them to me so I can playtest and implement them.

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Ω



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The VOYAGE of the PRINCESS ARK

Part 35: The return home

by Bruce A. Heard

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

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Amphimir 25, AY 2001—Haldemar:

After the strange discoveries of the past weeks, I decided to return to Alphatia and warn Her Imperial Majesty. I couldn't take the time to fly the *Princess Ark* all the way back, nor did I want to take the risk of breaching the skyshield for a faster journey. The ship still needed repair anyway. So, despite Her Majesty's orders to stay away from the empire, I took along Lady Abovombe and faithful Myojo when I cast a *travel* spell, Talasar would take the *Princess* out of the land of Wallara and seek another repair site.

I had to find a short cut through the

outer planes. Soon after leaving the Astral plane, we reached the plane of Draesten, a cluster-universe of raw energy in the outer planes. There, we appeared to be standing on a high mountain peak Rainbows of magical might shimmered across the sky all around us. We flew for some time among Draesten's dizzying flashes and bursts of hue and energy when I noticed a flickering silhouette following us. It was so faint I had missed it earlier, but it was there, and it was alive. The silhouette, possibly 20' long, seemed to follow our flight, occasionally coming up to our side.

I spoke to it, but it did not respond. I tried sign language, with the same ineffectual result. At last, I gambled a *read magic*. Success! The flickering light was sentient and friendly She stated she'd be willing to carry us to the site we sought, in exchange for a burst of magical energy—mere food for this creature. I suspected curiosity to be her motivation, for this place was filled with all sorts of energy.

As the deal was struck, the three of us found ourselves within the multicolored entity and shot across the sky, hurtling through Draesten like comets in Mystara's firmament. It took little time to reach the end of our journey in this strange world. The creature—I called her a *flicker*—stopped among a cluster of floating rocks. Floating above one, it created a gate of blue, crackling light.

I cast a minor spell as payment, then we bid the flicker farewell and entered the gate. Alas, I soon discovered it led not to the place we had sought. I had expected to see the Hardball arena in Sundsvall. Instead, we stood in the Ethereal plane, observing through the wisps of ether a very large and unknown cavern somewhere on the Prime plane.

The gate faded away behind us. Trapped! The flicker had tricked us. But





why? I had no *travel* spells left. So, while I could rest and meditate for new spells, Myojo and Abovombe would watch for any activity in the cavern and around us in the Ethereal plane.

Amphimir 26—Talaras, from a later account: Not far from the lands of Wallara, we found a patch of very tall trees towering over the forest. We could see no activity below, save for some unusually large raccoon-faced monkeys casually jumping from branch to branch—nothing to worry about. They'll make a good stew for the crew.

I had the *Princess Ark* hover above a clearing, and sent the crew down to prepare for the ship's landing. Once they were down, I ordered the ship to become visible to ease repair. Work was proceeding at a good pace. Several trees with perfectly straight trunks were soon cut down. Raman and Leo were doing wonders directing operations.

Suddenly, a volley of stings, stones, sticks, spears, and arrows came pouring down on the crew. Sentries were the first to fall, most of them without a word. I saw Ramissur pull a sting out of his arm, take a few steps, and fall flat on his face. Poison! Our attackers were hiding in the bushes and the trees. I could not see them. Feeling a burning sensation on the back of my neck, I turned around and barely had the time to notice a strange, raccoon-faced monkey staring back at me from under the shadow of a large fern. It held a long blowgun. The scene blurred and all went dark.

Amphimir 26—Haldemar: It appeared the cavern was made of black stone fused by great heat. Approximately 500' in diameter, it had the shape of a sphere except for the flattened floor. A dull-gray structure, almost 200' long, occupied the center. Nearby stood a large statue with an inscription at the bottom: "Alexander Glantri—Still He Protects."

Glantri? Perhaps we had entered a secret crypt somewhere in Glantri. The Draesten flicker clearly had something in mind when it lead us here. There must have been someone else behind its actions—someone powerful. Who?

I studied the gray structure and found no way to enter it. The whole object was magical and impervious to my influence, even from the Ethereal plane. I tried *dispelling* its fields of magic and casting a *magical door*; but these attempts and several others proved futile. The mysterious structure either exuded powerful *anti-magic* or it was an artifact. Considering the size of the structure, either possibility seemed mind-boggling. Even Alphatia could not produce something like this! To think Glantrians concealed such a device sent a chill down my spine.

I had guessed I'd have to deal with some sort of mystery here and had studied my spell of lore last evening. The spell revealed the structure was called the "Nucleus of the Spheres." It also unveiled its

function: to enhance one's magical prowess while forever draining magic from the world of Mystara.

I felt a ghastly hand clutch my heart. How could they? The Glantrians were using some sort of evil magical device to destroy the most precious element of our world. Life without magic? Inconceivable!

All I had learned in the past weeks now made sense. The clues about Glantri, Alphatia, and magic being drained were pulling together. Somehow, I was linked to all this. Perhaps my destiny had already been woven, and it led me to this obscure place. Else, someone wanted me to come here, despite my journeys away from the Known World.

I had to do something about this Glantrian scheme, whatever it was. If there was something like *forbidden magic*, this was it. If I warned Her Majesty, it would mean war. Surely, the empire would not ignore this fiendish magical device and would have to march against Glantri sooner or later. Thyatis would, of course, inevitably rise against Alphatia, given my country's actions. Knowing Thyatians, they just would never allow an Alphatian presence in what they've always considered as their backyard.

What was I to do? I had fought before and knew all too well the savagery and sorrow of war. Many would suffer and die. Should men die for magic to exist? How right was this cause?

My dilemma was eating at me. If I did nothing, magic and all that is wondrous would disappear forever from our world. If I exposed the Glantrian scheme, empires would clash in perhaps the greatest of all wars, bringing misery and darkness to many. What if Alphatia lost the war?

No. I wasn't brought here merely to do nothing. If so, they should have chosen someone else instead. I just was not that kind. Perhaps without magic there would be neither man nor world—indeed, it was time to leave this forsaken place. I had seen enough.

Amphimir 27—Talaras, from a later account: I awoke to find myself tied to a tree trunk. Next to me was Raman. The remainder of the crew was slowly waking up as well. The entire crew was similarly tied, dangling from branches or tied to masts on the *Princess Ark*. With horror, I realized our assailants had taken over the ship.

They were halfling-sized creatures, more or less like monkeys. They were intelligent. Two of their war-party leaders were arguing, perhaps about what to do next. I asked Raman, "Are you hurt, man?"

"I don't think so. I've been listening to them for some time. I can understand some of their words. If only I could move, I might be able to communicate with them." Raman tried to twist out of his ropes.

I could move one hand. I managed to loosen some of Raman's ropes and they began to give way. The natives began

playing drums and a distant echo responded. Good, that kept their attention away from us. Raman eventually freed himself and untied me. Before anything else, I prayed for Razud to bestow upon my companion a blessing to neutralize poison. He would need it to approach the natives—soon-as my voice attracted the natives' attention.

Raman stepped forward, cleared his throat, said, "Gentlemen, would you please—" and went on chirping at the natives in their strange speech, making gestures. After a moment of silence, a wave of rage overtook the natives. Raman had perhaps insulted one of the leaders. A cloud of poisoned stings came flying in his direction. A moment later, Raman was still standing there, trying to protect himself while removing the prickly stings. The natives became suddenly quiet.

In apparent awe, they all dropped to their knees and bowed before Raman. "Oh, by the Brow of Smaarad!" said Raman. "They think I'm some sort of forest spirit!" His ability to resist their sleeping poison had truly impressed the natives. They were ready to obey him, up to a point. Raman convinced his followers to untie me, but they refused to free anyone else. Soon afterward, the natives carried us toward their village.

Amphimir 27—Haldemar: With the help of a *travel* spell, we returned to the location in Draesten where we had last seen the flicker. She was gone, and so was the magical gate. As I suspected, further attempts to return to the Glantrian device through the outer planes failed completely. Without the gate, I was unable to retrace our path to the cavern.

Our journey led us to the Hardball arena in the Imperial capital. It was a game day. The place was crowded and no one noticed our arrival. We entered the palace grounds thanks to my family seal. Seals are magical items that Alphatian nobility often use to enter or exit the Imperial palace. It gives the Lord of the Guard a convenient way of locking out unwanted families and checking on who visits the palace. I was relieved to see that the Haaken seal was still acceptable. The magical door opened after I removed my seal from the recess. We entered.

Palace halberdiers came to attention as we walked down the cavernous main hallway. Noblemen and palace officials politely nodded as we went by, largely minding their business. So far, things were going fine.

At regular intervals stood pedestals with the busts of past rulers and legendary state figures. Unfortunately, they were fitted with *magic mouths* that emphatically announced our arrival, according to the seal I had presented at the entrance. Much to our discomfort, their calls echoed down the long hallway. We would've preferred inconspicuousness to pomp and circumstance just then. After some time, nobles began giving us furtive looks, while people

whispered behind our backs.

The Imperial Herald walked up to us and discreetly slipped a note into my hand. It said that Her Majesty wished to see us at once. At least she had found out quickly enough about my return. Unusually, we met in her quarters in a rather informal way. It appeared that she was more concerned about avoiding public attention than displaying any outgoing friendliness. Fortunately, Empress Eriadna did not bring up the topic of my obligation to stay out of Alphatia.

Empress Eriadna nevertheless enjoyed the presence of Lady Abovombe and even showed some curiosity toward Myojo. She had never seen a rakasta before. Then came the more serious business. I informed her of all that had happened lately, and of the Glantrian device. She considered the information at length.

"I do trust you, Admiral, but I doubt that the Council of Wizards will. You have no tangible proof of these incredible things you just told me. It will take time before I am in a position to back your discovery. Even then, there is dissention among the council. A faction secretly works to split the council, perhaps conspiring to seize the throne. I haven't yet identified who is behind the treachery. I am convinced that this faction would push the council to discredit you and your discoveries in order to get to me.

"Unbeknownst to the council, I have pursued a quest to unveil that hollow world of yours. I have now received proof of its existence beneath our world, and started establishing a way to reach it more quickly. Some day, that new world will be Alphatian. Should anything happen to the empire as a result of the Glantrian scheme, look toward the hollow world. You might very well find me there.

"You find my words rather gloomy, but I have been suspecting some great evil at work. I have known for some time now that magic is slowly waning from Mystara. The temple priests have spoken of friction among the Immortals, and it seems to have something to do with magic. If this is true, Admiral, someone far greater than even kings and emperors of Mystara has guided your path ever since you left the empire. If so, even the whole of mighty Alphatia may not make a difference at the end.

"I will speak to the Glantrian wizard-princes. I will pray that they listen to the voice of reason. Should I fail, a great war will follow. I am not certain we'll win, but this empire will fight like never before. The world will not be the same again.

"Admiral, it is time for you to return home. I want you to stay at your ancestral domain in Floating Ar. You will be safe there. Be patient. I may need your help and the service of your loyal crew in the difficult times to come. You have done well and shall not be forgotten."

Amphimir 28—Talasara, from a later account: Some time before arriving at their village, the war party halted the

march. Everyone rested from the long, difficult journey through the woods.

Sometime after our meal, both Raman and I began suffering from severe cramps. A shaman had made us drink a magical potion of his making. As a result, we both shrunk to the natives' size. The shaman watched us and laughed, "You not spirit! Not spirit!" That was bad luck.

We eventually reached the village—a place named Cafua—if Raman got the name right. The village sat up in the branches of the tallest trees. Precarious, hanging bridges linked a multitude of platforms on top of which sat the natives' huts. They had to haul us up with ropes, since we couldn't climb the tall trees at all. We were allowed some rest in the shaman's hut—a detestable place with all sorts of dried insects pinned to the walls, all manner of snakes and arachnids hanging from the roof, and, worst of all, an impressive collection of mummified skulls, most of which looked like shrunken human heads,

The shaman showed up with a sly grin. After a rudimentary conversation with Raman, we learned that these were the phanaton people of Jibaru, forest hunters and tree dwellers. It took some doing to convince the shaman that we weren't from Herath—apparently people they didn't like. He still seemed suspicious. A phanaton warrior entered the hut and motioned us to follow him. The village chief wanted to see us.

He, too, was very suspicious. Then, the shaman told Raman to enter a large cage that sat on one of the tree platforms. It was filled with large spiders. I quickly bestowed upon him the same magical protection against poison, but that did not reassure him one bit. He hated spiders. At the sight of what lay in the cage, so did I. There was little choice there. Dozens of warriors aimed their bows at Raman and I. The chief then said "You enter cage, or Ixu make trophy of your head."

Raman entered. The spiders all leaped on top of him. I could barely see his hands and feet sticking out from under the crawling mass, as he screamed in abject terror. The village chief raised his hand and a volley of blowgun stings neutralized the spiders.

Moments later, the phanatons pulled Raman from under the dozing arachnids. It seemed the spiders did not react as expected. The shaman then said, "He not man from Herath; spiders attack him." The phanatons quickly applied herbal concoctions to Raman's wounds.

The rest of the day went more peacefully, thank Razud. We learned that the phanatons of Jibaru were spider-hunters, and not surprisingly, had gotten in trouble with the neighboring Herathians over the years. Not having seen many humans, they thought we too were from Herath. Had the spiders not attacked Raman, by now our heads would be adorning the chief's hut, soon to be followed by those of the

entire crew,

Finally, the Jibaru released us and the crew. They brought food (baked spider legs), fruits, nuts, and other forest goods, while the crew worked on the ship. After a night of feasting, drum-beating, and dancing around a large campfire, we took our leave and returned to the *Princess Ark*. It turned out these phanatons were good fellows after all.

Amphimir 29—Haldemar: After another travel spell, we were back aboard the *Princess*. I was pleased to see repairs were on schedule and that everything had gone well. At least they had an easy time!

I announced the news of what had happened to the crew. Everyone was stunned and overjoyed. At last, we were going home for good. I couldn't help thinking about what was to come, though. What did the future hold for the *Princess* and her loyal crew? It seemed that the adventure was over for now. But does adventure ever really end on Mystara?

The End

Phanatons

Land of Jibaru—Capital: Itucua (pop.: 1,250 phanatons); ruler: Queen Barana-Ui "Orchid-Soul," daughter of Queen Ujiri-Xuu "Forest-Whisper"; Immortal patron: Ui.

Phanatons are halfling-size mammals that look like a cross between raccoons and monkeys. A membrane stretches between their limbs that allows them to glide from branch to branch (and to fly at higher levels). They have long, prehensile tails that can easily support their weight. These tree-dwellers were originally described in *AC9 Creature Catalog*, page 43.

Relative to the ancient araneas of Herath, phanatons are newcomers among the civilized races. In their early years, phanatons were forest predators that fed on large insects, lizards, and small mammals. Immortals gave them a natural agility that made the phanatons well suited to hunting dangerous creatures like poisonous snakes, scorpions, and spiders. Among these, the latter were by far the most common prey in the region.

At first, phanatons were viewed as a nuisance by other races. In their early years, phanatons hunted common spiders and occasionally giant ones—araneas used the latter as servants, thus the spider-folks annoyance (see episode #30, *DRAGON*® issue #183). It was fashionable then for affluent araneas to capture and tame young phanatons as pets. No araneas in their right minds would otherwise ever venture deep into the northwestern end of the Orc's Head Peninsula since the region was notorious for being infested with these pesky creatures.

Over the centuries, phanatons grew smarter. They had been a race on the brink of becoming fully sentient. Perhaps the habit of those captured phanatons to mimic their aranean masters precipitated the natural process of their evolution. At

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the heart of Jibaru, there rose a new breed of phanatons who organized a society and eventually took over the region.

They got better at hunting spiders, thanks to their natural agility, but also due to new hunting methods involving bait, nets, and missile weapons. They also learned to make blowguns to shoot needles dipped in a paralyzing poison made from giant-spider venom. Although many spiders still dwell in the region, there are far fewer of them today. Phanatons then began raising giant spiders in captivity, as cattle, but in order to renew their stock, phanatons performed occasional forays into Herath, whose forests were reputed for their plump, juicy giant spiders.

Some unwitting araneas were caught in their natural form and taken back to Jibaru. Amazed phanatons later discovered "humans" among their catch, and not knowing what to do with them—certainly, they would not eat them!—the phanatons released them. Phanatons came to believe these spiders to be the souls of very evil beings. They were a bad omen. Since then, a prevailing suspicion among the phanatons is that the people of Herath harbored evil spirits among them.

Survivors of the phanaton hunts returned to Herath, bringing tales of "ferocious and intelligent phanaton hordes bent on devouring the nation!" Herath dispatched a heavily armed force to probe the region beyond the Forbidden Highlands. Soon they ran into a large phanaton war band. Surrounded by what they primarily viewed as dangerous predators, Herathian officers (araneas) panicked and ordered an immediate attack. The Herathians were slaughtered almost to the last, mostly because of the phanatons' blowguns. Several more Herathian "crusades" took place over the following decades with the same horrifying results.

After what had happened with the chameleon men of Wallara (see episode #33, DRAGON issue #186), Herathian wizards were reluctant to use overwhelming magic to destroy the phanaton clans. Their expeditionary armies being systematically eradicated, they finally decided to reinforce their defenses along the Forbidden Highlands. Meanwhile, occasional raids by phanatons into Herath still took place, mostly to acquire venom for their blowguns. Some hunting parties were wiped out. Others got through, but now with the new habit of beheading captured humans—especially officers or nobles, and thus araneas—and shrinking their heads as war trophies. Despite the fact phanatons developed a taste for fruit, vegetable, nuts, and even fish since their primitive origins, the two races have maintained a virulent hatred of each other.

The phanatons have gotten along fairly well with the chameleon men of Wallara, especially since they discovered their common fear of the Herathians. Today, phanatons trade with the Wallarans, bartering whatever goods they can manufac-

ture. Garish piranha-bird feathers, woven spider silk, and phanaton pottery are in particular demand by the chameleon men. Emu eggs, giant termite larvae, and crocodile skins are a favorite among phanatons. Also traded are occasional human-made objects, either stolen from Herath or traded from a Texeiran outpost lying at the edge of The Horn, a sandy peninsula north of Jibaru, near the Trident Isles. It is a penal colony, with a fortified prison at the tip of The Horn.

Phanatons have sensed the difference between Herathians and the colonists of The Horn, but a relative distrust still prevails. Trade with Texeiran colonists takes place occasionally when the latter sail up the Jururu and Xinga rivers. Sometimes a handful of escaped convicts will seek refuge among the Jibaru. If anything goes wrong during such encounters, these human visitors are likely to end up with shrunk heads as well. Rare tree resins, cocoa beans, vanilla, healing mosses, and silver are what attracts the colonists to sail up the dangerous, piranha-infested rivers.

Soon after they had organized their first society, Jibaru phanatons multiplied rapidly. They established many more "clans," usually centered around single villages of no more than 300 individuals. Rivalries and frictions grew among the clans until their first clan war took place. The death toll was heavy. Fearing an attack from Herath, shamans arranged a truce during which the clan chiefs chose the greatest war-chief as their king. The monarch has usually little to do on a day-to-day basis, but when the nation is endangered, the king can summon the Council of Clans at his capital, the City of Itucua. The clan chiefs usually votes on major issues—the king counting for a full third of the total votes at the council. If the king has more than half the votes, his wishes will be respected, or else the clan chiefs will go on deliberating until a solution is found. If a war takes place, the king commands to all war hordes of the Jibaru. Monarchy among the Jibaru is hereditary. Within the past decades, a small group of "nobility," as medieval humans would conceive it, has

grown from the ranks of shamans, clan chiefs, and minor war chiefs. There is no social difference between males and females among the Jibaru, age alone being the way of sorting out who in a family inherits a king's or clan leader's position.

Immortal patrons of the Phanatons

Ui—(alias Ordana) Head of the pantheon. She commands the forces of nature. Patroness of the forest and protector of its people, Ui is the one who gave the phanatons the spark of intelligence so they could avoid total subjugation by Herath. Although an ally of Korotiku in the maintenance of the Hollow World, Ui despises his spider folk, and loathes what they did to neighboring chameleon men followers of her friend, Calitha Starbrow.

Mother-Earth (Marau-Ixui)—(alias Terra) Patroness of birth, life, and death; the cycle of years and seasons; earth and fertility. She is the one who created the primitive phanatons as natural predators to balance the aranean threat on the Savage Coast. Mother Earth is a friend of the Star Dragon and sympathizes with neighboring chameleon men. Shamans of Ui or Mother Earth usually support good relations with the Wallara tribes.

The Huntsman (Uatuma)—(alias Zirchev) Patron of the hunt, but also of bravery, charm, and success among the clan. The Huntsman is a friend of Ui. He is the one who guides the hunting parties and the war bands during times of crisis.

Phanatons as PCs

As an option, phanatons could be run as player characters (or NPCs with levels). Here is a way they could be added to your game. It is suggested that PCs' game statistics be rolled with the standard 3d6 dice method.

Gliding: Phanatons can glide, usually from branch to branch, due to loose skin between its limbs. The distance a phanaton can glide is equal to three times the starting height. So, for example, if a phanaton jumped from a height of 30', it could glide over a horizontal distance of

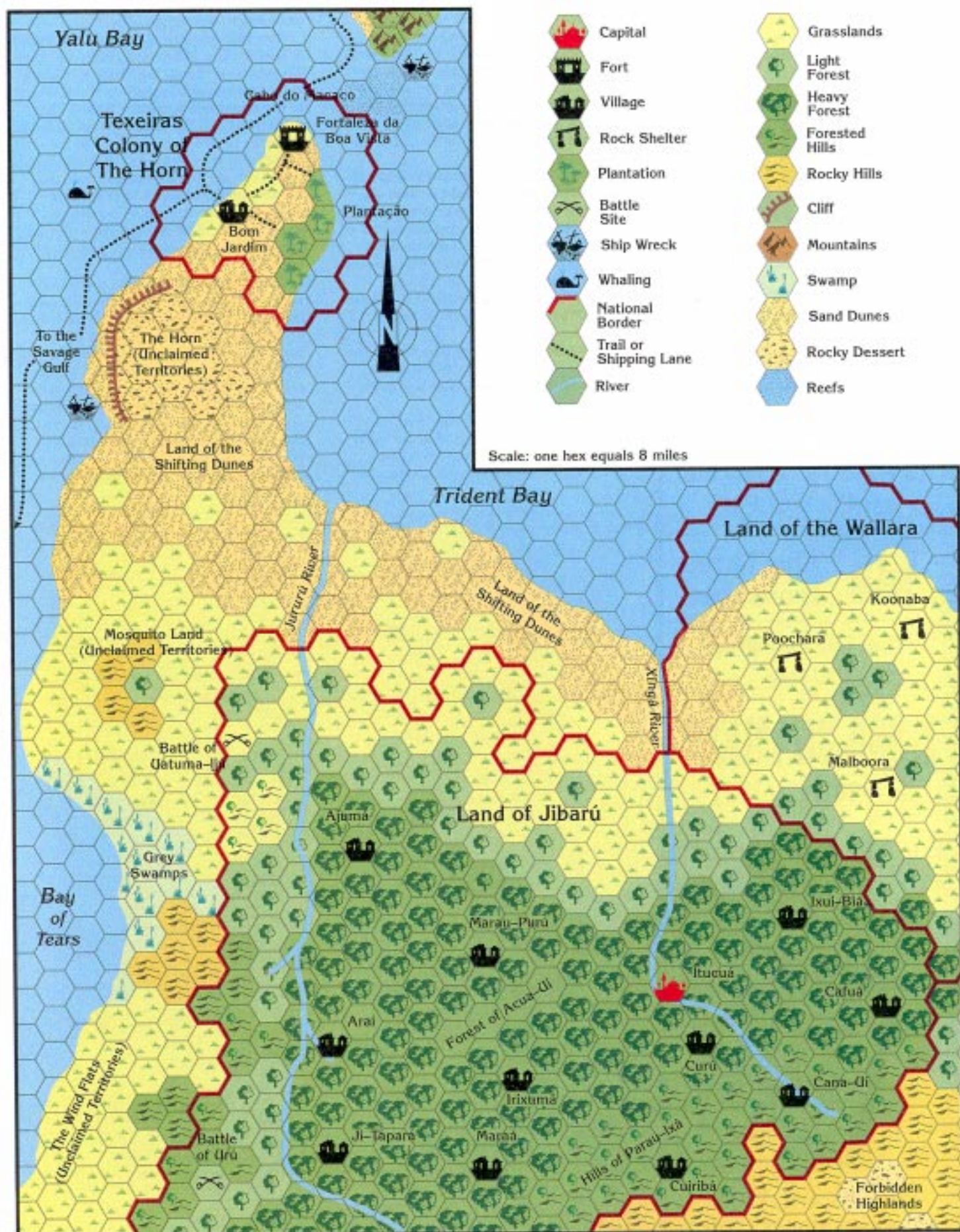
Phanatons

| Level | XP | HD | Special abilities | Shaman's XP | HD | Spell levels | | | |
|-------|---------|--------|-------------------|-------------|-------|--------------|---|---|---|
| 1 | 0 | 1d8-1 | Glide | 0 | 1d8-1 | - | - | - | - |
| 2 | 1,800 | 2d8-2 | — | 3,000 | 2d8-2 | 1 | - | - | - |
| 3 | 3,600 | 3d8-3 | — | 6,000 | 3d8-3 | 2 | - | - | - |
| 4 | 7,200 | — | Fly | 12,000 | — | 2 | 1 | - | - |
| 5 | 14,400 | 4d8-4 | — | 24,000 | 4d8-4 | 2 | 2 | - | - |
| 6 | 28,800 | 5d8-5 | — | 48,000 | 5d8-5 | 2 | 2 | 1 | - |
| 7 | 56,600 | — | Pass plant | 96,000 | — | 2 | 2 | 2 | - |
| 8 | 112,200 | 6d8-5 | — | 200,000 | 6d8-5 | 3 | 2 | 2 | 1 |
| 9 | 225,000 | +2hp** | — | 400,000 | +2hp* | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |

* + 300,000 XP per level thereafter.

** +2 hit point per level, Constitution bonus no longer applies.

Constitution bonuses should be added only when the PC is created and every time it gains a new level, up to 8th level.



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90' maximum tat the rate of 50'/round). When gliding, a phanaton must spread its arms and legs to catch the air, and therefore cannot fight, cast spells, or do anything requiring two hands. For every 100 cn of weight they carry, phanatons reduce their horizontal gliding range by 20' for the same loss of altitude as an unencumbered phanaton.

Flying: At 4th level, phanatons can fly—that is, maintain level flight or gain altitude, but only if updrafts or normal winds are present. The phanaton can gain 10' of altitude for every 60' of horizontal distance covered with normal winds (see the Rules Cyclopedia, page 90). A strong breeze will reduce the horizontal distance to 30'. Phanatons do not fly in high or extreme winds.

Pass plant: Phanatons gain the magical ability to *pass plant*, as per the druids fifth-level spell. They can use this ability once per day.

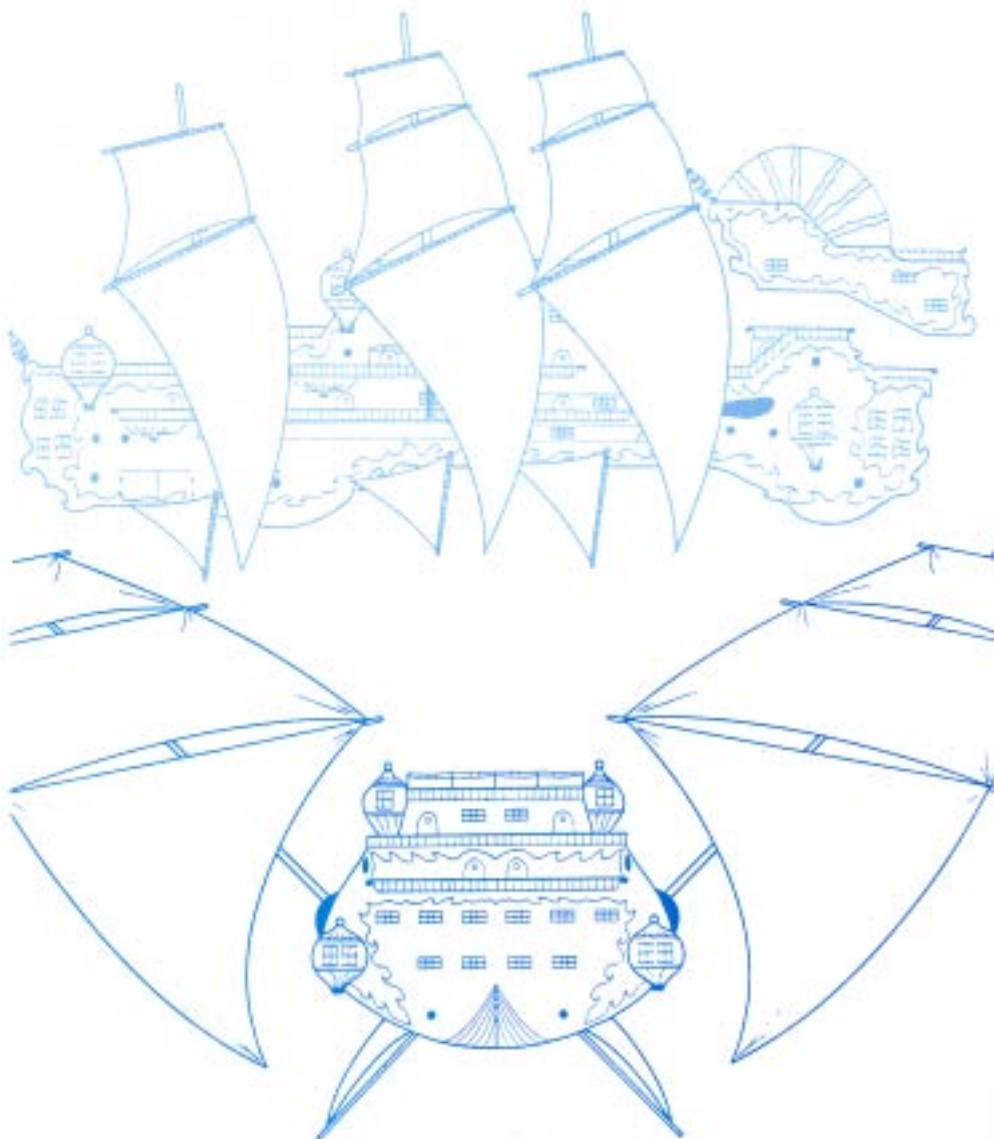
Shamans: Also called the "wise-ones," they are chosen at birth and begin learning the way of the shaman from a very young age. They are entrusted with the

knowledge of reading and writing.

They can only cast spells from the druidic spell list (see the *Rules Cyclopedia*, page 33). Shamans should have both a Wisdom and Charisma of 12 or better. If the *Wrath of the Immortals* accessory is used, shamans of Ui gain the ability to *move silently* and *hide in shadows* as thieves of the same experience level so long as they remain in trees. Mother Earths shamans gain the mystic's ability to *speak with animals*. Shamans of the Huntsman receive the general skills of "Tracking" and "Alertness" plus any other general skills they might have.

Jibaru shamans must use up one skill slot in order to read and write their own language. Common Jibaru don't have that knowledge. Shamans must then choose language skills to speak treant, dryad, and elven (if any such creatures exist in the phanatons home), before any other skills. Non-shamans may acquire Jibaru writing skills, but with an initial penalty of - 3 to their Intelligence scores. Monarchs and other Jibaru leaders usually have that skill.

Miscellaneous: Phanatons are poor



swimmers, preferring their arboreal habitat. Phanatons do not have *infravision*. The more common, primitive (nonsentient) breeds of phanatons are normally clumsy with their hands. When fighting, they are likely to drop objects (coconuts, branches) on their attackers, or bite them (1d6 points of damage), or use simple weapons (branches, stone maces, or other blunt objects). Phanatons of Jibaru have learned to use small spears, short bows, and blowguns with needles dipped in a paralyzing poison (save vs. poison or remain paralyzed for 1d6 turns). Shields and armor are rarely used since they negate the phanaton's ability to glide. All phanatons are otherwise naturally agile (PC phanatons must have a Dexterity of 16 or better to qualify). Their natural AC is 9, with a +2 bonus to their AC and to all saving throws due to their small size and agility. They have the following racial modifiers to their game statistics:

| Abilities | St | In | Wi | Dx | Co | Ch |
|-----------|------|----|----|----|----|-----|
| Race | Max. | 16 | 15 | 15 | 18 | 18* |
| Phanatons | -2 | -1 | - | +2 | - | - |
| Shamans | -2 | -1 | +1 | +1 | - | - |

* Natural Charisma applies only between phanatons, elves, treants, and dryads; otherwise, penalize Charisma - 1 when dealing with other humanoids, - 2 when

dealing with humans and demihumans other than elves. Phanatons and araneas have a relative Charisma of 3 when dealing with each other.

Names & language: Tapuru, Urua, Maragu, Araca, Ixaituba, Tuaca, Uapagu, Cacui, Jarapua, Gujari, Ixugu, Garanui, Axaua, Purucui, Palama, Tapaju, Uruxu, Itupaxingu, Macapui, Irigi. The Jibaru language does not have "e" and "o" sounds. The "x" is pronounced "sh," and the last vowel in the name is accented. Double names are usually a sign of nobility, as shown for the two queens mentioned earlier in this article.

The spoken language is still primitive as far as grammar and syntax go, requiring many gestures. The written language otherwise requires an extensive library of symbols representing animals whose sounds come close to the desired syllables. Ideograms conveying ideas complement other written symbols available to Jibaru shamans. The rest is left to the readers' interpretations.

Phanatons: AC 7, HD 1-1, MV 90' (30') or 150' (50') gliding, AT 1 bite or weapon, D 1d6 or by weapon, Save as F1 (+2), ML 7, AL Lawful (any for PCs), XPV 5. Size: 4' tall.

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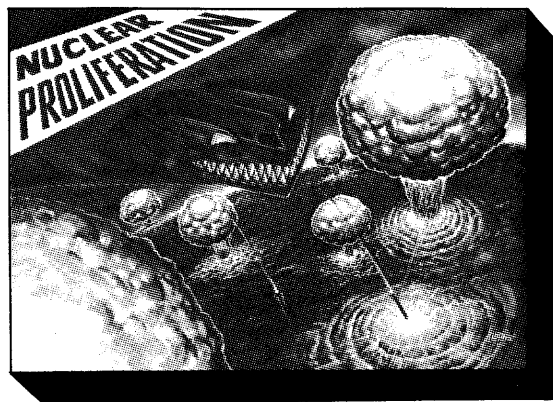
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Calathangas

("The Rat Blade," "The Sting of Xerastos")

This unique sword first appeared over 80 winters ago during a plague that swept the Dalelands. It was used by a warrior of Battledale named Rathinor, who eventually fell fighting a band of thieves in the wood, killing and wounding several of them before he himself died. The rogues were never seen openly again and presumably disbanded.

The blade disappeared for 15 years, until a young and ruthless soldier named Xerastos bought it from a peasant for the price of six sheep. He grew quickly to infamy as captain of a small but powerful group of adventurers. His enemies feared him no less because of rumors of an awful curse upon his sword than for his prowess with the weapon.

Xerastos met his fate a decade later at the hands of an eager paladin who sought to destroy the blade. The paladin killed the wicked man and intended to return Calathangas to his church, but took ill before completing his quest and disappeared. The weapon has not been seen since.

Description: Calathangas is a short sword with a very sharp steel blade and a plain hilt set with a white moonstone (worth 250 gp). It is +1 to hit and +3 on damage. Although it is not intelligent, it is evil and inflicts lycanthropy (wererat) upon anyone who so much as holds the blade without passing a saving throw vs. spells; this check must be repeated each week the weapon is used.

In combat, anyone injured by the blade but not actually killed by it has a 20% chance of contracting wererat lycanthropy. The sword glows only when rats are within 50' of it; if the wielder so desires, he can summon and control 2d12 giant rats (30%) or 6d12 normal rats (70%). They arrive in 1-4 rounds if any are nearby. Should the wielder compete with a vampire or other creature for control of the rats, Calathangas succeeds 70% of the time.

XP Value: 800

Dyerwaen

("Forester's Friend")

This unique weapon was forged by the gray elves of old Myth Drannor as the first men began to fill the Dalelands. It was given to Torek Graybeard, the leader of the new human settlement, as a token of friendship between the two races. When Torek died childless, he gave Dyerwaen to his nephew Tureen, who bore it proudly until his disappearance six winters later on a hunting trip.

The sword surfaced briefly 12 winters ago in the hands of a goblin raiding party. The goblins clashed with a passing group of adventurers and were defeated; Dyerwaen was taken to Cormyr to be sold at auction, but was stolen by thieves en route. It has not been seen since.

Description: Dyerwaen is a fine steel broad sword with a rose etched along the length of the blade; its hilt is tightly wound with green velvet. It is +2 to hit but has no bonuses on damage. The weapon sheds light (up to a 10' radius) when its wielder desires, glowing at no other time.

In a forest setting, Dyerwaen's bearer is

camouflaged so as to be 90% invisible when motionless, nor will he leave any trace when traveling through such an environment. In addition, if the sword is suspended from a rope, the blade always points to true north. The wielder is entitled to use the Tracking and Weather Sense nonweapon proficiencies at a +2 bonus on ability checks.

A few spell effects can be used by the wielder of Dyerwaen as well. He can invoke invisibility to animals (P1) at will, or *speak with plants* (P4) as a 7th-level priest once per day. These powers require only a command word and have an initiative modifier of +3.

Finally, elves and woodland creatures of good alignment regard the sword bearer as though his charisma were one point higher, to a maximum of 18. Dyerwaen is itself chaotic good, although it has never displayed any sign of intelligence.

XP Value: 1,200

Elquillar

("The Sword of Many Faces")

This unique blade has been difficult to trace but is at least 700 winters old. Although some scholars maintain that it was forged by the elves to spy upon the activities of young and rising races, it is probably the work of a Calimshite illusionist named Akhir Ahad, who was forced to excel in his sorcery by the power of his political enemies. Legend has it that he constructed the weapon to help him escape numerous assassins. Eventually, the night rogues caught him, but not before he had passed the blade on to his most trusted bodyguard, whose name escaped the record books. The latter used it to such effect that it is impossible to locate it with certainty until some 300 winters later, when it appeared at an auction in Waterdeep. A number of murders ensued, and the sword was again lost.

Its most recent wielder is said to be an assassin who calls himself "The Rider in White." He is a well-educated individual with an excellent reputation, working artfully rather than with cruelty. Many of the little governments surrounding the Inner Sea have at one time or another hired him to remove undesirables, the victims often (though by no means always) being of evil alignment.

Description: Elquillar can change its shape to become any type of sword, scimitar or dagger, though it's always only +1 on attack and damage rolls. Such a transformation occurs whenever the wielder desires another weapon to appear, and it takes less than a round to complete. Multi-colored runes spelling out its name appear on the blade regardless of its current shape or any efforts to conceal them.

Elquillar's master may alter his own shape as though wearing a *hat of disguise* (*Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 170); this requires that the sword be kept on his person, though it needn't actually be held (e.g., it can be in its scabbard). Further-

more, the bearer is protected as though by a *ring of mind shielding* (DMG, page 148), although in this case Elquillar must be firmly grasped in hand. Finally, whenever this weapon touches (or strikes in combat) a creature in other than its natural form, Elquillar returns the target to its true shape. There is no saving throw against this effect. Thus a gold dragon, a *shape changed* wizard, a vampire, a poly-

morphed griffon, or a doppelganger might all be induced to assume their normal appearances at a touch.

XP Value: 2,000

Evithyan's Blade

Evithyan was a high elven hero of old, no less a skilled wizard than a warrior. It is widely held that he fashioned this sword himself, nearly 1,000 years ago in ancient



Myth Drannor, then used it to fight the drow in the Underdark. When his time came to pass over the sea to Evermeet, he gave the weapon to his apprentice, Calthalyon. In turn, the young elf used it to great effect and eventually handed it to another. This changing of the guard lasted for several hundred winters, until one elf met a premature fate and the blade was lost.

It reappeared in Hillsfar 70 years ago in the possession of a novice thief, who had somehow stumbled upon the weapon. He was poisoned in less than a week; although he survived, the sword was taken and has not been seen in the years since.

Description: This long sword has a well-balanced steel blade, the haft being of mithril and set with a small emerald. The sword is normally of +3 enchantment. When used against the drow, however, it becomes +5. On a natural 20, the blade drains 2-8 Constitution points in addition from the dark elf, unless a saving throw vs. spells is made. The lost points can be regained at a rate of one point per day of complete rest. Any elf who loses all Constitution points to the blade will die. The drow are aware of this and fear the weapon accordingly; they must make a morale check whenever confronted by Evithyan's Blade.

XP Value: 2,200

Heart of Stone

("Gorgon's Breath")

Description: This short sword has an intricate silver blade with runes that spell "Heart" on one face and "Stone" on the other. Both the scabbard and the rather spartan pommel are made of black adamantite.

The sword is +3, though it cannot damage creatures from the elemental plane of Earth. Such elementals will not normally harm the bearer, however, unless provoked. On a natural 20, the target must save vs. petrification or be turned to stone; the bearer saves vs. petrification at +4.

The wielder may cast the following spells once per day: *meld into stone* (P3, double weight capacity), *passwall* (W5), and *stone tell* (P6). In addition, any of these spells may be cast once each per week: *contact other plane* (W5, elemental plane of Earth only), *stone to flesh* (W6), and *stoneskin* (W4). All spells are cast at the 12th level of ability.

XP Value: 5,000

Ice Claw

This sword was forged by the dwarves of Citadel Adbar (see FR5 *The Savage Frontier*) centuries ago to stem the onslaught of dragons in the Ice Mountains. Their high king maintained the weapon in his personal armory and bestowed it on a select group of champions for specific

quests; it had no exclusive wielder and was only seldom used. Dwarven tradition holds that Ice Claw has slain at least one dragon and three fiends during its colorful history, as well as many lesser foes.

One hero failed in his appointed task and lost Ice Claw to treachery; he shaved his beard in shame, then left in exile to recover the blade. He died without success 116 winters ago.

The sword remained lost for the better part of four decades before it eventually found its way into the hands of one Captain Farzahn of an obscure mercenary company. When he later tried to force himself on an elven maiden named Ulshanya, she slew him with her sorcery and took the sword for herself. She is still an active adventurer and travels across the Realms with the weapon.

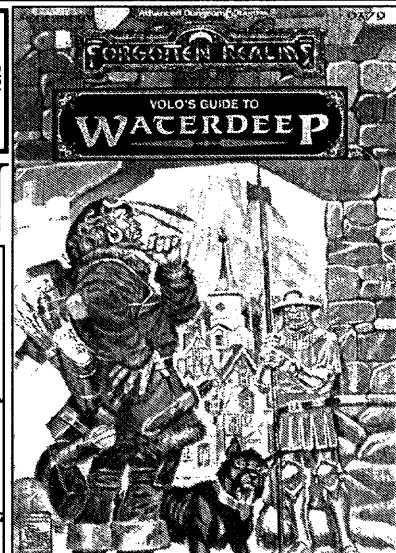
Description: Ice Claw is a unique short sword with a polished off-white blade that is cool to the touch. The pommel is silver, twined with black adamantite thread and set with a large diamond (worth 5,000 gp). It is of lawful-neutral alignment (Intelligence 17, Ego 20), communicates by speech (in Common or Dwarvish) or telepathy, and can read writings of either mundane or magical nature when touched to the open script.

This sword acts as a *frost brand* +3 (DMG, page 185) with the special purpose of defeating dragons of any alignment.

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White Wolf Magazine

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The wielder gains a +2 to all saving throws and takes -1 hp per die of damage sustained in combat against dragons (to a minimum of 1 hp per die). Ice Claw's bearer is also immune to the aura of fear surrounding some dragons.

XP Value: 2,600

Neekar

("The Sword of Tongues," "The Waterdhavian Diplomat")

This unique blade first appeared centuries ago in the treasury of a noble house of Waterdeep. It was lost in a duel with a rival family, who in turn sold it a generation later when the family briefly fell from fortune. Both houses would doubtlessly pay a handsome sum for its recovery.

Description: Neekar is a steel broad sword with a plain silver pommel and an ivory scabbard. Unlike most magical swords, it sheds no light and has no combat bonuses. If a *detect magic* spell is cast upon it, it proves to radiate an aura of divination. It is of lawful-neutral alignment (Intelligence 16, Ego 10), communicates by speech, and can read nonmagical writings.

Neekar's primary ability is its power to speak in any language native to the Prime Material plane, a function derived from the complicated use of a *tongues* spell in its creation. This is even applicable to archaic or regional dialects. By the same token, it lets its wielder read any text

written in such languages merely by touching the blade to the work (the sword understands such texts, too, reading whatever is exposed to the blade's "sight"). No mouth or eyes appear on the weapon; its sensory abilities are purely magical in nature, so it can see in every direction from its blade, and hear all that's said within a 60' radius. It cannot use telepathy, even with its wielder.

The weapon was meant to be an inconspicuous aide in politics and is indeed a shrewd negotiator. It has a history of participation in delicate treaties that it is quite proud of, and the sword is often willing to parley on behalf of its wielder for even trivial matters.

XP Value: 1,000

Nightwatcher

This unique blade first appeared on the Sword Coast nearly 200 years ago in the possession of a grizzled old adventurer who claimed to have found it in an ancient ruin deep within the Great Desert, Anauroch (see the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Cyclopedia of the Realms*, page 23). The old man gave it as a wedding present to his eldest daughter's fiancé, and it thenceforth passed from father to son for four more generations until one used it to pay off his gambling debts.

Nightwatcher changed hands with bewildering frequency over the next 50 or 60

winters, showing up all across the Realms. It was finally purchased by an eccentric adventurer who met disaster in battle with trolls 30 years ago. It has not been seen since.

Description: Nightwatcher is a long sword with a very sharp, black-adamantite blade and a silver-and-ivory pommel set with a large black pearl (worth 500 gp). It is a +3 weapon that radiates no light.

The sword's bearer can see at night under an open sky as well as if it were daylight. All magical darkness within 30' of the blade is dispersed, though darkness of natural origin is unaffected, except as noted above.

When planted firmly into the ground, Nightwatcher hums loudly if anyone with intent to harm its wielder approaches within 60'. This functions even if the individuals are concealed or invisible, though Astral and Ethereal creatures cannot be sensed by the sword.

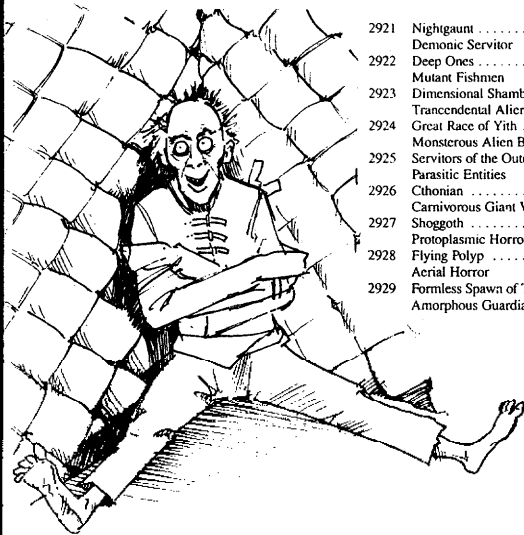
XP Value: 2,400

Sword +2, shock blade

Description: There are perhaps a score or more of these magical weapons throughout the Realms. While of many sizes, the swords are often identified by the large hilt-fitted opals used in their construction.

Continued on page 119

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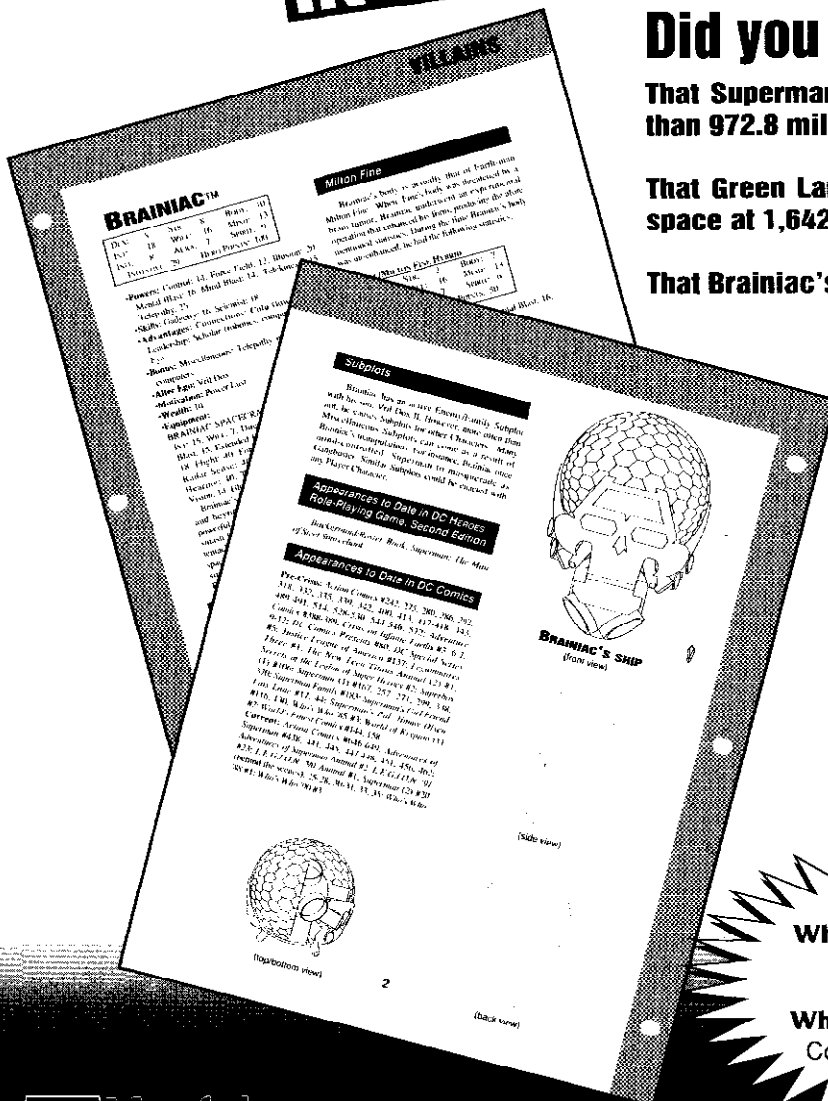
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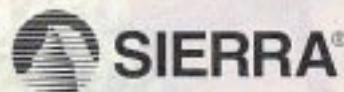
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In the interest of space, we're trying to write briefer reviews for most of the software we discuss. Also, your letters and faxes are of high priority to us, so please write to us when you have questions or hints for us. Please remember we live on the West Coast, and our fax hours are from 9:00 A.M. to 5:00 PM Pacific time.

Sierra (of *King's Quest* and *Quest for Glory* fame) has acquired Bright Star Technology. This is a clue that Sierra is planning to enter the Macintosh software market more strongly. Bright Star is well known for its HyperAnimation technology, especially speech synthesis.

Sega has established the Sega Youth Education and Health Foundation Charitable Trust. Initially funded with \$3 million from Sega of America and Sega Enterprises, funding will continue through Sega donating a part of its cartridge sales in the

U.S.A. to the Trust. The first charity to receive funding from the Trust is The George Lucas Educational Foundation, an organization that seeks to improve education by creating new ways to integrate interactive multimedia technologies with teaching and learning.

Electronic Arts has just signed a new, multiyear licensing agreement. Not only will Electronic Arts continue to publish Sega cartridges, but you can expect the game company to start producing games

for the new Sega CD unit.

Spectrum HoloByte is moving to larger offices at 2490 Mariner Square Loop, Alameda CA 94501. Its new telephone number is (510) 522-3584. You can look forward to several new releases from Spectrum during the next 18 months, including *Operation: Fighting Tiger*, *A-10 Warthog*, and *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

The *Legends of Future Past* (LOFP) game has debuted. This fantasy role-playing game (FRPG) game resides on the Digital Dreams Network (DDN) operated by Inner Circle Software in Worcester, Mass. Access is through your local TYMNET node. Charter membership is \$49.95, which includes the player's manual, six hours of on-line credit, free conversion of your character for play in LOFP, and no monthly membership fees during the first year. Regular membership, which includes the player's

Computer games' ratings

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

manual and a \$2 per month membership fee, is \$19.95.

The adventure takes place in Andor, Land of the Shattered Realms, starting in the City-State of Fayd. With six main religions, a Hall of Justice, guilds and shops, various skills, and eight races, there are broad gaming possibilities ahead for members. Although we haven't yet played LOFP the environment as described in the player's manual is quite intriguing. For readers of our column, a free copy of the quarterly DDN newsletter entitled *Zephyr* is offered to you. Call (508) 757-5737 to request it, or write to DDN at 1415 Main St., Suite 760, Worcester MA 01603. The information we received certainly attracted our attention!

H.E.L.P.

From Sam Hernández and family of Puerto Rico comes the following requests. "I'm stuck on level 11 of *Eye of the Beholder* because I don't know what to do in the Room of the Key, so I can't open the door. What do I do? Also, in *Les Manley's Search for the King*, how can I get Helmut Bean to go with me? What do I spill on the hotel carpet?"

David Endler of Naples, Fla., asks, "I have the game *Beyond Zork* and I've come to a complete standstill. I read the hints in DRAGON issue #182 by Jake Haney, but I am still stumped. How do you get past the monkey grinder? How do you get the helmet out of the trench when the horse is covering it? How do you fly the pterodactyl?"

Michael Lavoie of Nashua, NH., epitomizes the character of most DRAGON readers. Not only does he decide to help a fellow gamer, but he assisted by answering two queries posed by gamers in our column in DRAGON issue #183:

"I have answers to two of the questions posed in issue #183. First, Charles Lin queried about *Eye of the Beholder II*. If he has gotten as far as he said, he must have acquired all three parts of 'Talon.' Simply place the Eye, Hilt, and Tongue of Talon into the sword imprint (the sequence doesn't matter). This brings down the barrier, leaving behind a useful item."

If you don't have the three parts, read this hint from Allen Reaves of Ingleside, Tex.: "The Tongue of Talon was dropped by the frost giant who turns to dust after he finishes talking. The Hilt of Talon is on the fourth level of the Azure Tower (the level that is infested with medusas and aerial servants). It is found under a pile of bones in the two-by-two room where a secret door is opened to the west by pressing a stone in the north wall (this is shortly before Dran traps the party and drops them into the frost giant prison). The Eye of Talon is the gem used to open the door on the second level of the Azure Tower (the level filled with basilisks and bulettes) past the pressure plate that moved a section of wall in front of the party. It is possible you might have left the Eye of Talon in



Aces of the Pacific (Dynamix)

the wall (it can be removed without the door closing)."

Michael Lavoie continues:

"The next query came from Sean Larson regarding *Spellcasting 101*. If you do have all the spells, then you must go to the Housemaster's Suite in Frogkisser House and take the surfboard from the wall. You need the Dispar spell to get it (if you lack this spell, have you negotiated the Maize Maze yet?). Examine the dials on the board and compare them to the map that came in the game box; their use should be obvious. Take the surfboard to the boat dock, put it in the water, get on it, set the dials, and push the red button. A final note: Be sure that you have the Kabbul spell (you'll have to 'bust' your way into the upper stacks) and the popular book, both in the library. You absolutely cannot win the game without them."

There have been several requests from gamers involved in FTL's *Dungeon Master*. Ian Richmond from Michigan answers a question from Bruce Stevens from Columbus, Ohio. "The Neta and Ros paths do meet under the Demon Director, but require two different solutions. To open the door through Neta, you force a skeleton into the alcove. When this is one, 'God' strikes it down with lightning. The ninja way is to lead a skeleton into the teleporter. When it is behind the door, pelt it with missile weapons. That is why the rocks are in this room."

If anyone wishes some exacting clues for the Sega Genesis version of *The Immortal*, please send us an SASE and a note requesting this information and we'll send you a listing of hints and tips. This compilation was kindly completed by Roberta Rizza and D. Urbano of Wallingford, Conn. Their list is far too extensive to print in this column, but with their permission we can send the material to anyone who

needs it.

Yi-Zhon Liu of Palo Alto, Calif., has tackled both Bruce Kumsteen's *Secret of the Silver Blades* questions, and Charles Rose and Inoo Labion's *Dragon Wars* questions posed in issue #183.

"In *Secret of the Silver Blades*, after getting the Staff of Oswulf, head north, then west, then north again to find a malfunctioning teleporter. Before stepping through, memorize all spells and heal the party, as stepping through the teleporter inflicts about 30 hit points of damage on all members. You'll face many umber hulks upon your arrival. You are now on level nine of the mines. Journey south to the mine shaft and kill the gargoyle guards to lift the wall of force blocking the shaft. Next, head down to the tenth level and into the dungeon to find the three keys used in the Dreadlord's Castle.

"In *Dragon Wars*, head to Nisir to find Namtar. Collect the treasure and Dragon Eyes near the stairway from the Underworld. Now, you can fight your way through a guard room or use a climbing skill to bypass it. Either way, you should find yourself at the edge of a gap, with Namtar's lair on the other side. Use the Golden Boots to get there. While you're in Salvation, you should also show the Sword of Freedom to the Universal God (by using it) to have it blessed, which enables it to cast an Inferno spell when used. The rock on the Faerie Bridge shows where the pit Namtar sprang from is located. To kill Namtar once and for all, you need to bring his body here and dump it in. I haven't found the Black Sickle yet, but the Rusty Axes are more powerful than the Battle or War Axes, although they do subtract three from your AV. To get to Namtar below Nisir, first get out of the starting rooms by using Soften Stone spells, then head to the big pit and cast an Air Summon spell.

Now, go through the doors, turn right, and cast a Soften Stone on the next wall. Proceed inward and then cast another Soften Stone spell to get into yet another room, which leads you to Namtar's lair. When facing Namtar's army, you should call the Dragon Queen with the Dragon Gem to skip the fight, saving your resources for the fight with Namtar. Use the Freedom Sword, Spiked Flail, Dragon Sword, Crush Mace, Gatlin Bow, and Magic Quiver, in addition to casting Rage of Mithras, Mithra's Bless, Zak's Speed, Cloak Arcane, Kill Ray, and other powerful spells. Keep your magic potent by using the Dragon Eyes."

Reviews



Aces of the Pacific (Dynamix)

Aces of the Pacific

Dynamix, PC/MS-DOS

For World War II Pacific Theater combat, nothing beats *Aces of the Pacific* (AOP). Whether taking off from an airstrip or from an aircraft carrier, you will soon find yourself in the thick of action against talented enemy pilots. Utilizing an interface similar to that of the *Red Baron* game, you have total flexibility in not only learning how to fly your WWII fighters, but also in starting your career and in choosing combat missions.

As is common with Dynamix games, the player's manual is one of the most complete, thorough, and enjoyable publications to accompany any game. Included is a quick run-through of how to pilot your aircraft and enter combat. The historical overview is thorough and interesting, but as we are all aware, gamers want to dive into the simulation and worry about reading later.

AOP is one of the easiest flight simulations to learn. Within five to ten minutes, you should be up engaging enemy Zeros. Read the section on proper flight and combat practices, and you should become quite successful. The only drawbacks we found to this game are the rather static, motionless screen views if you fly on patrol. Additionally, when we were diving at an enemy plane, the foe would on occasion stutter and shift positions as though a magic hand had propelled it forward or



Darkseed (Cyberdreams)

backward on the screen. This can ruin your shot, so be aware of this.

All menu controls are point and click. Nothing could be simpler. With mission recorders and realism panels that you can adjust, AOP is a great addition to your flight simulation library.

This WWII flight/combat simulation requires: DOS 5.0, 2MB of RAM, 20MHz CPU (80386 or better), a VGA graphics board, and a hard disk drive. You should also have 610K of free conventional memory and 311K of expanded memory (EMS). Joy stick, mouse, and Thrustmaster I/O devices are supported. AdLib, Roland, ThunderBoard, and SoundBlaster sound cards are also supported.

Darkseed

Cyberdreams, PC/MS-DOS

Cyberdreams is on the right track, but the implementation of its first offering needs some fine tuning. Yes, the H.R. Giger graphics are absolutely awesome—you'd think this adventure jumped right of the *Alien* soundstage! The graphic interface allows you to click your mouse button to activate a specific command icon that appears on your screen. You can click to check things out, pick them up, use them, and so on.

Darkseed offers excellent voice digitization, especially when coming from an internal PC speaker. We imagine with a SoundBlaster, the digitization is even better. You can save games at any point and replay them when you want. As the lead character, Mike Dawson, you've escaped to the new home you've purchased in Woodland Hills in order to do some writing. Seclusion is what you wanted—horror is what you get, especially the kind of horror in knowing that you must never lose disk #1 in the set because *Darkseed* uses the key disk form of copy protection. This means you must have disk #1 in your A or



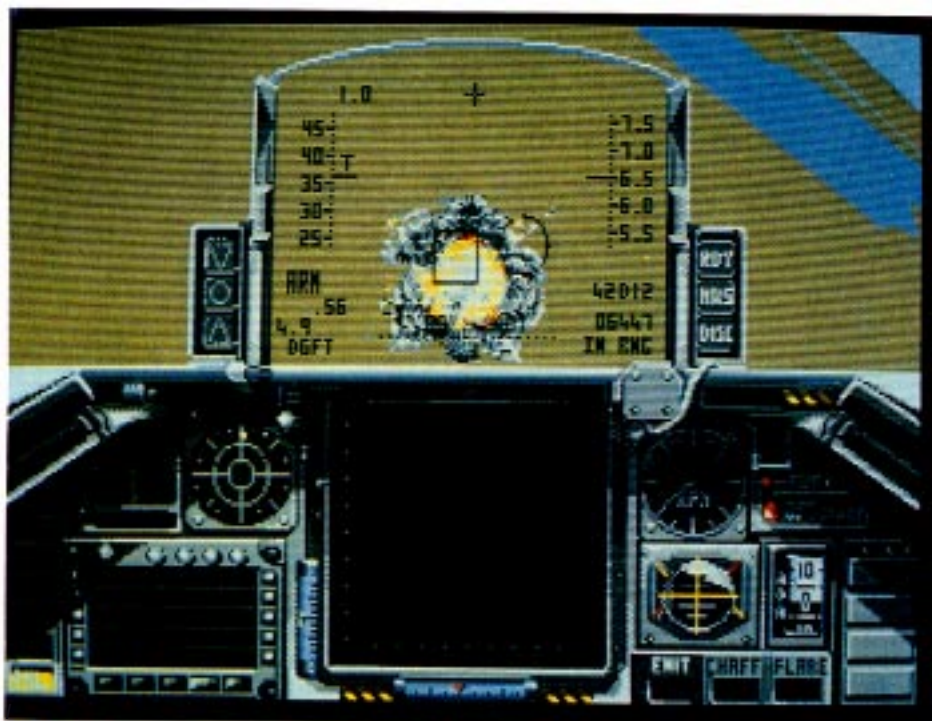
Darkseed (Cyberdreams)

B drive in order to play the game. We do not believe this form of copy protection is viable and recommend that Cyberdreams come up with some other form of security for its games.

The documentation is poor, as it doesn't alert you that many "accomplishments" are required within certain periods of time. You'll figure out what you didn't complete, and you then have to restart your game from the beginning in order to complete the necessary activity. By the time you've done this eight or nine times, it becomes extremely frustrating! Add that some of the items you need to retrieve are so small and so well hidden in the graphics that you could spend quite some time moving your icon around the screen just trying to find these important relics.

This adventure is a graphics delight, containing puzzles galore and great playability. Cyberdreams is able to produce games that will excite consumers, but only if it listens to some of the complaints and works them out before its next release.

This graphic adventure game requires at least a 12MHz 80286 computer, 640K RAM, a VGA graphics board, and a hard disk. It supports AdLib and SoundBlaster cards, mouse, and joy stick.



Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte)



Falcon 3.0 (Spectrum HoloByte)

Falcon 3.0

Spectrum HoloByte, PC/MS-DOS

If you want to know what it's like to fly and fight in an F-16 Fighting Falcon, *Falcon 3.0* is the flight simulator for you. The program treats you as though you have some intelligence. It not only offers a smooth, user-interface for maneuvering through the different selection screens that offer exciting missions, but also a well-written manual that doesn't talk down to even a novice flyer. In fact, their eight-lesson Red Flag tutorial is the best flight simulator tutorial we've used by far. One complaint though, and it's a common one when a software publishing company releases a thick manual, is that there is absolutely no way to keep the page open to your tutorial when you're in the thick of controlling your aircraft. We would like to see more publishers using wire-ring spines when they know their manuals are going to be heavily referenced.

Falcon 3.0 has wonderful animation and their sound drivers are quite good. Due to IBM or clones' cheap quality, the voice feature is rather tinny when played through your internal speaker. We recommend that if you don't have a SoundBlaster or similar sound card, don't bother

with the game's voice feature. The music soundtrack, when played through a Roland sound card, is outstanding.

Your Training starts with teaching you how to take off and the basics of flying through air-to-air and air-to-ground engagements. You start by learning about the different screens in the War Room and by selecting your flight squadron. Then you move through pilot assignments and weapons loadings. You can even jump directly into battle with an Instant Action order! As there are a number of options, some of them rather complex, Spectrum HoloByte was thoughtful enough to include a real escape—the Escape key backs you up to the previous screen.

The Autopilot feature is a great way to learn about the F-16. During your tutorials, it'll even land the aircraft for you. And if you decide to go into combat and are having some difficulty maneuvering to attack position, Autopilot will do its best to bring you in behind the enemy for some clear shots. You can even accelerate the Autopilot mode to bring you into combat more quickly.

There are various views, so you're not stuck just viewing the heads-up display. You get a chase-plane view, satellite view, and tracking view, all of which are rotatable not only horizontally and vertically, but left and right as well. Watching yourself take off or land in the tracking view is a definite help in learning how to fly the F-16 correctly. You can even zoom in or out on your plane, or watch yourself from the vantage point of your wingman.

With an enormous variety of missions from which to select, you are guaranteed never to be bored while piloting your F-16. The danger from enemy ground and air forces is immense. *Falcon 3.0* is one flight simulator every gamer should acquire. For

those with Macintosh systems, talk is that a new version is just around the corner. We hope so, for one of the outstanding features of this flight simulator is the ability to play opponents via modem, especially when your friends are flying from different systems.

Spectrum HoloByte continues their success with *Falcon 3.0* for PC/MS-DOS computers. With a wealth of material included in the game box including accurate maps and a troubleshooting card for those who may not have enough system memory to run the game, this flight simulator continues to reign as one of the best. This flight/combat simulation requires: DOS 5.0. Recommended systems are: 2MB of RAM, 20MHz CPU, a VGA graphics board, and a hard disk drive. Joy stick or mouse optional.

Minotaur

Bungie Software, Macintosh

Imagine trying to develop an exciting multiplayer adventure game not knowing what model of Macintosh computer any of the players possess. Add the requirement that the game be played by modem or an AppleTalk network, and you have a predicament

Bungie has succeeded in this rather daunting task. The *Minotaur* fantasy adventure game not only meets all minimal expectations—it exceeds them! However, an up-front warning! This is a tough game. We rarely lasted beyond the first 15-20 minutes. Granted, the graphics are a little less than what one might expect on a Macintosh game. For those playing in black-and-white, any icons must be readily identifiable from others. This means large icons to represent those 80-odd items to be picked up) such as weapons, objects, spells, and armor. You'll note that these icons occupy a full "hex" on-screen. So, if you find a spell that normally comes in a small bottle, it'll look as big as your character.

To test this game's playability, we engaged in a two-character duel using a Macintosh IIx with S-bit color and a PowerBook 170 over both an AppleTalk network and by modem. The game slows when movement operations are being processed for both characters simultaneously, but there was no problem identifying who was who and so on. The key to this game is not in moving your character through the maze to find spells and weapons, but in learning how to counteract what your opponent(s) might have to use against you.

Via AppleTalk, you can participate in a game involving seven players. Movement is handled through your numeric keypad, your cursor arrow keys, or the following keyboard combination: "p" for up, "l" for left, semicolon for down, and apostrophe for right. We found the lack of mouse support quite annoying. In a multiplayer game, your target's name and icon appears to the left of the on-screen maze. If pulsat-

ing crosshairs appears over this icon, that is your current target. You can press your Tab key to cycle through all your opponents to select whichever target you wish. You can also designate other players as "friendly" using your plus key—however, rest assured many alliances dissolve in the heat of battle.

Attacking in a two-player game requires some practice, so the publisher has included a single-player exploration mode that allows you to explore the labyrinth to learn what the icons represent and how to use them. In this mode you can't die, but neither can you kill. Two disks come with the package as well as two command cards.

Minotaur would, we believe, do well on an on-line service such as America On-line, GEnie, or CompuServe. We don't know if such discussions have taken place there, but they should be considered. *Minotaur* is a terrific game for telecommunication gamers but could withstand a new version that fully supports the Macintosh mouse for character movement.

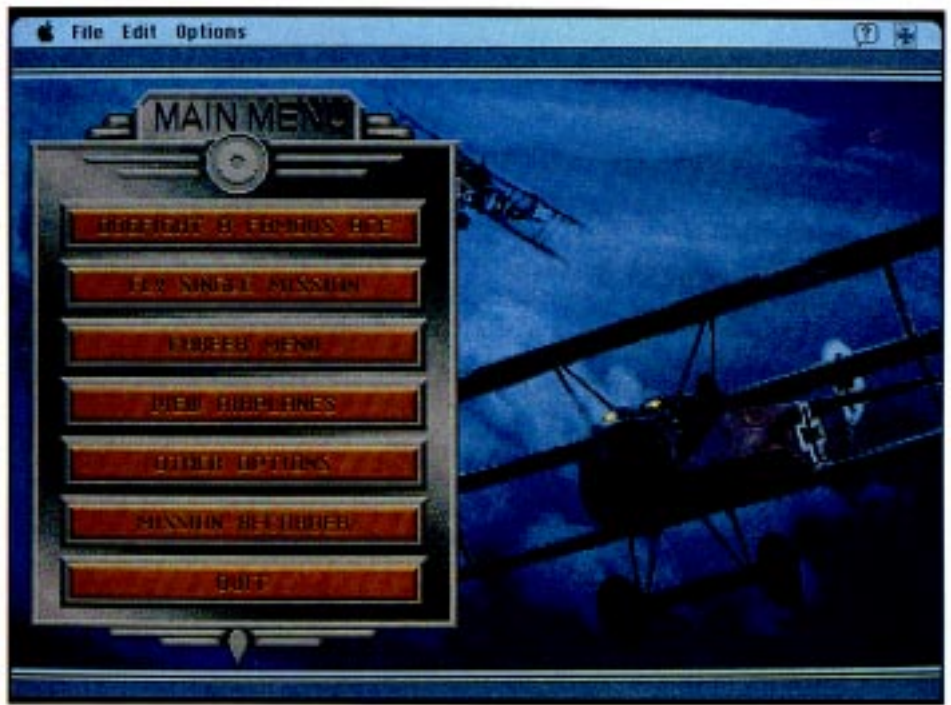
This adventure game for at least two modem players requires System 6.0.5 or greater (and is System 7 compatible), 1MB of RAM for black-and-white play, an 8-bit video card and 2MB for color.

Prince of Persia

Broderbund Software, Macintosh

If you aren't an arcade game junkie yet, get your hands on this excellent offering from Broderbund. We ran *Prince of Persia* (POP) under System 7 on both our Macintosh IIx and our PowerBook 170 and were delighted with its playability. With thoughtful consistency in the use of the Macintosh human interface guidelines, POP will leave you wondering where all the hours went! Once you start, addiction is the result of your having to ponder puzzles while under a time limit that adds to the game's enjoyment. You will get frustrated, as you'll forget some of the paths taken earlier to avoid traps or get through obstacles. If you fail to complete a level by getting killed, you have to start that level over again. There is no saving a game in the middle of a level. Fortunately, you can save your game as you succeed at gaining the upper hand over levels.

For our taste, there is too much copy protection. Each time you wish to restart your game from a saved level or progress to a new level, you must enter the first letter of a word designated in your user manual. Granted, the way you enter that letter is unique—your character must find the potion with the correct letter assigned to it and drink it—before the next level door will open. When you consider the number of times your character is going to die, this becomes disruptive as you ponder how to better yourself on your next level attempt. You can simply restart the level, but whatever time you used on your previous attempt is no longer available—you're off and running again



Red Baron (Dynamix)

with less time than before. That's why we preferred to open a saved game, so that the remaining time factor was in our favor.

It'll take you three or four starts to get the hang of the numeric keyboard assignments for your on-screen persona, who must rescue the Sultan's daughter and the throne from the evil mitts of the Grand Vizier Jaffar. As he has tossed you into the dungeons with nary a possession, it takes quick action and quicker wit to master these 12 complex levels. When death does come to you, either from a fall from a great height, snapping metallic jaws, or nasty spikes, the gruesome result is seen on-screen. Learn from your mistakes!

POP offers some of the most fluid animation ever offered and 250 rooms packed with action. POP is the best arcade/action game we've played on the Macintosh, and we highly recommend it to all gamers!

This arcade/adventure game, a new conversion to System 7, requires 2.5MB of RAM for black and white game and 4MB of RAM for color game. For System 6.0.2 to 6.0.7, it requires 2MB of RAM for either black-and-white or color game. A hard drive is required.

Red Baron

Dynamix, Macintosh

This is a great offering from Dynamix. While *Hellcats Over The Pacific* from Graphic Simulations proves polygonal graphics offer superior screen animation, *Red Baron* (RB) shows what can be accomplished by a publisher who takes the time to convert a PC/MS-DOS game to the Macintosh environment. Featuring smooth-frame animation, good sound effects, and exciting missions, RB is as much a "must-buy" for Mac gamers as *Hellcats*. Heck,



Red Baron (Dynamix)

you can never have enough good flight simulations in your library!

We found flying using the keyboard commands to be the most effective. All menu selections are point-and-click, enabling you to dive right in and battle a famous ace, fly a single mission, or go directly to the career menu. If you try the latter, you select either a career in the Royal Flying Corps or the German Air Service in December of 1915. Your mission assignments are quite varied and include attacking Zeppelins, dogfighting enemy planes, and protecting recon missions. Should you survive and find promotion to First Lieutenant or Oberleutnant, you now become the flight leader and are responsible for one other pilot's actions. Make it to captain and you command four planes plus your own, which you can paint to your own specifications. Try for the Victoria Cross or the Red Eagle Order medals. The ultimate achievement is to earn more victories than Frenchman Rene Fonck (75) or Rittmestier Manfred von Richthofen (80) and become the ace of aces.

Various views are available that allow you to scan the sky or ground for targets. You can compress time if you are in a

hurry to meet some objective and you can record your mission for later playback. Maps are included to help you with your various missions, and you get one of the most exhaustive manuals published. It contains not only the control documentation you need to learn to fly the plane, but also a wealth of information in its historical overview sections. RB is an exciting flight/combat simulator, and for color Mac garners it's a great addition to your software game library.

This WWI flight/combat simulation requires: a hard disk, SuperDrive, 8-bit video card, 2MB RAM for System 6.x or 3.5MB for System 7. The simulation also supports the Gravis joy stick.

Clue corner

Dungeon Master (FTL Games)

1. In the starting room, put the torch in the sconce to open a jumping hallway. An imaginary wall opposite the sconce has a full suit of chain mail behind it. Be sure to open the teleporter using the Ful bombs and Ven potions, so you'll have a return route from Ros.

2. Instead of going to the FulYa pit, just return to the starting room. To do this, just fall down a pit in the Corbum Bomb Pillar room. Each return trip to the Supplies for the Quick room grants new treasures. Also, check for secret walls here.

Might and Magic III (New World Computing, Amiga version)

1. Inside the pyramid on the Isle of Fire, you can obtain an Interspatial Transport Box that can teleport your party just about anywhere. It seems to have unlimited uses.

2. The following locations have one of the hologram sequence cards: Fortress of Fear, Halls of Insanity, Dark Warriors Keep, Cathedral of Carn, Tomb of Terror, Maze from Hell.

3. These locations cannot be teleported to, but can be teleported from: Castle Whiteshield, Castle Bloodreign, Castle Dragontooth, Whiteshield Dungeon, Bloodreign Dungeon Dragontooth Dungeon, and Central Control.

4. For those who do not wish to spend a lot of time in the Maze from Hell, here are the coordinates for the Hologram card and the Ultimate Adventurer Fountain. You can use a series of teleports to get to the locations and, with luck, not run into any encounters:

Water Mane Fountain: X14, Y19.

Hologram sequence six: X27, Y23.

5. You need to be an Ultimate Adventurer and possess the Blue Priority Access Card to get to the end of the game. The card can be obtained by bringing 11 orbs to any of the kings. In an earlier issue of the column it was said that you only obtain one million experience, no matter how many orbs you present. I found that

the kings give you one million experience for each orb you bring them

6. For 100,000 gold each, your characters gain every skill in the game (including Thievery) inside the Halls of Insanity.

Eric R. Smith
Clovis NM

Prophecy of the Shadow (SSI)

1. Berrin has the white key to Larkin's workshop that is northwest of Larkin's house.

2. Search the doormat at Larkin's house to find the iron key, which opens the house.

3. The bandit camp is north of town. The password is "Znfandel." Kill the Mage Hunter to get the Death Warrant, which you should give to Berrin.

4. The wizards tower is northeast on the island. You need to use a rope to enter. Kill the zombie.

5. The glasses are useless, but the severed head and the platinum catalyst are useful.

6. Use Larf's staff to activate the teleporters to leave the island. To find them, look for pair of conical stones placed next to one another. Stand between the stones and use the staff.

7. You need to show the scroll Berrin gave you to both guilds' masters. Garen's house is northeast of Silverdale and Gerald's house is due west.

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8. The Torlok cave is in the center of the Great Forest (inside, you must get the Chieftain's tongue). The library is a little east of the cave area in the Great Forest

9. Use the Teleporter southwest of Withering Lands to get to the last High Gazer. Find the Eternal Lamp there.

10. Enter the ruins in the Withering Lands—you can find the Earthen staff by searching the corpses.

11. Once the guild masters have been killed by Mage Hunters, you can use the Death Warrant to gain entrance to Granite Keep. Find the Everful Flask. Fiona the maid will give you a key to Cam Tethe's room. Kill Tethe to get the key to the Dungeon, where you can free the Princess. If Tethe is too tough, engage him in melee for only one or two rounds, then exit. He doesn't follow. Heal yourself and fight him again. Repeat, if necessary—he has about 100 hit points.

12. Free the Princess and she gives you the key to the torture chamber. Use the key to enter and get the evil adornments.

13. Wear the evil costume to enter the temple in the Town of Malice. Get the magic fan that can turn you invisible.

14. Walk on the plants to enter Fell Swamp. Talk to the witch Esme on the island. Give her the severed head. The acid can be purchased in many places. The spider venom can be obtained by killing spiders in the Mage Tower that the Last

High Gazer sends you to. The Pango fruit is on a bush in the SW corner of the Withering Lands, near an abandoned house.

15. The Shadow Sword can be found at the bottom of the silver mine, located north of Silverdale near the coast.

16. Use the teleporter just above the temple in Malice to get to Abruxus' castle. Place the four "elemental" objects on the correct pedestals: Fan (air), Flask (water), Eternal Flame (fire), Earth Staff (earth). Take the appearing door to Abraxus. Cast the spell that the witch gave you on Abruxus and then kill him with the Shadow Sword. Use the same technique you used against Cam Tethe because Abraxus has about 200 hit points.

17. Also, drink any strength potions you can obtain. Train with the Guy in Glade and drink Gazer Icor. These all raise your stats.

18. There is an Orb of Sight that a Mage Hunter possesses in the library. There is a Pack of Holding that can be found in the sewer system below Granite—it allows you to hold over 50 additional items.

Scott Ferrigno
Columbia CT

We want to thank everyone who has graciously responded to reader queries after the answers have been published. The time they take is much appreciated, even if their names aren't published. Keep

up the good work by sending your comments, hints and tips to: The Lessers, 521 Czerny Street, Tracy CA 95376. Until next time, game on!

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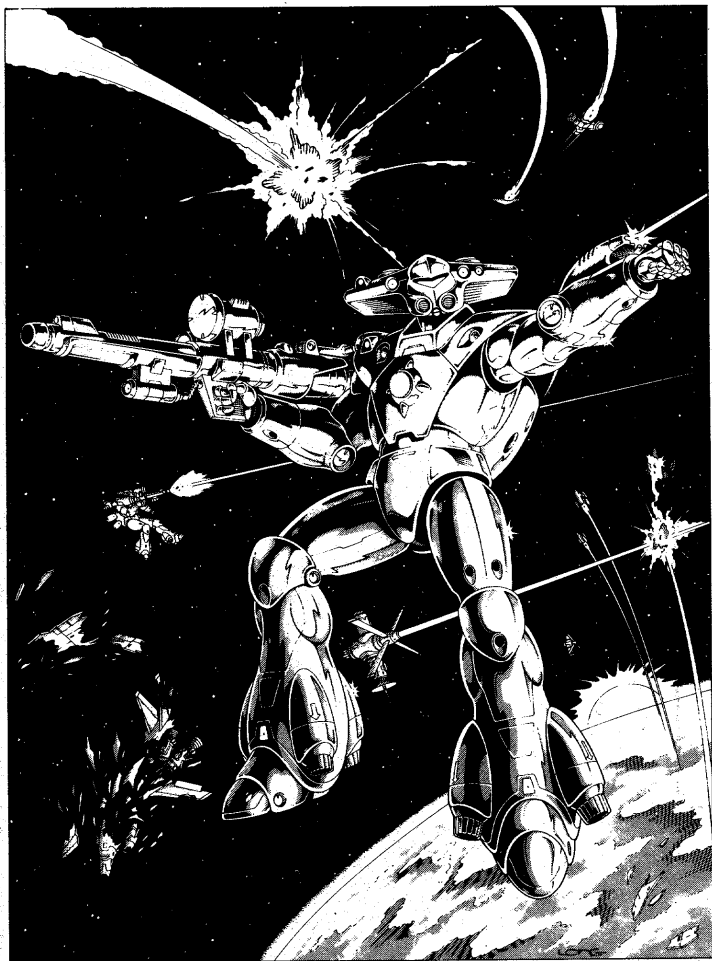
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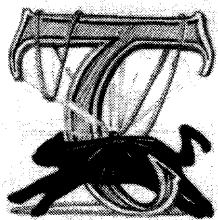
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he city of Dartmor sprawled untidily along the shores of the river Foamfleck. It was neither the largest city in the region nor the most beautiful. In fact, its only distinguishing feature was the excellence of its thieves' guild, a distinction that the city council preferred not to advertise. Despite the council's best efforts, however, "as slick as a Dartmor thief" had become something of a byword in the area.

The Thieves' Guild of Dartmor was located in a large and ostentatious stone mansion in the nicer quarter of the city. Not that everybody knew this, of course, but the observant had noticed that, despite the apparent affluence of the mansion's owners, nobody knew precisely who they were or how they managed to pay for the upkeep of the property. Moreover, there was the undeniable fact that Tenebre Place had never had so much as a window broken—much less been robbed—in the century that it had been standing. Until very recently, that is.

The current head of the Thieves' Guild went by the sobriquet of Nightshadow. She had straight raven-black hair, emerald-green eyes, and a temper that was uncertain at the best of times. She was just over five feet tall and appeared to be a descendant of the elusive elven race, except that her distinctly pointed ears were matched by a set of equally pointed teeth. Just at the moment, those unnerving teeth were bared in a grimace that was most definitely not a smile.

The master thief was furious. She was both a light sleeper and cautious to a fault, but sometime in the early morning, while she had been sleeping following a particularly successful cat burglary, somebody had stolen a very precious object from her and escaped entirely unnoticed. Only the single item had been stolen: a silver chain bearing an onyx pendant in the shape of a leaping cat. What made matters worse was that the chain had been around her neck at the time of the theft, for she never removed it from her person.

The entire guild was in an uproar. It was not considered good form to steal from another guildmember, let alone the guildmistress herself. There were a great number of anxious faces in the stately halls of Tenebre Place, and more than a few knocking knees, for Nightshadow was determinedly interviewing every guildmember she could find.

The master thief's office was on the top floor of the building, in the northwest corner. It was expensively furnished in dark woods and heavy brocades, and the floor was covered by a plush, wine-red carpet that glinted with gold thread. Nightshadow's unadorned, black-clad form appeared almost out of place in the midst of such luxury. She was sitting behind a massive oak desk, with a hastily procured list of the current guild membership in one hand and a writing stylus in the other. A tall man with dark eyes and closely cropped brown hair stood slightly behind and to her left. A pale scar ran from his right temple to the corner of his mouth, giving him a twisted, enigmatic smile that was as chilling in its own way as Nightshadow's unusually pointed teeth. His long, slender hands were clasped under his chin, and the silent, impassive stare with

Something Familiar

by Eliza Erskine

Illustrations by Jeff Menges

which he fixed each testifying guildmember was calculated to unnerve even the most hardy and cold blooded among them.

This was Perik Quinn, a diviner by trade, a mage of considerable skill who had been cast from his own guild many years before for reasons that he did not speak of and none dared ask. In the Thieves' Guild, one did not pry into such matters. Quinn was Nightshadow's partner in business, and they had been an exceptionally successful team for the past decade, a diviner's skills being of great value to the enterprising master thief. The mage was among the very few to know the true significance of Nightshadow's missing pendant, but he was not one to share secrets.

It was many hours later when a tired and frustrated Nightshadow rose from her chair and wearily shut the heavy office door behind the last of the available guildmembers. There were still a number of people to track down and question, but for the moment she had had enough. She turned to face Quinn, her features suddenly impassive. They looked at each other for several moments, each assessing the other's thoughts.

Abruptly, Nightshadow spoke, her voice harsh.

"You know that there must have been magic, powerful magic, involved in this theft."

Quinn nodded. He knew what she was going to ask next, and his shoulders tensed involuntarily. He moved a few steps toward her but halted reflexively as she laid a hand on the hilt of her dagger.

"Perik, I must know. Did you have any hand in this outrage? You are the most obvious suspect, for not only do you have access to my rooms, but you know how losing my talisman affects me."

Keeping his eyes on hers, the mage sank slowly to one knee.

"Terilanelon Eiwonythwyn," he said quietly, using her true name, "I swear to you in the name of the Lady of Magic that I was not party to this deed in any way, manner, or form."

The master thief considered this for what seemed to Quinn a very long time, her face utterly devoid of emotion. Then she relaxed-her stance, and the tension in the room eased perceptibly.

"Very well, Perik, I believe you," she said, her tone no longer harsh, but full of steel. "I will have my spies' reports by tomorrow morning, but I do not wish to remain idle until then. What do you suggest we do next?"

Quinn stood gracefully and bowed slightly to her.

"Next, O Guildmistress, I suggest that I try to discover some information by magical means. It is a risky endeavor and time consuming, but well worth it if it works."

Nightshadow assented silently. She went to a corner of the room and pulled aside a tapestry. The wall behind it looked perfectly solid, but at a touch from the master thief it slid into a recess, leaving a narrow opening into the passageway beyond.

"I will watch over you as you work," she said to the mage, motioning him into the passage. "I fear that whoever took my talisman may realize that you are my best hope for recovering it and try some mischief upon your person while you are lost in a trance."

Perik Quinn decided not to question her motives. It was probable that they were entirely centered on the speedy recovery of her pendant, but part of him wished to believe that she was also concerned about his well-being. He led the way to his ritual chamber in silence.

The room was a large one, but this was not immediately obvious as it was cluttered with the accumulated apparatus of many years. There were two windows, but both were heavily shrouded in velvet, and the room was nearly dark. Quinn lit a half-dozen candles and set them about the room. Inlaid in silver into the floor, in the center of the room, was a large pentagram inside which lay an ornate mirror perhaps three feet in diameter. As Nightshadow watched, Quinn gathered up the necessary components and arcane items he needed for his spells. His preparations completed, the diviner stepped into the pentagram, laid the items he carried on the floor, and seated himself crosslegged on a small cushion in front of the mirror. He then made a complicated gesture in the air with his hands and spoke a sharp word of command.

The mirror began to glow brightly, then it rose off the floor to hover in front of Quinn, just at head height. With a glance over his shoulder at Nightshadow, he set to work, occasionally staring for long periods of time into the mirror. Seeing that the mage was wholly engrossed in his spells, Nightshadow stationed herself near the door, a nearly invisible figure in the wavering light of the candles.

The sun had set completely by the time the diviner sat back from his scrying mirror and looked around blearily for Nightshadow. He blinked, unable to find her, then jumped as she spoke from just beyond the warding pentagram.

"Well, magus, what have you found?"

Quinn rose unsteadily and sought out his most comfortable chair. Nightshadow handed him a glass of red wine and a thickly buttered slice of bread, and looked hopefully at him. The room was now lit solely by the light of the mirror, which Quinn had not yet dismissed.

Sipping thirstily at the wine, the mage tried to gather his thoughts.

"Well," he said at length, swallowing the last of the bread, "I have discovered that your talisman is currently in the possession of an old acquaintance of mine, a man by the name of Pal Revin. He is currently examining it in his laboratory, and he is very pleased with himself."

Nightshadow hissed under her breath and fingered the well-worn hilt of her favorite longsword.

"There is more," Quinn continued, frowning. "Although I was very cautious, I believe that Revin was alerted to my presence by magical means. Shortly after I began observing him, some kind of ward sprang up and prevented any further scrying. I then tried to determine whether he had accomplices within the guild, but without success. I do not think that he does. Revin is more than capable of committing such a crime without aid, and he is too cautious to bring in witnesses unnecessarily."

Nightshadow raised a slanted eyebrow.

"You seem to know this Pal Revin well, Perik. Was he a man of power in your old guild?"

Quinn met her gaze with a curiously twisted expression on his face.

"Revin was my teacher. All that I know of the Art he knows and more. He is the man whose accusations were sufficient to have me expelled from the guild. He is a very dangerous person to cross."

Nightshadow bared pointed teeth. One almost had the impression of a tail lashing angrily behind her.

"And I am a very dangerous person to steal from, Perik. Tonight, I think that I will pay a visit to this slimy soul-stealer, to reclaim what is mine and perhaps a bit more into the bargain."

Quinn sighed as deeply as she had earlier that day.

"I will accompany you, Shadow. Somehow I feel that I should. But be warned that Revin is neither a fool nor defenseless."

Nightshadow opened the door into the main corridor of the upper story of the mansion. She blinked in the yellow glare of flickering torches. Suddenly a thought struck her, and she turned back toward Quinn, who was slumped over in his chair with his face in his hands.

"Perik?"

He looked up, squinting against the light.

"Yes?"

Nightshadow looked around cautiously. Nobody was in sight.

"How would Revin know of my talisman, and why would he want it?"

The mage looked at her somberly.

"Pal Revin studies cat-lore. He has spent decades researching the various myths about cats, and he is obsessed with finding and collecting artifacts associated with felines, most especially those created by the Cat Lord himself, whom Revin knows well to be no myth."

Nightshadow felt a cold fear settle in the pit of her stomach. A man who knew of the Cat Lord, the powerful and mysterious *Felis Rex*, could be a grave threat to her. Her life was inextricably linked to that of the Cat Lord and his minions. She turned sharply on one heel and shut the door to Perik's workroom. Once in her own rooms, she changed into her working attire: tight-fitting black hose, a black silk tunic, and supple black boots. She was just examining her rope for thin or frayed portions, when there was a tap at her door.

A key scraped in the lock and Quinn stepped into the room, garbed much as she was. He had not made a bad thief, Nightshadow reflected to herself, although it was rare that he actually left the guild on assignment. She paused for a moment to admire the slender, muscled figure framed in the doorway, before slinging her sword across her back (for ease in climbing) and hooking her rope onto her belt.

They made their way silently through the lower levels of the guild, which were far below the supposed basement of Tenebre Place. These levels gave access to the sewer system, and to the secret tunnels known to members of the Thieves' Guild as the Underway. The passages of the Underway were damp and chill, and dimly lit by irregularly spaced torches. Quinn was glad when, after somewhat less than ten minutes of walking, they exited the Underway into a narrow alley between two large buildings.

Quinn peered around the corner of one building and pointed to a stone towerlike structure standing alone in

the center of a large, cobbled courtyard. Nightshadow pursed her lips in a silent whistle. Of course! She had always known that the mage who inhabited the tower was fond of cats, but she had never bothered to find out who he was, as one of her basic tenets of thieving was not to meddle with mages. Except Perik, of course, but he was a different case, though now and then even he could be as aloof and frightening as any guild magus—which, after all, he had once been.

Slowly and silently, the master thief and the mage made their way to the tower. Nightshadow regarded the rough-hewn stonework with professional contempt, for it would be an easy climb even without rope. With a last look at Quinn, who shrugged, she started to make her way upward to a dark window some twenty feet above the courtyard. Quinn watched her for a few seconds before concentrating his gaze on the surrounding area. The streets were deserted in this residential area, well away from the inns and taverns of the riverside. The only traffic that Quinn saw pass was a handsome coach, which sped by with a great clatter just as a long rope came snaking down the side of the tower to dangle a few inches from Quinn's head.

Waiting only until the noise of the coach's passage had died away, Quinn muttered a brief but heartfelt prayer to the Lady of Magic and began to ascend the tower wall. It was with great relief that he swung his leg over the window ledge and dropped lightly to the floor inside. His relief was short-lived.

Even as Nightshadow began to pull up her rope, there was a sudden glare of light, and Quinn realized, too late, which room they had broken into. Dropping her rope and trying desperately to adjust her eyes to the sudden light, Nightshadow whirled around, drawing her weapons. Quinn, who in the last ten years had learned much of thieving but little of swordcraft, did not even bother to pull out his dagger.

Pal Revin, Quinn's former mentor, was a man of average height, with a slight paunch and graying hair. He was standing in the doorway of his laboratory leaning on an iron-bound staff, the tip of which shone with bright light. A large tabby sat attentively at his feet, apparently much interested in the proceedings. Revin scrutinized his intruders carefully before permitting himself a broad grin. Quinn realized, without much surprise, that they had been expected.

"Good evening, Perik! I did so hope that the puzzling Nightshadow would bring you along with her this evening."

Quinn, his face set in an unreadable mask, caught Nightshadow's arm as she began to make her way around the heavy marble table that separated them from Revin. She snarled at him, but he didn't let go. He spoke quietly.

"Shadow, he's protected by a number of peculiar and unpleasant wards. I wouldn't get too close if I were you."

Nightshadow swore but stopped advancing. Quinn slowly released his grip.

Revin leaned his staff against the wall beside him and removed a familiar pendant from about his neck. He dangled it provocatively from his right hand so that the leaping cat-form showed clearly against the light from his staff.

Despite herself, Nightshadow hissed and lunged forward, her green eyes glowing with murderous rage.

"Give that back to me, wretch!"

Her sword sliced through a variety of intricate and very expensive glassware, which crashed to the floor, utterly destroyed. Revin looked annoyed as the master thief leaped to the tabletop and sprang at him with amazing agility. There was a crackle of fire, and Nightshadow was hurled backward, badly burned, her sword spinning from her grasp.

Quinn winced in sympathetic pain from his vantage point near the window, Revin cleared his throat.

"Now that you have had your chance at a little unprovoked mayhem," he said in an unpleasant, almost venomous tone, "perhaps you will be more inclined to listen to me."

Nightshadow, rising painfully from the floor, said nothing. Her eyes flicked toward her sword, but, she made no move to reach for it.

"This pendant," Revin continued, keeping a close eye on the thief, "interests me greatly. I can divine that it grants you some sort of shapechanging ability, but there are unusually strong magics in it that I do not comprehend. What I would like to know is more about Nightshadow, to whom it is closely attuned,"

Nightshadow glowered at him unhelpfully.

Revin did not seem to be upset by this. His expression was smug as he started to chant the words of a magical ritual, gesturing rapidly with the hand that held the medallion, Nightshadow backed quickly away toward the window and Perik Quinn, who looked furious and was shouting something about illegal magics. Suddenly, Nightshadow felt her gaze caught and held by Pal Revin, and she was unable to move.

"If you try to cast a spell, Quinn," she heard Revin say to the younger mage, "I will deal with you in ways that will make your expulsion from the guild look pleasant."

For just a moment, Quinn's impassive features registered an expression of sheer hatred. Then he shrugged and clasped his hands tightly in front of him, tacitly bowing to Revin's order.

"Now, little one," Revin said, turning his full attention on Nightshadow, "tell me truthfully, from whom did you steal this trinket?"

"I did not steal it," Nightshadow heard herself reply.

Revin's eyes gleamed intently.

"Then where did you obtain such a thing, little thief?"

Nightshadow struggled not to answer, fought the urge to tell her secret to this pitiless questioner, but in vain.

"My father gave it to me when I was born," she said, in a strangled voice.

At least, Quinn thought sourly, Pal Revin has the grace to look surprised. After all, it isn't often that you meet the only living child of the Cat Lord.

Revin was almost trembling with excitement.

"Prove that this talisman is your birthright," he commanded the ensorcelled thief.

Quinn breathed in sharply, Revin was tampering with something that he did not understand, and his former student hoped fervently that he would pay for it in blood.

Nightshadow blinked once, and in her place was a huge black cat with brilliant green eyes and whitely gleaming

fangs. The cat favored Revin with a pointed grin but did not move. Mere mortal magic could not hold the Cat Lord's daughter when she was in her true form, but Revin still had her pendant. Still, at least her thoughts were free of the mage's obscene control. And he will pay for the theft, she promised herself, and for every humiliation. Bloodlust rose within her, but she quelled it with an effort. No, she thought, blood is not enough. The punishment must fit the crime.

Her eyes alighted on the overfed tabby at Revin's feet, and all at once she knew how to hurt this proud, stupid, mortal,

Good evening little brother, she thought to the tabby.

The tabby stiffened, its tail twitching nervously.

Good evening, my Lady, it replied, knowing the voice, though it had never heard it before.

You serve one who seeks to hurt me, Nightshadow told it in menacing tones.

The tabby cowered, terrified by the power of the Lady.

And the giant black cat grinned just a little wider. Revenge was going to be sweet.

Perik Quinn had not really noticed Revin's familiar earlier, as he had been preoccupied with other things. He noticed it now, however, as it leaped suddenly from the floor and slashed its former master across the face before darting from the room. Revin screamed, an agonizing, heart-rending howl of pain. Then he collapsed to the floor and lay still, his features deathly pale.

For a moment, Quinn was utterly stunned. Beyond need for explanation he knew the cause of that anguished scream and felt an echo of the pain in himself. He thought of Petryl, and of the pride he had felt in the friendship and companionship of the young kestrel until she had been torn from him, ripped apart by magical energies no mere bird could survive. For that more than anything else Perik Quinn hated Pal Revin. Harder to bear than any of the humiliations Revin had heaped on his too-capable apprentice, the murder of his familiar had left a scar that twenty years had not healed. And now, it seemed, vengeance had indeed been taken, and justice served.

Quinn was recalled from his bleak memories by a gentle nudge on his leg. The black cat was glaring expectantly at him, as though he were supposed to know what to do next. Oh yes, Quinn thought, still fighting the shock of what had transpired, and the lingering pain that it had evoked. *She needs the pendant.*

For the truth of the matter was that, contrary to popular belief, Terilanelon did not need her pendant to assume the shape of a cat, but rather to assume the humanoid shape in which she was more frequently seen. She was not an elf who could become a cat, but a cat who could, with the help of the pendant, become an elf. She preferred the bipedal form because, when she remained long in cat form, she found herself becoming more instinctive and less rational.

Quinn muttered a few words and walked slowly over to peer at the unconscious form of Pal Revin. Unfortunately, the older wizard was still guarded by protective magic. Tensing his shoulders, Quinn forced himself to reach for the pendant, still clutched in Revin's grasp. *You've been hurt before*, he told himself, and you survived it then. Quickly, before he could think better of it, he snatched at the pen-

dant. Fire lanced through him, but he was ready for it and did not drop the precious talisman. Gasping, he fell to the floor, his strong hands burned and blistered and oozing blood. He closed his eyes, fighting back tears. Suddenly he felt a wet coolness across his injured hands. With unaccustomed gentleness and none of the roughness that one would associate with a cat's tongue, the black cat was cleaning his wounds and more, actually healing them. When she had done all she could, she padded slowly backward and peered down at him anxiously.

Quinn sat up slowly and placed the silver chain around the cat's neck. The form before him shimmered, and then Nightshadow was kneeling in front of him, her features pale. She smiled wanly at him.

"I've never been in cat form without my pendant before," she explained hesitantly. "My thoughts seemed to grow more like those of a cat every instant. It is not a sensation I enjoy."

Quinn stood up, still shaking with reaction.

"What you did to Revin was cruel, Lady Nightshadow."

Nightshadow gave him an odd look, surprised that he was so shaken by the business. Perik Quinn had nerves of steel and a streak of ruthlessness that had cost more than one person's life.

"He has been punished in a manner fitting his crime," she said finally, fingering her pendant. "I dissolved the link that bound him to his familiar, who was a cat and therefore subject to my power. I am only sorry that the

shock did not kill him."

Quinn shivered at the malice in her tone and did not reply. He drew a deep breath and slowly let it out again. Nightshadow was hauling in her rope.

"I think that we may as well leave by the front door," she remarked.

Quinn, whose hands were still very sore, agreed.

"I wish we had had time to explore his library," he remarked sadly, as they quietly let themselves out into the night.

Nightshadow grinned toothily.

"Ah. . . I am glad that you are recovering your fine sense of larceny, Perik. Still, I must reluctantly concur with your assessment that robbing a mage's tower is court-ing death. Alas for the treasures lost!"

They walked slowly toward the Underway.

"Perhaps we ought to give some thought to leaving the fine city of Dartmor," Perik said hesitantly, stopping to look back at Revin's tower.

Nightshadow turned as well and slipped her arm through his. They stood together in silence for a moment, two black shadows under the pale light of the stars, Then Nightshadow nodded decisively.

"You are quite right, of course. I only hope that Revin takes a long time to recover."

Perik Quinn looked away.

"He will . . ." he murmured softly. "Oh, he will." Ω

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Role-playing reviews

©1992 by Rick Swan

Try something new in the board-game field



The 1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ game fair was so thick with gamers that I wouldn't have been surprised to hear dice clattering in the bathroom stalls. Not only were the scheduled events packed, players seemed intent on filling every square foot of the convention center with impromptu games. If you didn't watch where you were going, you risked bumping into somebody's dungeon or squashing an imperial army.

It was quite a spectacle, and I spent a lot

Role-playing games' ratings

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

of time roaming the halls to check out what people were playing. Role-playing games, naturally, were the main course, ranging from elaborate AD&D® campaigns to a homemade oddity where the player characters looked like anthropomorphic garden tools. Board games seemed especially popular this year, judging from the number of open boxes I almost stepped in. The AXIS AND ALLIES* and SPACE HULK* games were among the favorites, as were the CIVILIZATION* game and the

eternally popular MONOPOLY* game. However, though science-fiction, war, and family board games saw plenty of action, fantasy board games were as scarce as cheap food. Considering the dozens of fantasy board games published in the last decade or so, it's surprising they don't draw the crowds.

But maybe it's not so surprising. With few exceptions, fantasy board games seem to have the life-spans of tsetse flies. Apparently, gamers play the new releases a few times, then stick them on the shelf and never come back.

After looking over my own game library, I've concluded that most fantasy board games deserve their second-class status. Over and over again, designers return to the same two tired approaches, neither of which have worked all that well.

Transplanting role-playing concepts is the first and most obvious approach. In RPG-derived board games, players control the actions of one or more colorful characters, struggling to complete a quest by battling monsters and snatching treasure. Examples include Games Workshop's TALISMAN* game, Iron Crown's FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING* game, and West End's TALES OF THE ARABIAN NIGHTS* game. While such games can be entertaining, they're ultimately hollow experiences because they're only superficial renditions of the real thing. In RPGs, players can theoretically go anywhere and do anything; board-game players are limited to a narrow selection of actions. RPG characters resemble real people; board-game characters are collections of numbers. RPG players interact with a living, breathing referee; board-game players interact with a rule book. It's possible to maintain interest by adding new encounters and options—the TALISMAN supplements do this quite well—but if it's role-playing you want, why settle for a board game?

The second approach uses war games as a template, substituting magic wands and dragons for machine guns and Marines. In these games, two armies comprised of variously powered units clash on a battlefield, fighting for terrain objectives and high body counts. The Avalon Hill Game Company has tried this approach a number of times (the DRAGONHUNT* game, the DRAGON PASS* game, and the DARK EMPEROR* game, for example), employing hex maps and die-cut counters that weren't all that different from its SQUAD LEADER* game and other historical products. TSR's DRAGONLANCE® board game (from 1988) boiled down to a tactical air game, using flying dragons instead of Messerschmitts. Though well-designed war games of any type can be fun, fantasy board games invariably lack the sophisticated mechanics and historical resonance of military simulations, which makes me lose interest fast.

For fantasy board games to come into their own, designers need to quit leaning on war games and RPGs for ideas and take

a few chances. How about a fantasy board game that seriously explores the ramifications of magical research? Or a fantasy game that combines exploration and economics along the lines of Avalon Hill's STELLAR CONQUEST* game? Or a fantasy CIVILIZATION game, with the players taking the roles of gods creating their own universes?

Well, maybe some day. While there aren't any ground-breakers among the products we're examining this month, all of them boast intriguing design features or unusual twists that make them worth a look, even from those who've given up on board games as dull and predictable. Are there any classics? Check the hallways at next year's GEN CON game fair.

XANTH* game

Boxed game with 16-page rulebook,
27" X 15" mounted game board, 162
playing cards, 15 six-sided dice, six
pawns, 12 chits
Mayfair Games, Inc. \$25
Design: Mike Nystul
Development: David N. Searle
Editing: Jim Musser
Art director: Ike Scott
Game art: Jael

In Piers Anthony's pun-ridden Xanth novels, characters such as Chester Centaur and Stanley Steamer visit places like Deer Abbey and the Isle of View, encountering deafening blossoms called Hell's Bells and tough canines named Rock Hounds. The XANTH board game dutifully follows Anthony's lead, wallowing in word play and drawing as much inspiration from Alfred E. Neumann as J. R. R. Tolkien. Whether this approach strikes you as playfully subversive or cringe-inducing kid's stuff depends on your tolerance for whimsy—and I mean whimsy by the megadose.

Since I've suffered through enough ponderous fantasy to last me a lifetime, I've found the occasional Xanth book to be as refreshing as lemonade in July. The same goes for the board game, which combines the breezy appeal of the novels with a set of easy-on-the-mind mechanics. The result is a charming diversion for players who don't take their games too seriously.

Neither the premise nor the rules hold many surprises, as RPG conventions are pretty much followed to the letter. Players assume the roles of familiar Xanth personalities (such as Bink and Dora Zombie), wander around a map of Xanth, pick up magical goodies, and attempt to complete simple missions. Each personality, called a Chair Actor, is profiled on a playing card featuring a color portrait, numerical ratings for Strength and Cunning, and a brief description of his special talent (e.g., Bink can cause a reroll of any die, and Zora Zombie can absorb damage more efficiently than other Chair Actors). Quest cards,

dealt randomly at the beginning of the game, describe each player's mission, which may involve escorting another Chair Actor to a particular destination or traveling to a series of locations as an envoy of the king.

After the players acquire Chair Actors and missions, each receives five Encounter/Event cards, used to bolster the fortunes of their own Chair Actors or serve as obstacles for opponents. Each E/E card contains two different encounters: the owning player can use either one he wants. Encounters include hazards (mostly monsters, such as the Kraken Weed and Abominable Snowman), objects (like the Healing Draught, which restores a Chair Actor back to health), and events (the "Edit" card, for instance, cancels a previously played hazard).

A player completes his movement phase by moving the pawn representing his Chair Actor to adjacent regions. There's a two-region limit on land movement, while a dice-roll determines the amount of available sea movement. After the Chair Actor finishes moving, opposing players make his life difficult by slapping down E/E cards. Usually, the active Chair Actor must face a monster. The Chair Actor can avoid the monster by rolling less than or equal to his Cunning rating. Otherwise, combat ensues, which requires the combatants to roll less than or equal to their Strength ratings to inflict damage on the other guy. Combat continues until one opponent is Xonked Out (suffering damage equal to his Strength) or the Chair Actor retreats (this gives the monster a bonus attack). If a Chair Actor ends up in a region that corresponds to the location on an object card he holds in his hand, his Chair Actor acquires that object; the object card is then placed with the Chair Actor card. The player replenishes his hand to five cards, his turn ends, then it's on to the next Chair Actor. The cycle continues until somebody completes his mission.

It sounds routine, and to a certain degree it is. Completing the quests doesn't require a lot of thought or planning, as there's usually an obvious route to each destination. The hazard cards function as a series of random events over which the recipient has no control and few options; unless you happen to have an event card that delivers you from evil, you either leave or stay put to engage in a tedious die-rolling contest to resolve combat. Worse, the difficulty of the missions is wildly uneven; a player who must journey all the way across the board doesn't stand a chance against an opponent whose destination lies just a few regions away. The rulebook dismisses this inequity by claiming that the game duplicates "life's inherent unfairness." That's cute but not particularly satisfying. An optional rule requiring players to complete two or more missions minimizes the balance problem but doesn't eliminate it.

Still, the sheer number of variables kept

me coming back for more. With two dozen Chair Actors, 26 different missions, and more than 200 encounters, the XANTH game invites replays, if only to try out the various combinations. The colorful board is a pleasure to explore. Disaster cards, which pop up intermittently in the E/E deck, wrench the game in unexpected directions; the "Deja Vu" disaster, for instance, sends all pawns back to the starting gate, regardless of their current status. And the barrage of puns makes for an engagingly goofy atmosphere.

Evaluation: Mayfair has had mixed success adapting fantasy literature into board games. The MYTH FORTUNES* and DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN* games, to name two, were nice tries but didn't do a whole lot with the concepts in the Robert Asprin and Anne McCaffrey books. The XANTH game, however, is not only enjoyable but also captures the spirit of the source material in all its cockeyed splendor. Anthony fans should get a kick out of riding the Holey Cow to the Conversational Plateau and the Rumor Mill, while casual players should be in for some laughs providing they can withstand the Punishment. Now where's the Xanth role-playing game?

MINION HUNTER * game * * * 1/2

Boxed game with eight-page rulebook, 20" X 17" mounted map board, 72 Plot Cards, 40 Equipment Cards, 10 pawns, character sheet pad, one lo-sided die, one six-sided die, play money sheets, advanced rules sheet

GDW, Inc. \$25

Design: Lester Smith

Development: Loren Wiseman

Editing: Stephen Olle

Art director: Amy Doubet

Illustrations: Janet Aulisio, Liz Danforth, Dell Harris, Rick Harris, Dave Martin, and Thomas Darrell Midgett

In GDW's DARK CONSPIRACY* role-playing game, nasty alien creatures have infiltrated the world of the future, preying on the innocent and worming their way into our social institutions for their own fiendish purposes. Stopping them won't be easy; I suspect it'll take at least a couple dozen supplements, and maybe even an expansion set or two.

The MINION HUNTER game gives us struggling humans our best shot at striking back at the bad guys, as the aliens don't seem quite so formidable in this classy board game as they do in the RPG. Only four minions pose a genuine threat—the Nukids, Morlocks, ETs, and Fey Folk—and all it takes is a favorable die-roll to send them back where they came from. Best of all, the good guys don't die; they just go the hospital.

Players represent characters with four attributes: Empathy (psychic strength), Stalking (sneakiness), Combat (weapon expertise), and Contacts (access to friends

and allies). All characters begin with a single point in each of the four attributes. They spend the early turns of the game moving around the MONOPOLY-like perimeter of the board (called the Career Track), hoping to land on spaces that will beef up their attribute totals. Landing on the "Empathic Training" space, for example, gives the character two extra Empathy points and one bonus Contact point. Attribute levels don't shape a character's personality (personality isn't really a factor in this game) but instead serve to improve his chances when battling minions.

Meanwhile, the minions are busy hatching devious schemes to take over the country. A deck of Plot Cards represents the minions' activities. The back of each card indicates a particular city in Dark America (the name given to what's left of the United States after a few decades of corporate abuse). The front of the card, concealed from the players, names a specific minion and gives its relevant statistical information. The Plot Card on the top of the deck begins the game on the first space of the Plot Card Track. After every player turn, the active Plot Card moves another space down the Card Track. If the card moves all the way to the end of the track without being intercepted by a character, the card is flipped to reveal the secret minion. The card is discarded, and if the minion is one of the four primary threats (such as a Morlock or Fey Folk), the corresponding minion pawn moves an indicated number of spaces along the Plot Point Track. If any minion pawn moves to the last space of the Plot Point Track, the minions win the game and all of the players lose.

To stop the minions, the characters must intercept the active Plot Cards by bouncing between the Career Track and the map of Dark America. If a character lands in the right space on the Career Track, he's allowed to move to the Dark America city of his choice. If a character occupies a city that's shown on the back of an active Plot Card, the card is flipped, and the character confronts the minion. The character may battle the minion by making an Attribute Test; essentially, the character must roll less than or equal to the attribute listed on the minion card. For instance, to beat the Fey Folk, he may have to roll less than or equal to his Empathy score. Tougher minions might require the character to roll less than or equal to half of a particular attribute.

If the Attribute Test fails, the character is sent to the Intensive Care space of the Hospital Track and spends a few turns recovering; the minion continues moving along the Plot Card Track. If the test succeeds, the character beats the minion, the card is removed from the Plot Card Track, and the player collects the number of Fame Points indicated on the Plot Card. If no minion has made it to the end of the Plot Point Track after all of the Plot Cards have been played, the player with the most Fame Points wins the game.

Despite its RPG roots, the role-playing

features aren't the game's strong suit. There's no meaningful distinction between the attributes, and building them up depends more on lucky rolls than player decisions. The Plot Cards should more appropriately be called Monster Cards, as they have few narrative elements; the minions exist merely to attack the characters. The game discourages player interaction, as everybody operates more or less independently against the system-controlled minions.

As with the XANTH game, what makes the MINION HUNTER game fun are the imaginative encounters and clever details. Spaces on the Career Track give characters the opportunity to boost their attribute tallies by staging corporate raids and brushfire wars. Other spaces send characters spinning into the Proto-Dimension, where they may be able to take advantage of a dimensional shortcut to send them anywhere on the board. Demonground spaces may force the characters to face off against the evil spongies or the ET death ray. Not even the hospital is safe. A bad roll on the Hospital Encounters table may subject a recovering character to a Morlock attack or blood raid. Equipment cards, acquired by landing on the right spaces or making successful Attribute Checks, supply characters with everything from zip guns to palmtop computers. Interestingly, the equipment not only boosts a character's attributes (a zip gun adds +1 to the Combat score), it also serves as a medium of exchange; a hospitalized character may be required to pay his bill by forking over a weapon.

Evaluation: Serious role-players, particularly those caught up in the complexities of the beguiling DARK CONSPIRACY game, may find the MINION HUNTER game too slight. Those demanding an intellectual challenge may find it too easy; assuming the characters don't waste a lot of time wandering around the Career Track, the minions are usually doomed. (The advanced rules, which accelerate the minions' movement along the Plot Track, make the game more of a contest and are highly recommended.) However, if you'd like to get a taste of the DARK CONSPIRACY universe, or if you're fond of blowing away monsters, the stylish MINION HUNTER game won't disappoint.

GREYHAWK® WARS game

* * * 1/2

Boxed game with eight-page rulebook, 32-page Adventurer's Book, two 21" X 32" map sheets, 153 playing cards, 416 die-cut counters, two 10-sided dice

TSR, Inc. \$20

Design: David Cook

Editing: J. Robert King

Cover: Roger Raupp

Interior art: Ken Frank and Charles Frank
Counter and card art: Robin Raab and Karl Waller

Graphic design: Dee Barnett

A lot of gamers dismiss military simulations as too slow, too hard, and too boring. In some respects, they're right, especially about the boring part. Many war games take forever and a day to play, and the volumes of fussy rules often pursue realism at the expense of playability. Make no mistake: the GREYHAWK WARS game, based on the popular AD&D setting, has more in common with the SQUAD LEADER system than the MINION HUNTER game. But Dave Cook has bent over backward to make the mechanics as painless as possible without sacrificing the sophisticated interplay that makes the best military simulations so appealing.

As in conventional war games, the players command opposing armies struggling to kill enemies and control territory. The game begins with players selecting a scenario and receiving cards representing their countries. In the "Furyondy Frontier" scenario, for example, one side receives the Furyondy and Shield Lands Country Cards, and the other side gets the Iuz and Horned Society cards. Each Country Card lists the available troops; the Horned Society troops consist of two orcs, three hobgoblins, and one goblin, while the Shield Lands army comprises two medium infantry units and two heavy cavalry units. Players deploy the counters for their armies on the map, a detailed rendering of Oerth divided into dozens of discrete regions. Each region can hold a stack of up to five friendly troop counters. Players also receive a fixed number of hero counters, which function as super soldiers capable of a variety of special actions. Heroes may be deployed in any country controlled by a friendly player, one hero per region.

A die-roll determines which player goes first. After making sure his heroes are properly positioned, the active player begins his turn by drawing an Event Card and following the instructions. Some events, such as the "Rains Flood River" card (which prevents movement across rivers for the current turn), are played immediately. Others, like the "Buccaneers Attack" card (which gives a free attack against a ship), are held and played at the owner's discretion. The active player then completes an action for each of his troop stacks and heroes. Troops may move (up to three regions for infantry and four for cavalry, with forests and other rough terrain impeding normal movement rates), fortify (by constructing a castle to increase the defensive capacity of the region), or disband (the player removes a stack from the map, making the troops available for deployment elsewhere).

Heroes, naturally, aren't as constrained as ordinary troops. They may accompany troop stacks or split off on their own, moving up to six regions per turn. If a hero moves to an uncommitted country, he may engage in diplomacy by rolling a die and comparing the result to his home country's diplomacy rating. On a suffi-

ciently high roll, the uncommitted country becomes an ally. Heroes can also recruit mercenaries by moving to a special mercenary recruitment area, then drawing a Mercenary Card. If the Mercenary Card's alignment is compatible with the hero, the player acquires the card and may use it to improve his chances in combat. Finally, heroes may search for treasure in regions designated as magic areas. Before he snags a treasure, the hero must draw a Treasure Card and battle the indicated guardian monster. A single die-toss resolves the battle. A high roll means the hero triumphs, and the player adds one or more Treasure Cards to his hand.

Heroes and troops may engage in combat when occupying the same region as enemy forces. Both sides remove their counters from the map and arrange them in parallel lines so that every friendly counter faces at least one enemy. The attacker makes an assault against an opposing piece by rolling 1d10 and comparing the result to the attacking unit's strength, printed on the counter. If the roll is equal to or less than its strength, modified by any applicable Mercenary or Treasure Cards, the enemy suffers a hit. Strong units suffer two hits before dying, while weaker units bite the dust after a single hit. Combat lasts for three rounds only, though if a hero is present the battle may be extended to four rounds. A hero may also increase any unit's strength by one. Regardless of the outcome of combat, a hero never suffers damage. At the end of a player's turn, any damaged units that haven't taken any actions may be healed to their full strength. One new army may also be raised in any unoccupied home country.

Though fast and easy, combat is the least satisfying aspect of the game. The three-round limit seems arbitrary, serving no clear purpose other than to minimize the number of casualties. Because the strength of an opponent isn't considered when resolving combat, an attack against a tough infantryman can be as effective as an attack against a puny goblin. And why must heroes be invulnerable? I don't care how tough he is, I don't think that any character ought to be able to survive an indefinite number of assaults.

Evaluation: Combat aside, the GREYHAWK WARS game features sensible, easily mastered rules that make the game fluid and intense. The variety of units, ranging from ships to treants, encourages players to experiment with different strategies. The Mercenary and Treasure Cards increase the tactical choices, while the Event Cards keep things interesting by introducing a steady stream of variables. To put it all in context, the 32-page Adventurer's Book provides a detailed historical background, enabling ambitious players to incorporate the results of the board game into a GREYHAWK campaign. An intelligent design, well-executed and handsomely presented, the GREYHAWK WARS game

is a war game for people who hate war games.

BATTLEMASTERS* game * * 1/2

Boxed game with 28-page rulebook, one 54" X 60" vinyl battle mat, 103 miniature figures, 25 bases, 25 flag poles, three label sheets, four plastic hedges, one plastic castle, four terrain tiles, 10 cannon tiles, 100 tokens, 65 playing cards, six combat dice
Milton Bradley Company \$50
No design/art credits listed

Were you ever infatuated with a gorgeous classmate, only to discover that behind that appealing face were the brains of a plastic doll? Did you ever buy a novel for its spectacular cover, then find out the story was as interesting as the tax code? Do you see where I'm going with this?

That the contents of the BATTLEMASTERS box are impressive, stunningly so, is self-evident. The dozens of plastic pieces, detailed down to the bolts on the war hammers and scowls on the goblins, are a miniaturist's dream. The enormous vinyl battle map, with nearly 25 square feet of green fields and azure rivers, may be the biggest playing area ever included in a board game. Throw in a 5" plastic castle, a handful of skull dice, and enough odds and ends to bury the family dog, and it's like a visit from Santa Claus.

But while Santa may have been responsible for the components, it must have been Ebenezer Scrooge who came up with the rules. The systems are so stripped of complications, it's as if the designers were afraid that excessive decision-making might cause the players' heads to explode. After positioning their pieces on opposite sides of the battlefield, players draw cards from the Battle Deck, each of which depicts one or more Chaos or Imperial army units. Whichever units are depicted are allowed to move one hex in any direction. If a unit moves adjacent to an enemy unit (or, in the case of an archer or crossbowman, two or three hexes away), it may attack by rolling a number of skull dice equal to its combat value. The defender also rolls its combat value worth of dice. The number of shields on the defender's dice are subtracted from the number of skulls on the attacker's dice. The defender suffers the difference in skull tokens. A unit that accumulates three skull tokens is removed from the map. When all of the opposing units have been "skulled," you win.

Is that it? Just about. The Chaos player has a special ogre unit that can move and attack up to three times when his card comes up in the Battle Deck. The Imperial player employs a Mighty Cannon to bounce a cannon ball up to eight hexes distant, flattening anything it hits. Some minor terrain rules affect movement (no moving over rivers or past plastic hedges), while the castle grants combat bonuses to

any occupying unit. A few simple scenarios are provided for variety, most of them having to do with alternate methods of deploying the armies.

Too much of the BATTLEMASTERS game, however, is just plain silly. There's no meaningful difference between the various units, as just about all of them move and attack the same way. The rigid mechanics guarantee that strategic options are kept to a dead minimum. Units don't move any faster when traveling by road. Archers can shoot through friendly units, terrain features, and even the castle to hit enemy targets. And where's the magic? There's not a spell-caster in the bunch, a striking omission in a fantasy game.

Evaluation: So, if the game's nothing to get excited about, why the relatively high rating? Three reasons:

1. I played this several times with some grade-school kids, and unlike us grumpy perfectionists, every one of them adored it. They didn't care about the inflexible movement rules; they just liked the idea of a game big enough to fill the living-room floor. Players willing to overlook the conceptual problems may have a good time in spite of themselves. It's fast, surprisingly balanced, and a snap to learn—and there's an undeniable pleasure to be had from fondling all those pieces.

2. You want to be a game designer? Here's your chance! The BATTLEMASTERS

game is made to order for tinkerers, as its components are generic enough to accommodate just about any simple war-gaming system. Get started by assigning some spells to the beastmen and a movement bonus to the roads.

3. It's cheap. I found the BATTLEMASTERS game on sale for under \$30 at a shopping mall; considering the sheer volume of components, that's an unparalleled bargain. Even if you never get around to playing the game, you can get your money's worth by assembling the miniatures and painting them up, or using the battle map as a tablecloth. At this price, you might even consider buying an extra copy to store in the attic. Your grandchildren will love you.

Short and sweet

Sun County: RUNEQUEST Adventures in the Lands of the Sun*, by Michael O'Brien, Greg Stafford, and Ken Rolston. The Avalon Hill Game Company, \$19. This first-rate supplement, describing a Gloranthan farming settlement permeated by strange Sun Dome cults, reaffirms the RUNEQUEST game as the RPG of choice for grad schoolers. The quality of writing and precision of detail rivals that of a history text, bringing to life even the most mundane aspects of Sun Country culture. Particularly outstanding are the richly imagined scenarios, including a series of

tricky competitions to test the Harvest Bride's would-be suitors, and an investigation of the mysterious Rabbit Hat Farm, protected by a bizarre character called Pumpkinhead the Jack-o-Bear. Novices may be overwhelmed by all this; there are several references to previous RUNEQUEST supplements, and even a suggestion that an NPC improvise a story along the lines of *The Decameron* (do you have your copy handy?). However, old-timers who've mastered the nuances of the RUNEQUEST game should jump for joy at another chance to visit one of the hobby's most fascinating worlds.

Tales of the Lance, by Harold Johnson, John Terra, J. Robert King, Wolfgang Baur, Colin McComb, Jean Rabe, and Norm Ritchie. TSR, Inc., \$20. Like any multiple-author setting, Krynn has acquired some excess baggage over the years. The *Tales of the Lance* boxed set sets the DRAGONLANCE® saga straight, addressing the discrepancies, summarizing the history, and detailing key locales in a thick volume that stands as the definitive Ansalon resource. A generous set of character cards provides comprehensive statistics for Flint Fireforge, Theros Ironfeld, and other DRAGONLANCE icons, while a four-panel Dungeon Master's screen includes tables for everything from terrain obstacles to animal movement rates. Since much of this material is recycled, DRAGONLANCE saga fans who've been with the project since the beginning may not find enough to spark their interest (though if they pass, they'll miss the most lavish product in the series). But if you're thoroughly confused, or if you've been wondering what all the fuss is about, *Tales of the Lance* answers your questions and furnishes all the information you need to begin your own adventures.

■■■■■■■■

Rick Swan has been a full-time free-lancer for five years. In that time, he has worked for TSR Inc., West End Games, and Steve Jackson Games. He is also the author of The Complete Guide to Role-playing Games, published by St. Martin's Press. He has been writing reviews for DRAGON® Magazine for about one year.

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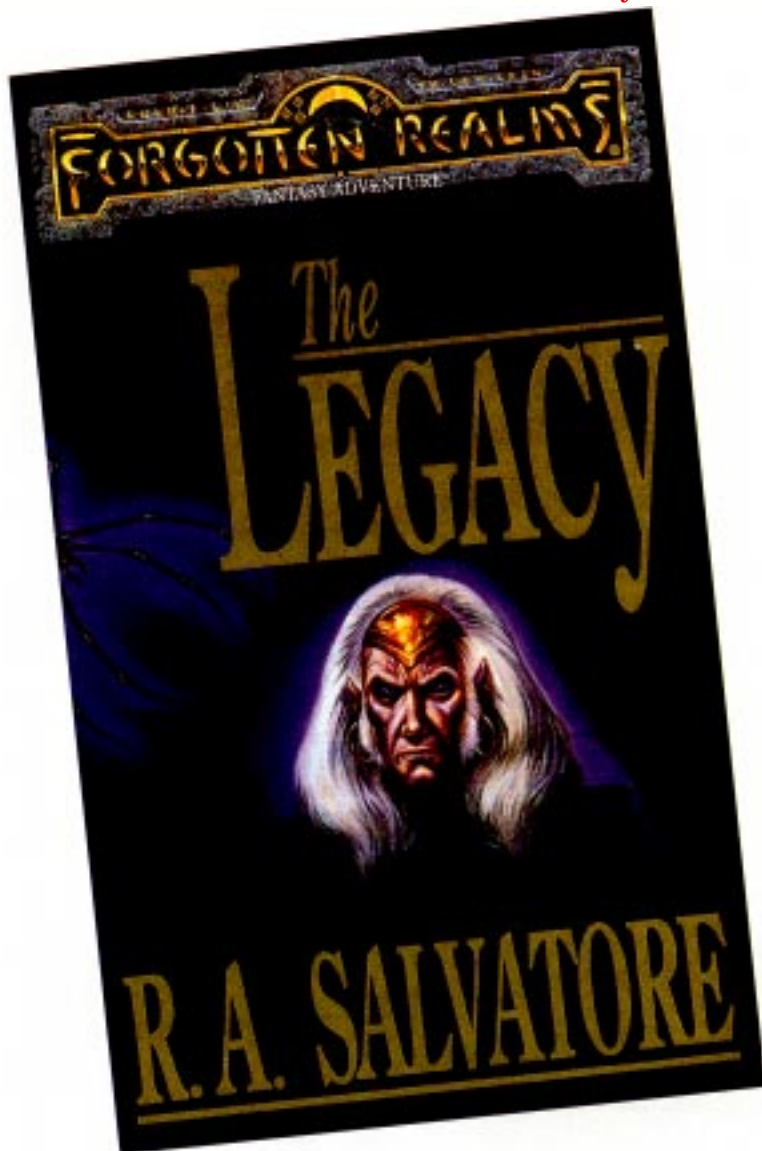
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NOVEL

I • D • E • A • S

by Sue Weinlein



Creating a *Legacy*

What exactly is the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting?

We can imagine people asking this question as they stop to look at a display of the first FORGOTTEN REALMS hardcover novel, *The Legacy*, in their local book stores. Surely this question could never have come from the lips of R. A. Salvatore, author of *The Legacy* and creator of Drizzt Do'Urden, one of the most popular heroes in the Realms.

It did. Five years ago, Mary Kirchoff, then managing editor of TSR's book department, called Salvatore to say she liked the manuscript he had sent her, but could he rewrite it to take place in the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting?

Rather than try to explain the scope of

the shared fantasy world to the first-time author over the phone, Kirchoff sent him the only Realms product published at the time: Douglas Niles' novel, *Darkwalker on Moonshae*. Figuring the Realms consisted entirely of the Moonshae Isles, Salvatore immediately put together a proposal for a novel involving Niles' characters Daryth, Canthus the moorhound, and a new hero: a young barbarian named Wulfgar.

He was surprised when Kirchoff sent him a vast map of the entire Realms and explained that she did not want him to write a sequel to Niles' book. Instead, she wanted to see a whole new story set in a completely different part of the world of Toril.

"It took us two weeks on the phone to

find a place on the map that wasn't already occupied by someone else doing a project," the author recalled. "After weeks of frustrating calls, I located a tiny bit of land—it must have been a typo. 'Is anyone there?' I asked. When they said no, I said, 'Good, that's where Icewind Dale is going to be.'"

It seems incredible to think that only a few years later, Salvatore, 33, has become one of the most-read authors of FORGOTTEN REALMS novels. The popularity of his dark-elf hero, Drizzt Do'Urden, a masterful fighter who longs for a place to belong, virtually assured the author of a best-seller with his latest effort, *The Legacy*. This novel, the Massachusetts author's first hardcover, involves characters from both his Icewind Dale and Dark Elf trilogies and spent four weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

As the story opens, Drizzt's life has never been better—until he uncovers the powerful Spider Queen's vengeful plot to destroy his life. With his loyal friends, the dark elf struggles to shake off the drow pursuers who have ventured to the surface in search of him. A human assassin, Artemis Entreri, seeks a duel to the death with Drizzt and conspires with the drow's sister, Vierna, who wishes to sacrifice the beleaguered dark elf to the goddess Lloth.

Salvatore completed *The Legacy* in a record two months to satisfy TSR's request for a new book about the dark elf. "That really wasn't a problem, because this is the book I've been wanting to write since *The Halfling's Gem*." He finished writing that novel, the final installment to the Icewind Dale Trilogy, in 1989. From there, he went on to write the Dark Elf Trilogy, detailing Drizzt's early life, and left the Icewind Dale companions' story until now to be continued.

Drizzt's birth

Readers of the Icewind Dale Trilogy know that Drizzt didn't start out as the main figure. When Wulfgar traveled from the Moonshae Isles across the Sea of Swords and north along the coast of Faerun to Icewind Dale five years ago, Salvatore had yet to conceive his most popular hero. The character was born during another phone conversation with Kirchoff, who asked the new author, "What are you going to do for [Wulfgar's] sidekick?" Although the author had never given the matter a moment's thought, he found himself saying, "I'll do a dark-elf ranger."

There was a long pause as Kirchoff considered. "A drow? What's his name?" Again, inspiration seized the writer, and he blurted out, "Drizzt Do'Urden." He knew he had stumbled upon something good when Kirchoff told him, "Okay, write it up."

"And that's where he was born, just like that," Salvatore said, adding that many readers assume the dark elf originated in one of the author's role-playing campaigns. Although the author has played fantasy role-playing games like the ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game for more

than 10 years, "I have to tell you, the game had very little influence on my writing," he said. Instead, his main influences included classical literature and the landmark fantasy works of J. R. R. Tolkien. "I like to think of Drizzt as a cross between Daryth from Doug's book and Aragorn from *The Lord of the Rings*."

Drizzt (pronounced "Drist") has certainly outgrown his "sidekick" status. The drow has been featured in seven novels to date, and he will reappear in a short story in the FORGOTTEN REALMS anthology *Realms of Valor*, due out in February, 1993. However, Salvatore also is working on the Cleric Quintet for TSR, featuring a young hero named Cadderly. Can this character and others to come possibly measure up to the drow's fame?

"They're not intended to," Salvatore said firmly. "Cadderly is a very different hero from Drizzt. As far as a hero goes, a fighting hero, I don't know that I'll top Drizzt, and I don't know that I want to. He has become the character I most like to write about."

The author said he finds the beliefs he shares with his creation give him a voice in his novels. "He's got the ideals I wish I had," Salvatore said. He hesitated. "Well, maybe I have them, but I think he adheres to them better than I do." He admires the fact Drizzt can tell right from wrong and choose the correct action, even when another choice might have been easier. "Drizzt doesn't cut corners. He doesn't stray from the course in the face of incredible hardship. I'd hope I could be like that."

Many readers admire Drizzt as well, but the author worries that the drow's reputation may get a little out of control. He doesn't want the character to lose his

vulnerability and become "Fonzie-ized."

"Remember back on the first season of *Happy Days*, the Fonz was a well-written character," Salvatore said. "He was the coolest of the cool. Then, as the series progressed, here's a guy from Milwaukee, right? Suddenly he's going out to the West Coast and winning surfing contests, he's jumping his bike farther than anyone's ever done before. He became invincible. Under his leather jacket there appeared a big S—Superman. That's not going to happen to Drizzt."

A new chapter

Has the success of this, Salvatore's tenth novel for TSR Inc., proved to be a turning point in his writing career? "I've been told it is by editors and several authors who've been there. They've all assured me that my life will change." He paused. "Certainly, now I'll be able to find work!"

"It was a turning point in my career because it was a hardcover. When you get into a hardcover novel, a lot of places start looking at you that never looked at you before. There are a lot of things that would've taken a lot longer without the success of the hardcover. *The Legacy* has given me exposure beyond the people who go back and look in the science fiction and fantasy section. Since *The Legacy* came out, many people in my hometown have come up to me and said, 'Oh, I see you've had a book published.'"

With that increased exposure came increased fan reaction. Salvatore has been invited to numerous gaming and literary conventions, and receives nearly 50 pieces of mail each month; that's double what he could expect in the pre-*Legacy* days. His fans range quite a bit in age, he said; mail

Continued on page 84

The Complete Works of R. A. Salvatore

The Icewind Dale Trilogy

The Crystal Shard
Streams of Silver
The Halfling's Gem

The Legacy (Hardcover and audiotape sequel to the Icewind Dale Trilogy)
Starless Night (Hardcover follow-up to *The Legacy*, coming in October 1993)

The Dark Elf Trilogy

Homeland
Exile
Sojourn

The Cleric Quintet

Canticle
In Sylvan Shadows
Night Masks
The Fallen For-tress (June 1993)
The Chaos Curse (Summer 1994)

Echoes of the Fourth Magic (Roc)
The Witch's Daughter (Roc)

The Woods Out Back

Tir na n'Og (coming from ACE/Berkeley)
Pot o' Gold (coming from ACE/Berkeley)
The Haggis Hunter (coming from ACE/Berkeley)
Forthcoming epic fantasy series (Warner Books, December 1993)

Game design credits

Menzoberranzan (boxed set)
FR7 *Hall of Heroes*
FR9 *The Bloodstone Lands*

Short stories

"The First Notch," *DRAGON® Magazine* issue #152
"A Sparkle for Homer," *Halfings, Hobbits, Warrows, and Weefolk*, Warner Books, 1992
"The Dark Mirror," *Realms of Valor*; TSR, Inc., 1993.





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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.).

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PALACON '92, Dec. 28-30

KY

This convention will be held at the Laser Chase in Louisville, Ky. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with prizes, vendors, and open gaming. Registration: \$20. Write to: The Paladin Group, 721 N. Hite Ave. #3, Louisville KY 40206; or call: (502) 893-8953.

1992 WINTER FANTASY™ Convention, Jan. 8-10

WI

This gaming convention, sponsored by the RPGA™ Network, will be held at the MECCA Convention Center in Milwaukee, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with a benefit tournament for the Milwaukee Zoo. Registration: \$16 (\$10 for Network members). Write to: WINTER FANTASY™ Convention, RPGA™ Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva WI 53147.

CONSTITUTION '93, Jan. 29-31

VA

This convention will be held at the Quality hotel in Arlington, Va. Guests include Jay Tummelson. Activities include RPGA™ Network events and role-playing games. Registration: \$10/preregistered or \$15/at the door. Preregistration is strongly recommended. Write to: CONSTITUTION, 1737 Seaton St. NW, Washington DC 20009; or call James at: (202) 986-7904.

GAMICON GAMMA, Jan. 29-31

IA

This convention will be held at the Wesley Foundation in Iowa City, Iowa. Guests include Erick Wujcik. Activities include role-playing and miniatures games with RPGA™ Network events. Registration: \$12 until Jan. 1; \$15 thereafter. Write to: Legends, 2054 8th St., Coralville IA 52241; or call: (319) 339-8701.

PANDEMONIUM 10, Jan. 30-31

*

This convention will be held at the Ryerson Hub Cafeteria in Toronto, Ontario. Activities include over 100 events, two auctions, dealers, five AD&D® events, plus RPGA™ Network games. Prizes will be awarded to tournament winners. Write to: PANDEMONIUM, c/o 17b Wales Ave., Toronto, Ontario, CANADA M5T 1S2; or call: (416) 597-1934.

CYBERCON IV, Feb. 5-7

CO

This convention will be held at the Lory Student Center on the Colorado State University campus in Fort Collins, Colo. Guests include Bruce Sterling. Activities include role-playing games, a costume contest, two video rooms, and open gaming. Registration: \$3/day or \$5/weekend before Jan. 30; \$5/day or \$7/weekend thereafter. Write to: Bill Keyes, Box 412 LSC, Colorado State University, Fort Collins CO 80523; or call: (303) 493-3652.

VISIONCON '93, Feb. 5-7

MO

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn North in Springfield, Mo. Activities include RPGA™ Network events, war games, miniatures-painting contests, an art show, a dealers' room, and a costume contest. Registration: \$10 until Jan. 15; \$15 at the door. Send an SASE to: VISIONCON '93, 1375 S. National, Springfield MO 65804; or call: (417) 863-1155 Monday through Saturday 3-8 P.M.

WARCON '93, Feb. 5-7

TX

This convention will be held at the Memorial Student Center, Texas A&M University in College Station, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with a dealers' room, Japanimation, 24-hour open gaming, and a games auction. Registration: \$12 preregistered, \$15 at the door. Write to: MSC NOVA, Box J-1, Memorial Student Center, Texas A&M, College Station TX 77844.

DUNDRACON XVII, Feb. 12-15

CA

This convention will be held at the San Ramon Marriott in San Ramon, Calif. Events include over 120 game events, seminars, a dealers' room, a painting contest, computer gaming, and a flea market. Registration: \$25 until Feb. 1; \$30/weekend or \$15/day at the door. Write to: DUNDRACON, 1125 Nielson St., Albany CA 94706.

GENGHIS CON XIV, Feb. 12-14

c o

This convention will be held at the Marriott Southeast in Denver, Colo. Activities include gaming of all kinds, RPGA™ Network tournaments, auctions, a figure-painting contest, and miniatures events. Registration: \$15/weekend. Write to: Denver Gamers Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044; or call: (303) 665-7062.

ORCCON 16, Feb. 12-15

CA

This convention will be held at the Los Angeles Airport Hyatt. All types of family, strategy, board, role-playing, miniatures, and computer gaming are featured. Find bargains at the flea markets, auction, and dealers' area. Attend seminars, demos, and meet special guests. Write to: STRATEGICON, P.O. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849; or call: (213) 326-9440.

HURRICON '93, Feb. 26-28

FL

This convention will be held at the Okaloosa Island Holiday Inn in Fort Walton Beach, Fla. Guests include George Alec Effinger, Margaret Weis, Douglas Niles, David Dorman, and Larry Elmore. Activities include game tournaments, an art show, video rooms, lectures, panels, filking, open gaming, an auction, a dance, a concert, a USAF Space Command demo, and a "Winterfest" for *Beauty* and *the Beast* TV fans. Registration: \$25 until Jan. 31; \$30 at the door. Write to: Bard's Tales Bookshop, 109D Race Track Rd., Ft. Walton Beach FL 32547; or call: (904) 863-7323.

JAXCON '93, Feb. 26-28

FL

This convention will be held at the Radisson Inn at the Jacksonville International Airport in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include all types of games, a miniatures-painting contest, a flea market, a dealers' area, a snack bar, and door prizes. Registration: \$12/weekend until Jan. 12; \$18/weekend thereafter. Single-day rates vary. Write to: JAXCON, P.O. Box 4423, Jacksonville FL 32201; or call: (904) 778-1730.

- ♦ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
- indicates a European convention.

TOTAL CONFUSION VII, Feb. 26-28 MA

This convention will be held at the Best Western Plaza hotel in Marlborough, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, with RPGA™ Network events, a miniatures-painting contest, and the annual costume competition. Registration: \$23/weekend or \$9/day preregistered; \$10/day at the door. Club rates are available. Write to: TOTAL CONFUSION, P.O. Box 1463, Worcester MA 01607; or call: (508) 987-1530.

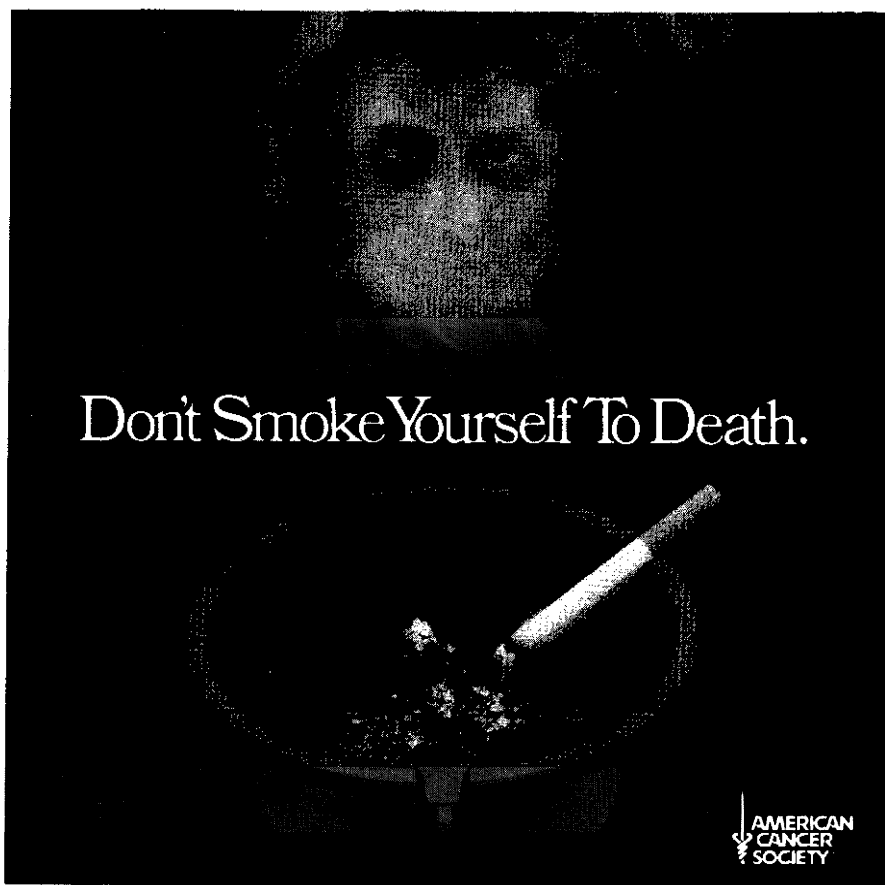
MINIATURES PAINTING CONTEST & GAME DAY '93**Feb. 27 IN**

This convention will be held Metalcraft Miniatures and More in Elwood, Ind. Activities include role-playing and war games. There is no entry fee. Fifteen categories of miniatures will be judged; get the list before entering. Write to: Metalcraft Miniatures and More, 926 N. 9th St., Elwood IN 46036.

CON OF THE NORTH '93, Feb. 27-28 MN

This convention will be held at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, Minn. Events include fantasy, war, miniatures, and adventure games, with an RPGA™ Network tournament. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$10/day. Write to: CON OF THE NORTH, P.O. Box 18096, Minneapolis MN 55418.

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.



Novel Ideas

Continued from page 80

comes from fifth-graders, who pass his books among their friends at school, as well as military personnel, who swap his books around their bases.

[Anyone wishing to write to R. A. Salvatore can do so by sending letters addressed to the author, c/o TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A.]

"Fantasy fans are wonderful. They're strong readers, they're hungry readers. They are people who seem to want a little more out of the world than what they've been seeing. Many of them are incredible idealists."

And many of them are also willing to stand in line for hours to get an autograph from the man who created Drizzt and Wulfgar. To promote *The Legacy*, Salvatore has done more than 30 book signing sessions in two months, including a nationwide tour. In addition, he signed books for more than eight hours during *The Legacy's* premiere weekend at the 1992 GEN CON®/ORIGINS™ game fair last August in Milwaukee, Wis. "It's been exhausting!" he said.

When he first began doing such autograph signings, Salvatore said he played The Author to the hilt, complete with suit and tie. He noticed that he was "not connecting with the garners, many of whom have better stories to tell than I do." So, he changed his signing wardrobe to jeans and

polo shirts, and now just; enjoys "funking out and having fun with the readers. A lot of my fans are surprised when they first see me. I think I look more like an aging high-school football player than a writer."

The writer

Being the author of a *New York Times* best-selling hardcover novel may have changed a lot of things in his life, but Salvatore said it hasn't changed the way he writes. "I don't think much is going to change as far as the writing goes," he said, although he pointed out that he will be able to take more time with his next hardcovers, including *Starless Night*, *The Legacy's* follow-up and Salvatore's sixteenth novel.

After sixteen books, has writing gotten any easier? "No. It's gotten easier to put the words down on the page. I don't labor over the words as much any more, and I have got the confidence now. But, there are other mistakes that can creep up and bite you. I'm grateful that I have a good editor in Eric Severson. It's easy sometimes, to forget the scope of the individual book and fall into the trap of monster-bashing. There are pitfalls that are still there, and that will always be there."

Salvatore pointed out that he had been writing novels for six years before his first book was published. While *The Crystal Shard*, which began back with that proposal to Mary Kirchoff in 1987, was his first

published book, he actually completed his first novel in 1982. He spent the next five years revising this modern fantasy, titled *Echoes of the Fourth Magic* (later published by Roc). His submission of *Echoes* to TSR brought him to Kirchoff's attention.

He still calls his discovery a "lucky break" and warns hopeful novelists to prepare themselves for their own big break. College gives a writer the necessary literary and historical background, he said. Revising and starting over give a writer discipline. Rejection and frustration give a writer drive. Most importantly, life gives a writer insight.

"It's the rare person indeed who can write a book of publishable quality before the age of twenty," he said. "There are not age requirements, but certainly there are life experience requirements."

Salvatore has had a couple new life experiences himself, thanks to the success of *The Legacy* "Someone once told me the first step to being an author is to be published. The second step is to be published in hardcover." What the third step is, he's not quite sure. But, if he can land a FORGOTTEN REALMS novel on the *New York Times* hardcover best-seller list only five years after first venturing into the Realms, there's no doubt he'll soon find out.

Ω

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by Steven E. Schend

THE MARVEL-PHILE

Super-Agents for super-campaigns

A few months ago, Dale came into my cubicle with an odd look in his eye. "Steven," he said, "I've got a bunch of great characters for you to work into the 'MARVEL-Phile'! Do the SHIELD Super-Agents for this month." Now, even though his Nick Fury disguise was impressive, I couldn't simply write up the agents immediately. Little did Dale know that there was almost no information on these characters, and it took six months of waiting for more comic appearances before I began this month's column. Thanks to Barry Dutter of Marvel Comics and Scott Lobdell, the creator of the new Super-Agents, for providing the necessary information to allow us to present the SHIELD agents for the 1990s.

IVORY™

| | | |
|---|--------|-------------------|
| F | EX(20) | Health: 56 |
| A | EX(20) | |
| S | TY(6) | Karma: 30 |
| E | GD(10) | |
| R | GD(10) | Resources: EX(20) |
| I | GD(10) | |
| P | GD(10) | Popularity: 0 |

KNOWN POWERS:

Kinetic energy control: Ivory has the Unearthly (100) ability to absorb, project, and redirect kinetic energy due to her Vibranium-saturated body. Within a range of five areas, Ivory can manipulate kinetic energy in a variety of ways, and she may be able to expand her powers in your game world (flight, enhanced hearing, silence field, body armor, etc., are all possible). Her current powers are:

—**Absorption:** Ivory can absorb up to Unearthly (100) Force attacks, reduce the speed of missiles and projectiles by Unearthly rank, and reduce sound and other vibratory attacks with Unearthly skill. She can retain the absorbed energy for 10 rounds, using it to fuel her Force and shattering attacks, and it is harmlessly dissipated by her Vibranium body structure.

—**Feedback:** Ivory can wrap her opponents in an invisible vibratory field that causes immediate feedback of any Force-, vibratory-, or sonic-based attacks, subjecting the wielder of said attacks to his own powers. Ivory can cause power feedbacks



Color by Steve Sullivan

of up to Monstrous (75) intensity.

—**Force blast:** Ivory can release absorbed kinetic energy as a Force blast (range of five areas) of Incredible (40) rank.

—**Force field:** Ivory is able to project a field of fluctuating kinetic energy that provides Unearthly (100) protection from physical and Force attacks and Amazing (50) protection from Energy attacks.

—**Shatter bolts:** Ivory can induce Remarkable (30) rank vibrations within the molecular structure of materials, causing lesser material strength items to shatter under the strain, and those of greater material strength begin to vibrate, possibly

shattering lesser rank materials around them. Constructed items, like weapons, tend to shake themselves into their components whereas whole items like steel doors break along stress fractures; vehicles must make a Body roll to stay in one piece. Other items must roll their material strength versus Ivory's Remarkable (30) attack or suffer Remarkable (30) damage. Ivory can apply her power in this way within a range of three areas.

TALENTS: Electronics, Physics, Language (Wakandan), Martial Arts B and D.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Ivory is a mulatto native of Wakanda, the African nation ruled by the Black Panther and home to the rare substance called Vibranium. Throughout her formative years, she was called Ivory as a slur against her mixed parentage and she was often considered an outsider. This treatment fostered a deep resentment against her fellow Wakandans, but she grew into a stable, compassionate young woman despite such treatment. As a college research assistant, Ivory was on hand during an experiment using Vibranium. Something went wrong, and Ivory's body became permeated with Vibranium. While she was recovering in the hospital, she was approached by Angar the Screamer, who used her resentment against the prejudice she felt in Wakanda to recruit her for his cadre of super-terrorists. Feeling just as out-of-place in their ranks, her good nature surfaced when faced with Timothy "Dum-Dum" Dugan's bravery and Nick Fury's heroics (see "Group History"); she helped them defeat Angar and was inducted into the Super-Agents program under the tutelage of Fury.

Ivory is a young woman of deep emotion and empathy capable of much compassion and goodness. She exhibits very proper speech patterns and is highly educated in the scientific research of her native Wakanda. Despite her beginnings with Angar's super-terrorists, Ivory is the Super-Agent most dedicated to the ideals of SHIELD. She has a low tolerance for prejudice, having been subject to much discrimination in her native Wakanda. Having been treated as an outsider for years, she has taken to the Super-Agents and Nick Fury as her extended family, relying on them for companionship and support.

In MARVEL SUPER HEROES™ (MSH) game campaigns, Ivory can expand on her powers and become one of the best, and certainly one of the most powerful, SHIELD agents in history. Ivory's power is something that SHIELD technologists would love to study; it is up to the GM whether Wakanda will allow such information of national security to be revealed (T'Challa might even request that she return home to the defense of her homeland). Unhindered by psychological difficulties or drawbacks due to her powers, Ivory has the most potential of these Agents to graduate beyond her status with SHIELD and join the ranks of independent superhumans such as the Avengers. If she goes solo, Wakandan agents, with advanced native technology at their disposal, might be dispatched to secure her return, unless she joined the Avengers with T'Challa's blessing.

KNOCKABOUT™

| | | |
|---|---------|-------------------|
| F | RM(30) | Health: 120 |
| A | GD (10) | |
| S | IN(40) | Karma: 46 |
| E | IN(40) | |
| R | TY(6) | Resources: EX(20) |
| I | GD(10) | |
| P | RM(30) | Popularity: 0 |

KNOWN POWERS:

Dreamtime energy absorption: Knockabout gains his powers and abilities by telling stories and weaving tales, using the energy of his storytelling (and, subliminally, the psionic energy of those who listen to and even partially believe his story) to tap into the Dreamtime and use the energy there to enhance his physical structure. He must tell at least one tall tale a day to maintain his power levels. If he is somehow prevented from doing so, his powers are each reduced by one rank per day until reaching Shift 0, reducing him to a normal human tone tale restores a rank of any one power at a time if reduced to less than Good (10) ranks).

Knockabout can manipulate his absorbed dream energy with the following effects:

—**Body armor:** Knockabout's skin and musculature are hardened, providing Incredible (40) rank physical and Force protection and Remarkable (30) rank Energy protection.

—**Enhanced abilities:** Knockabout's Strength and Endurance are both enhanced to Incredible (40) levels; if deprived of this power, his Strength and Endurance both slip to Excellent (20).

—**Growth:** When powered up, Knockabout can increase his size with Feeble ability, allowing him to reach up to eight feet in height with no marked increase in Strength. His normal height is 6' 6".

—**Leaping:** Knockabout's great strength allows him to leap with Monstrous ability, clearing 75 feet or live areas with a jump.

—**Regeneration:** Knockabout's amplified physical structure heals more efficiently than a normal human's, operating at Amazing (50) rank. At this rank, he restores 50 Health points per minute of rest.

TALENTS: Wilderness survival (Austrian outback), Martial Arts B and D.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Nothing is known about Knockabout's true background and it is doubtful any facts will be forthcoming. Knockabout is a pathological liar, though few know it since they are taken in by his seeming naivete. An Australian native, Knockabout is jovial, very friendly and outgoing, and boisterous to an extreme (this is all part and parcel of his power, allowing his loquaciousness to fuel his enhanced abilities, but he has been

telling so many stories for so long even he is not-perfectly sure where the lies end and the truth begins). Though he passes himself off as simple and naive, he is crafty enough to weave complex stories and tales without getting caught in a lie; if alone, he might tell someone his origin, but give someone else another story.

Knockabout revels in combat, always treating a fight like a game. He doesn't succumb to berserk rages or fury when battling, but he often barrels into a fight with no coordination or strategy. He is a brawler with an effective "bull-in-a-china shop" method. If he uses any strategic thinking at all, he works with what implements are at hand, using cars or machinery as bludgeons or throwing people over crevasses. His fighting generates a lot of damage and noise, the more the better as it will eventually be turned into a tale of ever-increasing magnitudes.

In MSH campaigns, Knockabout's player should generate a number of stories to keep on hand, ready to toss them out whenever there's a lull in conversation, role-playing, or action. Knockabout should always be quick with a joke or story, preferably ones tied to the Australian outback. No matter what the situation, Knockabout will never reveal his true name or the source of his powers for fear of losing them. He most often tells the truth on facts that cannot be disputed, but then tangles them in half-truths that can confuse the listener into doubting the facts. Knockabout is most effective either as a SHIELD agent assigned to work with other PC superheroes, or he could be encountered as a free agent wandering the outback. As always, he will not tell the details of his power, allowing people to assume he's a mutant or an altered human.

PSI-BORG™

| | | |
|---|--------|-------------------|
| F | EX(20) | Health: 76 |
| A | RM(30) | |
| S | TY(6) | Karma: 60 |
| E | EX(20) | |
| R | EX(20) | Resources: EX(20) |
| I | EX(20) | |
| P | EX(20) | Popularity: 0 |

KNOWN POWERS:

"Psibernetlc Circuitry": Psi-borg has extensive cybernetic implants within her arms, skull, and all along her spinal column. The microcircuitry is made of complex polymers of Arnim Zola's design that act as metals and standard circuitry but do not register on metal detectors or run a risk of implant rejection. Only X-ray machines and other scanners of Amazing (50) rank or greater can detect the implants due to their size, widespread organization, and unique construction. Psi-borg's artificially-induced powers

include:

—*Air control*: Psi-borg can psionically manipulate gasses with Incredible (40) effect. Her power stunts include maintaining a localized atmospheric pressure regardless of external air pressures (similar to pressurizing airplane cabins) and condensing and containing expanding gases to a limited area (“bottling” harmful gases before they affect others).

—*Flight*: Psi-borg has a Poor (4) rank Flight power, allowing her an aerial movement speed of four areas per round.

—*Invisibility*: Psi-borg can psionically mask her presence from the eyes of sentient beings with Amazing (50) ability, rendering herself invisible to organic visual sensors. She can expand the influence of her masking field up to one full area, making a number of persons invisible as well; this stunt reduces the power rank to Incredible (40) but accomplishes the same effect.

—*Mental bolts*: Psi-borg projects mental bolts through artificial circuits in her hands at a single target. The target must make a Psyche FEAT roll against an Incredible (40) intensity mental bolt or be knocked unconscious for 1-10 rounds.

—*Telepathy*: Psi-borg has a low-level telepathic ability; she cannot initiate mind-to-mind contact or communicate mentally, but she uses this power to locate a person’s brain patterns like telepathic homing signals. If she knows a person and has learned to recognize his brain pattern, Psi-borg can locate him with Remarkable (30) ability. For unknown persons, she can detect brain patterns and psionic activity with Excellent (20) ability. Her range for this power is Shift Z (500) (i.e., 400 areas or 10 miles).

TALENTS: Language (Latverian), Martial Arts B and D.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

A native of Latveria, Psi-borg spent her life in the idyllic Balkan country trying to lead a simple life but finding her drive leading her to callings beyond those of a mere peasant girl. As did all the natives of Latveria, Psi-borg made sure either to please the Master (Dr. Victor Von Doom) or to avoid his anger. In an attempt to gain his favor and attentions, she somehow escaped Latveria and approached Arnim Zola, the Swiss biochemist famed for genetic reconstruction. He grafted unique circuitry into her body to grant her psionic powers. The details of her attempt to become Doom’s most-favored agent are unknown, though she is one of the few Latverians who seems to be allowed free reign and apparently has no allegiance to Doom.

Psi-borg is a relatively unemotional young woman who yields very little infor-

mation unless absolutely necessary. She is very secretive and protective of her privacy, a learned response from having grown up in Latveria under the ever-present eyes of Doom. She is deadly serious in combat and acquits herself equally well in the use of her powers and in hand-to-hand combat. Given her propensity for secrets and her sometimes extreme emotional responses, many people wonder how much of her behavior is dictated by her and how much is controlled by her cybernetic implants.

In MSH game campaigns, Psi-borg can be both heroine and villainess; her freedom could easily be an illusion; either Zola or Dr. Doom (using Zola as an ally/agent) could be manipulating her from afar, using her to test the implants’ effectiveness. Assuming some hidden mechanisms are within her body, Psi-borg could be a mole for the master villains, recording or relaying (without her knowledge) SHIELD and world government secrets. If the heroes choose to have her as an ally, there is much adventure potential in freeing Psi-borg from the overriding influence of her implants, perhaps even uncovering a totally different personality. Psi-borg is a cipher for the Judge to use to his purpose: Psi-borg’s memory could be implanted (look at Wolverine for another example) so she could be molded into the ultimate psionic warrior for good or ill.

VIOLENCE™

| | | |
|---|--------|-------------------|
| F | EX(20) | Health: 66 |
| A | RM(30) | |
| S | TY(6) | Karma: 30 |
| E | GD(10) | |
| R | GD(10) | Resources: EX(20) |
| I | GD(10) | |
| P | GD(10) | Popularity: 0 |

KNOWN POWERS:

None; all of Violence’s abilities are a result of physical training or equipment.

EQUIPMENT?

As a SHIELD operative, Violence has access to the following SHIELD equipment and weaponry:

Plasma beam handgun: With a range of three areas, the handgun can shoot Incredible (40) rank energy. Its battery packs give it a capacity of six shots before the pack needs replacing. These handguns can be reduced in intensity for stunning opponents rather than killing them. If a target is hit by this weapon, he must roll on either the Energy or Stun tables, depending on the weapon’s setting.

Machine pistol: This gun shoots .30-caliber armor-piercing shells at variable rates of fire and damage: single shot (1 shot/round; Good (10) Shooting damage), burst (3 shots/round; Excellent (20) dam-

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age), and auto-fire (10 shots/round; Remarkable (30) damage). The range of the machine pistol is six areas, and each ammunition clip holds 60 rounds.

Uniform: The SHIELD Kevlar-lined jumpsuit Violence wears provides Good (10) protection against physical and Force attacks and Poor (4) protection against Energy attacks.

SHIELD experimental equipment: Despite her access to standard SHIELD weaponry, Violence tends to use equipment beyond the range of standard equipment normally issued to SHIELD agents. Given her status as a Super-Agent and her fearlessness, she is one of the few agents other than Nick Fury who tests new technology for SHIELD. Her standard weaponry in current use is as follows:

Combination handgun: Violence's large pistol combines a plasma beam handgun with a flame-thrower and a projectile pistol. The statistics for each of the settings are below:

—**Flame-thrower:** The gun can shoot Excellent (20) intensity flames up to a range of one area; it has enough fuel for 10 blasts or a constant medium flame of Good (10) intensity of three minutes' duration.

—**Pistol:** The gun can fire explosive projectiles to a range of six areas. The projectiles explode on contact with Remarkable (30) Force. The gun contains four explosive rounds before needing to reload.

—**Plasma beam:** This gun has a number of improvements over the SHIELD standard-issue plasma gun. Its range is increased to four areas and it conserves energy, allowing 10 shots before needing a new battery. It still fires an Incredible (40) rank Energy charge.

Reinforced uniform: Violence's uniform is an experimental weave of Kevlar and metallic fibers that still maintain the flexibility of cloth. It provides Excellent (20) protection from physical and Force attacks and Good (10) protection against energy.

SHIELD flying motorcycle: Violence rides the prototype SHIELD flying motorcycle. It has the same electronic intelligence, communications, and reconnaissance equipment as the SHIELD flying cars and performs with Incredible (40) Control (due to its smaller size and reduced weight). It provides Poor (4) Body protection to its rider (or maximum of two riders). Its top land and air speeds are Remarkable (six areas per round on land, 15 areas per round in the air). Violence's motorcycle also has rear-mounted machine guns that fires armor-piercing bullets at a combined rate of 20 shots/round for Incredible (40) Shooting damage (use Violence's Agility for the guns). The guns' clips are contained in the cycle seat and contain 200 rounds each.

TALENTS: Pilot—Air and Land craft, Marksman, Martial Arts B and D.

ROLE-PLAYING NOTES:

Violence, also known as Violet Pinkerton, is a emotionally troubled woman from England. She holds a personal grudge against Nick Fury. Her grandfather, Percival "Pinky" Pinkerton, was tried years ago for alleged war crimes while a member of Nick Fury's Howling Commandoes; though he did not blame Nick for this, Violet holds him responsible for this blot against her grandfather. Initially rejected for entrance into SHIELD due to psychological problems (labelled as suicidal, she was declared unfit for duty due to disregard for her own safety and that of others), Violet was accepted by G.W. Bridge into the Super-Agents program. Bridge's initiative was to provide the best and most powerful SHIELD agents; though Violet, now aptly code-named Violence, was a danger to those around her, she would be an extremely able (though undisciplined) agent and would do the least harm to superhuman teammates. It was also deemed necessary, by Bridge's initiative, to keep her in SHIELD simply so she wouldn't join HYDRA.

Violence is one of the angriest people your player characters could ever meet in a MSH game campaign. A member of Britain's growing numbers of disaffected youths, Violet is excessively violent in dealing with obstacles and problems; her outlook is borderline suicidal and she is totally fearless due to her instability. She is furious at Nick and at the world, and all her negative emotions are focused in her fighting. She charges into combat situations with little regard for her safety and that of her allies. Her casual disregard for authority, especially Nick's, could easily cause more trouble than it's worth for anyone working with her. Used as either a hero or a villain, Violence is the epitome of a "battle-happy" personality; she is only happy when she is in combat and gives every battle her all. Her only redeeming quality is her noble quest (of sorts) to clear her grandfather's name by serving with Fury and getting him to pay for Pinky's shame. No matter what side of the law she works on, Violence will always work with the most destructive and lethal weapons available, regardless of personal risk.

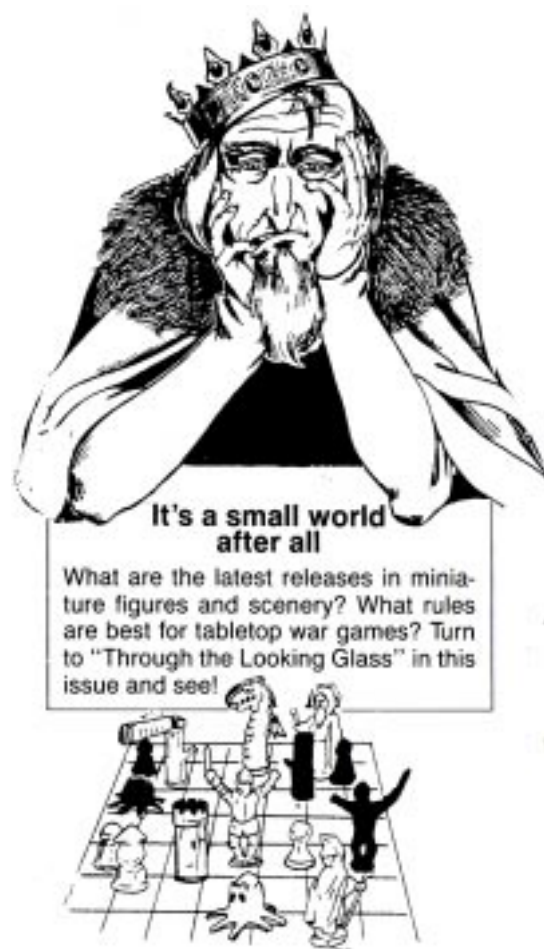
GROUP HISTORY:

The SHIELD Super-Agents program was founded by G. W. Bridge after the restructuring of SHIELD following the Deltite Affair. Working independently of Nick Fury's cadre of agents, Bridge recruited three promising candidates in Knockabout, Psi-Borg, and Violence. Their first mission was to rescue the SHIELD HeliCarrier from the hands of terrorists. After a minor

misunderstanding and scuffle with Nick, the Super-Agents, Bridge, and Fury managed to release the HeliCarrier from the clutches of Angar the Screamer and his superhuman terrorists. One of the terrorists, a Wakandan named Ivory, chose to betray her employer and side with SHIELD after witnessing Nick's and Dum-Dum's willingness to throw down their lives for the ideals of SHIELD; she passed the needed security clearances and joined the team.

After their initial mission, Nick Fury resigned as Director of SHIELD to take over the training of this quartet of undisciplined agents. Their powers and skills make them a valuable combat unit, but their inability to follow procedure and their recklessness could be tamed only by Colonel Fury. Their enthusiasm and aforementioned qualities reminded many people, especially Nick, of the old Howling Commandoes of World War II. Given their actions in reclaiming the HeliCarrier and on subsequent missions, the SHIELD Super-Agents could certainly become the Howlers for the '90s.

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by Skip Williams

SAGE advice

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 writer's guidelines for the magazine).

The sage temporarily concludes his exploration of psychic mysteries this month. Unless otherwise stated, all page references refer to *The Complete Psionics Handbook*.

Is the armor class gained through the Flesh Armor devotion cumulative with the armor class gained from normal armor or magical protections?

Generally, Flesh Armor is not cumulative with actual armor—except that an armored character who has no shield can use the "shield" created if the power check result is a 1. Treat Flesh Armor as non-magical armor when determining how it works with various magical protection items. Generally, this means that Flesh Armor is cumulative with *rings of protection*, but not with *cloaks of protection*. Flesh Armor also is not cumulative with *bracers of defense* or with other items that provide a fixed armor class, such as *robes of the archmagi*.

Can the Prolong devotion make a Ballistic Attack more powerful?

No. The Ballistic Attack devotion is a "single item" effect, which cannot be Prolonged (see Prolong power description, page 100).

How does the Phobia Amplification devotion work on player characters?

The same way it works on NPCs or monsters. Well-developed player characters probably will have a trait or personality quirk that can be turned into a full-blown phobia. If not, the Dungeon Master or player will have to supply one on the spot. If the power works and the victim's save fails, it is up to the player to decide what the PC will do. The DM

should be on guard against reticent players who refuse to have their PCs act upon their fears. The instant the player declares an action that the DM feels is inappropriate for a person caught in the throes of abject terror, the DM should disallow the action and suggest another one. If the player is stubborn and holds up the game by not playing along, the DM should temporarily take control of the character.

The initial cost for the Teleport science is listed as "10 + ." However, there is no "10" cost on the teleport table.

The first "20" in the table is a typo; Teleports of 10 yards or less cost 10 PSPs. Note that this change also applies to the Teleport Other science, whose initial cost should be listed as "10 +" as well.

Can the Molecular Manipulation devotion be used against a character using the Body Weaponry devotion? If so, what happens to a character who has a Body Weapon broken?

Molecular Manipulation can weaken or break a Body Weapon (see the question on the Soften devotion vs. Body Weaponry in last month's column). If the Molecular Manipulation power check succeeds, the Body Weaponry user can feel the weakness in his arm. If the Body Weaponry user stops maintaining the power and allows the Body Weapon to change back into an arm, the weakness disappears because the arm is part of a creature—no longer an object and no longer subject to Molecular Manipulation. If a Body Weapon breaks—because of Molecular Manipulation or any other cause—the Body Weaponry user loses that chunk of body mass, as though the affected limb were severed. The broken piece immediately changes back to flesh (it is cut off from the flow of psychic power that kept it in weapon form), and the DM might rule that the Body Weaponry user must immediately drop the power, although there is no game-logic reason that he couldn't go on spending PSPs to maintain the broken stump. In any case, I don't recommend any spectacular or gory effects when the Body Weaponry user does drop the power—he should just have a healed-over stump. Any means that can restore a severed limb, such as a *regeneration* spell or magical items, can restore the lost limb.

When using the Control Body devotion, exactly how do you hold a psychic contest between the attacker's power score and the victim's strength score? Does the psionic character make a regular power score check at all?

Yes, the psionic character makes a standard power check when using Control Body.

If the power check fails, the character pays four PSPs (see page 11) and he does not gain control of the victim's body.

If the campaign uses the optional "skill score" rule (see page 11) and the attacker's roll equals his power score, then he automatically gains control (although he can lose control by forcing the victim into a suicidal action and losing the resulting psychic contest).

If the power check roll is lower than the power score, there is a psychic contest. You hold this contest in exactly the same way you hold any other psychic contest (see page 22), except that the victim uses his strength score and the attacker uses his power score. This is because Control Body is psychokinetic; the attacker actually generates a physical force that can seize control of a victim's body. The victim however, can overcome this force by sheer physical strength.

Does a weapon moved by the Telekinesis science or Ballistic Attack devotion inflict normal damage?

Ballistic Attack can only move objects that weigh one pound or less; this excludes just about anything larger than a dagger. Any item used in a Ballistic Attack inflicts 1d6 points of damage regardless of its "normal" damage rating; this is due to the tremendous velocity the devotion generates. I suppose a sheaf arrow used in a Ballistic Attack could do 1d8 points of damage if the DM so desires, but there's no guarantee the arrow will hit the target point first, so I suggest sticking with the standard 1d6. Using Telekinesis to wield a weapon is more like normal melee, and a hit inflicts the weapon's normal damage rating. Unless you allow items such as arrows and quarrels to be used as stabbing weapons in melee, I don't recommend you allow them to be used Telekinetically either. (I know some campaigns allow characters to make stabbing attacks with arrows when there's no other weapon available. A typical "house rule" governing such attacks sets the damage at 1d2 and the arrow usually breaks when it hits.)

Does the errata on psionics supplied with the DARK SUN™ boxed set apply to all campaigns or just to DARK SUN games?

The errata sheet supplied with the DARK SUN boxed set is a general set of corrections that applies to psionics in general, not just to DARK SUN campaigns. If you don't have a DARK SUN boxed set, you can get the errata free by sending an

SASE to: TSR Inc., c/o Steve Winter, PO. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. Write a note saying that you'd like the errata for *The Complete Psionics Handbook*, TSR product #2117. Feel free to include any comments you may have.

If a psionic character uses the Animal Affinity science to gain the hit points of the creature he is attuned to, does any damage suffered carry over to the character's true form when the character drops the power? Do such hit points always start at the maximum when the power is first activated?

Any ability bestowed onto the character by Animal Affinity is strictly temporary, and it completely disappears when the power is dropped or when the character chooses to assume a different animal attribute. If the character chooses to assume an animal's hit points, he in effect gets a whole new set of hit points that have nothing whatsoever to do with the hit points he has as a character. When he drops the power, his hit points immediately revert to whatever total the character had when he activated the power. If the character uses the power to assume animal hit points again, he immediately has whatever total his animalistic alter-ego had when he last used the power.

Adjudicating hit-point recovery for characters with this power can be tricky. For playability, I suggest that "artificial" healing from first aid, magical items, healing spells, or psionics apply only to the hit-point total the character is presently using. That is, a *cure light wounds* spell cast on a character who is using an animal's hit points improves only the animal's hit point total. Since the unused hit point total cannot be damaged, it cannot be healed either. However, "natural" healing from rest should apply to both totals. In effect, both aspects of the character's hit points can be assumed to be at rest whenever the character is completely inactive.

Does the Reduction devotion affect a character's equipment and clothing? What happens to equipment and clothing if the character rolls a 20 on the power check and doubles in size?

According to the power description, Reduction is the opposite of Expansion. Since Expansion does not affect clothing or equipment (see page 60), it's clear to me that Reduction doesn't affect clothing or equipment either. If a Reduction user rolls a 20 on a power check, he should "pop" right out of his clothes. A DM might rule that the character suffers some damage in the process, say 1d4 to 1d8 points of damage. A strict DM will make the character roll item saving throws for anything the character was wearing; the magical fire category (see the item saving throw table in the DMG, page 39) seems to offer the most reasonable set of numbers for mak-

ing such saving throws.

Does the Dream Travel devotion induce sleep in willing subjects? That is, can it work if the subjects aren't sleepy?

The power description plainly requires that the psionic character fashioning the dreamscape where travel will take place must be asleep and so must any passengers he takes with him. If the DM rules that sleep isn't possible because the surroundings are too noisy or too uncomfortable, then no Dream Travel can take place. On the other hand, there is no reason to assume that characters who can make themselves somewhat comfortable and relaxed can't will themselves to drift off far enough to allow the power to work. Generally, if the characters involved are reasonably warm and dry, can sit or lie down without discomfort, and have no overt reason to feel anxious, they can be sleepy enough for Dream Travel. An unwilling victim who can force himself to stay awake cannot be compelled to Dream Travel.

Are the effects of the Psychic Drain devotion permanent? Can this power be used on nonhumanoids?

Ability score losses from Psychic Drain can be permanent only if the character

employing the Psychic Drain siphons away more than half of the host's psychic potential, and even then the exact effect depends on the degree of depletion (see power description, page 102). Hosts who are not depleted regain "lost" ability points when they awaken from the trance. (It's fine to assume that hosts who are prematurely awakened suffer from reduced ability scores, if any, until their hour of grogginess passes.)

The power description specifically states that "people" must serve as hosts. In this case, it is entirely within the spirit and intent of the rules to define "people" as creatures of greater than animal intelligence. However, the DM is on his own when it comes to determining the psychic potential of a nonhumanoid creature without defined ability scores.

If the Wrench devotion is successfully used on a creature that can be hit only by +1 or better weapons, does the creature become vulnerable to normal weapons?

Yes, it does. Wrenching completely strips the creature of its weapon immunity for as long as the power remains in effect. Note, however, that Wrench does not work on every creature that is immune to normal weapons. Lycanthropes, for example, don't have a dual, extraplanar existence and cannot be Wrenched. Ω

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The Game Wizards

The RPGA™ Network gets a facelift!



by Jean Rabe

Next month marks the 12th anniversary of the founding of the ROLE-PLAYING GAME ASSOCIATION™ Network, the largest international organization of role-playing fans. It also heralds some changes in the Network sure to delight gamers everywhere. The changes start with POLYHEDRON® Newszine, the monthly magazine available only to Network members.

POLYHEDRON® Newszine

When the Network began more than a decade ago, the Newszine was 16 pages long and was published quarterly. Through the years, it increased in size and improved in quality, and, in 1991, it became a monthly publication with 32 two-color pages and no advertisements.

In 1993, the magazine will feature occasional four-color covers and two games that can't be purchased anywhere else. The Network staff has been reviewing games and has settled on a couple that are certain to be winners.

The Newszine also will continue its popular columns, "The Everwinking Eye," by Ed Greenwood and "The Living Galaxy" by DRAGON® Magazine editor Roger E. Moore. All the articles in the Newszine are written by Network members, and all members are invited to submit manuscripts.

Other regular features include letters from Network members; "Notes From HQ," where the Network staff keeps members informed about what's happening in the Network; "With Great Power," by DRAGON

Magazine editor Dale A. Donovan; and "Into the Dark," by novelist James Lowder. "With Great Power" contains a wealth of hints and ideas for running super-hero game campaigns. "Into the Dark" is a video-review column featuring tapes gamers might find interesting and useful. Lowder's wit has earned this nongaming feature a strong following. Continuing features include "The New Rogues' Gallery," which features NPCs for a variety of role-playing games, and "The Bards Corner," which has featured short stories, poetry, and other entertaining tidbits.

A new feature will be "Club News," where Network members can learn how to form clubs, join existing clubs, and organize their own conventions. "Club News" will be penned by veteran club members from across the globe.

Computer-game fans will be pleased with "Take A Byte," which highlights new games from SSI, offers hints about current games—before clue books are available—and presents interviews with computer-game designers.

Everyone likes to win prizes, and the RPGA Network offers gamers many opportunities to enter contests and do just that. There have been contests to create monsters, magical items, spells, science-fiction weapons, and more.

POLYHEDRON Newszine will continue to feature fantastic contests open only to Network members. Some of the prizes include specially autographed games and supplements, original artwork, and more. During the next several months, members will have a chance to devise creatures and

encounters for the Networks portion of the GAMMA WORLD® campaign; create game aids; design villains for the AD&D® game; concoct still more monsters; and come up with the most wondrous and preposterous of gnomish inventions—and that's just to name a few. The best entries appear in POLYHEDRON Newszine or in game supplements produced by the RPGA Network.

The Newszine is not available in hobby shops. However, all Network members receive 12 issues a year as part of their membership benefits.

Tournaments

For more than a decade, the Network has offered fast-paced, fun adventures for variety of role-playing games. Members enjoy top-quality Network tournaments at conventions and game days across the world.

In 1993, there will be more Network tournaments open only to clubs. These clever team events feature problem-solving, role-playing challenges, tricks, and traps to challenge veterans. Clubs across the world will be compete for top honors and trophies. The Network is planning special competitions featuring the DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game, as 1993 marks the 20th birthday of that role-playing game.

The Network is also constantly adding new games systems to its library of tournament scenarios. The AMAZING ENGINE™ game system, coming soon from TSR, Inc., is one of the newest additions.

The prizes are getting better, too. At the 1993 GEN CON® game fair, top prizes will be available for Network tournaments. Some of them include: one copy of every product TSR, Inc. produces during a year; one copy of every game SSI produces during a year; a \$100 gift certificate from Ral Partha; \$100 gift certificates from TSR; and multiyear subscriptions to DRAGON Magazine, DUNGEON® Adventures, AMAZING® Stories, and POLYHEDRON Newszine.

There even will be a tournament where a lucky member's character will win a position in the government of a FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign city.

Most Network tournaments feature the AD&D game and its many worlds. However, there are also tournaments for the GAMMA WORLD game, TOP SECRET/S.I.™ game, BOOT HILL® game, and others produced by TSR, Inc. Network tournaments also feature games by manufacturers from throughout the industry. West End Games' STAR WARS®: The RPG, PARANOIA®, and TORG® games are also popular settings for Network tournaments.

Network members who participate in the tournaments receive points that help them rise in levels as players and judges. It's sort of like being a fighter in the AD&D game. The more the character accomplishes and the more battles he wins, the more points the PC's player adds

to his level. When Network members gain levels, they can compete in special, more difficult competitions. There are Feature, Masters, Grand Masters, and Paragon levels. The competition gets more difficult the higher a player progresses.

Garners who can't make it to conventions still can participate in Network tournaments through computer bulletin-board services. For example, the GENie system and America On-Line regularly offer Network tournaments.

Network tournaments are written by the members, and those authors also receive points in this international ranking of players and judges. Network tournaments are some of the best adventures around because they are balanced, offer a variety of challenges, and are well-written. The best Network tournaments are published in POLYHEDRON Newszine.

Network clubs

Clubs provide places to game, a chance to socialize with friends, and opportunities to try new systems. The Network has been committed to assisting local clubs for the past several years. Now, the RPGA Network is putting an even greater emphasis on clubs.

In the pages of POLYHEDRON Newszine, garners can learn of the clubs nearest them, how to form their own clubs, and how to do things such as incorporate clubs

for nonprofit status.

Clubs will have more tournaments and activities open just to them. For example, at next month's WINTER FANTASY™ convention in Milwaukee, there will be an event only for Network clubs, and at the 1993 GEN CON game fair, there will be two such events. The tournaments focus on teamwork and strategy, and the trophies and prizes are terrific. Groups of garners can form their own Network clubs and can enter the competitions.

Each year, the Network has a special year-long contest called the Gaming Decathlon. In it, Network clubs select 10 events that they will compete in during the course of the year. The Decathlon includes tournament competitions, writing contests, and more. The more events a club wins, the more points it garners. At the end of the year, the winning clubs are presented awards and prizes. The Decathlon is open to clubs throughout the world.

Network clubs also get to playtest upcoming releases from TSR. The AD&D 2nd Edition game was playtested by more than a dozen clubs. The BOOT HILL game and the GAMMA WORLD game, as well as several AD&D game modules, were playtested by members, too. Playtesting helps guarantee better products, and it affords garners an opportunity to offer input on systems and supplements before they hit the hobby shop stands.

The Living City

The RPGA Network has developed a portion of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign world. It's RAVENS BLUFF™, The Living City, and its environs. It can be found near the Dragon Reach. Network members contribute adventures, characters, rumors, and much more, which makes this part of the FORGOTTEN REALMS world ever changing and growing. Each month, features on The Living City appear in POLYHEDRON Newszine. These are all written by members.

There are tournaments set in The Living City, too. Members play their own characters, taking them from event to event across the world and gaining experience, fame, and fortune. Some characters are lucky enough to win government posts. One such post will be awarded at the WINTER FANTASY convention.

Other membership benefits

Want to find new people to game with? The Network can help. All an RPGA Network member has to do is to write to Network HQ with a list of up to five zip codes covering where fellow garners are sought (and send a \$3 processing fee). The member will receive the names and addresses of Network members in those zip codes.

The Network also can provide members with free lists of official clubs and their addresses. Each issue of the Newszine also includes convention listings. Game conventions are great places to meet new people. Further, each Network member is entitled to place free Classified ads in the Newszine. These short, personal notices can help you find new garners, locate hard-to-find gaming materials, or sell used gaming materials. A special section within the Classifieds is devoted to trading cards.

RPGA Network members often spend less on the latest game releases because they get a 10% discount to TSR's Mail Order Hobby Shop. Many game shops throughout the world offer discounts to garners who display their Network membership cards.

Only Network members have an opportunity to purchase fantastic Network merchandise. There are T-shirts, sweat-shirts, embroidered jackets, embroidered dice bags, tote bags, mugs and more. The apparel proudly proclaims the wearer's affiliation with the Network.

Joining the Network

The Network is changing and growing, and 1993 promises to be an exciting year. If you want to join, fill out the membership card inside this issue, or write: RPGA Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. Ω

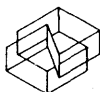
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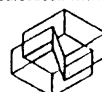
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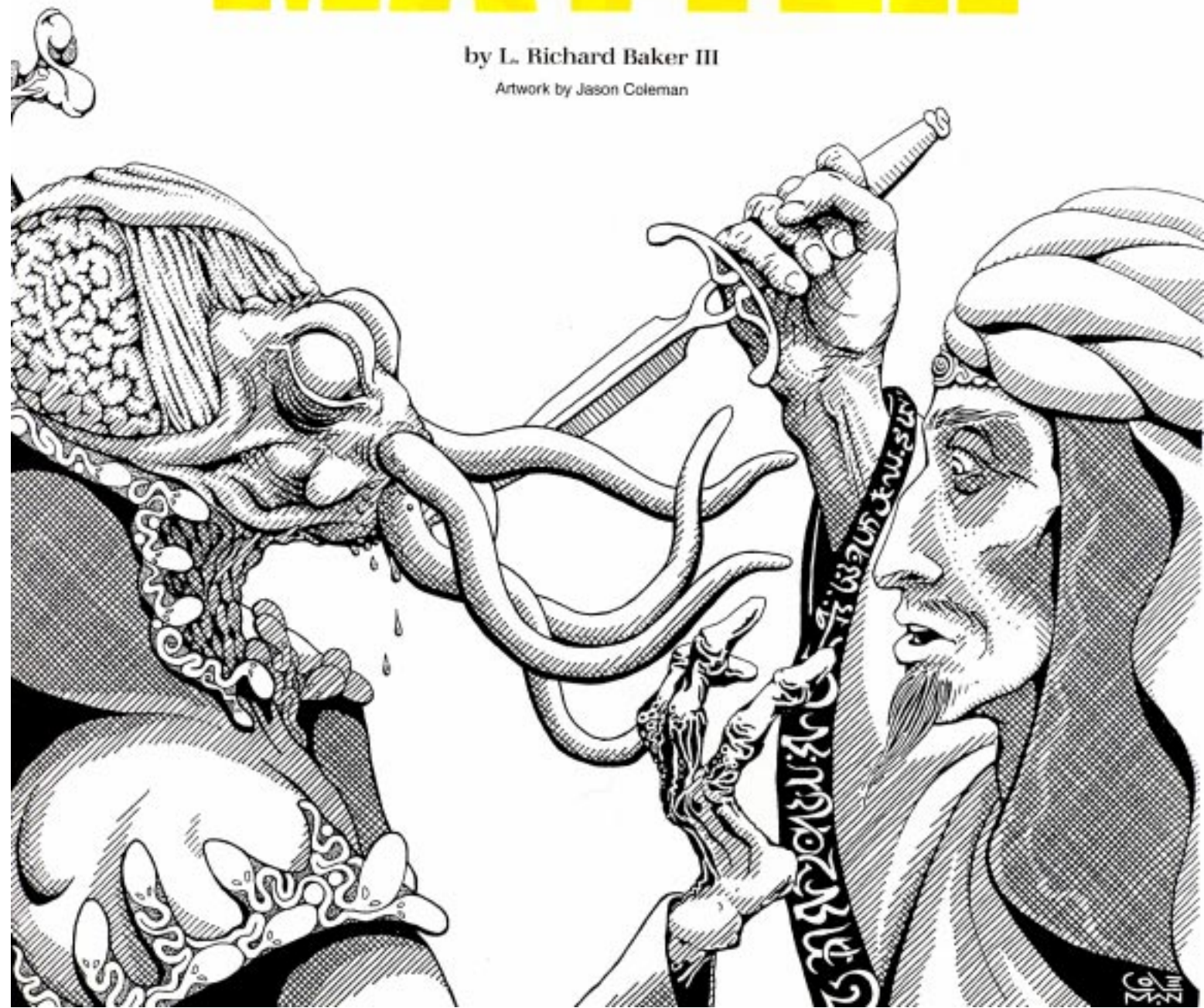


GAMES CENTRES

MIND OVER MATTER

by L. Richard Baker III

Artwork by Jason Coleman



The role of the psionist, the best AD&D® game character of all!

Which character can fight as well as a warrior, sneak better than a thief, cure diseases and injuries like a cleric, charm and control enemies with the best of wizards, and beats a bard for versatility?

If you guessed the psionist, you're right! The psionist of the *Complete Psionics Handbook* is the single most flexible and self-reliant character class of the AD&D® 2nd Edition game system. The psionist is also the most difficult character type to play. The player has to make hard decisions with each and every level about what his character's capabilities will be. He has to master a complicated game subsystem—namely, psionics. And last, but certainly not least, the player with a psionist character has to carve out his own adventuring and campaign role. Where does he fit in?

At first glance, the psionist seems like a jack of all trades. With Adrenalin Control, Flesh Armor, and Displacement, he turns into a formidable fighting machine. Invisibility and Shadow-form seem perfect for thieflike stealth. Cell Adjustment and Absorb Disease even give the psionist access to clericlike powers. With all these options open to the player, it's important to remember the character's limitations. It is very easy to get yourself into deep trouble by forgetting the difference between what your character does well and what your character has to use a pile of psionic strength points to do well.

Creating a psionist

When a psionist character is created, the first and most important decision of his career has to be made right away: What discipline will he select as his primary discipline. Think carefully about what you want your character's capabilities to be at low and middle levels. With time, the psionist gains access to any powers that please him—but for the first few levels of his career, the psionist is going to be very restricted by the limited number of disciplines allowed him.

Out of the six psionic disciplines, two can be dropped from consideration immediately. The psychoportive sphere has a number of useful and necessary powers, but there are far too few sciences and devotions to allow the psionist to advance past low levels. Similarly, the discipline of metapsionics is very useful for a high-level character, but many of the powers within the discipline have prerequisites that are difficult for a low-level character to meet.

Of the remaining disciplines, clairsentience is the least useful to the adventuring psionist. While clairsentient powers are perfect for nonplayer-character sages or information-seekers, a player character needs more punch and flexibility. Telepa-

thy, psychometabolism, and psychokinesis all afford the combination of offensive and defensive skills the psionist needs to be a viable character. Take a look at your PC's ability scores before you decide; some disciplines have a number of powers with power scores based on the same ability. For example, most psychometabolic sciences and devotions are based on Constitution; if your PC has a Constitution of 8, he is probably going to have a miserable career as a psychometabolist.

The single-classed psionist should strongly consider telepathy as his primary discipline, especially if the campaign has a lot of psionics in it. No other psionist is going to defeat a telepathist in mental combat, and the direct manipulation of mind and thought is what a psionist is all about. Multiclassed characters can afford to specialize in the other disciplines. Psychometabolism is perfect for warrior/psionists and thief/psionists.

The next battery of decisions come as you select your initial devotions and sciences. Telepaths and psychokineticists absolutely must take Mindlink and Contact or else Telekinesis at 1st level, since so many of the powers within their disciplines require these sciences as prerequisites. It is a very good idea to come up with an advancement strategy when your character is first created. Early on, decide which sciences and devotions you will want to have at higher levels, then make sure your PC selects the prerequisite powers.

It is a good idea to vary your PC's powers. Choose a good mix of offensive, defensive, and generally useful abilities. If your PC already possesses an offensive power capable of damaging an enemy, picking up Ballistic Attack or Chemical Simulation for their combat uses may not be as wise as selecting Dimensional Door or Body Equilibrium, powers that can get you out of trouble quickly. Mages and clerics can decide at the beginning of an adventure if they need an offensive or defensive posture, but the psionist is stuck with his chosen abilities until he reaches the next level.

There are a number of different views about selecting the particular devotions and sciences for a psionist, but here are my humble opinions:

Ten really great psionic powers: Adrenalin Control, Body Equilibrium, Reduction, Mindlink, ESP, Post-Hypnotic Suggestion, Truthhear, Dimensional Door, Metamorphosis, Levitation.

Ten just awful devotions: Feel Sound, Feel Light, Hear Light, Ballistic Attack, Biofeedback, Graft Weapon, Immovability, Time/Space Anchor, Incarnation Awareness, and especially Taste Link.

The adventuring psionist

While psionists can temporarily fill other roles in an adventuring group, that is not what they are meant to do. In a well-balanced party of adventurers, it may seem that the psionist is nothing more than a backup character. Players who allow themselves to fall into that role miss out on the psionist's true mission—dominating the spectrum of psionic ability for the benefit of his comrades.

What does this mean? Briefly, the idea is to exploit psionics for your advantage while preventing your enemies from doing the same. If your psionist character is the only one for miles around, this means she has the freedom to launch psionic attacks, reconnaissance, and support for the party. But, in psionics-heavy games, your character should stand ready to defend her group to prevent enemy psionists from turning your fighters into turnips. The idea is the same as tactical archery: If there are no other archers around, shoot at the infantry; otherwise, your first job is to keep the enemy archers from hassling your own infantry. Psionic supremacy is the most important duty of the psionist PC.

The second role of the psionist is the information-gatherer. Psionists have the potential to be the supreme information sources in an AD&D campaign. Clairsentient devotions can be used to scout out the terrain with even more stealth than a thief can achieve—after all, the psionist is not even there. Want to know enemy strengths and plans? Just ESP that sentry you saw in your mind's eye. Your psionist character can be a hundred miles away, planning the upcoming mission in a comfortable tavern, while he comes up with detailed plans of the camp and guard schedules. Psionists should regularly check up on known enemies to see what they are plotting next; there's no excuse for a psionist who gets surprised by ongoing events.

Lastly, a psionist is exceptionally capable as a party's utility man. Remember that this is a tertiary role, but in psionics-poor campaigns do not hesitate for a moment to exploit your PC's advantages over non-psionic characters. Unlike wizards, bards, and clerics, who must try to anticipate an adventure's spell requirements, the psionist can access any of his powers at any time. If the adventure turns out to be overland travel rather than the expected dungeon crawl, the psionist won't be caught flatfooted like the mage with *knock*- and *wizard eye* spells occupying that precious memory space. The ability to improvise is one of the single greatest advantages that psionists enjoy.

The fighting psionician

Despite a number of powers that can increase armor class or Strength, you should remember that your PC fights only as well as a rogue. With six-sided hit dice and a rogue's THAC0, physical combat is not the psionician's forte. In melee, his concentration can be ruined just like a wizard's. While a psionician can always maintain powers initiated earlier, he may find himself in a combat situation where he needs to initiate new powers and can't because he is in the thick of the fight. Don't get caught in melee unless you are certain your PC can handle all foes without his psionic advantage!

However, never be afraid to fight when you can stack the odds in your PC's favor by powering up those big psychometabolic devotions. A psionician's natural place should be back with the spell-casters of the party, but she can serve as an adequate rear guard to handle any enemies that slip through the front line of fighters. A combat position away from the melee will also ensure that she can launch psychokinetic and telepathic attacks in comparative peace.

During a combat situation, what should the psionician do? Generally, he is best off looking to attack individual enemies. Unlike a mage, the psionician will never knock down a roomful of orcs with one mighty spell of destruction. Like a thief, he needs to carefully select his targets for maximum

effect. Enemy leaders should be subjected to Domination, Post-Hypnotic Suggestions, and miscellaneous telepathic attacks. He should keep an eye open for comrades in trouble and toss attacks at the enemies who are pressing them. Id Insinuation and Ego Whip are excellent for briefly incapacitating enemies. Targeting enemy archers with the suggestion that they are out of arrows could help the party as a whole by suppressing missile fire.

Running a psionics campaign

Introducing psionics into a campaign can be a painful and surprising experience. If you are heading this way with your game, make sure you understand the rules as clearly as possible on advancement, combat, and using psionic powers. You can deal with individual sciences and devotions as they come up, but you must understand how the system works as a whole.

As the DM, you must make a couple of judgment calls on the effects of some of the more ambiguous powers. Does Psionic Contact alert the target to a mental intrusion, or is Contact unnoticed until a second ability is used? Can a psionician tell how far away a target is by the difficulty involved in contacting him? Should the psionician player be allowed to know the approximate level of his target by keeping an accurate count of Contact or Domination costs? There are good arguments for

and against each of these interpretations, and you should be prepared to lay down the law in your own campaign.

A psionic PC with Mindlink will be able to communicate with anyone in your campaign at any time. Given time, the psionician can call up sages for instant advice, clarify orders or ask for instructions, or even check on the activities of any person she has ever seen. Mindlink is better than a cellular telephone for staying in touch, and clever players are going to use that ability. Just like real life, effective communications in a fantasy campaign can spell the difference between success or failure. Why ride three horses to exhaustion to reach a frontier fort when the psionician can send a mental warning instantaneously? If you're the DM, be prepared to see your most nefarious plots foiled by instant communication and perfect counterintelligence.

On the bright side, there is nothing wrong with a NPC psionician using these same tactics on your players' characters. Assume that the great evil villain of your campaign, Lord Morgg the Dark, has a grand vizier who is in reality a competent psionician. When the PCs torch Morgg's armory, he tells the grand vizier to find out who did it and where they are. The vizier (possibly from hundreds of miles away, courtesy of Mindlink) interrogates a surviving guard who saw the PCs, and he gets a mental picture of the party. A few power-score rolls and PSPs later, he establishes Contact with one of the PCs. Now, using ESP, he determines their location and listens in on their plans. Another Contact and Mindlink notifies the nearest of Lord Morgg's legion commanders. Within minutes, the forces of evil are on their way to attack the hapless PCs.

If the vizier is especially evil and powerful, he requests the use of a few dozen slaves from Lord Morgg and uses Psychic Drain on the poor wretches to power a massive series of Teleportations. Lord Morgg's personal guard of chaotic-evil bad guys is on its way to the PCs' campsite within minutes of the beginning of the grand vizier's search. Evil psionicians are unbeatable assistants to the chief adversaries of any campaign.

Summary

Psionics adds a new dimension to any AD&D campaign. Before you allow wholesale psionics use in your campaign, you may want to try a pilot run with one psionician PC and an occasional psionic foe. The psionician character is a thinking player's character (no pun intended) who enjoys greater flexibility and self-reliance than any other class in the AD&D system. If you're ready for an extra challenge and a new twist on the old favorite, you're ready to play a psionician. Ω



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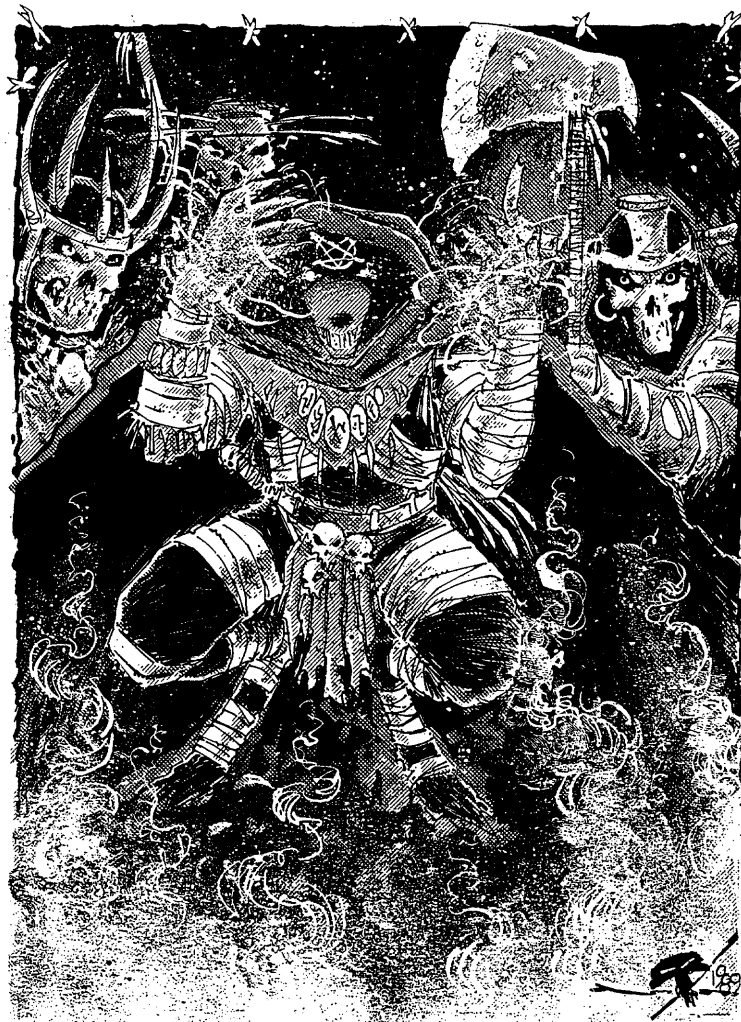
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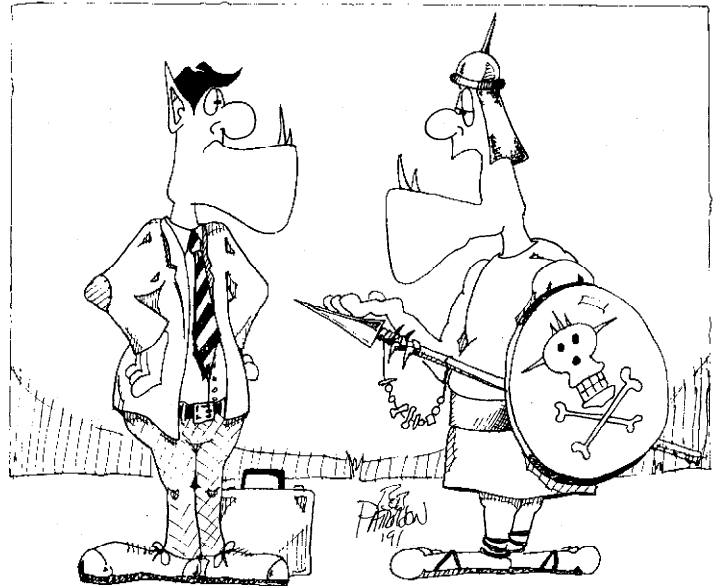
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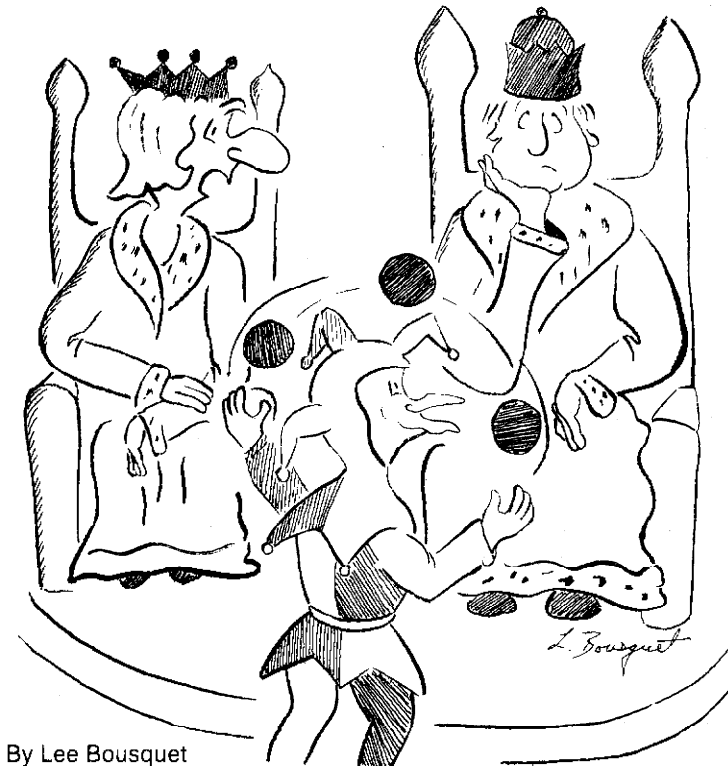
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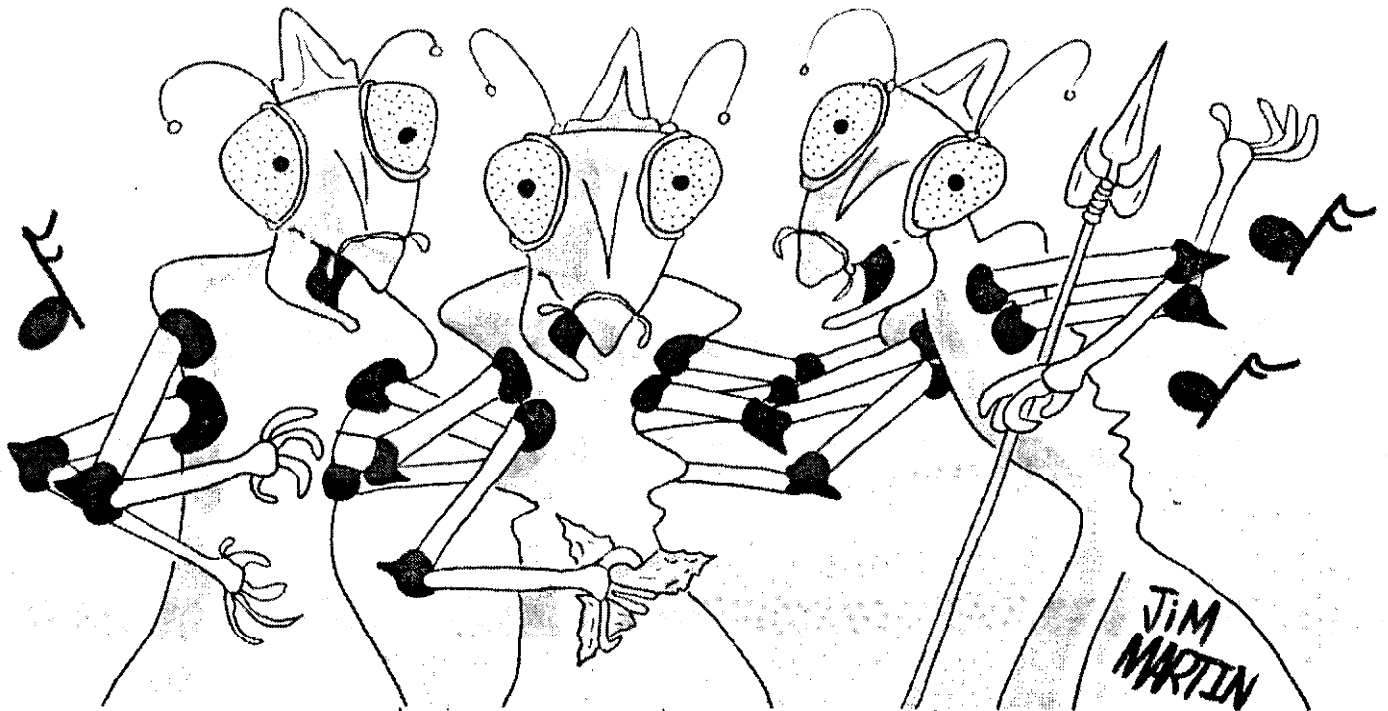


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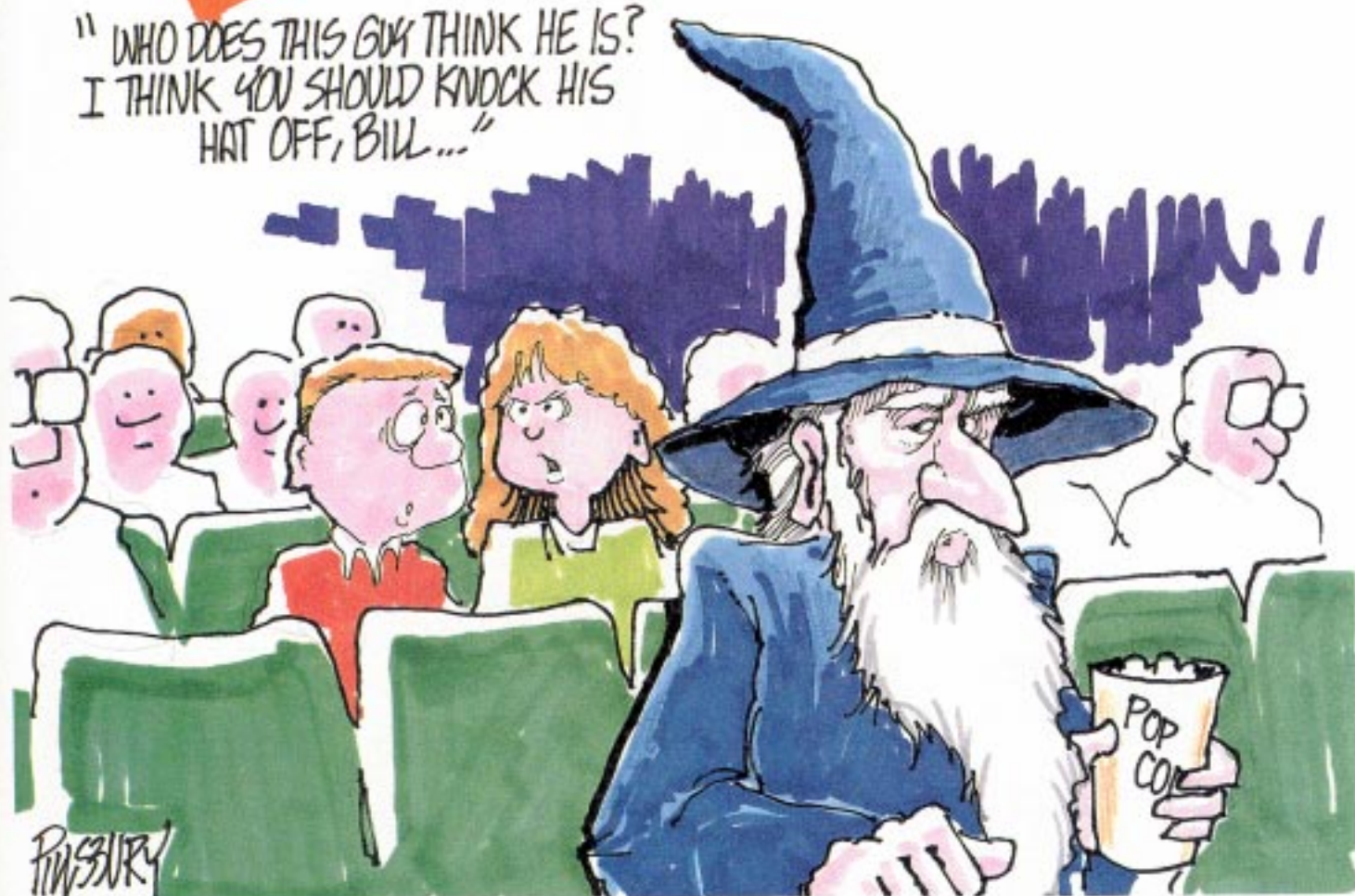
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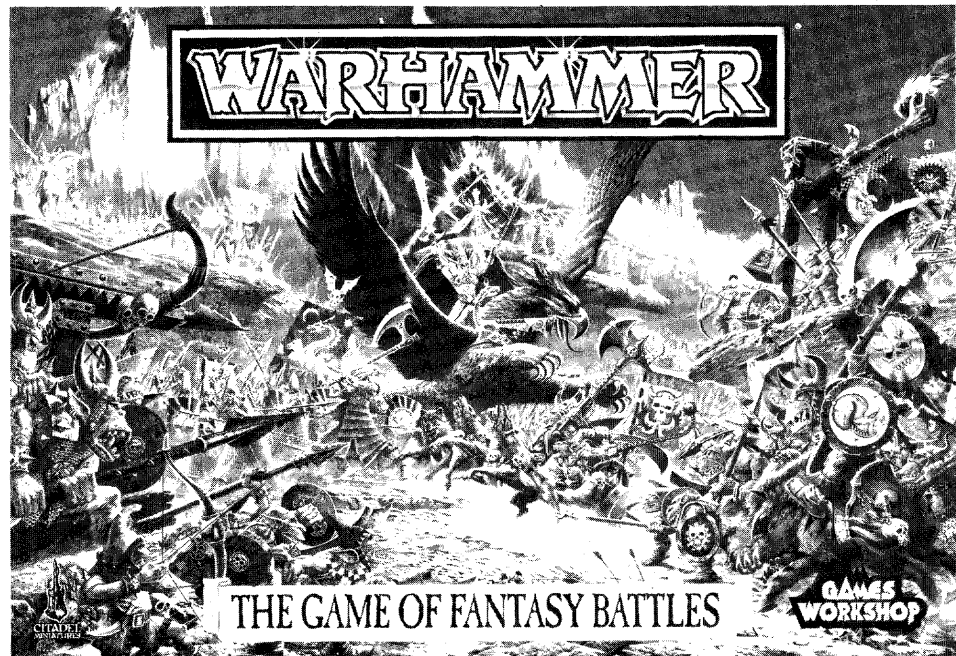




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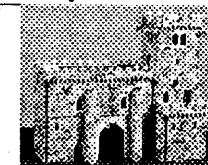
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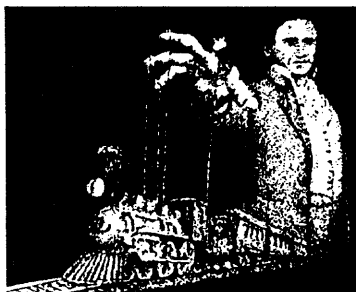
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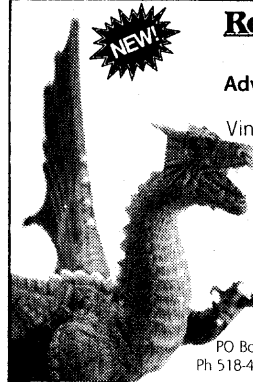
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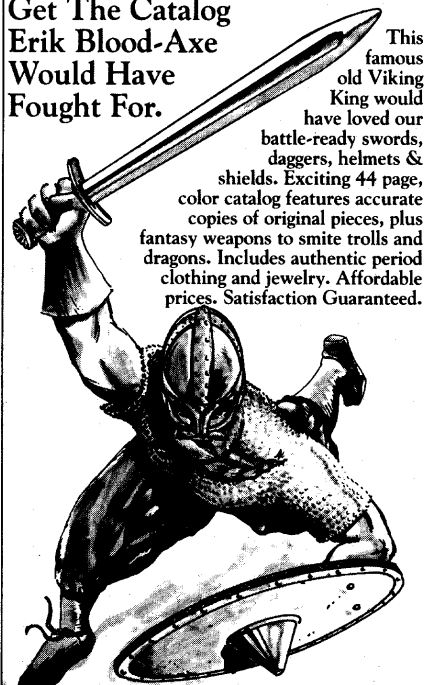
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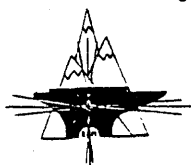
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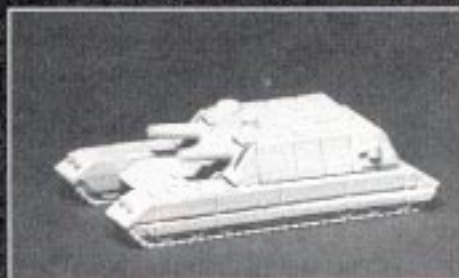
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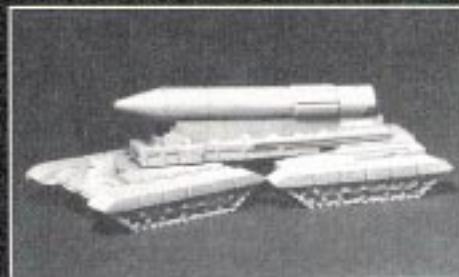
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Through the LOOKING Glass

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Dream Warriors (RAFM Co.)

It's that holiday shopping time again (part 2)

Welcome to part two of our holiday-shopping product reviews. In keeping with the spirit of the season, we're including a number of gift items as well as playing pieces. Remember to order early from your local hobby shop if it does not have what you want. Deliveries are slow at this time of year because of the volume, and stock is frequently depleted on fast-selling items. Shop owners are happy to help you find and procure what you want, but they may need more than one attempt to get the product. Each attempt may take up to five days or more, depending on how far the distributor is from the store and whether the distributor has a computer to tell the shop owner instantly if the product is in stock. Without the computer, you'll have to order, wait for the shipment

to arrive, and hope that it was not out of stock. This is not fun for either of you. Please don't wait till the last minute.

Short of a major disaster, I will be at the WINTER FANTASY™ game convention in Milwaukee and may run some games. If you want to speak to me there, I will be glad to chat provided it doesn't disrupt a game.

I here wish to thank my many loyal

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| * | Poor |
| ** | Below average |
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| **** | Above average |
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readers; I enjoy hearing from you and take your comments to heart. To everyone who reads this column, I send the joy of the season, peace, and good fortune.

[Editor's note: The Medium Omni 'Mechs planned for the last issue were dropped for reasons of space (this explains the curious painting credit from last issue's first paragraph). They are presented here instead.]

Now, on to the reviews:

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Ral Partha Enterprises

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10-841 Medium Omni 'Mechs **** ½

Medium Clan 'Mechs for FASA's BATTLE-TECH* game are now available from Ral Partha. All these 'Mechs are used by more than one Clan, but each type is used heavily by only one Clan. Each 'Mech is a kit containing a number of different pieces, including a hex base. Please remember to carefully read and follow all kit instructions if you get this item.

Dragonfly: The main user for this 'Mech is the Ghostbear Clan. The miniature stands 30 mm tall and is 25 mm across. The miniature is very similar to its line drawing in the game reference books, differing only in the position and placement of the gun on the left arm; the gun should be much lower than the fist. The second difference lies the upper superstructure and cockpit. The picture has the front around the head area being rounded; the miniature has the area flat. Including the hex base, this item is made up of seven pieces, all of which had some flash but went together with only minor difficulty. Use superglue sparingly on the small peg holes.

Fenris: This is the most standard-looking 'Mech in the Clan units and is used mostly by the Wolf Clan. The figure is an excel-

lent match with its line drawing in *Technical Readout 3055*. It stands 40 mm tall and consists of six separate pieces, all of which go together and fit well, though there are obvious mold lines on the outside of both legs (the lines came off with a minimum of difficulty except in the lower areas).

Black Hawk: This is almost a nonspecific Clan 'Mech, used only marginally but most often by the Wolf Clan. This 'Mech is short and squat, being only 28 mm high and 32 mm wide. The miniature is made up of seven different parts. The two inside legs do not match up with their holes and must be bent to fit. There was a large amount of flash on the pieces, but it was removed with some work. The line drawing and the miniature match perfectly except for the chin weapon units. I admit that the 'Mech in the photo here is facing the wrong way on its feet; this resulted from an emergency repair when I looked at the picture but unknowingly did the opposite. The 'Mech holds together well now.

Ryoken: This is primarily used by the Smoke Jaguars. This miniature stands 38 mm tall and matches the drawing in *Technical Readout 3055* exactly. This unit consists of eight different pieces, all of which had flash or mold lines that needed cleaning. The pieces fit together well, except that the arms did not quite clear the legs and the figure had to be put slightly askew to allow the arms to be deployed.

These models require work but are worth it when finished. If you are building specific 'Mechs, these are highly recommended. The cost is \$18 per box.

RAFM Co. Inc.

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2008 Dream Warriors

**** ½

The Dream Warrior set contains 16 lead figures allegedly scaled to 25 mm, but actually standing 30-32 mm high. The figures are of beings rising in ghostly vapors from differently shaped bases. The designs make it difficult to tell whether there is any flash or not, as any flash would look like vapors. Mold lines are visible on the nightmare steed and some of the foot troops, but all are easily removed and do not impair or detract from the detailing.

The troops included seem to be either human or bestial "chaos" types. The six "chaos" troops are armed with a variety of weapons and are of different species. Chaos figure #1 has a bovine skull, a partially formed body, overlapping armor plates, and shoulder plates with spikes. He is armed with a long pole and flail, and his helmet has elongated steer's horns.

Chaos figures #2 and #3 are armed with glaive-type polearms. Both figures are armored and carry decorated circular shields (#2 has a skull and #3 has what seems to be a Mercedes emblem); spikes



Falcon Grav Tank (Epicast USA)

rise out of their backplate protection. Figure #2 has a head that points to canine ancestry, while #3 looks like a tentacled demon with a fin. Figure #4 carries a poleax on a wooden pole but is otherwise very similar to #1 and #2. His circular shield has a spider-web design; he, too, has plate armor. His face is almost goblinlike, and his mouth is open as if screaming.

Figure #5 has only vapors for a body from mid-chest down; like the others, he has overlapping plate armor. His left arm ends in an ax and his right arm ends in a wicked long sword. His face and head appear sharklike (he has a thick fin over his head), and he wears a predator's grin. The standard bearer for this unit, figure #6, has exaggerated facial features that bring a frog to mind. His standard is a skull flanked by thick wings on an ornate pole. He also carries a shield.

None of the human figures has fully formed legs or lower torsos, and even some equipment is partially formed. Figure #1 has a polearm and shield at the ready; his helmet has its visor down with a swordlike blade on top. Plate protects his chest and shoulders, but his back has little armor. Figures #2, #3, and #4 have various polearms held in the guard position. Figure #2 has the deep-set plate armor of #1, but his shoulder protectors look more like pads. His shield has a pattern like #1's, only with a skull grinning from under a hood. Figure #3 has scale mail and a round shield boasting a skull and crossbones. His helmet has tusklke features on the bottom with a spike on top, and a skull face on his breastplate. Figure #4 has heavy plate and a closed helmet with a skull and a set of fins that make the helmet appear to be an aerial bomb. He carries a rectangular shield on his left arm

Human figures #5 and #6 are armed with hand weapons. Figure #5 has chain mail with an elaborate breastplate that includes massive shoulder protection. He holds a many-pointed sword-club in both hands. A skull appears on his right shoulder armor. His skin-covered skull is open-mouthed, with a tongue sticking out in defiance. Figure #6 has a skinless skull supported by high-backed plate and high collar. He clutches a simple long sword in armored hands with his arms crossed. Shoulder plates with rivets are evident. The figure appears to be waiting patiently.

Figure #7 is a scale-mailed champion protected by a huge kite shield with a skull crowned in knives and lines, carried on his armored left arm. His right hand holds a bastard sword with a skull on the hilt; another skull adorns his armor. A pointed ridge runs up his spine, capped by a closed helmet that comes to a point. The standard bearer for the humans has a trident-shaped totem braced on an ornate pole. Runes cover the outer two tines, while the center tine is sharp. The head is covered by a teardrop-shaped helmet; the spine is exposed. His left arm supports a shield with a burst pattern with a large spike at the center of the burst.

Last but not least is a wraithlike leader riding what could very well be a barded nightmare from TSR's AD&D® game. The horse has a small saddle, scale barding, and plate protection on its head, chest and front legs. Tack detail is very good; the teeth and baleful eyes stand out well. The miniature is mounted on a slightly rounded base that gives it a rocking-chair appearance but also suggests the mist rising around it. All hair streams out behind as if the horse were at full gallop. The rider is covered in plate mail from foot to neck.



Trick or Treat Dragon (Black Dragon Pewter)



Relaxin' Wizard (Black Dragon Pewter)

Both his hands are armored; the left clutches a knife while the right has a long sword. A long cape flows back from his shoulders, with the top half of the rider's skull glaring out between its folds.

This set could be used for anything from a dream army sent to kill characters in their sleep to a ghostly army rising from a battlefield to protect their possessions. With the use of individual figures, this army could be a welcome addition to the ranks of your undead. It is highly recommended at \$18 per set.

Epicast USA

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Falcon Grav Tank

Eldar players—attention! You now have equipment to rival the APCs of Imperial Troops or the equipment of the space orks in Games Workshop's WARHAMMER 40,000* system. This Falcon tank gives you the ability to move troops over obstacles and provide fire support.

The Falcon Grav Tank kit is scaled for 25-mm figure use and made of a heavy epoxy substance that accepts paint readily. It comes in three pieces: a flash suppressor, the main tank body, and the grav unit for mounting underneath. The body is wedge-shaped, starting at 1" wide and expanding to 4" wide at the engine mounts and nozzles. The main body is 7" long, with the gun adding another 3/4" to the front. The vehicle is just over 2" high at its highest point.

The flash suppressor must be trimmed to fit correctly onto the barrel; some filling might be needed. The grav unit has to be placed in such a way that the rear hatch aligns with the upper edge of the hatch on the main body. While the grav part has a

great deal of detail, the bottom of the main body has no detail and even has a copy-right message on a visible place in the rear. You will want to fill this message with putty in order to get a quality display piece. You must also fill the exhaust nozzles, and you must also note that the nozzles are not symmetrical. The tank's upper part has a number of details molded on, but they are slightly exaggerated and rounded as are most epoxy castings. Few bubbles or pits were noted.

This piece is useful not only for GW's WARHAMMER 40,000 system but other games using grav vehicles. It is well recommended even with the work needed, and it is worth its \$20 price tag.

Black Dragon Pewter

2700 Range Rd.
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Trick or Treat Dragon

Gift pewter is always popular at Christmas, and this year we have a good selection for you. This first piece arrived too late for the October issue, but it was cute enough to be worth a shot. The Trick or Treat Dragon stands 40 mm tall, his young, scaly body hunched in anticipation of treats and treasures. His head is covered by a mask, and two red gem eyes stare fixedly ahead. His hands hold open a sack of treasure open. A pearl sits in plain sight. To his left sits a jack-o-lantern with two red eyes and a lopsided, wavy grin. Enthusiasm such as you see from kids every year leaps out at you. This is truly a neat little treasure at only \$15.

1043 Relaxin' Wizard

This 36-mm wizard sits back in a tall wooden slat chair with cushions, dressed in a comfortable robe that drops to the

floor to join a fallen conical hat adorned with wizards symbols. His chair back is covered by a bat with its wings spread and two skulls with red jewels for eyes. His left hand holds a pipe with a red-jeweled bowl while his right hand fingers an old spellbook with runes. He has a slightly puzzled expression and looks as if he is going to say something. Both crossed legs rest on a footstool of large books. The wizard is the picture of peace and contentment during a wild season. This figure is well worth its \$15 price tag.

HG 517 Guardian Angel Hologram

*** 1/2

This angel stands on a base of waves and sand, with ivy curling around the edges and encircling the form of the angel. The angel is female and extremely thin, almost angular. There are some molding defects on her stomach and buttocks. Her hair streams out behind as she is getting ready to blow a ribbon-wrapped trumpet while she holds a long sword (the arm supporting the sword is overly squared and thin, detracting from the image). The wings are excellent and also form part of the support for the well-done hologram of Earth, complete with visible mountain ranges,

Seen from a distance, this is a nice figure, but it doesn't bear up well under very close scrutiny. Its price is \$40.

Soldiers and Swords

25 Fayette St.
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T002 Barkeep

**** 1/2

Townsppeople are always in demand as sources of rumors or background information. The local barkeep hears everything and is usually ready to impart a piece of wisdom for a small fee. This barkeep is a



Guardian Angel Hologram (Black Dragon Pewter)

true 25-mm figure, as measured from base to eyes, and is-made of lead. He is slightly stout at the waistline and wears a shirt with rolled-up sleeves, simple pants, and plain shoes. His left hand holds a bar rag; his right presents a bottle for consumption. An apron pocket bulges with the evening's take.

The face is interesting. A bushy moustache and eyebrows and mutton-chop sideburns frame a head bare except for a fringe of hair in the back. His expression is solemn. There are no flash spots or mold lines. At \$1.25 each, this figure is a very good value.

E006 Luna

This is another true 25-mm scale figure that adds a female fighter to the non-bikini brigade. Luna looks like a female thief armed with a long sword and dagger. The sword has a defect at mid-blade that needs to be fixed. Luna wears long gloves, a tight blouse open at the neck, tight pants, high boots, and shin guards. Crossed belts support scabbards for both sword and knife. Shoulder guards and a scarf complete the detail on the body.

The face is plain with concentration evident. Facial detail is good; care should be taken when removing the slight mold line from the face. Her hair falls slightly lower than shoulder length. There was flash between her left arm and body and



Luna, Man-At-Arms, and Barkeep (Soldiers and Swords)

some between her legs. This is a good female figure that is intelligently dressed; it is recommended even with the work needed at \$1.25 each.

R004 Man-at-arms

**** ½

This figure is suited in armor of a style fitting the period from 1360-1410. The figure wears a bascinet helmet with a camail (chain-mail neck guard) that covers a mail hauberk and a jupon (under-armor padding). Shoulder guards and arm protectors are well done. Both hands have gauntlets, and the right hand clutches a long sword. A shield can be attached to the left arm after painting. Both legs are protected by leg and knee plates and knee guards. The feet are covered by solerets. The face is that of a middle-aged man with his mouth open as if shouting. Unfortunately, his face also looks as if it is missing part of the jaw.

This piece would be equally at home in either an AD&D game world or in historical miniatures games. For a complete naming of all the parts of the figure's armor, see page 119 of Palladium Books' *Compendium of Weapons, Armour and Castles*, which has an almost exact copy of the figure in a standing stance. This figure is highly recommended at \$1.25 each.

Miniatures

656 East McMillan
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Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

70 Harcourt St.
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1023 Blood Tor

This set is guaranteed to warm the heart of any barbarian lover on your gift list. The kit consists of four 25-mm lead figures with peg supports and a detailed 25-mm scaled base that provides most of the text for the diorama's story.

The figures consist of a male and female barbarian and a pair of very unlucky hobgoblins. The male barbarian is true to classic form, with mostly bare skin and good muscle tone. He wears a pair of laced sandals with shin protectors, a loincloth, and a helmet with nose guard and horns. A large knife hangs from a disk belt, but he is busily putting his axe to use. Long hair falls from beneath his helmet, and a tooth necklace adorns his neck. Both his wrists have bracers that help the figure support the hobgoblin that is held by the neck in preparation for chopping. The hobgoblin hangs mostly limp with his fangs visible and eyes bulging slightly. The hobgoblin is bare except for a loincloth, bracers, and shin protectors. A scimitar hangs limply in his right hand. His ears are held straight up, as if he knows he is about to die.

The female barbarian is fighting a foe who is obviously just as doomed. This hobgoblin is protected by a round shield with studs, a breastplate, bracers, and



Blood Tor (Thunderbolt Mountain)

metal shin protectors. He holds a scimitar as he gives his opponent a hateful gaze. The female barbarian is dressed in a French bikini bottom, steel breast cones, and shoulder protectors. Flexible leather boots extend to her knees, which are covered with metal protectors. Both wrists have bracers. A round shield with stars and a sword pattern graces her left arm. The visor-up helmet frames her expression of concentration and disgust as she guides a long sword through the neck of the hobgoblin in a death blow.

The base is the real jewel, and it should provide a challenge to anyone who wishes to bring out all the detail with painting. It

is a 2" circle representing a group of rocks that crown a hill. On these rocks are all the hobgoblins who have died at the hands of the two barbarians. Over 20 bodies or parts of bodies litter this area, wearing plate armor, leather, clothing, or nothing at all. A variety of weapons, shields, and other items clutter the scene and add a wealth of detail.

The diorama will probably not come out exactly as the picture here shows. We had to bend some legs and arms to fit the holes as they were drilled. This is a minor problem that must be fixed before painting. Still, this set is highly recommended at \$13.95.



Centaur With Bow and Lance (Viking Forge)

Viking Forge

1727 Theresa Ln.
Powhatan VA 23139

M-99 Centaur With Bow

* * 1/2

Centaur archers are good troops in fantasy miniatures games, as they can double as cavalry and scouts, with weapon skills as well. This centaur archer measures 21 mm to the top of his back and 33 mm to the eyes; he is shown after arrow release. He wears a leather jerkin and has bracers on both wrists. The horse part of his body has squared legs on the insides; the legs are also spindly and not in scale. The horse part is flat, with no chest to speak of, and has flattened surfaces where muscle groups should be. The chest of the horse is angular instead of rounded and broad. The human part of the figure has a quiver of arrows; a cape covers his back, and his facial features are not very clear. Long hair falls to his shoulders. It looks like his arms are covered by chain mail.

This figure is not recommended for most gamers. The quality of my review piece was extremely poor and even had a crack in the lead from the stomach of the horse through the quiver. I have seen other centaurs from Viking Forge and they were much better. This is at least one of the few male centaurs with a bow that I have seen. As the figure is, it is not worth its \$3 price.

M-100 Centaur With Lance

*** 1/2

This figure also has problems with both its horse and human parts. The horse legs are flattened on the inside, and the body is much too thin and almost looks like it didn't form completely underneath when cast. The human half is armed with a lance and has a sword hanging on the left on a wide belt. Arm muscle detail looks slightly flattened. He is dressed in a skin cape, shirt, and neck protector. The facial detail is slightly off. This miniature will need work. I cannot recommend this figure at \$3 each.

Grenadier Models Inc.

P.O. Box 305
Springfield PA 19064

Grenadier Models UK Ltd.

25 Babage Rd.
Deeside, Clwyd, Wales
UNITED KINGDOM CH5 2QB

5001 FANTASY WARRIORS *

Companion

Last year, we reviewed the FANTASY WARRIORS* boxed game from Grenadier. This year, Grenadier has released a companion set that increases the original set's playability considerably. The new companion has rules for undead armies and equipment and the means to form new units from the dead. Mercenaries are now

brought into combat, and new army lists for everything from Amazons to undead allow you to set up campaigns that pit the races against one another.

The set is well laid out, with rules in an easily read and followed format. The frequent illustrations do not always seem to go with the text, but usually support it. The margins contain lots of examples and suggestions to aid the understanding of the text. The undead rules integrate themselves well into the system and cover each of the undead types in specific sections. This rules' companion also gives artillery rules and introduces heavy weapons and gunpowder as well as weapon-equipped monsters. New rules and tips are clearly marked, and space is left for notes in some areas. New magic is included that allows combat between mages, and great magic is given that extends combat abilities of the units.

This 80-page book is done in black and white. There is a sheet of colored counter that includes arrows, counters for cannon volleys, dragon breath, necromantic and terrain markers. I highly recommend this book for anyone who bought the FANTASY WARRIORS game; I still highly recommend the game itself, and even more so now. The cost for the book is \$12.95.

5617 Barbarian Battle Leader * * * * ½

This loincloth-wearing barbarian is 29 mm tall and made of lead. His legs are covered by boots bound by thongs. His chest and back are bare except for a shield across his back and a necklace. A belt secures a knife and sheath and supports the loincloth. Both wrists have bracers, and a huge bastard sword leans across his shoulder.

The barbarian points ahead; his face shows concentration and aggravation alike. His lips are curled back and cheeks slightly sunken. His good eye squints (his left eye is covered by a patch that stands out well). Muscle detail is very good on the entire figure, but there was flash between the legs that was easily cleaned. This figure is highly recommended, even at \$1.75 each.

Mithril Miniatures

Macroom, Co. Cork
IRELAND

Ed Wimble/Prince August

Miniatures USA
The Byrne Building, Lincoln & Morgan
Streets
Phoenixville PA 19460

M248 Ghân-buri-Ghân and Wose Spearman * * * * ½

M249 Wose Warrior with Blowpipe and Wose Priestess * * * * ½

All these Woses (from J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*) can be handled in one quick review, as they share many common traits. They are true 25-mm scale and range from 22 mm to 26 mm from



Barbarian Battle Leader (Grenadier Models)



The Woses (Mithril Miniatures)

base to eyes. All bases are rectangular with beveled edges and are covered with pebble-shaped rocks.

Both fighters wear only loincloths, and they appear slightly pudgy, with visible navels. The spearman has his hair pulled back into a topknot, while the blowpipe warrior's hair hangs straight down. Both figures have glue-on arms and weapons, but the arms didn't quite match up, even with bracelets molded there. The priestess has a fringed lei that covers her breasts and a fringed loincloth in front. Her right hand sweeps out as if blessing, and her left hand clasps an ornate, tasseled totem. She looks middle-aged and gaunt, as if she

has suffered much.

Ghân-buri-Ghân is a hero of the War of the Rings for allowing an army of Good to pass through his lands. He wears a tasseled loincloth and a tooth necklace, with his hair pulled back into a topknot. A stone axe is clenched in his right hand while his left hand signals a stop.

None of these figures had any mold lines or flash, although each weapon arm was unprimed; all will require work and careful handling. These sets are highly recommended to anyone who really loves *The Hobbit* and other Middle-earth books and games. They are priced at \$3.49 per pack of two.



Straw Pallet and Bed (Fantascenes)



The Armorer's Workshop (Fantascenes)

Fantascenes

Box P
Pine Plains NY 12567

1-12 Beds and Straw Pallets **** ½

If you lived in the Middle Ages and went to an inn, chances are that you would have slept on a straw pallet rather than a bed. Beds were reserved for the most expensive rooms and were usually had by nobles or very rich people. This set contains two beds and two pallets, all scaled for 25 mm and made of lead.

The straw pallets are 7/8" wide and 1¼" long. A wood frame contains the straw. The pillow is cloth-covered, and a wrinkled sheet or blanket lies over straw. Each

pallet has rough spots that will require cleaning of mold points at leg ends and board junctions. The beds are sheet-covered and have blankets, turned down, and pillows. The beds are slightly smaller than the pallets and require light cleaning at the bedposts. These items are highly recommended for dioramas or gaming use. A package of these is \$4.98.

1-07 The Armorer's Workshop **** ½

This is a seven-piece lead set in 25-mm scale. Each of the tools shown is essential to either a blacksmith or a weaponsmith. The tool bench consists of two parts, the legs and a plank top. On the top rests a hammer, a file, pliers, part of a horseshoe, and some

nails. Next to the table sits a metal pot, partially filled. There is also a deflated bellows. An anvil sits on a stone section. The mold lines on the anvil and table legs are easily cleaned up. The cooling tub is mounted on a plank-and-block stand that has a mold line across the top row of blocks (this can be easily removed by scraping). The tub also has a line across the water surface, but again this is easily removed.

This set easily lends itself to dioramas or city adventures. The pieces should probably be mounted on a card base so they stay together. This set, actually more typical of a blacksmith's shop than an armorer's, is highly recommended at \$4.98.

Lance and Laser Model, Inc.

P.O. Box 14491
Columbus OH 43214

028 Dwarf Winged Hussars ****

This 25-mm set could be used as a serious war-game unit or a tongue-in-cheek set. The set contains two dwarven soldiers and their mounts: two mules in full normal tack (dwarf-sized at 22 mm high along the back and 32 mm long). The mules have fringed saddle blankets with tassels on the tack. A sabre in a scabbard hangs from the left side of each, and a pair of pistols or clubs hang in holsters on both sides of the neck. Each mule stands still with its left ear cocked forward. Muscle detail is good; a mold line is barely visible after priming but is easily cleaned. No other flash was noted. Each base is uneven and can be painted like rough earth.

The riders are armored with light plate, including pot-bellied breastplates and overlapping plates protecting their limbs. Hands are covered by riding gloves. Each dwarf's face is visible, showing a well-kept beard and moustache, although the nose is covered by a protector and the ears by flaps. In their right hands, the dwarves clutch lances with pennants; the left hands hold the reins. The most interesting feature is a wood frame (a peg-in-hole type) that attaches to each dwarf's back and supports a large number of thick, well-detailed feathers—thus "winged" hussars.

I plan on picking up two more packs so I have a set of medium cavalry for my dwarves. I like the figures, which I recommend at \$5 per pack of two.

Heartbreaker Miniatures

Paoli Tech. Ent. Center
19 E. Central Ave.
Paoli PA 19301

Gamecraft

A16 Gardeners Row
Business Center Ltd., Liverpool
UNITED KINGDOM L3 6TJ

HB119 Magic Users ****½

This three-wizard set is made for the ever-popular 28-mm scale and is not suit-

able for use with true 25 mm. The figures are made of lead.

The first wizard is a flamboyant type wearing a long robe with fur trim. The long-sleeved robe reaches his fur-lined boots and is cinched by a wide belt with a round buckle and a bag on the left side. A furry cape covers his shoulders. His cap is fur-lined and crowns a bearded face with chubby cheeks and bushy eyebrows. His left fist is clenched; his right clutches a long totem with a skull mounted on a pole. The figure looks like a necromancer.

The second figure's long robe is decorated with arcane symbols, front and rear. Voluminous sleeves hide most of the left arm except for the hand, which clasps a wooden staff with excellent detail. His right hand is up as if waving; the wrist has a studded bracelet. A belt supports a bag, a jug, a wafer belt buckle, and a charm. His face, hair, and beard remind me of Charlton Heston in the movie, *The Ten Commandments*. A mold line in the sleeves was not as easy to clean up as I thought it would be, but there was no flash.

The third wizard wears a long robe with embroidered sleeves and hems. His belt supports a variety of pouches and bottles on the left and a large bag on the right. A key and lock hang from a chain on his belt. His hair falls to midback, and a cape drops to his knees. Though bald, he has a long beard that falls to his waist. His right hand and forearm are clenched into a fist, while his left hand clutches a large oak staff.

All the figures are well made; very little needed to be done to prepare them for painting. The features seem to be exaggerated and the heads oversized, but not enough to be cartoonish. These are recommended for people looking for new mages for GW's WARHAMMER FANTASY ROLE-PLAY * or other fantasy games, or as possible leaders for miniatures' forces. They are nice at \$4.95 per set of three.

I want to thank Sam White for the excellent painting job on Blood Tor and the Falcon, and Fred Hicks, Jr. for his job on the Dream Warriors.

If you need to contact me, you can at: Friend's Hobby Shop, 14112 Washington St., Waukegan IL 60085; or call: (708) 336-0790 MWThF 2 P.M.-10 P.M. or S&S 10 A.M.-5 P.M.. See you next year!

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What's your opinion?

What is the future direction of role-playing games? What problems do you have with your role-playing campaign? Turn to this issue's "Forum" and see what others think—then tell us what you think!



Magic Users (Heartbreaker Miniatures)

Bazaar of the Bizarre

Continued from page 54

Such a blade inflicts a bonus of 2 hp electrical damage (over and above its normal bonus) on every strike; metallic armor and shields (even if magical) are discounted for to-hit purposes, as the tiny arc of energy can hit its target even though the sword itself may have missed. In addition, the wielder is protected as if by a *ring of shock resistance* (+3 on saving throws vs. electricity, -2 hp per die of damage). Finally, the bearer may *call lightning* (P3) twice daily if a storm is in the area.

XP Value: 1,200

Sword +2, vampiric regeneration

There are only seven of these magical blades in the Realms, most of which are broad swords.

Description: Half the damage this weapon inflicts on opponents is immediately bestowed on the wielder, with all hit-point fractions rounded down (q.v., *ring of regeneration*, DMG, page 149). If the target of the blade is not a living creature (an extraplanar being, golem, or undead, for example), it functions only as a normal magical sword. It cannot otherwise cause regeneration, nor will it restore life, limb, or organ. The wielder's hit points cannot increase beyond his normal maximum by virtue of this blade's powers.

XP Value: 5,000

Editorial

Continued from page 96

and Barbara all proofread this column at least once before it went into the magazine.) Taking these suggestions will get you that much closer to having an article accepted (and will make my life easier).

If, after all this, your article is still rejected, don't take it personally. We aren't rejecting you, just that particular article. I wish I could write a personal letter to each author who has an article rejected, but I just do not have time. Remember, DRAGON Magazine is not a writing school. We don't have the time to critique your article in detail. Do not resubmit a rejected article to us, either. "No thanks" means just that. If we want you to revise your piece, we'll ask you to do it.

I apologize if this sounds harsh, but the harsh truth is that if you want us to publish your article, you have to follow our rules. It's really not that tough to do. Get our guidelines and follow them. Query us before you send in an article. Use common sense.

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Dale A. Donovan

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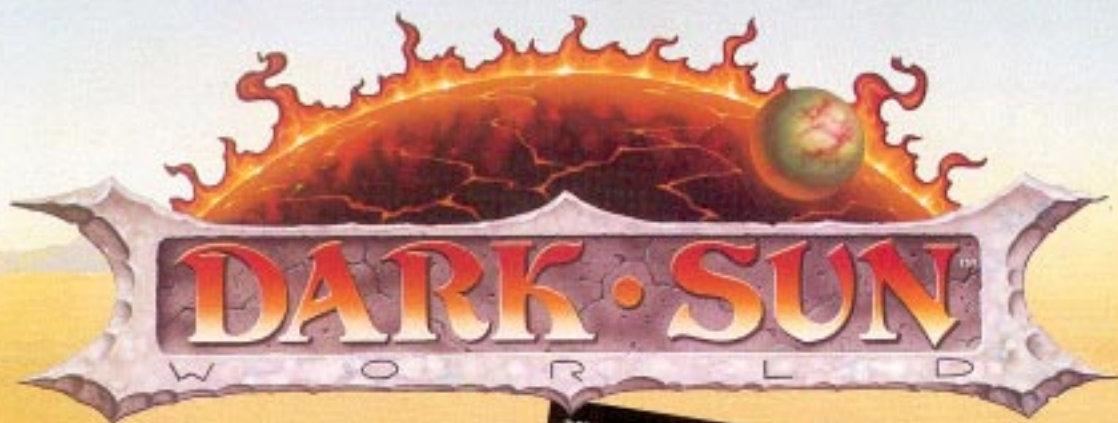
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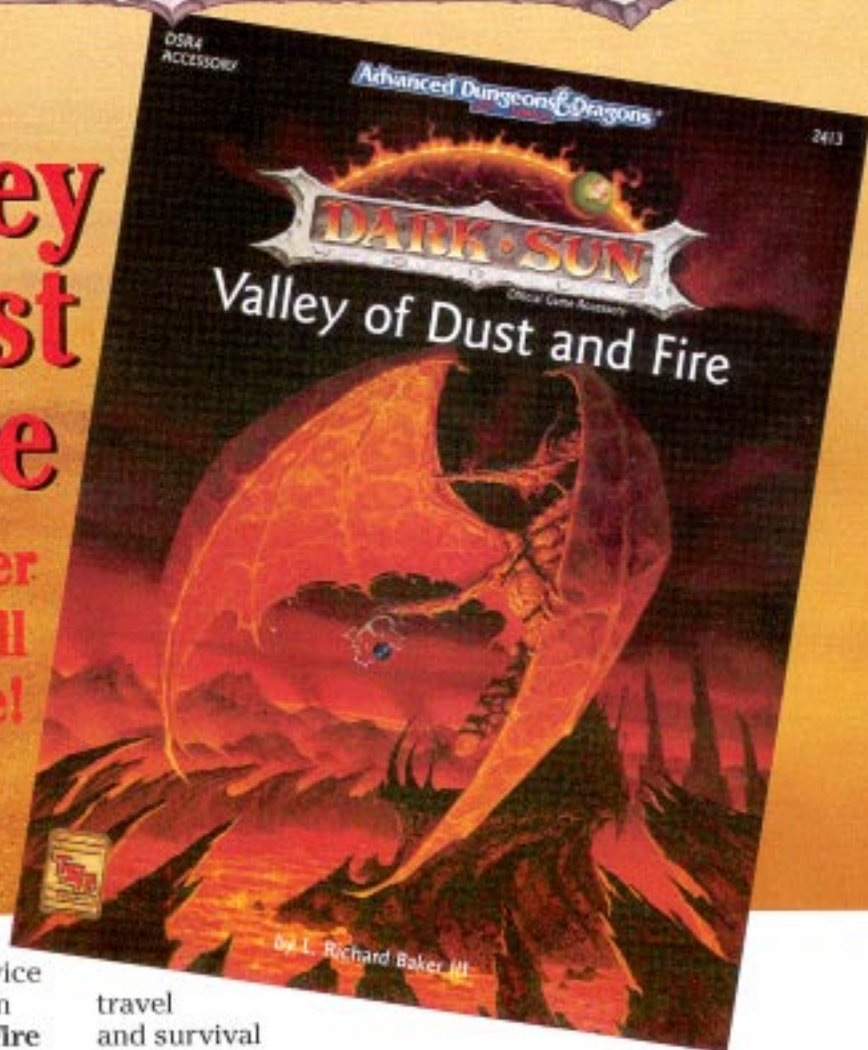
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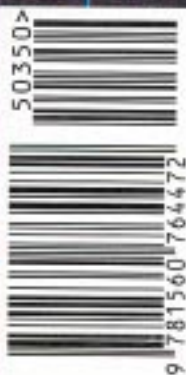


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