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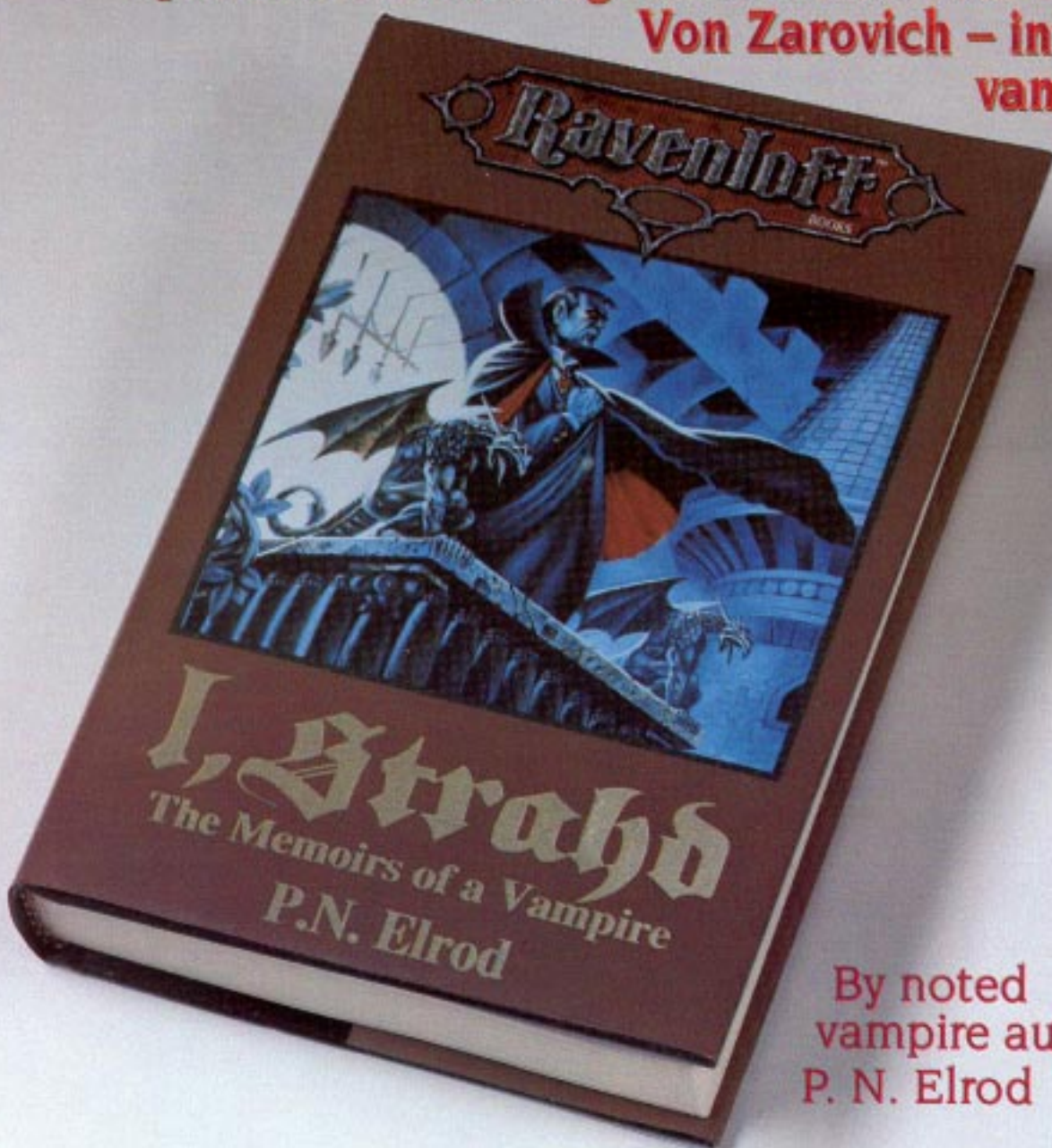
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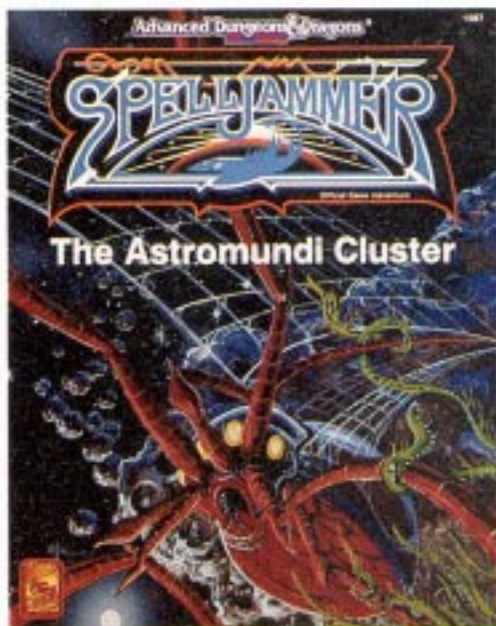
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COVER

Scott Burdick, long famed as a cover artist for DUNGEON® Adventures, sent us this painting as a sketch. "Want it?" he asked. "Yes!" we said. Boy, there are days when I really love being an editor.

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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

Thanks also to Bill Fawcett and Arthur Collins, past authors for DRAGON Magazine, who called the editor personally to pass along this information. Demons and Wizards was released in 1972, and TSR's DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game was first printed in 1974. Based on our own sources, there appears to have been no relationship between the two.

We had martial-arts demos at the game fair about two years ago, but scheduling problems have eliminated them since then. If you gamers would like to see an expertly done demonstration of this sort, presenting several styles and techniques, by all means talk to the staff at the 1993 GEN CON game fair or write to the GEN CON staff afterward (c/o TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A.). If you really want to see it, something might be arranged.

Though the above letter was received in response to my call for any sumo-wrestling gamers in issue #194, page 4, I haven't heard from any. Anyone in Hawaii involved in this?

Snarf, n, & E

Dear Dragon,

When I was younger, my brother had a subscription to DRAGON Magazine (issues #82-106). I was just beginning to play, and I wasn't too interested in the articles (though I have since read every article), but I did read one thing every month: "SnarfQuest," the cartoon saga

I recently saw on a TSR products list *SnarfQuest: The Book*. I have gone to several bookstores in my area and come up with nothing. Is it out of print? Is it that no one really cares what happened to the zeetvah and the robot? I was wondering if anyone knows where I can lay my hands on a copy.

I have a bone to pick as well. THE FIFTH LETTER OF THE GREEK ALPHABET IS EPSILON!!!!!! It's true—I looked it up. Eta is the seventh letter. This small error stopped me from completing the crossword puzzle in issue #192 (that and some pretty obscure clues, like 50 Down and 71 Across). Thanks for your time.

John Kang
Darien CT

The TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop has Snarfquest in stock. To order; call (toll free) 1-800-558-5977 and have your VISA or MasterCard handy. Otherwise, write to: TSR Mail Order Hobby Shop, P.O. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A., and ask for a free catalog and information on that product (product #8118).

As for the error in 49 Across—ha, ha, April Fool! Um, actually, that's sort of embarrassing, and we'll be more careful with our Greek alphabet next time. And as for 50 Down—having been in the military for five years, it didn't sound very obscure to me!

Foil-pack surprise

Dear Dragon,

I just acquired some series II 1991 foil packs of [TSR collector cards]. Upon opening one, I found a moth crushed to card #575, the fire elemental. Was the moth drawn to the flame, or was it just a coincidence?

Phil Sullivan
Brockton MA

I mentioned this to the first Trading Card Tsar; Jim Ward, who looked at me with a pained expression and said, "Is there anything else I can help you with?" We'll assume it was a coincidence.

By the way, anyone writing to TSR with questions or problems concerning the trading cards should enclose a self-addressed, stamped envelope for a reply. It really does help.

Finding "Forum"

Dear Dragon,

I thought you might like to know that your "Forum" department is my favorite part of your magazine. I was very disappointed that issue #194 left it out. If it's a space problem, I'm sure there are other things you can leave out. I know it's not a lack of "Forum" letters.

Anita Evans
Lancaster CA

You weren't the only one who missed the column. It was a space problem, and we'll certainly try to avoid a duplication of this problem in the future. We have more "Forum" material to run than you'd believe.

Martial multiclasses

Dear Dragon,

I am a gamer/aikidoist/wrestler. I've been doing each for three, seven, and five years, respectively. I also practiced judo at one time. A fellow DM of mine (DRAGONLANCE® saga) is training in Gohn Dagow, a form of kung fu. Have you considered having a martial-arts demonstration at the GEN CON® game fair?

Zach Hudson
Ashland OR

Kukri or not kukri

Dear Dragon,

I am writing to you regarding two items in DRAGON issue #189.

The first thing concerns a letter from Pete Fox, Barnsley, S. Yorks, U.K. (on page 4). For his information, casting kits are available to him from Prince August Models, Macroom, Co. Cork, Ireland. There may of course be English stockists of these products. I believe Hamleys in London carry them.

The second item is the illustration on page 38 of a kukri. The illustration does not match the description of a weapon with a forward curving blade. I have included a drawing I made of a kukri that I recall my uncle having when he was an officer in a Ghurka regiment. Regarding the notches made on the blade, these were traditionally used by Ghurkas to nick their own thumbs, as they believed that a kukri should never be drawn without tasting blood.

Patrick Presnall-Kelleher
San Diego CA

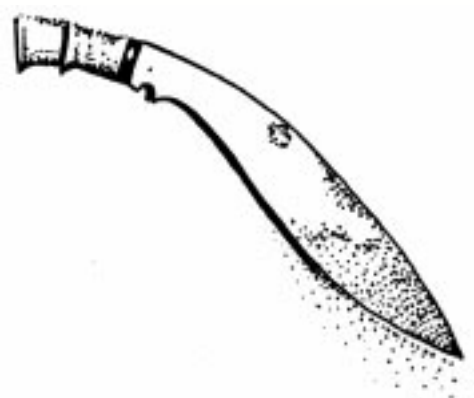
Oops. Steve Winter, of TSR's Games division, was good enough to locate another picture of the kukri, and you seem to be right. I appear to have mislabelled the artwork on page 38 of issue #189. We present a more accurate picture of the kukri here; the Dictionary of Weapons & Military Terms, by John Quick, proved very handy (however, I'm afraid I don't yet have the real name of the weapon on page 38). Thank you for setting us straight.

Uriah Heep—solved!

Dear Dragon,

In reference to Warren Mitchell's letter in issue #194, the title of the Uriah Heep album in question is *Demons and Wizards*. Just imagine how much trouble we'd all be in now if *this* were the name of our game!

Jeff Crook
Memphis TN



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FIGHTING BACK



MGITM

EDITORIAL

A little of Bob in all of us

We've been running a series of letters in this magazine about the things that players might say that should tip off the game master that he is being a bad GM. These got me to thinking about the (very few) bad GMs that I've known in the times I've gamed, and that led me almost immediately to think about Bob. Bob is not his real name, but I will call him that as I don't want people to point at him on the street and laugh because he was the GM who made all of his players roll for breast size, male characters included.

This is the truth. Bob had a lot of strange ideas about how to organize a campaign universe, and breast size was one. I gamed with Bob years ago in West Germany (when there was a West Germany), and he was running GDW's TRAVELLER* game. I have to say here that I practically worship the TRAVELLER game,

and I consider myself in debt to everyone who has helped make it the great science-fiction RPG that it is. However, no one could save the TRAVELLER game's reputation once it fell into the clutches of Bob and his breast-size tables.

I learned about all this when I sat down as one of the players in a new campaign Bob was starting. Other people had the usual assortment of pilots, doctors, and mercenaries. I had a barbarian, detailed in one of the early TRAVELLER supplements. After we rolled up our characters' basic statistics, we discovered it was time to find out what size breasts our characters had.

"Bob!" cried his wife, who was one of the players. "Bob, that's terrible!"

"Just roll," Bob said. "C'mon, it's important!" Being the obedient sheep we were, we rolled. Nearly all of us came out with overly developed chests of the sort nor-

mally seen in doctored photographs in supermarket tabloids. We were aghast, but Bob seemed strangely pleased.

Next came the distribution of artifacts. Wait, I'm getting ahead of myself—next came the distribution of psionic powers. We all got them, though they were normally supposed to be quite rare. After that came the artifacts. I forget what everyone else got, but I recall that my barbarian got a special gem that, when he rubbed it and concentrated real hard, made him invisible. Considering the physical mutations Bob was adding to the game, this seemed like a remarkably useful power.

The final development was a brief discussion on how the universe worked. The universe, Bob explained, was full of angels who would be periodically contacting our group for help in solving interstellar problems. We were part of a heavenly hierarchy, and we'd soon have our own special angels acting as our case officers for missions. We digested this, briefly played out a scenario in which our characters met and took off in a spaceship, and adjourned the game for another time. Oddly enough, none of the players (myself included) could thereafter find the time to get together to finish that particular campaign.

However, that was not the end of Bob's career as a GM. Somehow some of us were suckered into another of Bob's TRAVELLER adventures, this one ending with our group finding a free cache of fusion guns (as good as artifacts in a fantasy game) and a spacecraft full of gold, or something like that. However, one of our group did something antisocial, I forget exactly what. Bob, ever the subtle one, arranged for the Emperor of Space himself to show up on the spot with his entire galactic fleet, solely to chastise the errant player character. My character, a mercenary officer, became annoyed with one of Bob's too-bizarre nonplayer characters and decided to just shoot her, but she suddenly developed psionic teleportation and escaped, and I was given a warning to behave myself. When the game ended, oddly enough, none of the players (myself included) could thereafter find the time to get together to finish that particular campaign.

Rumors circulated among the rest of us gamers about Bob's other TRAVELLER campaigns, in which his closest friends suddenly inherited the entire galaxy (and all its angels) and gained super powers of which the X-Men and the Avengers could only dream. Bob would sometimes describe these game sessions in excruciating-

Continued on page 16



Artwork by Benedict Hughes

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The Greatest and the Most Honorable Adventure



Exploring the fantasy political campaign

by Jan Berrien Berends

Artwork by Lissanne Lake

Winston Churchill, past prime minister of the United Kingdom, once said, "Politics are almost as exciting as war, and quite as dangerous. In war you can only be killed once, but in politics many times." In role-playing games, a political campaign can easily be as exciting and entertaining as the traditional "monster hunt" adventures.

Many gamers believe that, as the player characters advance to higher levels, the campaign should shift somewhat to the political sphere. Also, there is no reason why a politically oriented game cannot be run even for the lowest-level characters. But how does one go about constructing such a campaign? What is this political stuff anyway? Something to do with elections?

Politics is, simply put, anything that has to do with the governing of people. In other words, a political campaign will be concerned with how people are ruled or rule themselves. As one can easily see from a brief glance at the political world today, where government is concerned, other issues arise. Human rights, the meeting of material needs, the defense of borders and acquisition of new territory, and the play of individual liberty against social needs, though issues in themselves, are usually political concerns as well.

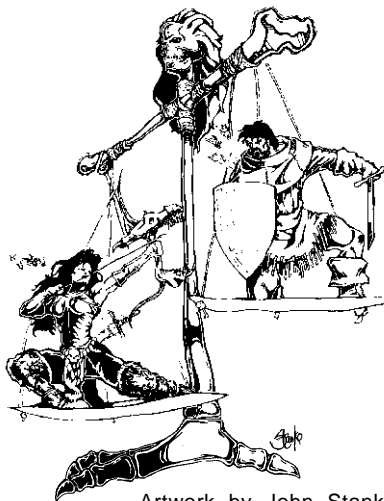
While there are certain similarities between traditional adventures and a political campaign, there are also vast differences. Most significantly, the PCs' goals are different because they center on the acquisition and exercise of political power, not on the amassing of wealth or combat-oriented powers.

This article examines the options available to DMs interested in political scenarios and primarily political campaigns. Included are numerous suggestions for possible political situations and adventures you can place in your campaign amidst various political backdrops.

Who are the PCs?

Whether a gaming group chooses to have a political campaign because the PCs are very powerful or because they simply think it sounds fun, you must ask yourself certain questions when creating such a campaign.

You must decide what role the PCs are to play in the political system. Do they start the campaign as established political figures, such as kings, viziers, or feudal lords? If so, their personal histories had better reflect a pre-existing political life. Although they could start as rulers and potentates, it is better for them to begin as minor political players and give them the



Artwork by John Stanko

opportunity to establish themselves politically as the campaign progresses. Thus, the player whose PC starts out as the captain of a small force of guards defending a frontier fortress will have great fun trying to get her character accepted among the ranks of nobility.

Consider the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*. At the beginning of that tale, Beowulf is the heroic retainer of a king, and he must perform heroic and valorous deeds. By the end of the epic, he has replaced that king and must be wise as well as valorous.

Alternatively, the PCs could start as political nobodies. Perhaps they are of a social class that allows them to participate in politics, but they are too young to have yet made such a move. Or maybe their social classes virtually preclude political participation, and part of the campaign is devoted to their winning the right (for themselves and for others like them) to play a part in the political arena.

Character class is another important consideration. If your campaign will involve a lot of spying, then psionicists, rogues, and diviners will be very valuable. If the political world is heavily military—say the queen to which the PC owes allegiance is at war with a neighboring country because of ancient ethnic conflicts—the player may choose to play a fighter who holds a position in the army. While the classes themselves do not necessarily dictate the PCs' roles in their society, many of the kits found in the various *Complete Handbooks* do.

The Herald, Jester, and Loremaster kits from the *Complete Bard's Handbook* are suited to most political campaigns, and the Skald kit would be appropriate for a Viking

campaign. In the *Complete Thief's Handbook*, the Assassin and Spy kits are good options. Fighter kits associated with the nobility are quite viable, and if the military plays an important role in the campaign, the Myrmidon kit might be suitable as well. The Patrician and Academic kits are good choices for politically minded wizards. For priest characters, you might consider the Nobleman, Peasant, or Scholar Priest kits. Of course, most other kits can be worked in as well. Often, the kits that require a bit more explanation are even more interesting. For instance, a thief who takes the Swashbuckler kit might have an identity as a noble fop who delights in (but is hopelessly inept at) politics. When necessary, though, he dons a mask and assumes the identity of an honorable (though cocky) street fighter.

You also may consider creating other, politically oriented kits. Some possibilities include: the Court Wizard or Astrologer, the Ambassador (excellent for psionicists), the Bureaucrat Priest, the Peasant Rebel (or any other kind of rebel), or simply the Politician kit. The *Complete Handbooks* have detailed information on how to go about creating new character kits. When creating political kits, personal interaction advantages (such as bonuses to NPC reactions) are very useful.

If you feel that certain classes would have too many advantages in the political campaign, feel free to limit or even forbid certain classes and kits. In an early Medieval setting, you might restrict all PCs to the fighter class. In a religious-political campaign, all the PCs might be priests.

This does not preclude creating NPCs of the restricted classes—in fact, doing so can create a real challenge for the PCs. This can happen if the PCs' sovereign has outlawed the use of magic or psionics, or perhaps only "barbarians" train in the use of the arcane or psionic arts. Maybe all the PCs are peasants, and they just don't have the opportunity to tap their inherent psionic abilities. Perhaps magic is just the stuff of legends, legends the PCs may encounter.

PC involvement

It is important to know the motivations of the PCs. If the players are to have characters who are believable and entertaining, they need to know what those characters want. These motivations are intimately linked to who the PCs are in the social and political world. Most often, motivations are closely tied to the fundamental theme of the campaign (discussed in the following section).

A player could create a PC who was taught from a very young age to believe in a certain set of political ideals. A young peasant lad may come of age and set out to free his peers from the indifferent dominance of the ruling classes. An orphan girl, raised by a rugged ranger, may abhor the destruction of her beloved forests and mountains in the name of civilization.

Perhaps a character is born to politics. Maybe she is the child of a noble, or was raised by a lawyer and everyone expected she would be one, too. A more interesting twist on this theme is to have the PC not know his real parentage. As the campaign progresses, he slowly comes to discover that he is the heir to the throne, or the spurned child of an evil warlocks or sultan's vizier. He has to come to terms with his ancestry in a society that sees parentage as central to one's identity.

Another possibility is that the world in which the PC exists allows social advancement only through the ranks of a bureaucracy. Perhaps this bureaucracy is the priesthood, or perhaps it is merely a secular organization created to maintain and carry out the authority and functions of the existing government. Perhaps the PC is a peasant who becomes a priest. In such a position, she might, if she is pious enough, be able to climb the holy ranks to something roughly equivalent to the papacy. The church may be her only chance at an education. Maybe the PC has secured a position as master builder in charge of maintaining the city walls. The day-to-day elements of the job may not be worth playing out, but the PC may also catch wind of certain political plots,

When choosing the PC's role in life, it is important to remember what he is after. What rewards does he seek? A PC with no aspirations is not fun to play. The PC must have reasonable goals that can be fulfilled within the scope of the campaign. Also, aspirations must have depth. Wanting to be ruler isn't enough. Why does the PC care? Does he perhaps hope to change something about the world? Is she the true heir trying to reclaim her birthright?

You must consider carefully what political rewards the PCs desire. A magical wand or mighty sword is not what the PCs are after. Instead, you must provide them with a chance for real political gains. Political promotions, the overthrow or death of enemies, the exposure of an opponent's secrets, or the successful hiding of one's own secrets are examples of political rewards.

In a traditional campaign, after the PCs have slain a dragon, they breathe a sigh of relief as they go to pick up their treasure. In a political campaign, the same rhythm of tension and release should be maintained. News that an important political ally has been murdered should cause nervousness, if not outright fear. How can the PCs know what is happening in the court of King Rufus if their double-agent

ally has been slain? When they are able to establish an alliance with another member of Rufus' staff, the PCs feel great relief.

Campaign direction

In order to have a coherent campaign, you must provide a cohesive political setting. Such a setting may be tenuous: the characters are likely in positions of some degree of political power and must work to preserve and improve their status. More interesting, though, are campaigns that have an issue or theme that runs throughout the many adventures that make up the campaign.

For example, the campaign could focus on a peasant rebellion. The PCs, who start the campaign either as peasants themselves or as sympathetic nobles, facilitate the rebellion. When the campaign begins, there is nothing more than minor discontent among the peasants. The idealistic PCs foster this discontent, directing it at the ones responsible for peasant suffering, i.e., the ruling classes. As the campaign progresses and the PCs advance in levels and political power, they assume more and more responsibility and control of the peasants. The climax of such a campaign would be the staging of an actual armed rebellion.

Other possible campaigns would have the PCs working to quell an evil rebellion. They might be involved in battles for land between petty warlords. They could be ambassadors, sent from one city-state to another to arrange alliances, treaties, and commerce. In such a campaign, they most likely will have missions from their government that they hide from the officials of their host city. Perhaps, while ostensibly sent to smooth relations between two states that have recently achieved a tenuous peace, the PCs are actually sent to sow the seeds of that city's downfall, ultimately bringing down the government and allowing their own to seize power. Covert activity is always fun and plays a role in almost all political campaigns.

Religious issues make excellent themes for political campaigns. The PCs could be working to spread a particular religion, or they could support religious freedom of choice. Perhaps the priests are struggling with the secular government for control of the populace. You could also set your campaign entirely within the church hierarchy, with the PCs working to eradicate corruption or to achieve bureaucratic or religious power.

An arena for politics that can easily be overlooked is the thieves' guild (or organizations of mercenary warriors, merchants, wizards, etc.). For one thing, the guild no doubt will have some kind of relationship with the legitimate government. They may actually control some of the government officials. Average citizens may be horrified to learn the extent of guild influence. Of course, the PCs could be on either side of a guild-government conflict. On the other hand, the guild may be struggling to win

certain liberties, trying to get the government to turn a blind eye to some of their activities. Also, within the guild there will be lots of political maneuvering. Who is in charge of the guild? Are the members of the guild happy with their leadership? Remember, there is a reason why thieves are so good at backstabbing!

The possibilities are endless. Combining two or more different, even unrelated, themes can produce complex motivations and rich plots. Remember that an element of intrigue adds a lot to a political adventure. Make sure there are plenty of untrustworthy characters. For example, a good intrigue-based scenario can involve the PCs being hired by a person they later discover to be allied with evil. Now, if they want the reward that was promised them, they'll have to commit morally reprehensible acts. If they insist on pursuing evil ends for personal gain, feel free to have their malicious benefactor betray them. He was probably planning to do this all along. If the PCs go ahead and tread the path of justice, they could wind up at odds with their patron, but you in turn can wind up giving them even greater rewards for this just course of action.

Running a political campaign

The most important thing to decide in a political campaign is what the PCs are going to *do*. In a well-conceived campaign, the PCs have goals when they start out. As discussed above, they may be trying to overthrow a city through espionage, uphold a prince's authority, etc. The question to be answered is how the PCs go about accomplishing their goals. While you could come up with adventure hooks every few sessions, the best thing is to let the PCs decide what they want to do next, thus influencing the course of the campaign.

Warning lights are probably flashing in your mind right now. How can a DM possibly allow her players to decide the course of the campaign? Isn't this dangerous? My answer is no, not if the campaign is properly prepared.

When creating the campaign world, you should devote a considerable amount of time to creating the politics of the world. Instead of producing only beautiful maps and detailed random encounter tables, you also must think about the nature of the governments in the PCs' political world. Consider the weaknesses and strengths of each government, as well as what goals are held by those in power.

Political systems in the real world are incredibly complicated, and you can never expect to truly duplicate this complexity in your campaign. However, the real world is nonetheless an excellent source for creating a political environment. For example, consider the political events that lie behind a real-world war. Over what issues were the factions fighting? What were the leaders' agendas? Did they share the agendas of the people they were supposedly leading? Although duplicating the complexity

is impossible, simulating it is well within your power.

When creating the world, be sure to put in plenty of real political weaknesses the PCs can exploit. Also, put in a few red herrings to confound the PCs. The adviser may seem like an evil and manipulative counsellor to the PCs, but maybe he really has the city's best interests in mind. Also, you might try putting in some legends about useful artifacts or future heroes. Will the PCs find those artifacts or become those heroes? Finally, you must be quite sure who has the political power—it may not be who the PCs (and the people) think! If you know all this information, you will not need to create adventures on the fly. They will already be there for the PCs to spot.

Once you have created the political environment, you should discuss it with the players. Tell them only what their characters would reasonably know. The first session could be devoted to discussing the characters' goals and filling them in about the world. Let them know about important NPCs, and hint at the darker or secret motivations of certain key figures. If you have time, prepare handouts that outline the basics of the political situation, focusing on issues that relate to the PCs' goals.

Now the PCs get to make their choices. If the world has been created well, and

you have revealed the right information, the PCs will be brimming over with ideas. Allow them to discuss their plans and spend time scheming, while you are ready to answer any questions they might have. Remember, though, that you do not need to answer every question honestly.

Before you end your session, demand a plan of action from the players. Do not be disappointed if they have missed your most important lead or seem to be heading off in the wrong direction. Once they have given you their plan, you have what you need to know to create an adventure for the next session.

Whatever their plan, you can create an adventure out of it. Their schemes may seem dry or dull. Perhaps they want to spend the next few days seeking interviews with various people to gather important information. But you can always arrange to have one of the people the PCs want to talk to claim to be busy—and inexplicably, she is busy every time they try to see her! Now they have to spend some time spying on their target to see what, if anything, she has to hide.

Among other things, the PCs can spend their time spying, carrying out assassinations, throwing parties at which they can gather information or influence colleagues, recovering items of importance, investigating disturbances in the social or political system, or carrying out the orders

of superiors. In the last case, the PCs might wind up doing what they would in any other campaign. That is, a superior might feel it necessary for the PCs to rid the city's sewers of some particular threat. Adding political dimensions to such a quest can be accomplished in a number of ways. Perhaps the superior is actually hoping to get the PCs killed. If they perform admirably, they'll attract the attention of someone with a great deal of political clout, or the attention of someone who resents their success.

During any adventure, feel free to add elements from the political scene the PCs are not anticipating. For example, while they are trying to find out if the court wizard is allied with fiendish powers, you might consider introducing a surprise assassination attempt on the PCs' lives. They immediately begin trying to figure out who wants them dead and why. It may be the wizard they were investigating, but the assassination attempt could come from an entirely unexpected source. These sorts of clues make good lead-ins to new adventures. They can also draw the PCs' attention to what you think they missed.

Inevitably, the PCs come up with plans that have nothing to do with what you anticipated would happen in the political campaign world. That's fine—work with it. For example, if the PCs get the notion into their heads that the lord chamberlain is in



cahoots with their own arch-enemy, they'll want to investigate. But when you created the lord chamberlain, you envisioned him as an uninteresting court official. However, the PCs have an intriguing idea, and it might be worth introducing it into the campaign. Always consider their ideas, even ones you did not consider, might be true. The lord chamberlain might indeed be a double agent. You must decide whether you want it to be a fact, or just a false trail.

Once you have decided if the PCs' beliefs are accurate, you can create an adventure that will let them find out—or not. Maybe you decide that they are right about the chamberlain, but you want them to think that they were wrong. Or maybe they are wrong, but you can introduce clues that make them think they are right. If they later act on misinformation, they can get into all kinds of sticky situations in which they will be called upon to use the political skills of diplomacy, denial, and dishonesty.

It is important to make sure the campaign doesn't lag. As with any campaign, you don't want to wear the players out. But you must also be careful to keep the game exciting. Instead of monsters around every bend, there are political plots, malicious enemies, and potential allies. Within a given gaming session, try to include at least one extended stretch of action. Political campaigns tend to have a lot of talking, which is fine. But most players and DMs want some action in their adventures, too.

The action need not be central to the plot, but it must be real, relevant, and dangerous. An assassination attempt can be a good action subplot. The PCs, having come within an inch of their lives near an abandoned warehouse, investigate the building and find hidden access to the city's sewers. There, they pursue their assailant, perhaps falling afoul of some of his well-laid traps, or even running head on into an unpleasant sub-city monster. Spy missions, assassination missions, courier errands, and even side trips to gain treasure for political funding can all be easy ways to introduce some action.

It is more challenging, and more fun, to find causes for action in audiences with authority, efforts to influence NPCs, and even research. Maybe in order to find out the truth about the king's witch, the PCs have to retrieve a book from nearby ruins. Or maybe the emperor, tired of hearing the PCs' pleas, has them cast into a maze in which waits a hungry minotaur. Or, in order to gain followers, the PCs have to perform heroic deeds.

Ultimately, the PCs wind up creating a lot of the world. This may seem ridiculous at first, but by playing off their expectations you can create a world that is remarkably believable and extremely entertaining both to play in and to run. It often does not seem to the PCs that they are helping to create the world. Instead, it seems to them that the world is simply very vivid and realistic, because wherever

they turn, they find something interesting.

Of course, you'll often be called on to prepare parts of your world you did not even know existed. Unless you are a very experienced DM and are willing to wing it, you'll need preparation time. This is why you should keep on top of what the PCs plan to do. In order to keep the red carpet unrolling under their feet, you need to know in what direction they are going.

Nonplayer characters

When you create your campaign world, you should develop a large cast of characters for the PCs to encounter. Many NPCs will in the campaign appear again and again. In some cases, a single NPC may be the focus of an entire campaign. An example of this would be a campaign in which the PCs are devoted to a certain political figure, such as a blessed sovereign like Charlemagne or a peasant hero out to change the world, such as Robin Hood.

[Editor's Note: An entire political/action campaign could be built around the exploits of a band of NPCs fighting to correct social or political injustices. Realize that Robin Hood's quest was politically motivated, i.e., he sought to end Prince John's unjust and corrupt reign. PCs could join or even lead a band of NPC freedom fighters who seek some form of political change. Not only must the PCs win military victories against the corrupt regime's forces, they also must win the hearts and minds of the people if their movement is to gain popular support. Steve Jackson Games' GURPS Robin Hood examines this type of campaign in several gaming genres.]*

In political campaigns, the PCs won't meet just peasants, merchants, and other adventurers. They also will kowtow to kings, princesses, dukes, and other powerful nobles, and hobnob with bureaucrats, military officers, diplomats, and other members of the petty nobility. Since politics is fundamentally concerned with people, it is important to give these NPCs real depth.

The most important characteristic of your NPCs in a political campaign is their motivations. Their goals, real or false, open or hidden, must be known to you if they are to play their part in the adventure successfully. A king who merely sits on a throne dispensing arbitrary justice has no place in a political adventure, while a minor official who has secretly sold out to the enemy does.

An NPC could be interested in acquiring or maintaining political power, rather than the traditional magical or financial power. Alternatively, he may be devoted to a particular political ideal or cause, such as king and country, democracy, or universal freedom. Finally, he may be trying to interfere with the actions of a political rival or disrupt an enemy's plans. The most powerful political figures can be pursuing several goals simultaneously.

Of course, you should be sure to take the time to give the NPCs personality.

Especially for recurring characters, you need to develop a consistent personality for each NPC in addition to giving each one a range of motivations. Ample coverage of the issue of NPC personalities can be found in other DRAGON® Magazine articles (see issue #184 in particular), as well as in *the Dungeon Master's Guide*.

The kinds of NPCs you need to develop vary with the type of campaign you are running. For example, if your campaign has an early Middle Ages setting, you want feudal warlords, retainers, and serfs. In a later medieval milieu, a royal family probably exists, and a governmental bureaucracy has begun to develop. There are advisors, numerous ranks of nobles, and all kinds of friends and relatives of the ruler interested in power. In an Arabian campaign like the AL-QADIM™ setting, the people will be governed by a sultan, advised by one or more viziers and a gaggle of court wizards and astrologers. Throw in a few courtesans with secret motivations and visiting nobles from other states bearing wondrous gifts to make the setting complete.

You must not forget the religious figures. If there are any religions in the world, they'll probably want to take a part in the political process. Therefore, important priests, shamans, or temple officials need to be developed as fully as any other NPCs. And if the campaign focuses on political-religious issues, there will probably be as many religious figures as any other NPC.

Some NPCs who hold political power may have little or no power in terms of magic or combat. While a king in an early medieval setting is expected to lead armies to war, when a complicated bureaucracy has developed the king may be willing to leave fighting to others. He may instead concern himself with the intellectual side of the affairs of state. Thus, there should be plenty of zero-level characters involved in politics.

To take a historical example, consider Louis XIV of France. He was extremely adept politically, as shown by his ability to control his courtiers. His influence was so great that their squabbles centered on the right to dress him in the morning rather than on political and economic matters. Perhaps he was correct when he said, "I am the state." Yet, while he was a focus of political power, the wars he waged were largely wars of diplomacy, and his personal role as a warrior was insignificant. In AD&D® game terms, he probably had high Wisdom, Intelligence, and Charisma scores, but he probably was a zero-level NPC.

Of course, you must make sure any characters the PCs might fight can hold their own in battle. They themselves do not need to be skilled combatants; instead, they might surround themselves with people who are capable of defending them. Remember, wisdom and prudence are as important to the role of rulership as an arsenal of spells or a mighty sword.

Fantasy politics

Of course, the AD&D and D&D® games are a lot different from the real world. Magical powers are real and dangerous, fabulous beasts abound, and incredibly powerful entities may choose to take a hand in the affairs of humankind (or elvenkind, dwarvenkind, etc.). Unless your campaign is meant to be historical, be sure to include plenty of fantasy elements.

Fantastic NPCs: It is possible to include nonhumans in the political sphere. In Waterdeep of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting, the beholder, Xanathar, carries political clout within the sewers beneath the city, and his twisted touch extends into the streets above as well. In the Gothic RAVENLOFT® campaign, half the political players are dead (undead), and the most of the rest are either insane, supernatural, or truly evil. Don't forget about creatures that can appear to be human. Doppelgangers, some dragons, and illusion-using creatures fit this category. Imagine the PCs trying to track down the doppelganger assassin they've learned is present at their lords court before it strikes.

Character race and race issues: Perhaps the campaign centers around a conflict between character races. Do the elves and dwarves have trouble getting along? Are goblins threatening to overwhelm the gnomish population? In the DARK SUN®

world, halfling society is largely separate from the rest of the world, and interactions between halflings and other races is always fraught with tension. Most non-halflings don't even understand the halflings' government. Mysterious and foreign systems of government are fascinating things to discover and explore.

Planar concerns: Extraplanar beings can play an important role in politics. If you have a large pantheon, the gods are almost surely playing a hand in politics. (Take a look at the Trojan War for inspiration.) Other very powerful beings will be important as well. The Dragon of Athas is a supernatural force with potentially dire political consequences. After all, what does a king do when an unstoppable force demands a sacrifice of thousands of lives?

The political adventure

In ongoing campaigns with an exciting but not necessarily cohesive series of adventures, you can easily run adventures in which PCs get involved with tense, potentially explosive political situations. When the adventure is complete, whatever the outcome, the PCs move on to a new situation, the previous politics largely forgotten.

Crafting a single political adventure does not require as much work as creating an entire political campaign. Most of what

was said in the previous section still applies. However, you needn't carry your efforts to the same lengths.

Getting the PCs get involved

Especially when the PCs' sole motivation is personal gain, this question can be difficult. Of course, the PCs can be hired by some wealthy political figure to carry out a mission for her. While this may not be a particularly fascinating start, it is a tried-and-true method, and there is nothing inherently wrong with it. Besides, though it may *seem* a bit lackluster, you can make it fascinating if you take the time. For the sake of intrigue, this "swords for hire" method of starting an adventure can prove to be the most viable option. Remember, the PC's employer may not be what she claims to be.

Of course, there are other ways to involve the PCs in a political adventure. One of the best ways is to give the PCs some personal stake in their mission. Try to create an adventure hook that draws the PCs into the adventure for their own reasons. The PCs may be quite ready to take a hand in politics if, for example, they have a base of operations in a large city and a new law is made which outlaws the use of magic, or requires that adventurers entering the city surrender 80% of their wealth to the civil authorities. Perhaps a friend of the PCs has certain political



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connections for which he is targeted by someone with political aspirations.

For example, the PCs' old buddy Magnar might be a dear friend of the Duchess of Lambriadok. Unfortunately for Magnar, the infamous Count Poguish would like to be the next Duke of Lambriadok, and he has decided that if he could dominate Magnar he'll have an extra card up his sleeve in his future political machinations. So he kidnaps Magnar's family. It's up to the PCs to help their old friend out.

The PCs can become involved with politics inadvertently. Perhaps that magical sword they found in the horde of the last dragon they defeated traditionally belongs to the MacPhearson clan. But if the MacPhearsons' arch-enemies, the O'Donnells, catch wind of the fact that the sword has been recovered, they may well try to capture it in order to humiliate the MacPhearsons. The PCs must decide which clan to side with and whom they wish to have the sword. Of course, the PCs may well choose to keep it for themselves and be forced to high-tail it out of the Highlands before meeting untimely demises at the hands of the rival clans. The adventure will not be very political, but the political mood is still present because of the set-up.

Because the PCs in this type of campaign are not created specifically for political adventures, their motivations will be simpler, at least in terms of politics. This obstacle should not be too hard to overcome. As the above examples show, you can always find a way to exploit the PCs' existing motivations to hook them into a political adventure. Use their desire for treasure or power. If they are willing to fight a dragon for material gain, they will probably also be willing to dabble in political maneuvering at court.

PC objectives

In a short adventure, the PCs will not be called upon to overthrow a country or assume the mantle of rulership. In fact, very often their missions will be basically the same as in a nonpolitical adventure. They may have to slay a fierce monster, rescue an innocent, or retrieve a rare artifact. The difference is that the motivation for their quest is based on the political agendas of various NPCs with whom the PCs interact. Furthermore, the PCs' success or failure will have real political consequences.

The most significant difference between a political campaign and a political adventure is that the adventure must have a self-contained plot. Shortly after play begins, the PCs should have some idea of what they are trying to achieve. Also, when they accomplish their goal, they will be ready to go on to something else. The story is largely over. Although there is nothing to stop you from putting some twists and turns in the plot, you should know the hook, the obstacles, and the conclusion to any single adventure.

One political adventure could involve the PCs' quest to retrieve a crown that must be worn by the ruler of a country at an annual ceremony if she wishes to remain in power. Unfortunately, the crown has been captured by agents from a neighboring country who wish to incite upheaval so they can attack the first country more easily. Most likely, the PCs have hunted for rare and valuable objects before, but this time they are doing it to hold a country together. If they fail, war will soon erupt.

NPC interaction

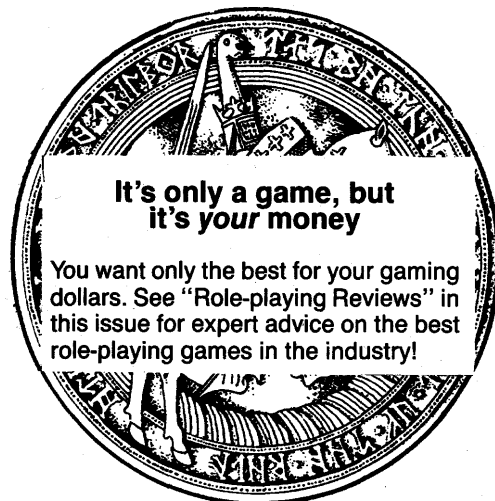
As with an ongoing campaign, motivation is the most important characteristic of NPCs. While a few simple traits should be sufficient to give the NPCs real personalities, if you don't know what they are after, it will be impossible to play them well. You decide that the prince is foppish, but if you do not know what he is trying to get out of the people around him, then he simply does not fit into a political environment.

Conclusion

The ideas in this article should help you run a political campaign. Of course, the best source for ideas is the political history of the various peoples of our own Earth. Wars, the growth and collapse of empires, the rise and fall of various royal families, and the emergence of new political systems all can be inspirational. You do not have to look only at the past. A campaign based on what is happening in the political world today could prove fascinating. Also, you might look to fantasy and science-fiction novels and stories for ideas.

Although the political campaign is challenging to run, it is well worth the effort, for in the words of John Buchan, Scottish statesman, "Politics is still the greatest and the most honorable adventure."

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Editorial

Continued from page 7

ly cheerful detail, punctuating his tales with comments like "Cooooool!" or "It was wicked!"

We all put up with Bob anyway because he was, after all, one of us—a gamer. Besides, Bob was a player, too, and seeing Bob play sort of made up for his being a GM. I was running a TRAVELLER game in which the group was fleeing a space battle when Bob's character, a scout with his own 100-ton scoutship, showed up to join the fun. The enemy forces were escaping the battle in a 30-ton lifeboat and the players were happy to let them go, but Bob wouldn't think of it.

"I want to ram their ship!" Bob announced. He obviously assumed that starships and ancient galleys were built alike.

"You're sure about that?" I asked. Everyone else stopped talking and looked on in horrified fascination.

"Sure!" Bob said. "I have the bigger ship!"

I had Bob roll his character's Piloting skill, and he made the roll. Bob's 100-ton scout plowed into the 30-ton lifeboat at a speed of tens of miles per second, normal orbital velocity. Both ships were instantly reduced to clouds of scrap—Bob's character, too. It was the shortest character lifespan in any game I'd ever run, about one minute.

"Your man's dead," I told Bob. "Kaput. Gone. He blew up."

A look of total confusion crossed Bob's face. "What?" he asked. "How?"

I have no idea where Bob is these days, but despite everything I still wish him well. He was, after all, a gamer, and at one time or the other we've all been a little bit like him. I certainly have, given that I once ran an AD&D® game in which I gave away Captain America's shield in one of the treasure hoards. It's a terrifying thought, but there's a little of Bob in all of us.

Cheers to you, Bob, and best of luck with the empire. It would be a dull galaxy without you.

Roger Moore

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Cultivating Campaign Cultures





Societies should have character, too!

by Buck Deason Holmes

Artwork by Jim Holloway

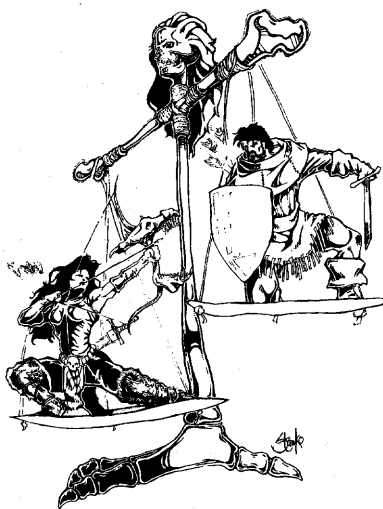
Tales of far-off foreign lands and exotic cultures have always interested fantasy and science-fiction fans. The elves of Middle-earth, the Fremen of Arrakis, and the Klingon Empire are all examples of popular alien societies. These societies intrigue fans because they each have a unique, specific culture. These cultures go beyond the physical description of the people and the function of the society in the story, giving their respective races character.

A DM can enhance a campaign by recreating this exotic feel in the cultures of her campaign world. Whether one plays in a homegrown campaign or in one of the published settings, giving character to foreign lands and people adds variety to the game and increase the excitement of a role-playing adventure.

Getting started

The first step in developing a people's culture is examining the game's rule books. Many such books have very helpful sections on life and culture. Some of the best for the AD&D® game are the 1st Edition game's *Oriental Adventures* book, the 2nd Edition game's *AL-QADIM™* and *DARK SUN®* campaign sets, and many of the entries in the *Monstrous Compendium*. The D&D® game's *Gazetteers* are the best rules on culture for the D&D game. The *Gazetteers* also work well for the AD&D game and many other fantasy RPGs. Steve Jackson Games has some very interesting cultural material in its *GURPS* Japan* and *GURPS Supers I.S.T.* rule books.

These books provide the basic information about societies that a DM needs, but the DM should take it one step further. For example, the *Monstrous Compendium* states that stone giants are "crude artists, painting scenes of their lives on the walls of their lairs and on tanned hide scrolls." By describing or drawing the art of a clan of giants, a DM could add character to the whole species. What would stone giants draw? If these giants are like most primitive peoples, they would draw pictures of hunting and the performance of rituals. They might draw pictures of their gods and mythological heroes. Their great



height would make their worldview different from a human's and their art would reflect that difference. A PC might see a picture of a giant moving through an orchard as we would move through a field of wheat. Stone giants probably would not have a heroic portrayal of a story like David and Goliath.

The following sections give tips on how to portray the character of a culture. Like a writer showing a culture in a work of fiction, a DM needs to add significant details about a society in a game world. These details must enrich the story and be interesting to the players. These details should be dropped into the game while maintaining the flow of the plot. The aspects of culture given here are examples of interesting details that can be easily worked into the game. While the focus is on the AD&D system, the principles here can apply to any RPG.

Language

Since most role-playing is verbal, portraying a society's language is the easiest and most powerful way to highlight a society's culture. Imagine a typical gaming session. The players have just settled down and the DM begins the adventure:

"While at the local tavern, a dwarf walks up to the party. He is wearing plate armor

and a sable cloak. He has a warhammer at his side. On his face is a look of grim determination. As he approaches, he says, 'Yo, hey guys, wanna go kill us some zombies?'"

The above scene would have been more interesting if the dwarf had spoken like a dwarf. If he had said, "Well met" rather than "Yo," or if he had greeted them in Dwarvish, the scene would have sounded much better. By dropping or changing some words, phrases, or the word order in a sentence, a DM (or a player, for that matter) can make a character and its culture more vivid to the imagination. Just one or two such words in a given encounter is enough. Remember how Yoda, from the *Star Wars* films, used a different sentence structure when he spoke.

Good words to translate into a native language include hello, goodbye, yes, no, orders ("attack," "do it," "attention"), terms of endearment (lover, friend, etc.) and my personal favorite, insults. A defiant orc prisoner is less impressive if he calls a character a "moron" than if he were to use an orcish word, especially if the PC doesn't know exactly what the orc just called him. I think orcs would have many creative insults.

Accents can work just as well. If you have the voice for it, add an accent. Give those barbarian highlanders a brogue (like the Scots). Nonhuman creatures would speak with an accent due to differences in body structure. It would be hard for tusked humanoids, such as a bugbear or hobgoblin, to pronounce "F" and "V." Thus, a hobgoblin might say "hight" instead of "fight," and so on.

As there are several vernaculars of English, the Common tongue also could change from place to place. People from different areas would speak differently and have their own special slang. This diversity might be even greater in most campaign settings than in the real world. In an SF setting, the language would be diversified because of the distance of planets and the great population in the galaxy. A more primitive setting would not have the technology (TV, radio, easy transportation, etc.) to keep the language uni-

fied. During the Middle Ages, it was very common for units of measurement to be different in each town. This diversity caused problems for merchants and visitors. Adventurers might suffer from the same breakdowns in communication.

Possessions

Every society creates unique equipment, art, and gadgets. The material possessions of a culture are great points of description for a DM. A DM can easily work these items into a game by putting them on NPCs and with treasure. A man from a distant Renaissance country might have a pocketwatch or a printed book. Some islanders might wield shark-toothed clubs. A party would be amused (or disgusted) if they found a kobold grooming kit.

An item might have significance to the PCs because of its function (an arquebus, for example) or because of its cultural significance (a totem that shows the wearer to be friendly). Those characters interested in combat would be intrigued by different weapons and armors, Potions, medicinal herbs, spell components, spelunking equipment, climbing gear, and widgets like Chinese (or gnomish) puzzle-boxes are highly prized items that PCs could come across. Since we are talking about fantastic realms, a culture could produce truly amazing items. For example, a tribe of mountain dwellers could make hang-gliders or skis.

Smaller, less important items such as totem figures, good luck charms, clothing, art objects, and tools can add color and interest role-players. A character who is a farmer might visit a far-away city in order to find new tools. A money-hungry party might trade in a form of artwork (drow spider-web sculpture, for example) that is rare or unheard of in their land but quite common in other areas.

When one of my characters visits a new place, I have her try to get an item that is unique to that area so I can remember where that character has been. My notes are often reduced to a list of equipment. I must confess that this makes it easy for me to brag as I talk about where my character has been while I describe what she has on her.

Sustenance

One of the most important aspects of a society is its food. A DM should tell the players what their characters are eating. Better yet, the DM could *show* the players. A little food can add flavor (ahem) to the game and focus the players into making their characters more three-dimensional.

An example of the power of cooking is from my own campaign world of Nmumu. Because of the availability of peppers and chocolate in the land of Andapostahd, a group of primitive tribesmen called the Trorro have a unique diet. While most of my players would not eat the dish most favored by the Trorro (beef soaked in pepper sauce with chocolate milk), that

dinner gave them something to talk about. That meal also gave the Trorro a lot of character. Any encounter with the Trorro will include an invitation to dinner—a dinner that the characters graciously refuse: The dish did a lot more than make a group of tribesmen unique; it gave the PCs insight to the fauna and flora of the area. It also gave us something to laugh about.

Food could be very important if a society's eating habits are rather bizarre. An event similar to the "chilled monkey brains" dinner scene in *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* could easily be incorporated into any RPG adventure set in an exotic land. If a group of people have built up a resistance to poison or disease present in the food they eat, the PCs might be in danger because of the meal arrangements. Better yet, the PCs might be the dinner arrangements:

"This stew is very good, Tshani. What is it called?"

"Camro-chi."

"Camro-chi, huh. What's in it?"

"Oh, potatoes, onions, an herb called ydonna, and elf meat."

The next time they come to visit Tshani and his tribe, the party had better not bring their elf buddy along.

Food of a more appetizing nature is still interesting. Attempt to invent a new food, beverage, or spice for a place, or find a rare, archaic recipe from medieval times. Also, foreign restaurants are neat places to eat at before a game. Order some kafta or lamajun before playing in the AL-QADIM setting. It is easy for the stomach to lead than the mind.

Customs

Every culture has laws and social practices. These customs are very important to the people of a society and help define who they are. In a game, these customs are great tools for generating adventures. A custom can cover just about anything and can come from a number of sources. Some customs are considered trivial while others are regarded as mandatory rules of behavior. Breaking a taboo or not following the social norms could result in a PC being attacked or just being made fun of as a "barbarian."

The strongest customs are the stern commandments based on the laws of the local deity or the legal codes (orcs might have a law against killing the priests of Luthic). Less important are the rules based on profane philosophy and superstition (those same orcs might believe killing small furry animals on dead logs during the full moon is bad luck). Finally, every group has codes of etiquette and courtesy (the orcs might think that it is rude to pick at or try to heal other people's wounds).

All customs can be thought of as rules ("We don't do that here") but this is not always the best way to look at them. For example, a character's name is determined in part by the society into which that

character was born. A list of customary names based on a culture is a quick and easy way to add realism to the game. It also cuts out characters with names like Bart the Bugbear.

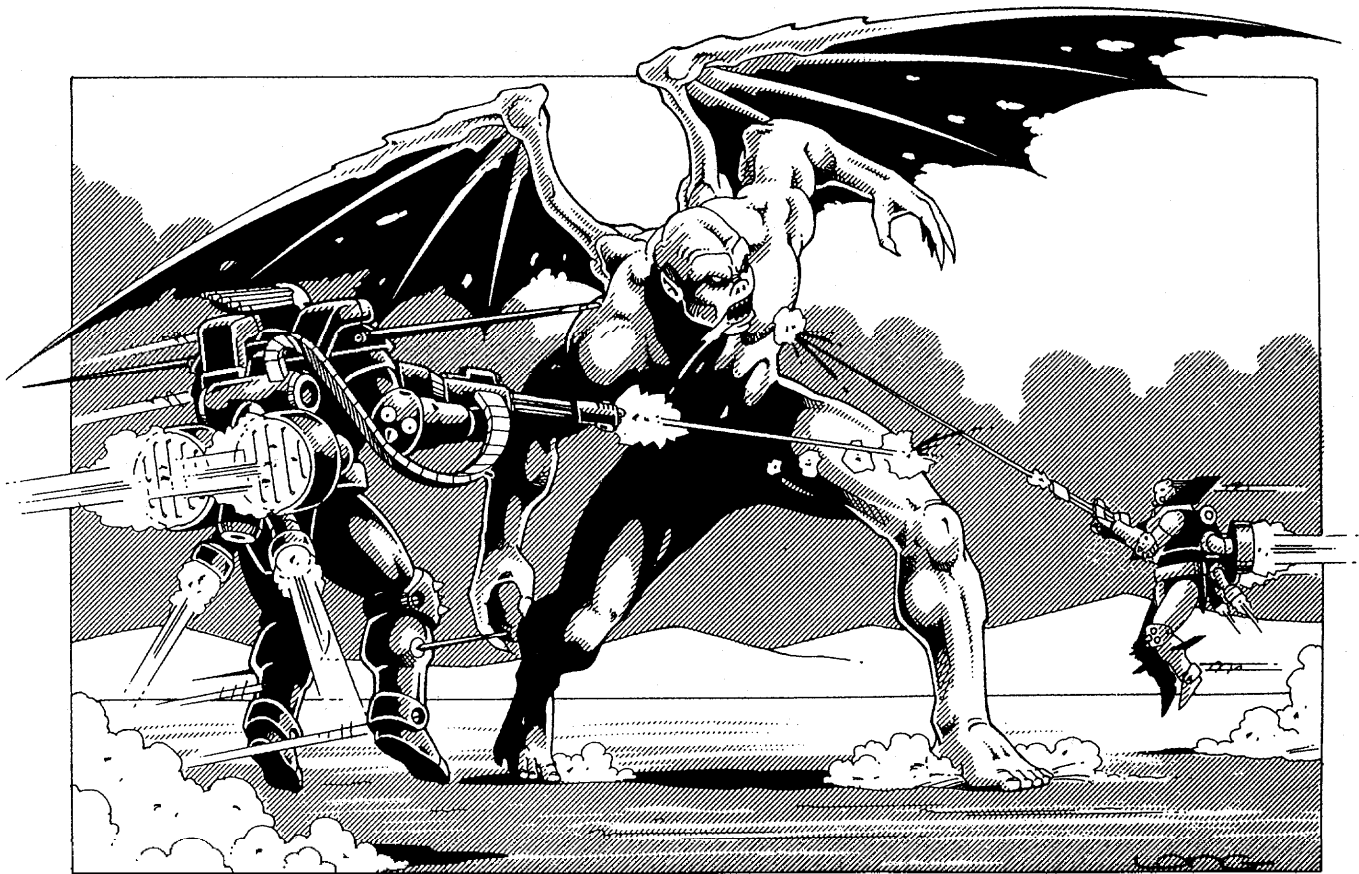
Chart A is a list of some customs that might effect a society's reaction to a PC. A DM could pick a few customs, either by random roll or by choice. After the DM determines the custom, he then rolls on Chart B to determine the severity of the custom. The number in parentheses is the modification on reaction (see the *DMG*, page 102). The character gets the penalty for a difficult custom (i.e., a result of 1-3 on chart B) if that character succeeds in fulfilling the expectations of that custom. The character receives the bonus for a custom that must be obeyed (i.e., a result of 6-10 on chart B) if that character fails to follow that custom. Of course, the penalty or bonus are only applied to individuals who saw the behavior and who care about the custom.

Example: The party is about to enter the territory of a tribe of primitive men who might be enemies. The DM has rolled a 61 for Chart A, so this tribe values the search for fame and fortune—i.e., adventure. He then rolled a 3 on Chart B. Thus, the tribe believes that only very noble people have the courage to seek out adventure. The traveling party is going to be highly regarded by these people because the PCs are strong and brave enough to leave safety and comfort in search of fame and riches.

Knowing the customs of a people can help a player fit into or rebel against a culture. If he wanted, for some reason, to fit into orcish society he might attempt to follow those rules listed above. The DM could then arrange a situation where the PC wants his character to kill a priest of Luthic. Now, the player has a problem: does his character kill the priest and risk excommunication from the orcish church, or does he follow the commandment, not kill the priest, and have the orcs like him? Conversely, if he knows about orcish etiquette and wants to really annoy an orc chief, he might poke a sore that the orc has (if he can stomach it).

A lawful society generally will have more rules than a chaotic one. Even chaotic societies would still have customs, though. A tribe of free-spirited barbarians might shun the PC who won't have "a friendly brawl" with them. These barbarians even could have strict punishments for such crimes as kidnapping and slavery.

As in real life, characters who can fit into a society can work better in it than those who do not fit. If swearing is considered very bad behavior in a town, the character who watches his mouth will get more help from the locals. The character who swears up a storm will have a hard time finding any compassion. Indeed, the townspeople might give the "nice, polite fellow" discounts on equipment and hints on how to defeat the bandits that are on



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the nearby highway, but they might not provide vital medicines to “that trash-talker”

Customs can create many adventures while providing a vivid image of a people. A character might be banished or even attacked if he breaks these rules. Perhaps the party uses one of these laws to escape from some enemy who has the upper hand (“I challenge you in single combat for the lives of my friends”). Customs might interfere with combat. Medieval knights (circa 1200 A.D.) could only fight from dawn Monday to sunset Wednesday; all other times were days of peace. Cavaliers, paladins, and other noble warriors might have similar limitations. Certainly the army from a town of Dumathoin worshipers would not fight on the new moon, although they wouldn’t tell you that. These are the best kinds of details, as they simultaneously add dimension to the game world and the plot.

Philosophy

Characterizing a people involves thinking about their motivations and values. The culture’s outlook on the world is very important. What do they think of strangers? What do they think of adventuring or war? Do they value personal honor or material comfort? Not only should the big things be asked, but the little things as well. What do they think of taverns or gems? If a society believes that only thieves have excellent manual dexterity, think of the ramifications of a bard who juggles in the attempt to charm a crowd. One little detail can cause a people to hate, fear, love, or admire a party of adventurers.

This difference in viewpoints could be taken to very bizarre limits. A society of sentient oozes would have a very different culture. So, too, would very bizarre life-forms such as treants and myconids. Extraterrestrial cultures also would be very different. If those sentient oozes were from another planet, they could have a technology based on liquids and a philosophy based on nonresistance (i.e., go with the flow). These creatures would have very different witticisms based on their viewpoints. Phrases such as, “That’s a sweet pill to absorb,” or “You’re just banging your sense-orbs against the wall,” might be common.

Conclusion

The ideas listed above can be applied to any society, race, religion, or location. Because of the emphasis many fantasy RPGs put on races and religions, most players think of societies in those terms, but two groups with the same religion, race, alignment, and economy could be drastically different, especially concerning the nuances of their culture.

When presenting a culture, one needs to be careful not to add too much detail. A DM who mentions every part of a culture is going to bore the party very quickly. The

cliche, “Leave them hungry for more,” applies here. The campaign generally works better if the PCs take a strange culture and run with it. Let them ask the questions and tell them about the things that interest them. Don’t be afraid to improvise if they ask about something you haven’t created. One can logically apply what one has done to other aspects of the culture. Remember that a big custom or habit can have ramifications on very small things. A stoic society is not going to have humorous plays performed in the streets or cute pictures of animals on children’s clothing.

When designing cultures, a DM should be as logical as possible without jeopardizing having fun.

Chart A

d100 Custom *

01-05	Always show honor in battle. When facing an opponent one should fight face-to-face and never use poison, oil, or magic.
06-08	<i>Help (by force, if need be) your peers to do what is good and proper for the society</i>
09-12	Observe proper manners at the dinner table. Follow the rituals and eat the right amount of food. Discuss only proper topics while at the table.
13-18	Be polite to your peers and show respect for your superiors. Humble yourself before leaders. Always show courtesy. Sacrifice your pleasure if need be.
19-21	<i>Be serious and stoic. Never tease others. Laughing is very rude.</i>
22-25	Never eat or kill a certain animal (crickets, mockingbirds, the tribe’s totem animal, etc.).
26-29	<i>Always accept/give presents.</i>
30-32	<i>Show your anger: Let your hatred drive you.</i>
33-36	<i>One gender must be subservient to the other. The inferior gender is not capable of rational thought and must be “guided.”</i>
37-41	<i>All property is public. If you are holding an item, you own it. Someone else can use the items that you don’t need.</i>
42-45	<i>Gender lines must be definite. Men should look and act like men; women should look and act like women.</i>
46-49	Holidays are important. Rituals and sacrifices must be done at the proper time. Certain actions cannot be committed during the holidays.
50-53	Always keep your word, even if it means your death.
54-56	Music is sacred. Only certain people can sing certain songs. Some music is taboo and must not be played.
57-60	<i>The group is everything. The individual’s life is secondary.</i>

61-64	<i>Make a name for yourself Seek out fame and fortune.</i>
65-68	The family is important. Know your genealogy and family history. Seek a good name for your family.
69-72	Certain skills or occupations can be known only by certain people. Only those certified may have those proficiencies.
73-76	Certain possessions can only be owned by certain people. Do not have these items in your possession if you are not authorized to own them.
77-79	<i>Do not stand out. Act and look like everybody else.</i>
80-83	Do not touch, associate, or look at those who are not in your caste. Keep them separated from us.
84-86	<i>Degrade and humiliate yourself at every possible opportunity</i>
87-89	<i>Never forget that you are guilty Tell people what you are doing. Keep no secrets.</i>
90-92	<i>Only those of the community are allowed full privileges. Foreigners should be watched and their movements limited. To be a part of the community, one must have a native name and occupation.</i>
93-96	<i>Every item should be ornate and decorated. Common items should be aesthetically pleasing.</i>
97-00	Let everybody live as they like. Oppose no one and do not judge.

* Those customs in italics are reversible if the DM so chooses.

Chart B

1d10 Importance

1	Only paragons of virtue are able to fulfil the expectations of the custom (-4 on reactions).
2-3	It takes a very noble soul to fulfill the expectations of this custom (-2).
4-5	This is an old custom that is outdated. Most people don’t live by that custom any more. It is ignored by all except the most conservative and the very old (0).
6-7	Not following the custom is rude and tasteless. A breach of etiquette, to be sure, and a sign of trouble, but the person might be brought to understand (+1).
8-9	Only rude and malevolent people engage in such behavior (+3).
10	Only villains practice such behavior. These beings must be driven out or killed. Protect the children and old people. Pray for deliverance (+5). Ω

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The Art of Storytelling

The GM's challenge: creating your own role-playing adventures

Artwork By Stephen Schwartz

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Creating your own role-playing adventures is one of the most exciting aspects of being a game master. It is the bread and butter of game mastering and separates the good GMs from the great. Creating a good adventure story is much like writing a good book; there are many similarities between the two that can be explored and used. Here, I'll show you how I construct a story, starting with the bare skeleton of the plot, setting, main characters, and theme, then fleshing it out with the "Big Seven" and other trimmings. I'll use as an example an adventure that I wrote for *White Wolf* magazine called "The Golden Ship," showing the process you go through to create a good story. The adventure was designed for White Wolf's ARS MAGICA* system, but the points made here apply to almost any role-playing game and genre.

The plot is all

As in any story, the plot forms the basic story line along which the action flows. A good plot is very simple, with the complexity in the story being added with the various trimmings. The plot consists of some



obstacle or conflict that the characters in the story must overcome. The obstacle or conflict can be internal or external to the characters, but its resolution forms the backbone of the plot. You should be able to describe the plot in a couple of short sentences; otherwise, you are adding too many trimmings and aren't sticking to the main plot.

In "The Golden Ship," the main plot is as follows: "A group of Tuatha de Dannan have been harassing Norman ships in northern Ireland with a ghost ship made out of gold. The characters hear about this ghost ship and set off to find the ship and capture it for their own use."

As you can see, the plot is pretty simple. The obstacle or conflict in the story is the finding and capturing of the golden ghost ship. We now add to this backbone, and the adventure begins to take shape.

Setting up the setting

The setting for a story is the "stage" upon which all of the action takes place. It is the backdrop against which the unfolding story is told. The setting provides the atmosphere for the story, and it also delineates and sets parameters for the action to come. For instance, if an undersea setting is used, the characters are limited by their magical, technological, or natural abilities to breathe water and move around freely. It is important to describe the setting in detail, for it provides much of the story's reality. Without a good setting, the story lacks much of its impact.

In “The Golden Ship,” I chose northern Ireland in the late 12th century as the setting, mainly because of the Norman invasion of Ireland taking place at that time. The Normans became the protagonists against which the Tuatha de Dannan would defend Ireland, which the myths of Ireland claimed the Tuatha would do. I narrowed the setting down to three spots: the fishing village of Ballyswag, where an old man could be found who had seen the ghost ship; Malin’s Head, a rock formation further down the coast under which the Tuatha lived; and the homestead of Jorga, a Firbolg, even further down the coast.

These three locales formed the crux of my setting. I decided that Ballyswag would be an isolated fishing village that shunned outsiders. Malin’s Head would be a barren, desolate rock inside which could be found a beautiful faerieland. Jorga’s home was a simple farm built along the coast.

The main characters

With the setting complete, I chose the main characters in the adventure. Of course, your players provide most of the main characters, but your nonplayer characters also fill a few of these roles. The main characters are those whose actions have a significant effect on the outcome of the story. They are the people you get to know well and who spend a good deal of the story in the limelight.

In my story, I needed only a few main characters. Obviously, Jorga the Firbolg would be a main character, since his home was one of the three parts of the setting. To this I added Tanya, a librarian from Dublin who has an interest in the sightings of the golden ship and takes this information to the players’ wizard characters. The old man in Ballyswag plays a major role as a source of information on where the golden ship hides during the daytime, since he is the sole person alive who has seen the ship. The head of the Tuatha de Dannan, Danea, plays a pivotal role in whether the characters obtain the golden ship or not, and the ship’s undead captain, Sverik the Blue, rounds out the list of main characters who are NPCs.

Placing the theme

The final part of the story’s skeleton is the theme. The theme is the idea that you wish to explore in the story. It brings unity to the story and is explored throughout the story by the actions of the players and the main characters. Even the obstacle or conflict that forms the plot usually resonates with the theme. It is the thread that ties everything together and usually teaches the players something.

In my story, the theme was xenophobia—the fear of those who are different from yourself. In the story, the people of Ballyswag react poorly to anyone who lives outside of their village; the Tuatha de Dannan are riled up against the Normans, who are invading Ireland from beyond; and Jorga is ostracized because of his huge, hideous

appearance. Even the characters were victims of xenophobia, because (in the ARS MAGICA system) they are wizards and live outside of the rules of society and the Church.

As you can see, the theme of xenophobia tied together all the different people in the story. Through the characters’ interactions with the various main characters, they could explore the way xenophobia affected their lives and the lives of the other main characters.

The big seven

Now that we have the backbone of the story, we need to add the flesh to the bones and give the story more substance. The Big Seven are points essential to the telling of a good story, and any good GM will ensure that all seven are represented in each story that they tell. They consist of: action, role-playing, problem-solving, flexibility, discovery, rewards, and a lead. We will examine each of them below and give examples from “The Golden Ship.”

1. Action. Action generally means combat, one of the mainstays of most role-playing games. Action is the part of the story that makes the players sit up on the edge of their seat. Their hearts start to beat faster, their minds whirl with various strategies, and their fear for their characters’ lives is almost palpable. Combat also provides a chance for the characters to work together as a team. Victory in combat is the yardstick against which many campaigns measure their success.

But action doesn’t always have to mean combat. Action can be any part of the story that builds the excitement level of the story. A chase across the rooftops of New York, attempts to control a plunging aircraft, trying to escape pursuing members of the town guard—all of these are examples of action that doesn’t necessarily mean combat.

In my story, there was one main source of action, though several other possibilities existed depending on the actions of the characters. In order to enter the Tuatha’s sidhe (lair), the characters must defeat its guardians—a giant spider and a two-headed mollusk. There is a real possibility that they must battle the undead Sverik and his crew on the golden ship. Combat with Jorga the Firbolg and the Tuatha de Dannan would be avoided, we hope, but the possibility is there nonetheless.

Action should be used by the GM as a means to keep the players’ interest up. It provides the players with an easily quantifiable means to succeed and visually helps them to see how far they have come toward achieving their goal. Action, and combat in particular, should be a part of any story, but you have to avoid using it too much. Used in the right quantities, it can become the climax to a good story; used too often, it becomes just another in a series of hack-and-slash battles. Don’t cheapen the effect of action—use it, but use it sparingly.

2. Role-playing. This member of the Big Seven may seem obvious enough, but you would be surprised how often GMs overlook this one when they design their own stories (sometimes even professional designers fall prey to this one). A role-playing encounter is one in which the players get to role-play their PCs’ personalities and interact with the game world. It is a chance for your players to delve into the world where the story is set, to get to know the main characters in the story. Role-playing is what makes the game into a story. It provides the character development that is so important in the writing of any good tale. Make sure that it becomes an integral part of your adventure design.

In “The Golden Ship,” the characters get a chance to role-play with most of the main characters because the PCs need information from the NPCs to complete their quest. Tanya provides them with the quest to begin with, the old man in Ballyswag needs to be talked to so the characters can narrow their search down to Malin’s Head, and the Tuatha de Dannan must be dealt with in order to obtain the ship. Finally, Jorga must be dealt with on a role-playing level so the theme of the story can be struck home.

3. Problem-solving. Problem-solving is overcoming an obstacle that stands in the characters’ path of success by using brains and wits instead of muscle and weapons. It can consist of something as simple as figuring the best way into the tavern to something as complex as a 100-part riddle that must be solved for the characters to leave a labyrinth. Sometimes problem-solving involves finding a way to get a valuable NPC on your side.

In my story, the first problem is finding the hiding place of the golden ship. Once the characters find out that the ship lies in Malin’s Head, they have to figure out how to get inside. When the ship is found, there is the “small” matter of getting it out of the sidhe, since only the Tuatha can counter the spell that keeps it in the sidhe. And finally, the biggest problem is trying to get the Tuatha to give the characters the ship without killing Jorga the Firbolg, whom the Tuatha want the characters to kill. If the characters get past this problem, they are very good indeed.

4. Flexibility. This is one aspect of creating your own story that many GMs overlook. By giving your players many options as to how they can complete the adventure you have planned, you open a can of worms that requires you to detail many different avenues of the story, just in case the players decide to pick one of the obscure options. It is very tempting to give the players just one path toward success (“I’m sorry, you just have to defeat the red dragon to get the treasure; there’s no other way!”). By giving one path, the



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amount of work you need to put into making the story is reduced manifold. However, the sense of realism will be lost—the players need to feel that the choices their PCs make throughout the adventure actually make a difference between success and failure. There should be more than one way for the characters to accomplish their goal in the adventure, so that the choices they make as the story progresses significantly change the path the story follows.

I ended up with three major options in “The Golden Ship.” The main one involves the characters finding the ship, dealing with the Tuatha de Dannan, and receiving the ship in exchange for Jorga the Firbolg’s head. Of course, this option isn’t very palatable to many players, so I provided them with ways around a “bittersweet victory” that were more difficult but also more satisfying. There was always a chance that the characters could somehow make the deal with the head Tuatha, Danae, and trick him into parting with the ship before the ruse was discovered. Of course, the golden ship could be taken by force when it was out raiding, but a powerful curse on the ship would make this option a very bittersweet victory.

6. Discovery. Adding something new to your game world with each story you run helps it come to life, and it expands the bounds of the “known world” so that it becomes something of awe and grandeur to the players. Players like to discover new things (don’t we all?) and adding them to the story line makes each story something that all the players will look forward to. The act of discovery is one of the traits that separates humans from the animals, so use it to your advantage when you are crafting your stories.

When I ran “The Golden Ship,” the story added many new things to our campaign. The Tuatha de Dannan and the Firbolgs were both new to our saga. Our troupe had yet to explore northern Ireland, so the addition of Ballyswag and Malin’s Head gave us some reference as to what existed up in the wild north. And, of course, the golden ship itself provided a powerful new magical item that would become a mainstay in our stories for years to come; it had a definite impact on the campaign.

6. Rewards. Rewards offer your gaming group a tangible means to measure success. Many times a reward means money, jewelry, and magical items—things that the players can count, see, and feel. But rewards can also take the shape of something less tangible but just as pleasing, such as a valuable ally won, an old nemesis defeated, or a powerful threat thwarted. Rewards are what a successful group garners for its victories, so you must make sure that your story contains them. Usually this isn’t a problem for most GMs. What does tend to happen, though, is that GMs try to overcompensate their

players by giving them too many rewards for their successes, and thus is born what we refer to as a “Monty Haul campaign”—a campaign where riches and rewards are given away much like they did in the old “Let’s Make a Deal” game show (“And behind door number two, we find . . .”). Make your rewards less money oriented and more intangibly oriented, such as giving the group the aid of a ghost’s advice rather than a haul of golden coins. Both are useful, but the ghost is more interesting and, nicely enough, remains in the GM’s control, so its effect on the campaign can be constantly regulated.

Funny as it may seem, my initial reason for writing “The Golden Ship” was to provide my gaming group with money that it desperately needed, not to give away a magical item with the power of the golden ship. As the story evolved, the money became such a minor part of everything that I put it in the hold of the ship and made the golden ship one humongous treasure trove (but one which would be very hard to win). Of course, the characters could make a number of very powerful allies (the Tuatha and Firbolgs, with the possibility of having Sverik and his undead raiders joining the character’s side) and a number of less powerful ones (Tanya the librarian and the people of Ballyswag). There is also information to be had from many of the main characters, and information can sometimes be just as rewarding as gold pieces.

7. A lead. Finally, you should include leads to future stories when you are crafting your story. Leads make the world seem that much bigger, since things are obviously happening around the characters that don’t have any bearing on the quest they are currently engaged in. The adventures that the characters embark on will seem like an integral part of the world, something that didn’t suddenly appear for their amusement but which existed in the universe before they came across it. Thus, everything seems more real. Besides, it makes the characters seem much more in control of things when they can decide which adventure they want to go on next (“Hey, guys, remember that rumor we heard in the tavern in Highport?”). By weaving the lead into your story, you can introduce the stories that you want the characters to see without making them feel like they are being forced from one story to the next just because that is what you’ve prepared for that week.

In my story, the capture of the golden ship itself could lead to many future stories, depending exactly on how it was obtained. The Firbolgs could come to avenge Jorga’s death, other Tuatha might try to get the ship back, and even the Normans might try to avenge the loss of their ships. On a more mundane level, I put a captain’s log in the ship’s hold that chronicled the exploits of Sverik the Blue;

it provided kernels of stories that the characters could follow up on.

The trimmings

Now that you have the skeleton of the story fleshed out with the Big Seven, you are ready to add the trimmings. These are little things, peripheral details if you will, that add a sense of realism that will have your players coming back for more.

In addition to the main characters, throw in a number of minor personalities to round things out, make the world seem more alive, and mask the importance of the main characters until the players discover the truth for themselves. Minor personalities can be anyone, from a bar-keeper to the wilderness guide the characters hire to the two orcs guarding the dungeon gate. If you can make these bit parts come to life, your stories will be much more exciting, just as a great movie contains many small characters with memorable lines.

Also, try to bring in ties to the adventure from the past. An old nemesis who shows up, either as a main part of the story or as a sidelight, will tie your various role-playing stories together and, again, make the world seem that much more large and real. A long-lost relative spotted at an inn that the characters stop at on their way through town adds a certain depth to the story that the players will appreciate.

Finally, a few side episodes that have nothing to do with the main plot will spice things up and keep the players guessing as to what is important and what isn’t. A pickpocket attempt, rescuing a child from the bottom of a well, and perhaps a side journey to visit a shrine where a saint is said to have been sighted are all little episodes that keep the world spinning and alive.

Final touches

Your story is now set. You have the skeleton of the plot, setting, main characters, and theme fleshed out by the Big Seven and touched up by the trimmings. The only thing you need now is to bring everything to life, and that is where your characters come into play. They are that spark of life that will make your story pulse with life. Like Dr. Frankenstein, you have created a masterpiece, but your players will make that masterpiece live. You now have the knowledge to write your own stories. Remember to think of adventure writing as story writing and follow all of the same conventions, and you will be pleasantly surprised at the depth and realism, the excitement and intensity, and the pure pleasure you can derive from writing and running your own adventure stories. Ω

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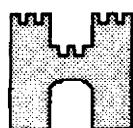


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Organization

And in role-playing games,

by Richard Hunt

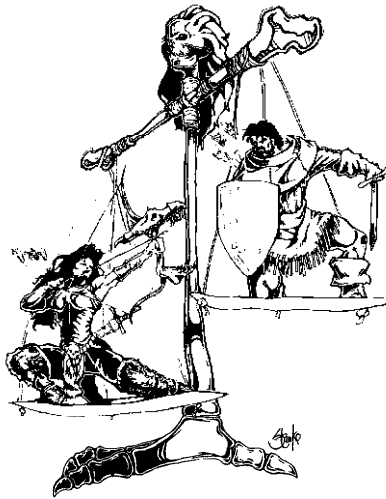
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One commonly overlooked aspect of successfully mastering any fine role-playing game is the ability to organize the game itself. This entails every 'aspect of the game, from the rules right down to the paperwork that keeps it running from session to session. A badly disorganized game master is a frustrating sight, especially for the players; it can utterly crush their confidence and respect for his ability to run a successful and enjoyable game. A GM who fumbles through piles of rule supplements, forgets crucial playing materials, or loses important information from session to session eventually ruins the continuity of the game. He eventually becomes frustrated and impatient with the effort, as well as the hard criticism of his players, at which point he must either give in or . . . get organized!

Before deciding to get organized, the GM should be sure he really has time to master the game. A lack of time could be the real cause of the disorganization. As we all know, GMs are people, too. If lack of time is the problem, the best thing to do is keep the game as simple as possible. Restrict the use of supplementary material, avoid the use of house rules, or play a little less frequently. This cuts down on the amount of game material the GM must learn and gives him more time in which to prepare. Frankly, playing a simple version of the game is better than not playing at all.

The players can also handle some tasks. In fact, turning over select tasks to members of the group is another good way to find the time for a quality game. Really enthusiastic players, typically those who keep adventure logs, remember past sessions with great clarity, or have a passion for rules accuracy, can often be phenomenal at keeping track of party-related information, freeing the GM for other functions.

Organization is otherwise a very practical matter. Knowing where to put everything is the first step; keeping it there is the second. This article suggests several methods for doing just that, for the



AD&D® game as well as other fantasy role-playing games.

Organizing the rules

The first task every GM must tackle is organizing the rules. Many game systems present the GM with several optional rules systems, even in the basic rule book. Such is the case with the AD&D 2nd Edition *Player's Handbook* and *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Supplements and additional references may also enter the market as time goes on, and these can pile up—even contradict one another—unless the diligent GM stays on top of them. Decide early on what optional rules you are going to use. Upon buying a new supplement, read it and decide what sections you plan to use in the same manner. Write up a list of all optional rules or mark them in the books. I highly recommend the use of Post-It Notes or easy-stick labels so you can change your mind later. Be sure to inform the players of your selections, allowing them to make the same marks in their own rule books as well. Be flexible and allow the players to voice their objections or suggest changes. In the end, this gives you something to point to when a player declares his intention to use an optional rule you may have disallowed.

Many GMs also have house rules. Write these down somewhere and place them in the rule book or a notebook with other materials. If there are a substantial number of house rules, consider writing up a small pamphlet of them to copy and distribute. New players are especially appreciative of being apprised of all house rules from the start.

Material from game magazines (such as this one) can present a special problem

The best solution is to decide which new rules to include. Be very selective and avoid using every new rule or article. Photocopy the table of contents from every issue of relevant magazines and the articles themselves. Place all of them in a loose-leaf notebook, in date or issue order. Plastic tabs may even be used to separate articles on different subjects, particularly new magical items, weapons, spells, monsters, and procedures. Granted, this is a great deal of trouble, but it could be worth it once you have established a system.

A good way to avoid all this is through the use of a computer database; it can be used to create an index of the articles you plan to use sorted by subject matter. Simply print out a listing of the articles you plan to use after updating it each month. I am in the process of converting from photocopies to a data base—it's highly recommended. Of course, this requires that the magazines be on hand during play, perhaps on a nearby shelf.

Once all this is done, physically separate the rule books you intend to use from the ones you don't; this includes house rules and article notebooks. Place all of the relevant ones on a shelf near your writing desk, computer, or wherever you plot each game session, for quick and handy reference. It is also important to keep books from other systems, old editions, magazines, boxed sets, board games, and modules separate. Many of these can still be valuable reference materials, but the core rule books are of higher priority. Separating the rule books solidifies in your mind which references are most important; it also allows you to just grab them all when moving to the play area without having to sort through them every time you play.

Organizing the game world

Once the game rules are organized, the game world material is next. The first step here depends on the game world. If the game world is a commercial product, your task is relatively simple; just put all materi-

is Everything

ve do mean *everything*!

als detailing the world in the original box, placing any supplements next to it. Place this right next to the organized rules on your shelf. Read them often and become very familiar with where specific information (history, politics, etc.) is located. If optional rules have been introduced with a particular world, mark these as you would basic rule books and supplements.

All world maps should be framed (poster frames are inexpensive) and hung or pinned up in the play area if at all possible. Poster frames are really a must, since you can write on them with markers without marring the maps. Leaving the maps in the box does not allow you to become familiar with them. If a world atlas is available (such as with TSR's FORGOTTEN REALMS® and DRAGONLANCE® settings), then by all means use it instead. Atlases tend to be more detailed, highly portable, and by far easier to use than posters. I have seen more than one GM attempt to navigate the party's course on fold-out maps, throw up his hands in disgust, and toss the whole mess on the floor!

The GM should then set about making changes to the world. Just because you bought the game world does not mean that you can't do a bit of judicious pruning. You bought it—it's yours. Take out the things you really hate and add anything you wish. Change the names of places, people, historical events, gods, or anything else, all to suit you. It may even be necessary to make up a few things that the designers failed to develop. For instance, I have found that almost no one includes a world calendar! You could even go so far as to add new cities and develop areas that remain purposefully undeveloped. All major additions should be detailed in writing. Place such information in another loose-leaf notebook or in the boxed set. In this particular case, tell the players only the most obvious changes you've made; let them slowly discover the rest—those parts of the game world that are of your invention. Players who read game-world materi-



al and know it backward and forward will be foiled as well. Do as much or as little as you think needs to be done. If you're satisfied with everything on the whole, don't do anything—it's that simple.

Organizing your own game world is very time-consuming but extremely rewarding. How you develop this world is up to you. First, however, take a look at commercial game worlds for examples of what to do and *what not to do*. A good friend of mine bought a game world, made a ton of photocopies, bashed it with sweeping changes, then discovered that every commercial adventure set on that game world was tens of thousands of miles away from every other adventure requiring great amounts of travel, hundreds of random encounters, or magical explanations for how the party managed to get on the other side of the world! Needless to say, he gave up and moved on to another world, all the wiser.

The real key to beginning is to start with only the basics. This might include world history, the seasons, phases of the moon(s), mythology and gods, kingdoms and politics, geology, wildlife, and ecology. The GM has a unique opportunity to perform many tasks without mastering any of them; he is often expected to be a biologist, meteorologist, geologist, astrologer, historian, political scientist, and artist, to name just a scant few. Players often ask the strangest questions, and the best you can do is be organized enough to know where the answer might be, particularly when the question is about your world. The *AD&D Campaign Sourcebook/Catacomb Guide* is an excellent source of general tips, ideas, and information for *any* game system.

Keep in mind that your game world will *never* be complete. World-building is a very time-consuming process, sometimes lonely (unless you enlist aid), and often unappreciated. If you can live with all of that, then you are probably suited to the task of organizing a beautiful new game world. Unfortunately, no one can tell you how to organize it. Each world is unique in style and its organization depends on the individual. The only surety is that it *must* be organized in the same way that a painting must be painted. Seeking multiple examples is really the best way to decide how your world must be made and ordered.

The GM's notebook

Once the rules and game world are organized, the GM should decide how he wants to organize the day-to-day events of the campaign, the fine details of the characters' lives to come. The GM should put together another notebook to aid in running the campaign from session to session. The organization of this book may vary, but a basic blueprint for this notebook is very necessary; at the very least, it should contain six sections.

The first section should contain the campaign outline. Using standard out-

line format, the GM should write a detailed outline of how the campaign should progress or how an adventure should be introduced. A single outline should generally cover about 3-5 game sessions if possible, and each section should cover a major plot line. A section of a basic outline for an AD&D adventure might look like this:

The Dark Arrow

- A. The heroes have learned that Falcon's Peak is newly inhabited by a tribe of goblins, led by their chief Lorznskik.
- B. They are also aware of the presence of a green dragon, Emer, in the Havenwood, though they have not learned the location of her lair.
 1. An *arrow of dragon slaying* was lost on Falcon's Peak; this information is revealed by the new party member who lost it there, Vaulinon. The party hopes the goblins found the arrow and attacking their lair will yield it.
 2. The goblins do have the arrow, but are unaware of its nature. It is a "needle in a haystack" of tribal arrows.
- C. The party attacks Falcon's Peak and retrieves the arrow. They return to the city in preparation for the confrontation with the green dragon.
- D. The characters travel to the Havenwood, where they discover the location of the old dragon's lair from a pair of slightly green-tinted (from exposure to chlorine gas) ogres. After they interrogate the ogres, the heroes go to the lair.
- E. The heroes kill the green dragon with a successful shot—or they are in deep trouble!

Subplots, such as the appearance of a rival party seeking to gain the arrow, can be planned as well. The main thing to keep in mind is that this outline details what *should* happen, not what *will* happen. The party may decide to sell the arrow or ignore the adventure hooks altogether. That's why the GM should have other outline sections to fall back on. The outline is only a very loose script, and the GM should treat it as such.

The second section of the notebook should contain a very simple campaign calendar upon which to mark the passage of the days of the year, keep track of the current date, and write in small notes. A calendar with twelve months should be divided into four pages, three months to a page, with at least one square inch per day for notes (graph paper is excellent in this regard). At the end of a session, the time of day can be written in for the current date. This section helps keep track of time and events between sessions.

The next section should contain all of the campaign's major nonplayer characters. This can be a very thick section of notebook paper, computer printouts of all NPCs (one to a page), or the like. Index cards are really too small to keep very

good track of NPCs. Computer users can also include a list of all NPCs in the section for quick reference.

The fourth section should contain information on the player characters, including (using the AD&D game as an example) their names, classes, levels, races, hit points, proficiencies, or any other relevant information. The most important part of this section is the magical-item listing, which contains a list of all magical items for each PC. This serves two purposes: First, the GM can gauge the level of magic in the campaign, whether there is too much (i.e., Monty Haul) or not enough (i.e., Uncle Scrooge). He can also keep track of information that should be secret, such as magical charges, unknown functions, command words, and the special status of particularly harmful items (*cursed* items, *rings of delusion*, and sentient weapons). An item should have a question mark by it if it has not been fully identified by its owner. Again, a computer is ideal for keeping track of such things.

The last two sections should contain the adventure and the statistical listing of all monsters in the adventure, respectively. Modules should be photocopied if at all possible, so that sections may be highlighted, struck, or altered as necessary. A plastic sleeve for a three-ring binder (available at office supply stores) can house a fold-out style module. The last section should contain the statistical listings of all monsters in the outline and adventure; thus the goblins, ogres, and green dragon from the outline above would be included in this section, with all hit points pregenerated and ready to go. Hand-drawn or computer-generated forms are equally useful here.

Have campaign, must travel

The final task is to prepare for traveling to the game site, whether it be a dining room twenty paces away, a friend's apartment across town, or a gaming club. Many stores sell plastic containers, cardboard boxes, and other forms of luggage perfect for storing and moving game materials; fishing tackle boxes and cosmetics cases work well. In any case, keeping game materials such as miniature figures, vinyl mats, pens, pencils, dice, scratch paper, calculators, GM's screens, and other effects (trees, rocks, dungeon furniture, etc.) all together, organized, and ready to go on short notice is a necessity.

Using these methods for organizing your game can make as much difference as knowing how to tell a good story or knowing the rules of the game. How can you tell a good story if you don't know where to find it? The same goes for the rules. Players are impressed, at least subconsciously, by a well-organized game. Organizing the game by using these methods can benefit everyone and make the game an event to remember, with an organized GM to thank for it. Ω

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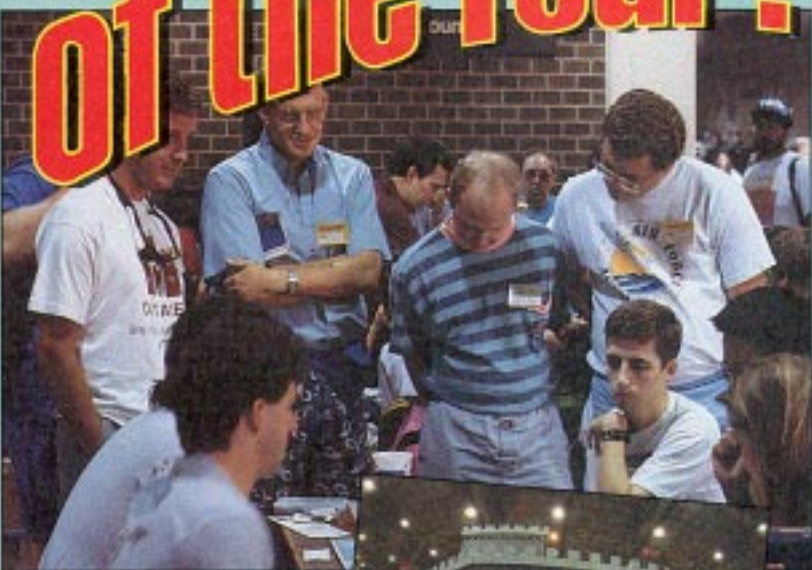
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I wrote these few points after reading "Forum" in DRAGON issue #190.

First, about William D. Sharpe III's comments about getting new players (especially females): I would like to point out that it is difficult to introduce someone to role-playing games if that person is not familiar with fantasy or science fiction. How can you involve a person in a magical setting if he or she does not know about Merlin or Gandalf? Even if that person knows about them, maybe it is not in their field of interest. In my case, though I have been involved in role-playing since 1982 (especially in medieval-like fantasy settings), I still don't feel comfortable gaming in a science-fiction setting, even though I don't miss a new "Star Trek" episode or book.

How do you introduce someone who is new to role-playing into a group? I like Mr. Sharpe's idea about solo adventures, but the group I am with has its own way to integrate someone familiar with fantasy or role-playing into our game. It can be done at a moment's notice, and it works well if those already with the group are familiar with all the game's rules. It could be called "improvisation/training." The new player is coached by one or two other experienced players who explain the basic rules and general setting, and help generate a new, low-level character. The other players dig up ideas for a short adventure in a city or a public place, preferably not a hack-and-slash or a seek-and-destroy situation. When the character is ready, someone acts as game master while others act as PCs, NPCs, or set crew, interacting with the GM and the newcomer within preestablished guidelines. Meanwhile, the new player is free to evolve a character in that setting by speaking and interacting with the PCs and NPCs. Let the player experience the character's life and surroundings; let the player add something to the ongoing plot and make totally unexpected moves (this proves to be a challenge to the

experienced players and adds new dimensions to the game). Often, the player's actions lead to a new series of adventures or can act as the introduction to an already-written module (homemade or store-bought) if everyone is dealing with new PCs. Most of all, the new player is not confronted with a set of rules that can prove to be a big deterrent, and he is put into a lively setting, not some kind of static environment.

Secondly, I would like to tell Cory Dodt [issue #190], with regards to his SSI rules problems, that: "As a DM, you will not be arrested by the TSR police if you do not stick rigidly to the AD&D® official rules" and "Dissension makes for bad evenings."

Since I started playing the AD&D game, I have played with the original rules, the *Unearthed Arcana* ones, the AD&D 2nd Edition ones, and a multitude of rules taken from DRAGON Magazine and the *Best of DRAGON Magazine* anthologies (and I have not started to look into the official rules supplements). Since then, all the groups that I have played with have adapted a common set of rules. Nowadays, that set of rules is made of the ones found in the AD&D 2nd Edition books (*PH* and *DMG*), with some adjustments that make the resolution of encounters and combat more efficient and less chaotic. Those modifications to the official AD&D rules are minor and few. There are other official rules we ignore intentionally because of their bulkiness. The bottom line is that we have great evenings, and that is the most important aspect of any role-playing game, because the rules are tools to the game, not the intent of it. The rules are there to provide a stable base on which we can have 'fun. I understand the frustration associated with the "another DM, another set of rules" syndrome (I experienced that a few times), but I repeat my advice: get a common set of rules, a common way to have fun.

Pierre Lapalme
St. Antoine, Quebec

I'd like to respond to the plea for help from Mr. Dodt in issue #190, regarding his trouble in getting his gaming group to recognize the distinction between the SSI computer games and the AD&D role-playing game. It sounds like you're trying to be too accommodating to player pressure, allowing them to decide how to run the game. As the DM, your word is law and should be final. If you firmly believe the rules you use are better than SSI shortcuts, then you need to stand by your decision.

I fully support your view on emergency bandaging and "death's door" victims. I rule much the same on these matters in my own game. I would, however, like to share with you some elements in my campaign that allow us to avoid some of the problems you seem to be having in yours.

I have never been a staunch supporter of spell components. I believe the components are meant to be somehow symbolic of either the desired effect to be gained from the summoned magical force or the intended recipient of the spell. I've never understood why a symbolic item needs to cost some outrageous sum in gold pieces, or why such components need to be consumed in casting the spell, as if such things as "a tiny ball of bat guano and sulfur" could provide the driving force for a *fireball* (assuming you're not trying to justify this with $E = mc^2$). I mostly dislike heavy dependence on spell components because, from Gandalf to Belgarath, fiddling with powders, silver bells, and dung doesn't fit my image of one mighty in the Will and the Word.

I agree with your interpretation of death from poisoning; *neutralize poison* is a necessary first step before *raise dead* can even hope to succeed. On the other hand, poisons in my game can have an onset time anywhere between three seconds and 15 minutes, depending on the toxin. An Intelligence check by the victim (to recognize odor, taste, or numbing) on initial contact usually allows a chance to use *neutralize poison* to halt damage already in process, or to halt damage before it even begins.

Finally, I'd like to support your ruling on spells upon advancing. Unless the wizards find a teacher (*not* an assembly-line training center) willing to sell their spells in addition to the price of level advancement (usually a quest for items needed in magical-item construction, not money), they're just going to have to make do with what they find in scrolls or steal out of NPC spell books.

My point is: Know what you want. I think it's just as inappropriate to blindly follow the "official" stuff as it is to succumb to the easier SSI streamlined hack-and-slash rules. Compromise can ease pressure, but it won't make you a happy gamer when you find yourself agreeing to follow rules that you don't think are right. Try to reason with your fellow gamers; if you have valid justification for your rulings while they just want it because SSI does it, you'll have a definite advantage. If you need to be heavy handed, tell them if they want to play using the SSI rules, they should stay at home Saturday night and play on the computer. I myself own *SSI Secret of the Silver Blades* and I know how much fun the game can be, but it's no match to true ROLE-playing.

Erik Koppang
Concord NH

I have been playing role-playing games ever since my childhood, and I am still a very avid player. Recently one thing has been troubling me, and that is the fact that as I get older, the more uncomfortable I feel telling people who don't game that I do.

I know that I should not feel this way, because gaming is something that I enjoy immensely, but I am starting to feel as though this alienates me from the rest of society. It seems to me that those who have never played a game like the *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS* game feel it is a child's game, that adults grow out of it.

That has left me with very ambiguous feelings. Do I give up one of the aspects of my life that I love dearly to avoid discomfort trying to

explain why I still game? Or do I disregard the feelings of the uninformed and ignorant, and continue to game in the closet? It is really tough trying to decide between the real world and a fantasy one.

I know this feeling will not go away, because I am unwilling to give up my most beloved of hobbies. I feel sick that the rest of this society does not understand that adults like to become wizards, thieves, or captains of starships. It is a sad reflection of how little is "acceptable" in today's world. After all, isn't the purpose of a hobby to release the stress and pressures of real life? What better way to escape your troubles than to become someone else for a few hours?

In closing, I would like to add a piece of advice to anyone who may feel as I do. You should look around you, see just who is giving you grief about playing role-games, and ask yourself just what type of spell would be best to educate them about what they're missing. Trust me, it is a whole new kind of fun.

Paul Bleiweis
Great Falls VA

Hear! Hear!

I am profoundly glad to read a letter from someone else [Amaryllis Roy, in issue #189] who is angered and alienated by the depictions of women on TSR product covers. As a woman gamer, sometime DM, and employee of TSR for several years, I heartily concur. It's taken a long time, but finally we have made some voices heard.

I have personally objected (in writing) to two pieces of art: the covers of the AD&D products *Unsung Heroes* and *From the Shadows*. In my opinion, if I can see that the female obviously

used a depilatory, I can see too much. Following the releases of these products, a group of women employees here at TSR met to discuss how we can facilitate changes to the presentation of women on our product covers. Time will tell how well we met that challenge.

If you note the artist's name on the pieces you found most objectionable, I'll lay odds it was the same person nine times out of ten. I'll not name names here; you can figure it out for yourselves. For what it's worth, that person is no longer employed by TSR. (His firing had nothing to do with the depiction of women in his paintings, but the outcome was the same: The principal "offender" is no longer here.)

Some years ago, I spoke with a young boy (perhaps 12 or 13) in Los Angeles who asked me why we always had "bikini babes" on the covers, when "real armor" would make so much more sense. I told him that he was the most mature teenager I'd met at that time and agreed completely with him. The difficulty lies in convincing the sales and marketing department that we don't need sex kittens in chain bikinis (or less) on our covers to sell our products. They seem to forget that some of our best sellers—the original FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign setting box, *Drow of the Underdark*, and *Ruins of Undermountain*, to name three—have no women on their covers, semi-nude or otherwise!

Please, those of you reading this, if you are in agreement that women are objectified and thus denigrated on our product covers, write to the company and say so. "Sex sells" has a place in the market, but not when the primary audience (according to our own sales and marketing department) is young teen males. Let your opinions be heard.

On a slightly related note, I must respond to the woman who wrote in saying that (forgive my paraphrasing) she couldn't believe that any women would be interested in DRAGONLANCE products because all the women on the covers were well-endowed. I'm sorry she's decided to judge the books by their covers. I feel it's necessary to let her know that, despite her assertion, the DRAGONLANCE product line has the highest proportion of female readers/gamers of all our lines. The fact that the cover women have what the writer considers to be large breasts isn't the point; the fact that those women characters are strong in their own right, not presented as men's toys or foils, is the drawing card of the saga. I suggest that reader pick up one of the novels and read it, regardless of the looks of the woman on the cover, and I'm quite sure she'll find a set of female characters who can hold a story line on their own.

Thanks to all of you who regularly make "Forum" an exciting, thought-provoking column!

Name withheld by request

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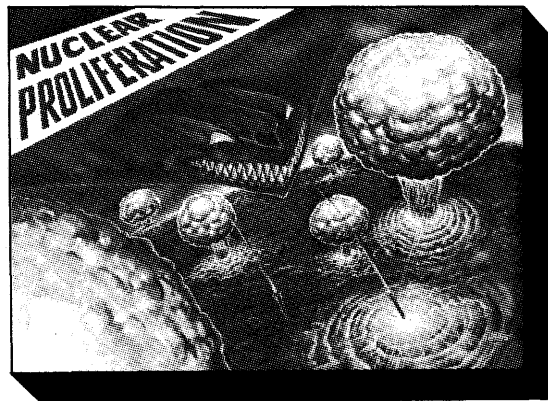
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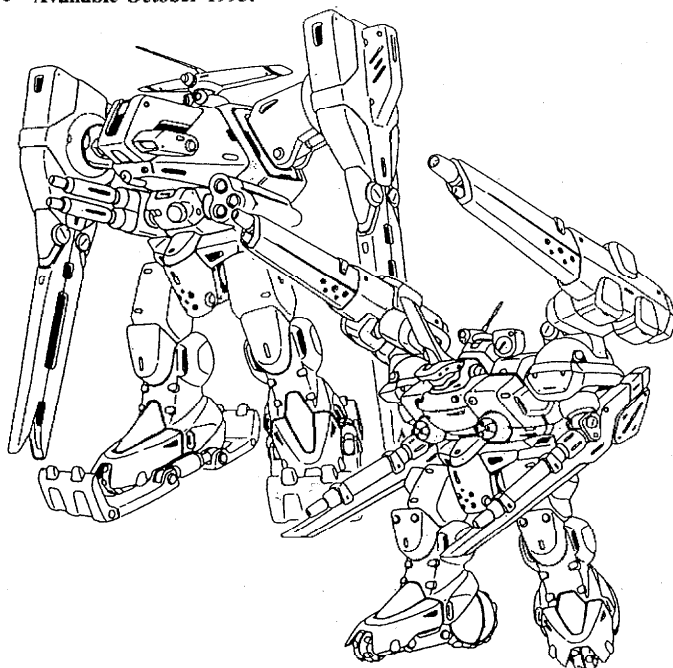
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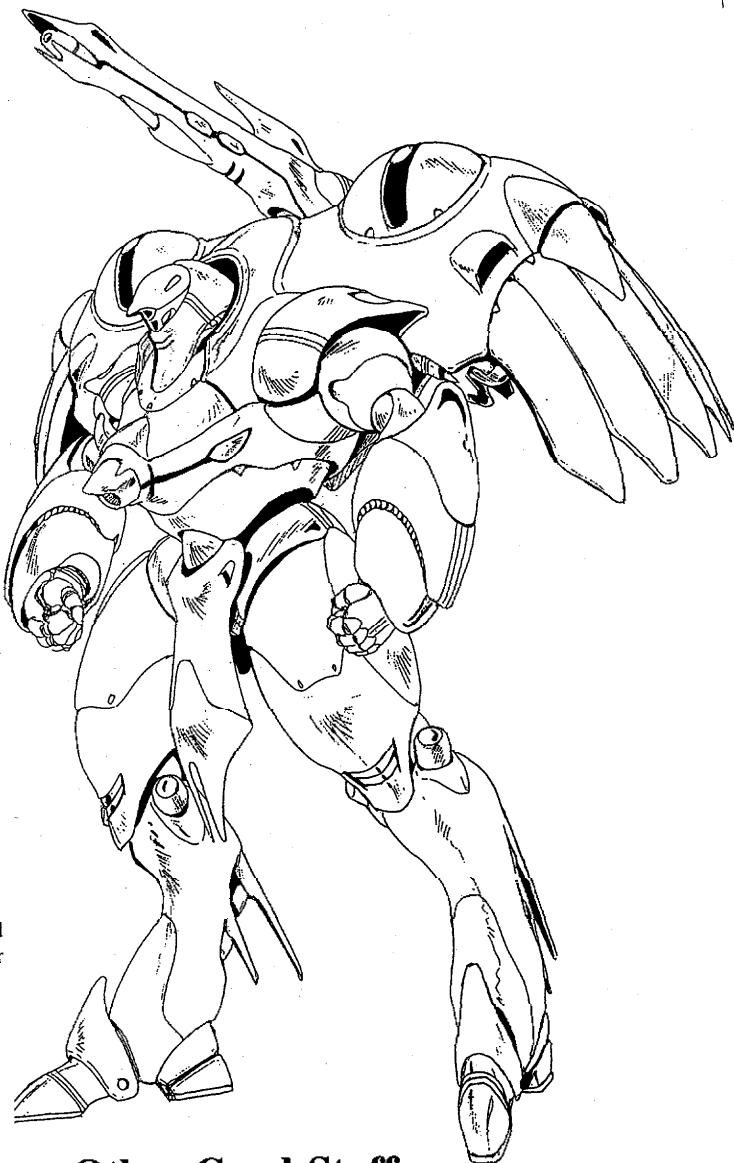
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SAGE advice

by Skip Williams

If you have any questions on the games produced by TSR, Inc., "Sage Advice" will answer them. In the United States and Canada, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON® Magazine, PO. 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).

This month, the sage again digs into his mailbag and pulls out a random assortment of letters. This group contained questions on a number of AD&D® campaign worlds, so join our sage on his tour. Our first stop is in the Domains of Dread.

Since nobody can detect good or evil in the RAVENLOFT® setting, can characters such as paladins keep their powers if they become lawful neutral or even lawful evil? Do clerics have to worry only about Law and Chaos? What happens to magical items that might damage good or evil characters, such as the *libram of gainful conjuration* or intelligent magical weapons? If these items work normally, why couldn't you test someone's alignment just by handing him a good-aligned sword?

Creatures on the Demi-Plane of Dread still have alignments, even though divination magic cannot detect or identify their auras. RAVENLOFT characters are in no way exempt from alignment restrictions. Note also that RAVENLOFT campaign player characters must be very careful about evil actions, as these can cause Ravenloft powers checks, which eventually can transform the character into a DM-controlled creature.

Actions that have consequences dependent on alignment, such as picking up a weapon with the wrong alignment, are unchanged in the RAVENLOFT setting. These arise from the interaction between the character's aura and the item's enchantment—you can't see a brick wall in utter darkness, but it still hurts if you collide with it.

I suppose one could test a character's alignment by tricking him into picking up an aligned sword. All such attempts should be played out, with the DM making sure

that the NPC in question is suitably wary. Note that this kind of testing can be both unreliable and dangerous. For example, if a party finds a magical sword in one of Ravenloft's domains, they have no easy way to check its alignment, even if they handle it themselves. If a sword has a lawful-neutral alignment, any lawful character can handle it safely (see the *Dungeon Master's Guide*, page 187), and the PCs might just arm a lawful-evil adversary. Likewise, a sword with a chaotic-good alignment is dangerous to any character who is not chaotic good. Handing such a weapon to a potentially friendly lawful-good NPC is certain to sour relations.

Why weren't the new spheres of priest spells from the Tome of Magic included in the Tales of the Lance boxed set, and why didn't you include them in your discussion of Krynn deities in issue #190?

As it was, Harold Johnson and the other *Tales of the Lance* authors ran out of room long before they ran out of things to say about Krynn. In fact, nearly a quarter of the original manuscript had to be dropped from the product. A smidgen of this material has seen print in POLYHEDRON® Newszine, and the rest is still awaiting publication. Needless to say, references to the optional material in the *Tome of Magic* were out of the question. I didn't talk about the *Tome of Magic* priest spells in issue #190 because the reader who posed the question about Krynn deities didn't ask about them.

Since you asked, here are my unofficial suggestions for using the *Tome of Magic* spheres on Krynn:

Paladine: Major: Law, Wards; Minor: Thought, War.

Mishakal: Major: Numbers, Thought; Minor: Travelers, Wards.

Majere: Major: Law, Thought; Minor: Time, Wards.

Kiri-Jolith: Major: Law, War; Minor: Wards.

Habbakuk: Major: Travelers; Minor: Time, War.

Branchala: Major: Numbers; Minor: Time, Travelers.

Solinari: Major: Thought; Minor: Numbers, Time.

Takhisis: Major: Chaos, Time; Minor: War, Wards.

Sargonnas: Major: Chaos, Thought;

Minor: Numbers, War.

Morgion: Major: Time; Minor: Numbers, Thought.

Chemosh: Major: Thought; Minor: Time, War.

Zeboim: Major: Chaos; Minor: Time, War.

Hiddukel: Major: Chaos, Time; Minor: Travelers.

Nuitari: Major: Thought, Numbers; Minor: Time.

Gilean: Major: Numbers, Time; Minor: Thought, Wards.

Sirrion: Major: Chaos; Minor: Numbers.

Reorx: Major: Law, War; Minor: Thought, Wards.

Chislev: Major: Time; Minor: Chaos.

Zivilyn: Major: Thought; Minor: Numbers.

Shinare: Major: Travelers; Minor: Law.

Lunitari: Major: Thought, Numbers; Minor: Time.

I've been getting a fairly steady stream of requests for this type of material (though there still has been only one attempt at a crass bribe). So, starting with the next issue, I'll work through all the pantheons in the *Legends & Lore* tome, one pantheon a month, until they're all done or until TSR, Inc. releases a product that makes the effort moot. If the enterprise still seems worthwhile after I finish the *L&L* pantheons, I'll move on to the *Monster Mythology* deities.

(The deities of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting appear with the additional spheres from the *Tome of Magic* in DRAGON issue #192.)

What kind of spell books would an elven mage/minstrel (from *The Complete Bard's Handbook*) have? How would the character go about gaining spells?

The character would have two completely separate sets of magical writings. One would be a set of books just like any other wizard would have, and one would be an eclectic aggregation of notes such as other bards would collect.

The character would add spells to each list in the manner appropriate to each class: through scholarly study and research as a wizard, and through happenstance as a bard. The exact process is up to the DM. In any case, the character must follow all the normal rules for spell acquisition, and must roll a "chance to know" each time a spell is added to either list. The character could attempt to add a spell from her wizard list to her bard list, but would have to make a second "chance to know" roll. When memorizing spells, the character cannot cross lists. For example, if the character knew *magic missile* as a wizard, but not as a bard, she could memorize this spell only as a wizard and could not use her bard spell "slots" to memorize extra *magic missile* spells. The character's Intelligence score still determines the maximum number of spells the character can have in each list. Ω

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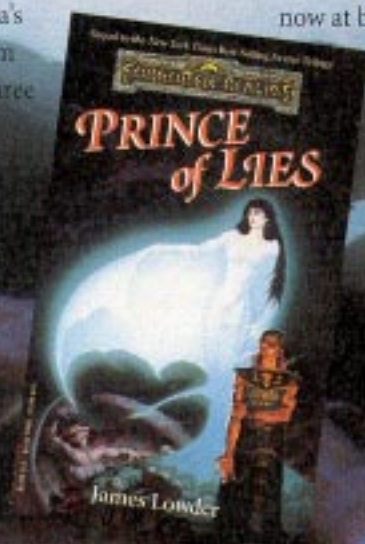


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The Known World

Crime Scene

A new definition of *bad*:
the orcs of the Dark Jungle and
their master

by Bruce A. Heard

This regular feature offers answers to letters on the D&D® game, its worlds and products, occasional articles, or "first glance" reviews of D&D game products. The reader is welcome "to send questions, suggestions, or criticism on the game or on the material published here. We can't promise all letters will be answered in this column, but they all will get our attention.

Once again we plunder Raman Nabonidus's library and discover some new material on the Orc's Head Peninsula, in particular on the inhabitants of the Dark Jungle. This chapter concludes our exploration of the Savage Coast.

Nimmurian Clay Tablets, by King Anupalassar II

I. "I loathe the orcs for the scar their warriors left on my face—and on my armies. It happened years ago, during the campaign of Nin-Shurgon. Most of the for-

est in this region had been cleared of the orkish infestation threatening the eastern Province of Sur. All seemed quiet as we prepared to cross the Ganlil River on our way back to Er. There was no sign of the orcs' imminent ambush, as is typical of these jungle savages. Hundreds of raging orcs rose from the bushes, from behind trees, and from concealed holes dug into the narrow forest trail, while others swung down from trees hanging from vines.

"Their attack was sudden and deadly, almost defeating my royal guard. Our war chariots had virtually no room to maneuver on the trail, and many were overwhelmed by the howling mass of orcs. We owed our survival to a desperate charge down the trail. Unfamiliar with this type of combat, the orcs attempting to stop us died under the vicious blades of the chariots' wheels. It was a dark day for Nimmur's heroes, as two thirds of the royal guard perished. All the wounded had been left behind, and no doubt they were taken away by the orcs and tortured for days somewhere under the dark and mysterious canopy of the jungle."

II. "By the end of the campaign of Nin-Shurgon, the orcs had discovered the nature of our curse [see this column in *DRAGON*® issue #192 for details on the Nimmurian manscorpions and their curse]. I have declared it against the law of Nimmur to venture along the southern trail without full military escort. Some imprudent travelers occasionally ignore this law, yet almost invariably their twisted and charred remains are found later at the edge of the trail, grotesquely propped up on bamboo sticks as a sinister warning to others.

"Although they seem barbaric and unintelligent, the orcs of the Dark Jungle remain cunning, ruthless warriors. At the Nimmurian methods of war and discipline, they throw total savagery. This does not explain how they still defy civilization after so many wars with Nimmur and Herath.

"The key to their strength is the jungle itself. The thick forest forbids the use of war chariots, relegating these powerful machines of war to the mere patrolling of trails. This has forced our armies to dispatch teams of convicts to keep the trails free of vegetation, as far as thirty feet on both sides of the trail. This is enormously expensive and dangerous. These teams require heavily armed escorts both to prevent them from escaping and the orcs from interfering with the clearing work.

"The orcs have also mastered the cowardly talent of hiding. They cover their bodies with the sap of certain plants to turn their skins green or brown, and their shamans often draw lines or paint stripes on the bodies of their warriors to imitate the foliage in which they will hide. These dyes can leave stains on skin for several

weeks even under rainy conditions. Sometimes, the orcs even add leaves or mosses to blend in perfectly with their milieu. In response to this, military scouts must always precede Nimmurian caravans traveling on the southern trail, to constantly probe the bushes ahead of the caravan."

III. "The orcs' tribes are independent from each other; however, major efforts from Herath or Nimmur to reduce the orcs' power have prompted the tribal kings to ally against the threat. The orcish population also develops faster than what the jungle can accommodate, so the orcs constantly try to conquer surrounding lands—primarily Nimmur and western Herath. Because of this, the orcs stand unvanquished, a deadly threat to civilization that must be dealt with once and for all."

Excerpt from a Tome of Herathian Alchemy, compiled by Malphica of Amion (decoded by Raman Nabonidus)

"My servants have recently begun working on a unique alchemical *potion of blight*. The project has been generously funded by King Anupalassar II of Nimmur. This poison is to destroy vegetation, in particular jungle. It is clear that the Nimmurian king wishes to wage a new war against the orcs of the Dark Jungle.

"If the potion works, the orcs would eventually be forced to fight most of their battles in the open. They would not stand a chance against Nimmurian war chariots. Vast new lands would then become available for substantial Nimmurian conquests. The consequences were too important, and I revealed the nature of our task to our king. Unbeknownst to Anupalassar, Ring Yahav of Herath has decided to quietly fund our research as well. Should Nimmur produce this potion, Herath would then do the same in order to claim its share of the southern peninsula [see *DRAGON* issue #183 for details on the Herathians].

"I surmise Nimmur's primary plan consists in pouring the poison into the Ganlil River, south of Mardesh, to clear its banks and open a roadway into the heart of the Dark Jungle. However, I suspect this poison conceals a greater curse, for its effects could spread to the lands of Nimmur and Herath. There is no telling how long this poison could affect the land. The tentative samples are so potent they could turn several acres of jungle into totally bare and sterile dirt for several decades. We are studying antidotes. Already one of my alchemists accidentally died after mishandling the substance."

Visions from a set of enchanted orc vertebrae (comments by Sir Archibald Bellayne)

"These twelve orcish bones are an amazing item, creating magical images and sounds in the mind of their user. They are simply tossed on a table, like dice, and

depending on their facing they generate fragments of orcish lore. Although confusing and time consuming, fragments of stories could be reassembled in a logical sequence. I am convinced some of the vertebrae are missing from my set, but here is what I gathered from a long series of bone tossing:

"A great fire-breathing dragon apparently lived among the orcs of the Dark Jungle at the time these bones were enchanted. The monster was called Pyre, and ruled the orcs from a great cavern in the middle of the Dark Jungle. There it kept hundreds of slaves, including humans and nonhuman creatures of the Savage Coast, that worked to extract a strange red ore from the earth. The enchanted bones referred to the ore as cinnabar. Pyre used the ore to augment its magical abilities and survive well beyond what its natural age should have allowed. The bones reveal Pyre was more than five centuries old at that time.

"Pyre subjected all the orcish tribes to its power. Every moon, tribal kings paid tribute to Pyre, in slaves, food, and treasure. There were several major tribes independent of each other, with an almost infinite number of subtribes owing fealty to the tribal kings. When Pyre desired it, these tribes united and conducted massive invasions against their northern foes. It seemed these coincided with the natural cycle of the dragon, when it awakened from long periods of slumber.

"I suspect Pyre still lives, judging from the orcs continued ability to foil Nimmur and Herath's concerted efforts to pacify them. According to visions from the orcish bones, Pyre sometimes adopted a human shape and traveled the lands outside the Dark Jungles. It spied secret places in Herath, Nimmur, and Robrenn, stole precious magical items, and killed rulers or key military leaders who showed success against the orcs' tactics. The last images I could piece together showed Pyre tearing to pieces an obscure group of Herathian alchemists working on a new magical potion."

Druidical Icons from Robrenn (interpreted by Raman Nabonidus)

"An ancient king of Robrenn once went on a quest to destroy a red dragon called Pyre. He died in his quest, but not before wounding the beast and causing it to lose an eye. The dragon fled, but it stole a sacred object from the druids, an eye made of ebony, before leaving Robrenn. This eye was a key item in the Robrenn mythology.

"Pyre placed the item into its empty eye socket as it left Robrenn. The eye bestowed upon its user the ability to turn its foes into ebony statues. The druids had used it for centuries to punish criminals and heretics. It was said that a victim's soul remained in the statue until it was

destroyed or until the statue was returned to flesh.

"The missing *ebon eye* has become the object of many quests since it was stolen. The military Order of the Ebon Eye was established by the druids with the sole purpose of returning the sacred object. Many of the order's young knights have sworn to find the *ebon eye* and have left on life-long quests. So far, none of these popular heroes have returned. It is a great honor among Robrenn warriors to become such a knight, or even to have such a knight in the family."

Ideologic runes painted on mummified lizard skins, by Haz'ar, Shaman of Shazak (translated by Thibaud de Châtelguyon)

"The orcs believe that the spirits of the dead remain in the trees of their jungle. Indeed, it is not rare to discover on some remote trail the ebon statues of warriors or sometimes even influential members of the tribe who were thought to have lost their way in the jungle. The shamans say that the forest spirits have captured their souls.

"The orcs build great wooden forts, especially near the entrances to their ancestral caverns. They cut down trees in some areas, haul the trunks to the top of forested hills, and build the forts among the growing trees. These fortifications are very difficult to spot from above. The shamans often have the builders carve on the forts' logs the screaming, demented faces of tribal ancestors known to have been taken away by the forest spirit. There are often hundreds of faces for each tribe, some dating back several centuries. Shamans will have ebon statues found in the jungle incorporated to the walls of the forts or temples. This is part of these orcs' ancestral lore.

"These orcs speak the same language as the one used in the Yazak Steppes by the goblins. The orcs know of the goblins but have no direct dealings with them. The Master of Hule has attempted to influence the tribal kings, but they change too quickly for him to maintain any real effective control. Somehow, tribal kings that have dealings with the Master end up as ebon statues within several moons. The shamans usually frown upon any dealings with foreigners. However, not all foreigners captured in the jungle are immediately put to death. I once observed a chieftain free a human visitor from Vilaverde after a long discussion. The human fluently spoke the language of the orcs. He came back weeks later with strange red pieces of metal and weapons. Right after the human's departure, the chieftain mounted dangerous ambushes against several caravans on the northern trail. That chieftain was never turned into a statue of ebony."

Scrolls found in a bottle floating off the coast of Davania (signed by a Capt. Enver Zogar)

"The orcs captured me many years ago. I then commanded the *Sea Fox*, a merchant ship from Shkodar. I am the last survivor of this ship and fear I'll never leave this forsaken jungle. Ring Ukul, my captor, has allowed me to write on these scrolls, thinking I would tell the story of his rule. For some strange reason, I felt compelled to do so at first, but over time I found myself unable to comply with Ukul any longer. Ukul is a despicable monster with a powerful personality who has replaced his severed hand with a harpoon head. I was to give him these scrolls yesterday, but instead I escaped with them. In these scrolls lies a warning to the ships that travel the seas near the Dark Jungle. I entrust the scrolls to this bottle and will cast it into the sea. I pray that one day one of my kind will find these words.

"Beware of the tribes living along the shores of the peninsula. They've acquired a cunning knowledge of the seas and maritime weather. Their shamans have acquired the magical ability to *predict weather*. I am certain that this is what allowed them to gain mastery of the seas, at least as far as one can tell from the land. Within the past decade, the substantial increase of merchant traffic between the Texeiras colony of The Horn, Nimmur, and Slagovich greatly encouraged the orcs to practice piracy, so far with great success.

"King Ukul once invited me to one of these raids. He had five giant outrigger canoes, each of them holding up to 120 warriors with paddles. Fully manned, such war canoes could easily reach twice the speed of a large sail ship for a short time. The king positioned his canoes ahead of the incoming ship, a Vilaverdan merchantman. This tactic forced the ship to attempt to break through the orcs' line, or else to double back and flee against the wind. The ship veered to the south instead, attempting to circumvent the line and still retain some speed, but two of the war canoes were able to pursue the ship. They came close enough to fire powerful ballista-mounted harpoons that got stuck into the ship's hull and its riggings. The orcs tugged on the lines attached to the harpoons, pulling themselves closer to the ship. Under scores of arrows fired from the canoes, brave sailors attempted to sever the harpoons lines. But there were too few soldiers aboard to return such fire and the two canoes maintained their grip on the ship long enough to slow it down and allow other canoes to catch up. Finally, like a whale exhausted by the tenacity of its hunters, the ship came to a halt. The Torreón swordsmen aboard fought gallantly, but soon the entire crew buckled before the fury of the orcs' barbaric assault. No one aboard survived. The orcs quickly plundered the cargo,

scuttled the ship, and returned to the safety of their jungle lagoons.

"Should you decide to sail in these waters, either come with several ships and well armed, or stay out of sight of the coast. The orcs' ambushes at sea can be as swift as they are unexpected. I have seen them operate as much in broad daylight as in the middle of the night, homing in on the lanterns of unwary ships."

Excerpt from "Ships and Battles," by João de Texeiras

"The biggest sea raid ever seen had 9,000 orcs from two tribes in 90 giant outrigger canoes. It is now referred as the Great Sea Terror, which lasted almost a year. This huge army spread chaos and destruction all the way up to the Gulf of Hule, where concerted efforts from Vilaverdan and Texeiras fleets forced it back south. The orcs had been terrorizing the coast from Herath to Narvaez, where they sacked and burned down the city of Puerto Morillos. They looted and foraged during the night, then fished, rested, and sailed during the day, under the shade of makeshift tents spread over their war canoes.

"The orcs had easily avoided our slower war galleys, taking advantage of storms and fog to escape. Their canoes were sturdy enough to weather the brutality of the storms, and the Great Shaman aboard the canoes was cunning enough to use fog as a means of avoiding unfavorable battles. The orcs often snuck back at night, sinking or setting fire to several isolated vessels in order to threaten the rest of the fleet. Then, they quietly retreated into the night.

"After months of rapacious plundering, mounds of loot began to slow their giant canoes down. This prevented them from escaping a two-pronged attack from Slagovich war galleys and Zvornikian troop transports. The orcs' sheer savagery was almost enough to defeat the coalition, but their luck turned when a javelin fired from a galley's ballista killed the orcs' Great Shaman. Deprived of their most potent sea magic, the orcs lost heart and abandoned their war canoes on the shore east of Robrenn, set fire to them, and continued their rampage on firm land.

"Pursued by all the local armies, 5,700 surviving orcs fled into the Yazak steppes, banded with goblins (for a stiff share of the orcs' booty), re-entered the forest north of Bellayne, skirted the Herathian border and finally returned to the Dark Jungle, following the Forbidden River. Of the 9,000 orcs that had left, only 3,800 survived but with great treasures. The remainder had fallen before rakastas of the Forest Marches of Wyndham, lizardmen or gatomen of The Bayou, and finally, before allied Herathian and Nimmurian border forces on the lookout for them."

The orcs of the Dark Jungle

For centuries, the humanoids dwelling in the southern region of the Orc's Head Peninsula have resisted Nimmur and Herath's repeated attempt to subjugate them. They owe their success to their ability to adapt to the jungle and sea. Their success also comes from their ancient leader, the dragon Pyre, who has added his knowledge of the northern foes and a ruthless authority without which the orcs would quickly return to their old habits of fighting each other.

The orcs of the land have formed dozens of tribes, with the smaller owing fealty to the larger. The tribes depicted on the map with this article show the boundaries of the five largest tribes only, the lands of the smaller ones being part of these main tribes. Their kings are listed in the following tribal entries; however, "royal" succession tends to be frequent (1d12 years from the moment PCs have their first interaction with this land).

Dark Jungle orcs have the ability to hide in the forest as a thief can hide in shadows (30% chance, individually or in a group). If the orcs have enough time to set up an ambush, if they use all camouflage usually available to them, and if they remain perfectly motionless, their chances go up to 60%. They do not wear armor, but carry shields and fight mostly with short bows, spears, and stone axes. Except for the Green Slayers, all Dark Jungle orcs know how to maneuver their giant outrigger canoes in high wind conditions or worse, using both sails and paddles. Their shamans also know how to cast *predict weather* as a 1st-level druid.

Their fighting units break down into hordes of about 1,000 orcs, then into warbands of approximately 100. Up to 75% of a tribe's adult population can muster during a war. About half of the Dark Jungle population lives in caverns underneath the Dark Jungle, which connect to the ancient Sokhtars' caverns [see this column in *DRAGON* issue #192] and those of the Herathians [see issue #183]. The connecting caverns are fortified and heavily guarded by the orcs and the forces at the tunnels' other ends.

Tribe of the Black Orchid—(North-west) Main tribal camp: F'faug (Pop.: 1,500 orcs, 310 troglodytes); Subject tribes: 4; Hordes: 7 (30 war canoes on the coast and last 80 miles of the Ganlil River); Ruler: King Qreebak "The Dreamer"; Symbol: black orchid on a crimson field; Patron: Ait-tha (a.k.a. Talitha).

The Black Orchid shamans are reputed to be the most skillful among the orchish tribes of the Dark Jungles in herbal knowledge. They concoct a black paste in which their warriors rub their arrows. The paste, made from a black orchid found in this region of the Dark Jungle, causes a fever within an hour to those

wounded (save vs. poison allowed). The fever lasts for 1d6+4 days, during which the victim is amnesiac and prone to follow any order whispered into his ear. The Black Orchid tribe is favorable to the Sea Plague tribe, but dislikes the Green Slayers who have allowed their dreaded green slime to infest the shores of the Ganlil River.

Tribe of the Silent Death—(Northeast) Main tribal camp: Ol-ömoi (Pop.: 4,100 orcs, 570 lizardmen); Subject tribes: 10; Hordes: 20 (45 war canoes, half of which prowl the Forbidden River); Ruler: King Bratagh “The Impervious”; Symbol: mouthless yellow skull on a black field; Patron: Karaash.

This is the most powerful tribe of the Dark Jungle, and also the one with the biggest problem: a long border with Herath. It is notorious for to sailing up the Widow River on war canoes and slipping deep into Herath. They hide during the day and travel at night, pillaging villages or caravan camps they find. The orcs of this tribe have developed the ability to move silently (40% chance on foot or on their war canoes; roll for each 120 orcs or single canoe involved).

Silent Deaths view themselves as the exemplars of orcish kind and demand that all other tribes subject to their authority and to the patronage of their great orcish immortal, Karaash. The Silent Deaths dislike the Green Slayers and the Storm Bringers, who have resisted the Silent Deaths’ attempts to make them subject tribes. The Silent Deaths, however, occasionally join major sea raids initiated by the Storm Bringers, for loot and to demonstrate Karaash’s powers.

Tribe of the Green Slayers—(North-central) Main tribal camp: Argak (Pop.: 2,200 orcs, 230 trolls); Subject tribes: 6; Hordes: 10 (9 war canoes, mostly in the swampy maze around Argak); Ruler: King Hāitar “Wood-Crawler”; Symbol: white eyeless face on a dull-green field; Patron: Na’al (a.k.a. Nyx).

These orcs have learned to capture and raise green slime in large stone vats. Before a battle, they fasten clay jars containing green slime (three 2-HD slimes per jar) on ballista-fired javelins. They can fire these javelins up to half the normal ballista range; on impact, the slimes are released and randomly scattered. Slimes are only used once during an ambush (the first round of javelins). The ballistae are usually installed at an ambush site and camouflaged under fresh foliage, or mounted on war canoes. Green Slayer shamans know how to prepare a slime-repellent paint that protects flesh from the green slime’s corrosion.

The Green Slayers are the only orcs who know how to get around the dark bayous

of the swamps surrounding their main tribal camp. The other tribes avoid this area for fear of the deadly green slime ambushes set by the Green Slayers. This tribe is favorable to the Sea Plague tribe but dislikes the Black Orchids for attempting to steal the secret of the protective paint. They fear the power of the Silent Deaths, their ancestral rivals, owing their freedom mostly to their knowledge of green slimes and help from swamp trolls.

Tribe of the Sea Plague — (Southwest) Main tribal camp: Zrag (Pop.: 1,800 orcs, 250 snappers); Subject tribes: 5; Hordes: 8 (53 war canoes scattered on the coastline); Ruler: King Ukul “Harpoon Hand”; Symbol: red harpoon on a dull-blue field; Patron: Oruguz (a.k.a. Orcus)

Once per moon, their shamans can cast a *cloudkill* spell as a 9th-level wizard. For this, at least 12 shamans must howl and dance for an hour. Shamans can perform the ceremony at sea if all are aboard the same canoe. The spell can neither be cast in the jungle nor at sea with high wind conditions or worse. When the spell is cast, greenish bubbles burst at the surface of the sea, releasing the *cloudkill*’s deadly vapors. Upon reaching a ship, the vapors sweep the outside decks, then sink into the ship’s lower levels. The spell can be used against only one ship.

The Sea Plague tribe is favorable to both the Black Orchids and the Green Slayers, during whose disputes they often act as mediators. The Sea Plagues, however, hate their ancestral rival to the east, the Storm Bringers, who can call upon high winds to dispel their *cloudkill* spells.

Tribe of the Storm Bringers — South-east) Main tribal camp: Ugmar (Pop.: 2,800 orcs, 290 ogres); Subject tribes: 6; Hordes: 11 (73 war canoes, of which 53 are scattered on the coastline and 20 control Red Lake and the downstream segment of the Forbidden River); Ruler: King Orögi “The Half-Ogre”; Symbol: black foot on a brick-red field; Patron: Crakkak of the Sharp Tooth.

Shamans of Crakkak have the ability to cast a *weather control* spell for the exclusive purpose of summoning or dispelling high winds at sea. They can do so once per moon; this requires at least 12 shamans howling and dancing for an hour. The shamans can perform the ceremony at sea if all are aboard the same canoe. They use the spell to break up large enemy fleets, flee a battle, or disperse cloudlike spells.

The Storm Bringers occasionally accept war canoes from the Silent Death tribe during major sea raids against the eastern kingdoms of the Savage Coast, such as the raids of the Great Sea Terror, mostly to bolster their overall strength. If this is done, Storm Bringer shamans arrange for Silent Death war canoes to be in the first

lines of combat. They also hate the Sea Plagues, with whom they’ve had numerous clashes at sea when attempting to intercept the same merchant ships.

The Overking: The Overking is Pyre, an ancient, huge, red dragon with the ability to cast spells (AC -5; HD 20****; 120 hp; MV 150’(50’)/360’(120’); AT 3 on the ground, 6 in the air, fire breath, or magical spell; DMG as per *Rules Cyclopedia*, page 169; Save F36; ML 11; TT Hx3, Ix2; INT 15; AL C;XP 24,000).

Pyre owns the druidical *ebon eye* stolen from Robrenn, in addition to whatever is in its treasure hoard. This magical item allows Pyre to turn anyone gazing at him into an ebony statue (save vs. petrification allowed). Removing the *ebon eye* (manually or with a *wish* spell) from his head would cause Pyre to suffer 3d6 points of damage (no save).

Pyre has also gorged himself with cinnabar, which has contaminated him to the 9th degree (see DRAGON issue #172 for Red Steel special powers). The cinnabar has enabled the dragon to survive much longer than its draconic longevity normally allows (see DRAGON issue #170, “From Hatchling to Immortal Guardian,” for data on dragon cycles and life spans). Cinnabar provides him with the following abilities: *cinnamorphism*, *detect cinnabryl*, *immunity to electricity*, *repel metal*, *X-vision*, *regeneration*, *anti-magic II*, and *planar phase*.

Pyre knows the following spells: Level I—*charm person*, *darkness*, *read magic*, *sleep*, *ventriloquism*; Level II—*detect invisible*, *entangle*, *ESP*, *invisibility*, *phantasmal force*; Level III—*clairvoyance*, *dispel magic*, *haste*, *hold person*; Level IV—*confusion*, *hallucinatory terrain*, *wall of fire*; Level V—*magic jar*, *teleport*

Pyre’s lair is located underground at a secret location that may have hidden access to all of the orcs’ caverns (this is up to the DM). In general, Pyre ignores occasional border clashes between the orc tribes, but he always puts an end to all-out tribal warfare and puts to death all tribal kings involved in such wars. If not sleeping or spying upon his underlings, Pyre is likely to be secretly traveling the northern nations.

With all its abilities put together, this is one of the most powerful dragons on the world of Mystara. Pyre should be used as a background figure that PCs do not encounter unless they are on a quest for Immortality. Destroying Pyre will probably mark the end of the Dark Jungle orcs’ power, as well as an inevitable destabilization of the political balance between the nations of the Savage Coast. Either way—*handle with care!*

Giant war canoes: These are huge outrigger canoes comparable to Viking longships, which Dark Jungle orcs use to wage

naval warfare and conduct river raids. Each canoe requires 100-120 orcs with paddles for maximum speed, but otherwise can use normal sails for long-distance navigation. Each comes with a ballista capable of shooting a solid harpoon attached to a rope. Tents can be pulled over the rowers to protect them from the sun.

Cost: 4,000 gp; Crew 100-120 orcs; Capacity: 30,000; Move (miles/day): 18/90; Move (feet/round): 90/150; Maximum Speed: 240 for one turn; Hull Points: 40-60; AC 8.

After a full turn at maximum speed, the orcs are exhausted and must stop. If attacked then, the orcs fight at -3 to hit and damage (1 hp damage minimum) for the rest of the encounter.

The Dark Jungle pantheon

Ait-tha (Talitha): Among the orcs of the Dark Jungle, this Immortal stands as the patron of thieves and victory by deception. Her shamans are the ones who ordered the Green Slayers' slime-repellent paint to be stolen. They often seek to capture isolated Nimmurian manscorpions; using the amnesia induced by the black orchid, Ait-tha's shamans plant secret orders into their captives' minds to steal some precious object from their Nimmurian mas-

ters. They usually do this to set Nimmurian rulers against each other (Pyre provides the information on the objects to be stolen). Orcish shamans of Ait-tha can also pick pockets as 1st-level thieves.

Crakkak of the Sharp Tooth: Storm Bringer orcs adopted Crakkak as their chief Immortal after witnessing numerous ravenous sharks attacking helpless human sailors from a group of sinking ships. So impressed were the orcs with the sharks' feeding frenzy that they began honoring the "great shark spirit." This caught the attention of Crakkak, who created a new following of shamans by sending dreams and visions. He rewarded his followers with the tribal ability to affect high winds at sea and with a new protection spell. Orcish shamans of Crakkak can cast this unique *protection from sharks* 30' radius spell in addition to their normal complement of spells. There is a 10% chance of sharks being present at a naval battle near the Orc's Head Peninsula (1d4 shark per ship or war canoe in the battle). This is a sign of luck for the Storm Bringers, who then get a +1 bonus to their Morale. Those orcs eaten by sharks, anyway are believed to have been called to serve Crakkak.

Karaash (Ilneval): Karaash is the patron of orcish warfare. He also defends the tra-

ditional values of the orcs and backs their struggle against not only Herath and Nimmur, but also against Pyre. The antidraconic sentiment remains well hidden, but shamans of Karaash might secretly back a serious attempt at destroying Pyre if they were convinced of its success. Karaashite shamans know of the Order of the Ebon Eye and its purpose. They don't believe these knights have a chance against Pyre, but they will not interfere with the knights' efforts.

Karaash is honored to various degrees in most tribes of the Dark Jungle. His following is strongest among Silent Deaths. If there could be such a thing as "orc-paladins," devout followers of Karaash are it. They constantly seek to demonstrate the greatness of Karaash's precepts and the value of orcish supremacy. Karaashite zealots gain a +1 to hit and damage when fighting unbelievers. Their shamans can also use crossbows (see the *Wrath of the Immortals* boxed set, Book 1, page 24).

Na'al (Nyx): As the patroness of darkness, Na'al is often honored among orcs of the caverns. The foggy region of the swamps around Argak is dark and dismal enough to remain a haven for her followers. The Green Slayers' attempts to raise green slime as pets and teaching it tricks caught Na'al's attention. This unique and totally hopeless endeavor to raise the level of consciousness of green slime received her utmost sympathy. As a reward for the Green Slayers' work in this field, she granted their shamans the knowledge of various slime-repellent recipes. Orcish shamans of Na'al can also cast a *darkness* spell once per day in addition to their normal complement of spells.

Oruguz (Orcus): The orcs of the Sea Plague tribe started out as pig-herders centuries ago, trading their pigs to neighboring tribes. The tribal kings of the Sea Plagues were then (and still are today) devil swine. This secret community of lycanthropes always managed to keep one of their own on the tribal throne, without the orcs' knowledge, thanks to the devil swine's ability to *charm* their victims.

The devil swine are the ones responsible for enforcing the precepts of Oruguz among their tribe. As a reward for their undying faith to him, Oruguz granted his followers the tribal *clouddkill* spell, which made them more powerful sea-raiders. Their new ability at sea earned them the great enmity of the Storm Bringers, who became direct rivals. Orcish shamans of Oruguz also receive a bonus of -2 to their armor class when fighting demihumans (dwarves, elves, and halflings). Ω

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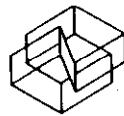
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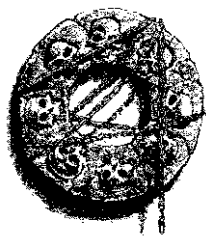


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*nce the lords of Agurak ruled
Over earth and sky and sea
With heavy hand and evil heart
The likes of you and me.
But brave Rhiannon went to them
And ruled them with a spell.*

*With blood and gold she bound them close
And thus Agurak fell.*

The Only Good Orc

by Liz Holliday

Rhodri scarcely had to look at the words written on the parchment he was holding up. He knew them by heart.

The big human sitting opposite him was reciting the words as Rhodri spoke, despite being falling-down drunk. If the barbarian could read, he was not as stupid as he had first seemed. Rhodri filed that piece of information away for future use.

"This is big secret, huh? Very big!" He leaned across the table toward Rhodri. "This song children sing in street. No secret!" He got up.

Rhodri grabbed the man's arm. Under the coarse cloth, the muscle was hard as iron.

"With children's song armed, you want to go find treasure of Aram Karagh? You go, elf. Me, I find easy picking. Like maybe, do single combat with red dragon."

"Don't be stupid, Lars," Rhodri said. The northman growled. There was no other word for it.

Damn, Rhodri thought. Where he was going, he would need a good fighter. Lars was quite simply the biggest, drunkenest heap of muscle he had come across. Rhodri had more or less picked the northman up out of the gutter when the last tavern Lars had blessed with his presence had thrown him out. There wouldn't be time to find anyone else.

"I didn't mean anything by it," Rhodri said soothingly, "but, of course, this isn't all I've got."

He put the parchment away and, from a scroll case he kept strapped under his jerkin, took out a much older piece that he handled with great care. Only an immense stroke of good fortune had brought it to him. "The way to the Tombs of Aram Karagh," he said dramatically.

Before he could continue, Lars cut in. "The map? You stole map from Lady's priestesses?" He sounded shocked and, Rhodri thought, possibly also a little impressed.

It seemed a shame to disappoint him. "No. That wasn't necessary, as you'll see when my . . . associate . . . arrives later. This—" he paused for effect—"this is the other half of the map. The part so long thought lost. And see here, these lines complete the Ritual of Opening." He pointed at the runes of the High Tongue that spidered across the bottom of the map. It was quite safe. He had no intention of telling the human the translation.

"So much magic," the big human said, leaning across the table toward Rhodri, "is very, very bad. Many curses from the evil old rulers—"

"No," Rhodri said. "Is very, very good. Much magic,

Illustrations by Paul Jaquays

much money—and a heap of superstitious nonsense that has kept others from finding it before now.”

“Many deaths,” the barbarian countered. “My people sing of in the mead halls. Your bards also.” *Damnation*, Rhodri thought. Then the human flashed a brilliant smile at him. “But is good. Is glorious death for me. For you.”

Over my dead body, Rhodri thought. “There’s more. I have the whole of the Lay, including the Ritual of Binding that will stop the Ancient Monarchs from following us to take revenge. At least, I have a translation; my associate has the original.” He took out a third scroll of parchment. This one was considerably longer than the others, but Rhodri only unrolled the top few inches.

*So sing the Lay of Rhiannon
For with her blood she freed us
But pure of heart and strong of arm
May follow when she need us . . .*

“You don’t want to hear the rest,” Rhodri said.

Indeed you don’t, he thought. *Not when it goes on so much about blood sacrifices. Even you could work that one out, eventually.* “I’m not sure it’s safe to just read it out, anyway,” he said. That was good. Just the right touch of menace.

Lars touched the parchment with a finger as thick as a sausage. “By Odin’s eye. Is truly Lay of Rhiannon complete?”

“Keep your hands to yourself.” He glanced at the door that led to the public room of the Golden Wheel Tavern. “And keep your voice down. The Lady only knows who might be listening.” It was true. The section of map was genuine, at least to the best of Rhodri’s knowledge. He had acquired it from an impoverished alchemist who swore she had inherited it from her teacher. Rhodri suspected its provenance was more complex and more dubious than that.

“Satisfied?” he asked, rolling the parchment up. He had put it back in its ivory scroll case before the human had a chance to answer.

“With whole of map and Lay, perhaps could be possible. So, I, Lars Ironhand, son of Njal Firebeard, hero of the Battle of Breidafjord, slayer of the Necromancer Ruselian, scourge of the White Cliffs, will go to tombs.” The man burped loudly, then wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. As far as Rhodri could tell, Lars had been drunk since morning.

Never mind, Rhodri thought. He brushed hair the color of ash away from one delicately pointed ear. Best remind the human what he was dealing with. No use letting him get funny ideas.

“Agreed,” he said. “You take a third of the risk for half the profit, since my companion is not interested in the fabled treasure of the place, but only in clearing out the evil.” He dumped a bag of coins on the table. They had been hard come by, but Rhodri considered them a sound investment. “And, to show our good faith, we will pay you five hundred good Ekkesberg kron in advance.”

Lars weighed the bag in his hand. “Is good,” he said, without bothering to count them.

Idiot, Rhodri thought as he followed the northerner out into the main room.

“Drinks all round,” Lars shouted. The landlady stared at him. “Yes, whole inn drinks when Lars Ironhand drinks!”

She went away and came back with two flagons of ale, which she banged down on the table. “Any trouble, you’re both out, understand?”

“No trouble, goodwife,” Rhodri assured her. Drawing attention to himself was the last thing he wanted.

“Sup ale, elf,” Lars said. “This ass-o-ci-ate will be soon here?”

“Soon,” Rhodri agreed. He didn’t want Lars getting upset. They had spent so much time finding him.

But Lars seemed happy enough. There was plenty of time for him to regale the inn with tales of how he had become a man by slaying the white wolf; of how he killed the Necromancer Ruselian in her tower; and how he defeated the frost giant Ulofgrim Kinripper in single combat. Rhodri soon felt as if he knew Lars’s life story as well as the man himself.

A little before second watch, the street door opened. A tall figure walked in, his white robe only partly obscured by his cloak.

“Ah, here he is,” Rhodri cried in relief.

“This is associate?” asked Lars. “With who we will raid lost Aram Karagh?”

“Indeed,” said the new arrival, and pulled his hood back from his face. Lamplight gleamed on blood-red eyes. He smiled at Lars, revealing an inch or so of tusk.

“An orc?” shouted Lars. His hand went, as if by reflex, for his sword. “Tell me is not true. You test loyalty of Lars Ironhand, no?” He looked wildly at Rhodri, who would have sworn he saw the northman’s eyes roll, and flecks of saliva fly from the corners of his mouth. “I want sword. I kill dead this, this *thing* for you.”

“Peace,” Rhodri said, thankful he had managed to find an inn that peace-bound all weapons at the door. “Allow me to introduce you—”

The orc, as if oblivious to Lars’s outburst, took off his cloak. The robe beneath was of purest white, embroidered with a fleur-de-lys in thread of gold.

“Odin’s beard!” Lars gasped.

The orc pressed his hands together, as if in supplication, “Truly, my child, once I was lost but now I serve only the Lady of Flowers—” his last words were drowned by Lars’s guffaws. He waited a moment, and when the sound had died down, carried on. “—who heals all things with hands as soft as rose petals.”

The landlady approached, wielding a broomstick as if it were a club. Rhodri said quickly, “Come, Lars, you have taken my money. Will you not also take my word? I promise you, the tale of how my friend saw the light is one worth hearing.”

“Orc should be dead. Better than in priest dress,”
Lars grumbled.

“If you truly think that,” said the orc, “I pray you kill me now. I’ve nothing to fear from going to my Lady.”

With that he dropped to his knees and bowed his head. "Maybe will," Lars said. He raised his hand as if to strike the orc hard enough to take off his head, even without the sword.

"Peace, I say," Rhodri said again. Sweat studded his brow. To lose the orc would be to lose the whole game. "There's hospitality between us. Are you a barbarian? Besides, I tell you, Timothy is the only good orc you'll—"

"Timothy? Timothy!" Lars let his fist drop, and gave his thigh a mighty slap. His hand was heavy with gold as yellow as his beard. *Flashy*, Rhodri thought, *like all the northern barbarians*. But he had no objection to that. Lars's laughter rolled on. "By Odin's runes, is fine joke," he said at last. He wiped his eyes with the back of a hand like a side of ham. "Maybe you tell me how come?"

"Timothy may tell you when he knows you better. He truly is pure hearted," Rhodri said softly. "And so he fears scorn, you see . . ." he let his voice trail off.

Gwyneth, the sage who had translated the Ritual of Opening, had introduced Rhodri to Timothy. The orc had insisted on being called that, right from the first. For a while, Rhodri thought the orc's preposterous tale of how he had seen the Light and entered the Church of the Lady might be true. After all, the orc had wept when Gwyneth had been found with a dagger in her back. Rhodri had almost regretted that bit of business. Anyone who could find a priest of the Lady willing to betray the church was too good a contact to give up easily, but he hadn't dared risk her gossiping about the work she had done for him.

Timothy had done all she said he would. It had taken days, but Rhodri had finally winkled the true story out of the orc: that he was really his tribe's shaman, seeking revenge on the humans who had wiped out his family.

He told Rhodri how he had spent many years insinuating himself into the church at Caer Maredd, until finally he had been made a lay brother. Then he had killed a priest and, disguised in his robes, stolen the church's part of the map and the Lay of Rhiannon. That had been even harder, he admitted, than finding Rhodri. And after all, neither part of the map was any use on its own.

Rhodri never had found out which god the orc really served. Its name was probably unpronounceable unless you had six-inch tusks. He shook his head to clear it of old memories. For the moment, he had to appear absolutely convincing. "Perhaps he might tell you one night around the campfire."

Lars seemed preoccupied for a moment. He glanced at Timothy, who was still kneeling, whispering prayers for the saving of souls and the healing of hurts. "Woman! Ale for me and my friends Rhodri and . . . Timothy."

They made their way along the last trading routes that ran to the south and east of Caer Maredd, then through the forbidding Siglara Pass, into the Dark

Lands. With Timothy's help—protesting, he put aside his white robes for the foul armor of an orcish tribesman again—they came at last to the stinking marshes of Karas Mikia, and thence to the foot of Mount Karagh. All this was not without its difficulties. Then they clambered up scree slopes made of crushed bones to the Tombs of Aram Karagh.

By the might of Lars Ironhand, they rolled aside the stones that shielded the entrance, and again by his might fought their way through a dozen dead men whose eyes flashed burning fire in a chamber with walls that dripped blood. They went blindfolded across an invisible bridge spanning an abyss filled with abominations so terrible that the sight of them would steal the sanity from anyone—human, elf, or orc. There were walls that clashed together like teeth of granite, and a floor that crumbled beneath their feet. Yet they came through it all, to a small room whose doors could both be watched at once, and there they made camp.

Lars had taken a deep gash on his biceps from one of the wolf-ghouls that roamed the tombs. He heated a dagger in the fire and begged Timothy to cauterize the wound. When the orc could not bear to hurt him, he made Rhodri do it instead. Timothy turned away as the human's lips went white with pain. Rhodri grinned. The orc played his part well.

The firelight sent shadows dancing up the walls, turning the cracks in the old stone into maps of hell. Timothy pulled out the gold fleur-de-lys he wore on a neck chain, but before he could begin his prayer Rhodri said, "Come, Timothy. Prayer's important, sure. But now's the hour for campfire tales, tales to stiffen our spines and put fire in our bellies."

Besides, he'd rather hear stories than prayers. You never knew what supernatural nastiness was listening out there in the darkness, listening for prayers and other signs of goodness. He had no belief that the Lady of Flowers would come to his rescue, not if she knew as much as her priestesses said.

He handed Timothy a skin of wine. Timothy stared at it for a moment. *Don't you dare*, Rhodri thought at him. The orc glanced over, out of little piggy eyes. Then he handed it on to Lars, who took a long swig.

"By Odin's patch, yes," said Lars. "You keep promise now, orc. Tell how got name, how came to join priestesses." He tipped the wine skin up again and looked slyly at Rhodri. "Or I could tell tale of Lars Ironhand killing Necromancer Ruselian. Is good tale—"

"No," Rhodri said quickly. "You'll tell him, won't you, Tim?"

"Will you not do it for me, Rhodri?" Timothy pleaded. "You know it as well as I, and the telling pains me. Besides, your tongue is silver where mine is lead."

The northerner was supposed to believe they'd been partners for years, but Rhodri didn't know if he could bring it off. The orc had had more practice, after all. Still, it would be damned convincing if he could.

Rhodri started to speak, but Lars stopped him. "Timothy tells," he said. "Was part of payment."

Timothy sighed. "If I must," he said. "My story began

on a chill January morning, the kind when the mist rises high and lingers long, and the sun hangs cold and small in the pale sky.

"It was a hard winter. My tribe had been forced to come farther and farther down from the Broken Hills. There was no game. We hadn't eaten for weeks, some of us. Not more than roots and berries. Vegetables!" He stared into the fire. "The human villages were easy pickings. Easier than traveling farther on empty bellies, when we might never have found any game. Easier than dying." He fed a twig to the flames. The sap hissed and spat. "Maybe we took it too far. Maybe if we'd stuck to raiding the cattle pens.

"The round-ears came and tried to wipe us out. They had elves to help, and dwarves too. I suppose I should have said we weren't the only tribe dining off human flesh that winter.

"Warriors, yes, that I can understand, even now that I've seen the Light. But they slaughtered pregnant females, cubs still at the breast, children too little to hold a spear, old 'uns so ancient their tusks had rotted right away. At least we only killed enough to eat." He looked up. Light gleamed blood-red in his eyes. "All of them. All gone, now." Was that a tear glistening on his cheek? Damn, but the orc was good. *Don't overdo it, though*, Rhodri thought.

"I volunteered for guard duty," Timothy went on. Got *bullied into it, I'll be bound*, Rhodri interpreted. "I must have dozed off. Suddenly the whole wood seemed to be alive with the enemy. I could smell them, the sweet greenish smell of live elf, and the earthy stink of dwarf. And human. It made—" The orc stopped suddenly. His cheeks flushed bronze with embarrassment.

"Go on," Lars said, leaning forward.

Blast, Rhodri thought, having heard what was coming next already.

"It made my stomach rumble," Timothy finished in a whisper. "I'm sorry," he said, without meeting Lars's eyes. "It's the way I was then. I won't lie about it."

The northman frowned. Rhodri could almost hear the clockwork whirring in his brain.

"Lars understands," Rhodri said quickly. "If you were faking your conversion, you'd be sure to lie about something like this."

Lars nodded slowly.

Rhodri almost grinned with relief. *That orc*, he thought, *is nothing short of brilliant*.

"Anyway, there were a dozen round-ears advancing through the wood, with one of their lily-white priestesses at the center." He traced the sign of the fleur-de-llys in the air as he spoke, but carried straight on. "I could smell the magic on the fighters' swords, but they were too far away to bother me. What worried me was the wizard at the back. He was looking straight at me, and his fingers were dancing. I just couldn't look away."

He stopped speaking altogether then and fumbled with a few more twigs, feeding them one at a time to the fire.

Lars stared at the orc. "Tell more," Lars said. Timothy

glanced up at him. For a long moment the orc and the human looked at each other. Something about that glance bothered Rhodri, but he couldn't quite put his finger on it. Orcs, humans. Who could say what went on in their minds? Anyway, Timothy was continuing. "I felt as if someone had stuck an ice-pick through my skull. As if my body were being wrenched apart. There was a flash of white light and a searing pain. I closed my eyes against it.

"When I opened them, everything seemed far away, as if I were viewing it from the top of a distant mountain. My body seemed swollen, and what with the screaming and the smell of blood, I was very confused.

"I saw the round-ears looking up at me. Magelight flickered over their blades, and I knew I was dead meat. Then I heard one of them say, 'A dragon! By the Lady I never thought the old wizard Daffyd had it in him.'

"I knew then I'd have to get out." He grinned as if at some private joke, revealing an extra couple of inches of polished tusk. "You see, I knew that any dragon the humans called would be on the side of the Lady. And even then, I was no fool. So I ran. I crashed through the woods, but my legs wouldn't obey me properly. Little spurts of steam—I thought it was steam—puffed on the cold air." Again, the private smile. *Watch it*, Rhodri thought, *You're doing fine. Don't give it all away now*.

"I was dragging a bush or something along behind me. I twitched to free myself. Rocks clattered behind me and began to cascade down the hillside. A tree to one side snapped like a toothpick. One of the humans began to scream. I started to think, 'Good! Die in agony and rot in hell, round ear,' like any good warrior should." He glanced up. "Well, don't blame me. It was part of my cultural conditioning. And anyway, at that moment I thought, 'I shouldn't call them round-ears, just because they're human. They're people, just like us.' Suddenly I realized that it was a beautiful day, and the fighting was pointless. It didn't matter who started it. I knew I had to stop it. I opened my mouth to say all that and—"

Rhodri smothered a giggle. He knew what was coming next. Luckily, the northman was too wrapped up in the story to notice.

"Fire gouted out of my mouth. The humans scrambled for cover as the hillside ignited like a torch. To me it felt pleasantly warm.

"I heard a human say, 'I thought you said gold dragons were always good, Daffyd you old fool!' from behind a rock.

"That was when I realized what I'd become. I opened my mouth to try to talk peace again, but the elvish archers let fly. I took three arrows, one deep in a muscle. That was when I ran. I flew off and let the carnage continue behind me, even though I saw how wicked it was." His voice was full of pain. *Wasted*, Rhodri thought. *He's wasted doing this. He should be on the stage*.

Sure enough, the barbarian was rapt, following every word. "Is bad blame yourself," he said. "The Lady, she does not." His voice sounded odd. Rhodri glanced

sharply at him. Could the orc have moved him that much? Apparently so.

But then he turned to Rhodri as if he had felt the elf looking at him. "Besides," he said, "is glorious death for battle-fallen. Is shame on him who stopped it." He grinned wolfishly.

"Yes, well, perhaps she has forgiven me, for the priestesses said I done enough penance," Timothy said. "I found myself an isolated hilltop and settled down to grieve and do penance for a while. Well, a good few years, actually.

"Then one day I woke to find that I had my old body back. It took me a while to work out that this meant that old Daffyd had died. I was sorry about that, because I never did get the chance to say thank you to him. You see, just because I had my old body back didn't mean I had reverted to my old ways. I still wanted to dedicate my life to goodness. In fact, I wanted to make amends for all the terrible things I had done in my past. So I made my way down to Caer Maredd and threw myself on the mercy of the priestesses of the Lady. The rest—"

Rhodri's nose flared. He could smell something. Incense and decay. Rotting flesh and old earth.

At that moment, Timothy leaped to his feet. "Ware enemy," he shouted, as the creature shambled into the light. There was a confused moment in which Rhodri only had time to make sure he had a wall at his back and his long sword in his hand. By then, Lars was on his feet too.

Timothy fumbled at his chain. *The fleur-de-lys?* Rhodri wondered. *You could take this act too far, you know. Besides, what do you think I'm paying the barbarian for? And anyway, you'd better not get yourself killed, orc. You've yet to do your part.*

Lars pushed in front of the orc. Rhodri relaxed slightly.

"Odin's toenails, I kill it dead!" the barbarian said as he swung his sword at the creature, "Dead, dead." But the room was too small for that, and the stroke was spoiled. As Rhodri watched, the northerner was forced to drop his sword. He caught one blow on his vambrace, but then the ghoul was at his throat. He went down beneath it.

Too bad, Rhodri thought. They might just need the northerner again. Still, the creature should be easier to kill once it was bloated with food. He raised his sword ready to kill it when it left Lars's corpse.

Timothy pushed him out of the way. Rhodri staggered slightly as the orc grabbed the ghoul by its hair and hauled it off Lars. What was the fool doing? He had his back to Rhodri, so the elf couldn't see, but he heard the orc say a few harsh guttural words in a language he didn't understand.

The ghoul moaned. There was a flash of darkness.

Then it was gone, and in its place there was only the smell of sulphur. *So you really were your tribe's shaman*, Rhodri thought. He was relieved in spite of himself. It was the first real proof he'd had that Timothy had been telling the truth. He'd tried testing the orc, of

course, but he didn't dare push too hard in case Timothy walked away.

He sauntered over. The barbarian was unconscious, and Timothy was tending his wounds. They didn't seem too bad, so maybe the orc was right and it was worth trying to save the human. No sense letting him get above his station, though.

"Now what did you do that for?" Rhodri asked. "He's outlived his usefulness, and we agreed we'd do away with him as soon as we could."

"Sorry," Timothy said. He stared at the unconscious northerner. "I must have got carried away."

It was hard to keep track of time in the darkness, but Rhodri thought it was their third day in the tombs when they finally came to the Great Seal, a slab of engraved marble set into an oaken door. The runes of the old High Tongue of the sorcerers were carved upon it, and around the runes a pentacle, and around the pentacle a circle of sigils, and around all these an unbroken circle graven deep into the stone.

Timothy and Lars—who had woken eventually and seemed only a little shaky—held torches aloft, while Rhodri rubbed soft black wax into the engraving so that they might read the words better.

"So," said Lars. "Behind here are old bad kings and queens. Get prayers ready, Timothy." He rubbed his neck, where the mark of the ghoul's teeth was still faintly livid. "This time, I let you go first, okay?"

Timothy said something in reply, but Rhodri paid no attention. He was looking at the runes. They were difficult to read, but he was almost certain they were the Lay of Rhiannon. Almost without realizing he was doing it, Rhodri whispered the Common translation:

*Once the lords of Agurak ruled
Over earth and sky and sea
With heavy hand and evil heart
The likes of you and me.
But brave Rhiannon went to them
And ruled them with a spell.
With blood and gold she bound them close.
And thus Agurak fell.
So sing the Lay of Rhiannon
For with her blood she freed us
But pure of heart and strong of arm
May follow when she need us.*

He glanced back at his companions. They were standing shoulder to shoulder a little way down the corridor, as if they thought he might try to run out on them. He wondered how much Lars truly suspected about what was to follow. Or Timothy either, for that matter. After all, if one sacrifice was good, two were bound to be better.

He put the map away and pulled out the second scroll case, the one he had been so careful to keep hidden. It bore the translation of the Ritual of Opening

from the second half of the map. He wondered if the sage Euan ap Tomas had lied when he sold it to him, either about this or about the commentaries that said blood sacrifices would be needed to keep the ancient monarchs bound. He could almost hear the old man speak: "It's blood-magic, elf. The problem for the Lady worshippers is that they'd be doing a small evil to prevent a bigger one. The Dark Gods understand power, though. The strongest rule. To bind the Monarchs of Agurak would bring their priests much honor. Find one of them to do the binding, and you'd have no problem."

Which just proved how little the old human knew of the Dark Gods. Try to fool their priests, and Rhodri would have been hounded to the far ends of the earth and back again. But an orcish shaman, that was a different matter.

It was too late to worry about it. He began to read the scroll. Blue lightning traced over the runes on the marble seal. As he spoke the last word, a clap of thunder sounded down the passageway, and for all they were deep under the earth a bolt of lightning struck the center of the pentagram. Slowly, the final door of the Tombs of Aram Karagh swung open. The smells of sulphur and saltpeter hung in the air. The candles guttered in the sudden draft, then sprang to life again. "Come on," he said to his companions. Surely it was the stink of burning and decay that made his voice catch in his throat, and nothing else.

He let them go first. Timothy was holding his fleur-de-lys up, as if it were real. Lars had his sword out. It would be as much use. As they entered the vast burial chamber, crystal spheres on the walls began to glow with cold light.

Rhodri noted the gleam of quartz in the obsidian walls, the gold chains that bound a dozen figures to their catafalques and held a dozen dozen warriors against the walls. Blue magelight played over ageless flesh. For an instant, he imagined those eyes opening, regarding him with infinite hatred. He thought he heard the sussurus of breathing slowed almost to a stop. Yet his attention was held only by the royal treasures: the regalia of crown, scepter, and orb at the foot of each catafalque, and the jewelry, gems and gold that lay in the caskets in the middle of the room.

Of a blood sacrifice there was no sign.

Lars strode up to the treasure. "Much riches here for all." He picked up a white-gold and diamond necklace and put it on. The filigree nestled among the hair of his chest. "Suits me, no? Timothy, do what must. Then we go, with treasure. Heroes, no?"

Timothy cleared a space in the middle of the floor and drew a circle in white chalk on the black marble. He filled it with runes and symbols, and then a pentacle. Rhodri noted with interest that it was perfectly symmetrical. Timothy was playing his part well, though that would not help him in the end.

He went to help Lars scoop the treasure into sacks. They took only the best of it, enough to keep them all

for the rest of their lives, ten times over. Still, Rhodri thought, it would be worth mounting another expedition sooner or later. When he could find suitable companions.

He glanced up. Timothy was lighting the last of the thirteen white candles he had placed around the pentagram. As the chamber filled with their churchish odor, their flames danced in the draft from the door, turning the orc's face demonic and sending shadows skittering over the walls, black on black.

Lars was on the far side of the room. Rhodri made his move. He launched himself at the human, who went down before him. The man was big, but he was ungainly. Rhodri flipped onto his feet and had a knife at the man's throat before the barbarian had really understood what was going on. Timothy was coming toward them. Rhodri would have to dispose of the orc eventually, of course, but not before the sacrifice had been made—to whatever god.

"Into the pentagram, human," Rhodri said. His voice was harsh with his exertion.

Lars's eyes went wide. He stared at Timothy. *The fool!* Rhodri thought. He really believed the orc's tale. He gave the northerner a sharp shove, and the man stumbled forward. A bead of blood appeared on his neck where the blade had nicked him. Timothy grabbed his arm and pulled him toward the circle.

"Wait," Rhodri said. "We should bind him. We don't want any trouble."

"You scared of humans, pointy?" Timothy asked. Playful banter or a taunt? Rhodri could not tell, but he would not be drawn. Soon, the orc would be in no condition to call anyone names.

"No point taking risks, not when we've come this far. If we don't want the shades of the Monarchs of Agurak after us, we'd better make sure they get their sacrifice."

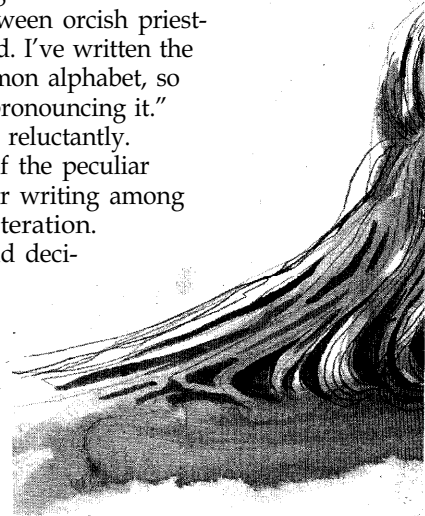
"Certainly." Timothy pulled a piece of thin rope from his pack and went behind Lars. He pulled the human's hands together roughly and tied them behind his back. "You're probably right," he said when he had finished. "You usually are." He smiled as he stood up.

Together they pushed the human between the candles. Rhodri was about to back off—he had no desire to get covered in more blood than was absolutely necessary—but Timothy said, "Wait. You have to read this out for me or the Binding won't work. There isn't that much difference between orcish priest-work and the human kind. I've written the spell out using the Common alphabet, so you won't have trouble pronouncing it."

Rhodri took the paper reluctantly. There were a few lines of the peculiar fish-hooks that passed for writing among the orcs, then the transliteration.

"I'll stand here," he said decisively, moving outside the ring of candles.

"If you want," said Timothy. He pulled a



stone knife out of its belt sheath. "But if anything goes wrong, you won't be protected from *them*." He gestured at the figures ranged around the room. Candlelight glinted on the blood gutter in the blade.

"Oh, very well," Rhodri said. He stepped into the pentagram.

Timothy dropped to his knees between Lars and Rhodri. "When I say go," he said. He raised the knife above his head, but then paused. He appeared to be meditating. For the first time Rhodri believed that Timothy really took all the mumbo-jumbo seriously.

"Go," the orc said. Rhodri started to read the words. He was suddenly afraid that he would stumble, and of what might happen if he did, or if the wards failed.

He had expected Timothy to plunge the knife straight into Lars's chest.

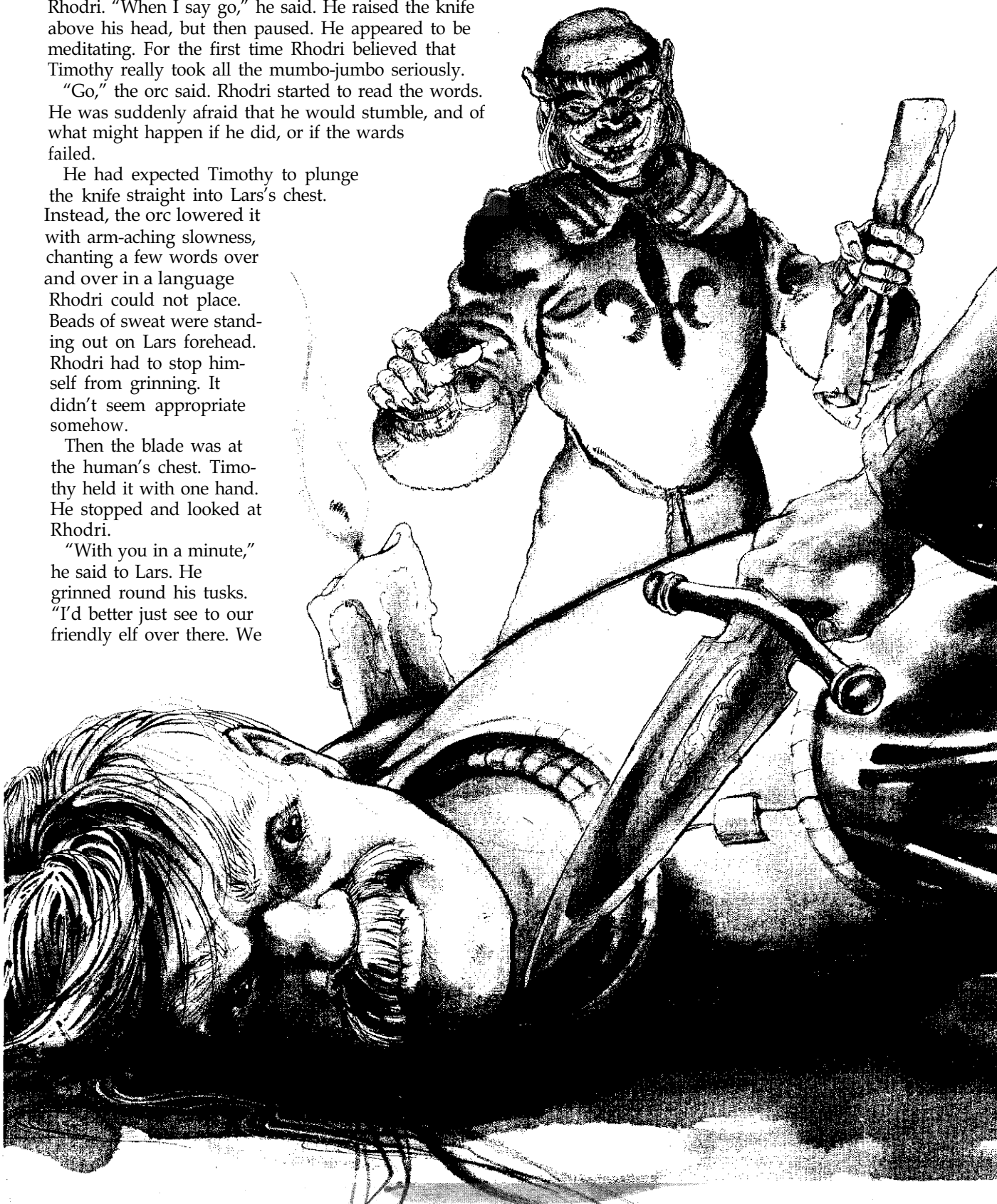
Instead, the orc lowered it with arm-aching slowness, chanting a few words over and over in a language Rhodri could not place. Beads of sweat were standing out on Lars forehead. Rhodri had to stop himself from grinning. It didn't seem appropriate somehow.

Then the blade was at the human's chest. Timothy held it with one hand. He stopped and looked at Rhodri.

"With you in a minute," he said to Lars. He grinned round his tusks. "I'd better just see to our friendly elf over there. We

don't want him getting all excited again."

Rhodri knew that was wrong. Timothy was talking to the human as if they were friends. He ought to stop it, but he couldn't move. His arms felt like lead. He couldn't move his legs. Then Timothy was standing in front of him.



"What?" Rhodri said. His voice came out as a long drawn-out moan.

"Sorry, Rhodri," Timothy replied. He plucked the parchment from Rhodri's hands. "It's the chant my granddad used to hypnotise himself. Helps the shaman trances no end."

Rhodri shook his head. With a great effort of will he shook off his stupor, but Timothy had the dagger and he was holding it like a professional.

"Assassin," Rhodri spat.

"Nothing of the sort," Timothy said tartly. "As I said, I'm a priest of the Lady. You should have believed me when I told you in the first place. Mind you, I haven't forgotten some of the things I knew from before."

Keep talking, orc, Rhodri thought as he maneuvered round. He fainted forward. Timothy dropped back half a pace. Rhodri grabbed one of the candles. It was as long as his arm and reassuringly heavy. He swiped at Timothy with it, buying just enough time to pull out his other boot knife.

"You're a fool, Timothy," he said. "You should have killed me when you had the chance."

"I couldn't do that, Rhodri. I told you: I'm *good*. I had quite a struggle to convince the priestesses' truth tellers to let me join the church." Timothy was moving too, tracking Rhodri all the way. "It isn't the sort of thing you can fake, no matter what you thought. So I wouldn't want Lars telling them I'd let them down just because I got carried away."

They stopped talking then. Rhodri had suddenly noticed how much closer Timothy was. Best make a quick end to it. He slashed at the orc's face. Timothy dodged in and out. They were jockeying for position again before Rhodri realized he had been cut across the front of his thighs. It was nothing, a stinging wound, but he knew he would have to be more careful. He fainted, but Timothy moved in the opposite direction and suddenly there was a line of blood across Rhodri's knuckles.

He felt himself begin to panic. He lunged wildly, then tried to turn it into a feint. Too late: Timothy parried the blow and the two daggers locked at the hilt. The orc's blade was underneath, but try as he might Rhodri couldn't force it down. His hands were slick with sweat. He heard someone grunt and someone swear, but couldn't tell which of them it had been. Then the dagger flicked out of his hands and skittered away into the shadows.

He began to back away. Timothy's eyes were burning with anger as he followed him.

"Come on, then," Rhodri shouted. "Get it over with, you hypocrite. Call yourself good, orc? You're no better than me."

Timothy sighed. "Oh Rhodri, you still haven't got it, have you?" He kept on advancing. "I'm not *just* a good orc." He smiled. "I'm the best."

Rhodri spat at him. It wasn't much of a retort, but it was the best he could do. He had hoped to distract the orc, but to his disappointment, Timothy didn't even flinch. He would just have to wait for the right

moment. Maybe when the orc went to release the northman . . .

"You might as well give up," Timothy said. "No hard feelings and all that. Just be a good chap and untie Lars for me, will you?"

Rhodri didn't move. The orc came up close to him and pressed the dagger just below his ear, behind the angle of his jaw.

"I don't want to do this," Timothy said. "Don't force me." Rhodri felt the orc's breath hot on his face. His mouth was suddenly full of the coppery taste of fear. He nodded very slightly and began to untie the northerner.

As soon as Lars was free, he grabbed Rhodri and bundled him over to the side of the room away from the door. First he and Timothy took all Rhodri's knives away, showing more imagination about where such things could be hidden than he expected. Then they bound him hand and foot and made him kneel. Timothy raised his hands and began to chant the Prayer for the Forgiveness of Sins.

You can't even begin to imagine the number and kind of my sins, Rhodri thought. And they were no better than he was, anyway. Lars had begun to rummage through one of the caskets.

"Get it over with," Rhodri said when he could stand it no longer. At least he hadn't intended to make Lars suffer.

"There are preparations we have to make first," Timothy said. Rhodri was sure the orc was laughing at him. "I'd better read it out," the orc continued, turning to Lars. "It would be entirely embarrassing to start making mistakes at this stage."

Lars nodded and held up a thin gold chain he must have found in one of the caskets.

"Here goes," Timothy said. "Kept in the darkest conditions imaginable, they who fear the Light because of their bloodlines are bound with gold." It was tantalizingly familiar, but Rhodri could not quite place it. The orc continued, "They are most evil, but for the sake of the world, Rhiannon, who was pure and strong, put them where they can do no harm."

Rhodri recognized it then: the verse from the map of the tombs. "Wait!" he said. "That's not what it means. I've got a proper translation. Let me go and I'll help you." It was his only chance. He could find a way to escape later. Timothy stared at him. For an orc, his arrogance was unbelievable. "You have to believe me, or you'll let all of them free." Even he could hear the wheedling in his voice.

"The verse translation you have is incorrect because it pays more attention to the poetical structure than to the meaning," Lars said. Suddenly, his grammar was flawless. "At the University at Ekkesberg, we have been working for years on a proper translation. Now that we have it, we've put our heads together with the Church of the Lady to get rid of the evil ones forever."

Damn northern barbarians, Rhodri thought. So much for appealing to their consciences. There had to be a way to escape. "At the proper conjunction of the spheres, the enchantment may be broken," Timothy

continued, "or it may be strengthened so that the chamber and everything in it is placed outside normal time and space for all eternity. But to do this requires the slow death of a willing sacrifice—"

Rhodri panicked. "Sacrifice. I knew it. I knew it."

"Shut up," Lars said shortly. "It says 'willing.' Even you can hear that."

"Not me, then," Rhodri said. He could feel the tears starting in his eyes even as he hated himself for them. "I'm not willing. I'm not, I tell you. And anyway, if I hadn't found the other half of the map, you'd never have been able to get into this place at all."

"Yes, and we're very grateful to you," Timothy said. He sounded genuine. "But do be quiet and let us get on with it. The proper translation is quite a lot longer and more complicated than the one you have. Lars, you had better watch him."

"Of course," the northerner said, "If you'd handed the map over to the church authorities when you first discovered it, we wouldn't have had to go through all this." He stood up, holding another length of chain. "Would we, Timothy?" The expression on his face was strangely wistful as he handed the chain to the orc. "This all the chain there is, I think. You are going to finish reading the Lay out? It's quite a long time since I heard it, and playing stupid so this oaf would bring me along has frozen up my brains. I wouldn't want to make any mistakes." He came and stood next to Rhodri.

Timothy continued, "—willing sacrifice without the shedding of blood. Great as we are, we can find no such victim.

"The sacrifice must be bound in gold as those others who should not be named have been bound. To this end we have left suitable chains here. Bind the victim saying—"

His voice went off into gibberish then. Gibberish like the words he had used to banish the ghoul. In any case Rhodri was too busy panicking to pay attention. If they thought he was willing to be a sacrifice, they must think he was kobold-stupid. His mouth had gone dry and his heart was pounding. A slow death. No blood. Maybe they were going to garrotte him. That could be slow, if you were careful. No-one knew that better than he did. Or they might use poison. Something to constrict the windpipe, maybe. He would have to make them understand that he didn't want to die for their stupid cause.

Lars grabbed him by the hair and dragged him to his feet. The pain was excruciating, but he supposed it would all be over soon.

"Now?" he asked as Lars pushed him toward the pentagram. Timothy was already inside it. He seemed unnaturally calm, and his face was pasty.

"Now if you watch carefully, you might learn something," Lars said. He tied a rope to Rhodri's bonds and fastened it to a knob at the end of the nearest catafalque, as if he were a dog and not an elf.

Lars went to Timothy. He put his hands on the orc's shoulders and began to speak to him. Rhodri tried to

break free, but the northerner was an expert. There was no hope. Then he caught what Lars was saying.

"Are you sure you want to do this?" the northerner asked. His voice was so solemn it made Rhodri want to giggle.

"I'm sure. Just make sure the candles are all lit before you leave."

And then Lars took the golden chains he had found and began to bind Timothy with them: round his ankles, round his wrists, and round and round his torso. And all the while he chanted words in the old High Tongue of the sorcerers, words that Timothy had repeated to him not very long ago.

The air in the room seemed to grow calmer and colder with every syllable. Rhodri found that he could hardly breathe. He wondered if it was his imagination, or if something old and so evil it made him seem saintlike really was watching what happened from a great distance. He felt its eyes on him and understood that it knew it was about to be banished forever. He wondered if he would have helped it if he could. Was he kin to it? Once he would have sworn he was. Now he did not know.

The last syllable was spoken. Lars stood up. He stared down at Timothy for a moment. The orc's eyes were half-closed, and he was swaying on his knees. Lars swiped at his eyes with the back of his hand, then went over to Rhodri.

"Get up," he said. He undid the knot that tied the elf to the catafalque. "You walk ahead of me."

"Wait," Rhodri said. "Untie me. It's too dangerous." Lars just stared at him. "Look, we'll never make it out of here alive unless you do. You won't get out."

Lars smiled. "I'll manage. You can always stay here, if you'd prefer."

"No!" Rhodri said. "No." His voice was thick with phlegm. He could not take his eyes off Timothy. How could anyone do this to himself? He wondered if speaking to the orc would spoil the charm. He resisted the temptation until he was right by the door.

"Timothy?" he said. The orc's head came up. His eyes opened. They shone like rubies in the candlelight.

"Why?" Rhodri asked. He had to know.

"The sins of my people, my own too. I have to expiate them. There's no one else to do it." The orc smiled sadly, and looked away.

"You could have anything you wanted. Fortune, fame. You could buy the world with the treasure in this room and have change left over for breakfast." Rhodri let his voice trail off. It was as if he and the orc were speaking different languages.

Timothy's head came up. For a moment there was a hint of old arrogance in the narrowing of his eyes. "That isn't what I want, Rhodri," he said. "I told you. It isn't enough for me to be the only good orc. I have to be the best."

Ω

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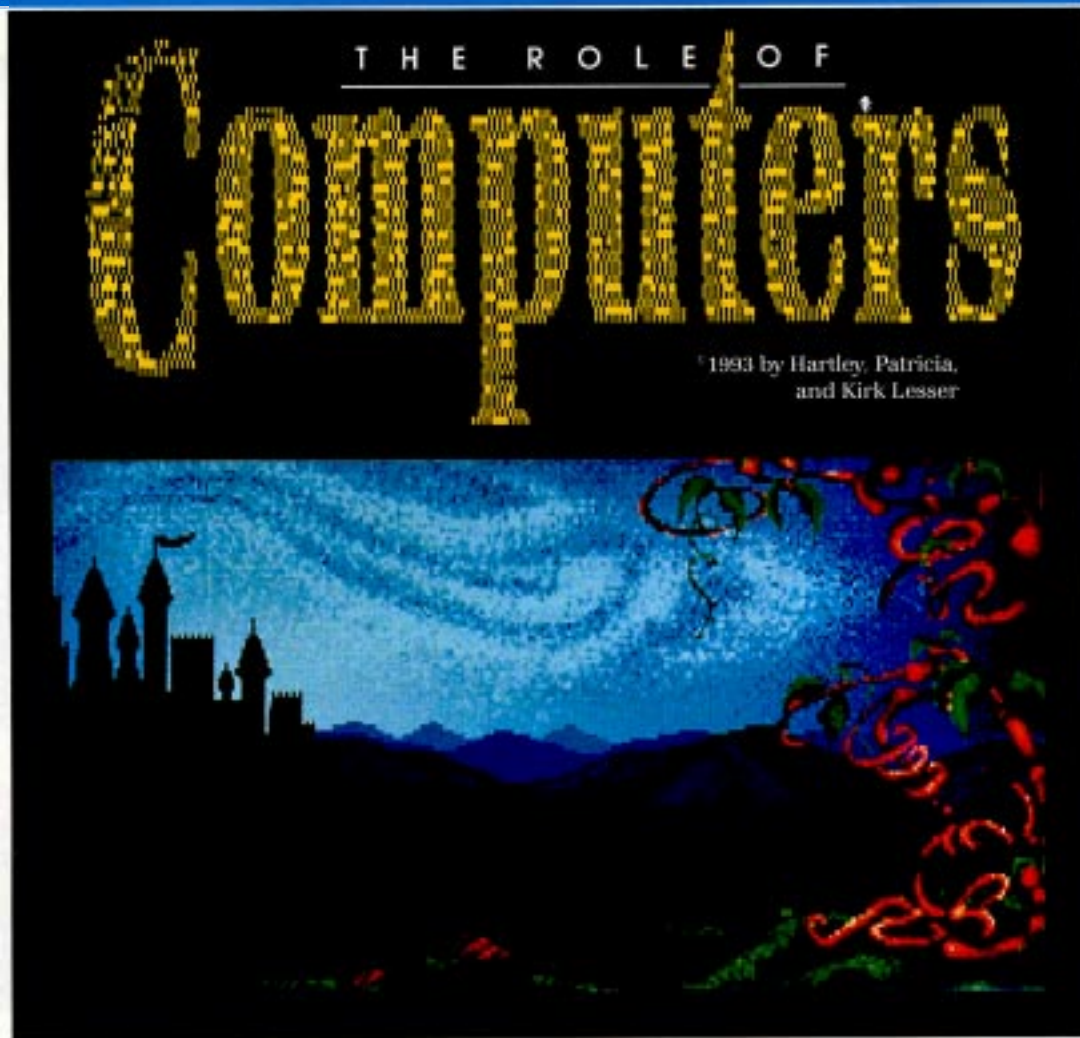
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Challenge of the Five Realms
(MicroProse)

Will you meet the *Challenge of the Five Realms*?

KnightLine

We just received *Strike Commander* from Origin Systems, and after installing the game (which required over 30 minutes!), all we can say is it looks like one of the best PC/MS-DOS flight simulators we've seen. *Strike Commander* offers intense combat action with stunning animation and graphics. Two other super simulators are Disney Software's *Stunt Island*, an original flight simulator that allows you to be the pilot, director, and the stunt coordinator, and *X-Wing* from LucasArts Games, the flight simulator with all the personality and dazzling animation of *Star Wars*. Although we haven't had time to review any of these games, it's our opinion that flight simulation fans will want these games. Without a doubt, they set new standards for PC/MS-DOS flight simulators.

However, be aware that the storage requirements are massive, and you're going to need a lot of memory. *Stunt Island* requires 13 MB of hard disk space, VGA graphics, a 33 MHz processor, and two MB or more of RAM. *Strike Commander* recommends four MB of RAM with a 33 MHz processor, 33 MB of hard disk

space, plus sound and music boards. As you can see, you're going to need a fast machine to run these games at peak efficiency. There's no doubt in our minds that if you have the hardware, you should check into these games.

H.E.L.P.

Several readers responded to Danny Pekofsek's request for help with *Eye of the Beholder II* that appeared in DRAGON® issue #192. They were Charles Lin of Burnaby, British Columbia, and Grant Szabo of Skokie, Ill. All solutions were similar in content.

"To open the door to the south, items must be placed on all four corner pressure plates. The party must then step onto the center pressure plate. The door

should open at this point. To keep the door open, drop an item onto the center pressure plate before leaving it. Save your game now. After going through this door, be prepared to fight 11 margoyles after turning west. Continue west 70 feet and you'll be in front of an illusory wall. Walk through it and travel 30 feet, then turn north. Continue north until you come to the wall. Push through it—it's another illusory wall. In this area is a stone gem (also look for a secret button to find more goodies). The stone gem, when taken to the room with the door with the runes, teleports you to temple level #2."

Reviews

Challenge of the Five Realms
MicroProse, PC-MS/DOS

Challenge of the Five Realms (CFR) is an interesting fantasy role-playing game (FRPG), but its presentation appears to be just a bit behind the times. The plot is interesting, if implausible. If you can take the information at face value, you'll have a good time questing in the five realms of

Computer games' ratings

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

Character creation requires you to answer several questions. This determines not only your physical attributes, but your talents like fighting skills and magical capabilities as well. When you've finished with the questions, you receive your full skill set and attribute designations for review. If you don't like your character, you have to reboot the game and start over.

The game starts at Castle Ballytogue with the Prince awakening after getting hit on the head. He learns that his father, King Clesodor of Alonia, has been killed by Grimnoth, an evil sorcerer. The prince must avenge his father's death and defeat Grimnoth. There are five realms, numerous cities, and many people to visit while Grimnoth's evil darkness starts to encompass the land. Humans inhabit Alonia, the enchanted forest is called Fraywood, Aerius is a cloud-based realm, Thalassy lies below the ocean, and Alveola lies below ground and is the habitat of gnomes. There is much to do and only 100 game-days within which to complete your tasks.

To make matters worse, your cousin, Duke Gormond, has claimed the throne after being told that you may have killed the king through the use of sorcery. He was told that you now flee the approaching plague of darkness after casting the spell that caused it. Your cousin orders knights to slay you and then he's off to Castle Ballytogue to claim the throne. You're going to have to deal with Gormond as well.

Before leaving the castle and its nearby village, you should locate some spell components and hunt down the rogues who stole your mother's treasure chest. It contains 50 gems, the Queen's diary, her diamond ring, bracelet, and two rubies. You're going to need the cash to arm yourself at the village armory and weapons shop. Be certain you've done everything you can do before leaving the castle and the village, because once you've left, your cousin will be enroute and it's going to be tough for you to reoccupy the castle without a full complement of NPCs.

We recommend you head south immediately, taking note of all the minor quests that have been suggested to you. Note that the evil sorcerer's dark cloud is going to be moving from south to north. You should find a sorceress named Cagliostro and gain the help of wizards. Once the dark cloud infiltrates an area, it's unhealthy to enter that location. By selecting quests which require a southerly visit first, you can gain knowledge or items to help defeat the darkness later. You'll also find that even as you undertake a quest, others will be presented that are mandatory to complete the major goal. Be certain to decide which quests make sense to undertake at which time.

The copy-protection system consists of



Challenge of the Five Realms (MicroProse)

entering a word from a page in the manual. Make certain you enter the exact word, otherwise the program boots you out to the DOS prompt. Also, realize that only a single word is needed. The instructions to type in exactly what is in the manual led us astray during our first try. The information required was part of a two-word sentence, so we typed in both words, and out we went to the DOS prompt.

The dialogue balloons are bothersome. Every time you encounter someone, all speech is contained in these white balloons on the screen, partially concealing it. The conversations are interesting, even though the verbiage is unnatural at times.

You can save as many as eight games. Movement is accomplished via the mouse. Note the direction of the arrow below your character and then depress and hold your mouse button to move your character in the arrow's direction. Sometimes the character simply won't move, even though there appears to be enough room for him to move in one direction or another. When that happens, you have to back up and try again. Trying to go through some doors can be quite frustrating.

Music and sound, although evident at the start of the game, are all but nonexistent throughout the adventure. The opening movie for the game is filled with some silly dialogue. Simply put, your hero's father is slain by Grimnoth, who wants the crown. Why the evil fellow simply can't take the crown after he slays the King makes no sense—after all, the crown falls to the floor between Grimnoth and the prince when the King is disintegrated. Instead, Grimnoth tells the prince to bring him the crown by a specific date. Then,



this evil sorcerer *leaves* and doesn't finish off the Prince—the evil one could've slain both the King and the Prince and acquired everything he demands right there. Granted, there wouldn't have been an adventure to play had this occurred, but as the plot now stands, it requires a great deal of disbelief on the gamer's part.

CFR left us with the impression of a game from the past. The graphics are standard, not state-of-the-art. The plot stretches belief, and the interface is reminiscent of the older *Ultima* series from Origin. Although there are far better FRPGs on the market, including several from MicroProse, CFR is an interesting adventure if you forget the opening sequences and decide to enjoy five very different realms. We reviewed this game using VGA graphics, a Roland sound board, and Aztech's Sound Galaxy NX in Sound Blaster Pro emulation mode.

The Journeyman Project

Presto Studios, CD-ROM game for Macintosh

Although slower than molasses (thanks to the hardware of CD-ROM drives not catching up to software technology), *The Journeyman Project* (TJP) is the most innovative science-fiction game we've seen on any system. All scenes are professionally rendered to the point of photo-



Legends of Valor (SSI)



S.C.OUT(Inline Design)

realism. The game interface is as unique an invention as you'll find anywhere. The animation is smooth, and the sound effects are superb. This game takes time travel where it's never been before as you try to counter time rifts by altering the cause of the rifts. Travel back to the time when dinosaurs roamed the Earth to locate the Temporal Historical Vault that contains the historical disc through which you can learn which histories have been altered. Encounter robotic machines that would just as soon destroy you as look at you. Learn how to withstand the rigors of a vacuum while investigating alternate paths. The adventure is intriguing and exciting, leading you to participate in what like a motion picture on your Mac.

Normally, a game as slow as this would not receive as high a star rating as TJP earns. The reason is simple. TJP is the first of its kind of CD-ROM-based entertainment, a true technological marvel that should be owned by gamers as a record of when interactive entertainment entered a new stage. With a Clue Book planned for

release later this year, TJP affords many adventuring thrills. If you, like us, appreciate the work of true game artists, this game is a must-have!

Legends of Valour SSI, PC/MS-DOS

We were quite excited when we received our copy of this FRPG. Then, the letdown—simply learning how to survive and navigate the city is boring! The graphics, claimed to be better than *Ultima Underworld*, are certainly its equal. However, wandering about a city trying to find quests and then fulfilling promises, when you can be tossed in jail for numerous days for absolutely no reason, and finding you forgot to pay your money at the inn and all your possessions have been seized, becomes highly frustrating. There are a large number of mini-adventures to be experienced within this realm, but only if you can hack the mapping chore you face. If you're going to purchase Legends of Valour, then purchase the Hint Book that goes with it. Without the book specifically

identifying locations and adventures for you, you're going to waste your time in the city or with the game. We reviewed this FRPG using VGA graphics and Aztech's Sound Galaxy NX sound board.

Pax Imperia

Changeling Software, Macintosh

Here's a space-colonization strategy game that really involves you in not only ship and technology building, but also in planet development. Unlike *Spaceward Ho!* (reviewed later) where combat is the name of the game, *Pax Imperia* requires you, as the Emperor, to consider all manner of revenue gathering, defensive, offensive, and star research opportunities. You select your galaxy how you wish your money to be spent on technology (the Radical technology selection creates some truly astonishing items!), which ships are to be built, how to reinvest in planet development, and much more. Highly interactive and replayable time after time, this offering presents a great value for gamers. The game's only drawback is that various windows need to be opened to accomplish game commands. This can become confusing, especially when you have four or five windows open atop the base screen. However, once you learn what you can do with galaxies, systems, stars, and planets, you'll find your window use optimized. In all, *Pax Imperia* is a definite must for Mac gamers. Look for its colorful and distinctive packaging at your local retailer.

S.C.OUT

Inline Design, Macintosh

A terrific arcade/strategy game, the goal of this game is to reactivate a moonbase infested with aliens. *S.C.OUT* gives you all manner of offensive weaponry to annihilate the enemy, from entity to worm to slime. But it's not simply moving around an easy playing surface to make your kills. There are all sorts of barriers to your success, including doors (some of which are locked), electronic doors, L.E.D. doors, barriers that won't allow cargo to cross them, and armored obstacles that can be destroyed only with continuous fire. There are devices you can find to assist in your endeavor, from electric railways to portable batteries that give power to the railway. Safe zones and teleporters abound, as do force mirrors that can be diagonal and four-way in nature. Watch out for those viruses! Despite a slow and sometimes jerky screen refresh when you scroll from side to side, *S.C.OUT* offers high replayability, great graphics and sound, plus a lot of action!

Spaceward Ho! v. 3.0

Delta Tao Software, Macintosh

A highly addictive space-conquest game, *Spaceward Ho!* finds you trying to colonize your galaxy and fighting off attempts of

alien races to colonize your world. You begin the game as the "owner" of a single planet, from which you dispatch Scouts and other ships to colonize the universe. As your Scout ships head for other planets, keep in mind the amount of fuel they have on board if it takes four fuel units to reach a planet, then it also takes four fuel units to return to your home planet.

You want to search for planets that are as close in nature as your home planet, say, something around 72° and about 1.0 G. Avoid planets with ratings of less than 0.4 G or higher than 2.5 G. You'll never terraform them into profitable planets. Start building your resources—you want to be able to build both defensive and offensive units. You'll thank your lucky stars you built enough defense satellites for your home planet the first time you're invaded by an enemy! This offering emphasizes raw action. If you enjoy colonization with force, *Spaceward Ho!* is definitely worth the price of admission. By the way, Delta Tao is one of the few publishers who believes in reducing packaging to its bare minimum in order to save trees and other natural resources to sell its goodies. We congratulate them for this policy!

Clue corner

Might and Magic III PC/MS-DOS version)

1. Enter DOE MEISTER at a mirror portal to enter a dragon's cavern where there is a large amount of money. Use Lloyd's Beacon or Mr. Wizard to get home.

2. Enter ORB MEISTER at a mirror portal to get a Power Orb. Unless you are very powerful, take the transporter to Fountain Head.

3. Blackwind got married on day 60.

Mario DeAngelis
Cranston RI

Treasure of the Savage Frontier (Amiga version)

1. Siulajia isn't the only NPC available for one of your characters to fall in love with. There's a male warrior named Jarbarkas and if your party leader is a female, he'll join the party instead of Siulajia. Speaking of romance, it's not automatic. If your character hangs back in battle or ignores the helpless, the NPC won't come to love him.

2. If you clear the mausoleum area in Loudwater, the townspeople give you a Cloak +2. Also in Loudwater, the young girl who approaches the party for help isn't really as pretty as she appears, but help her anyway, or the NPC will be angry.

3. Memorize Cure Disease, Dispel Magic, and Neutralize Poison spells before exploring the Waterdeep Caverns. The disguised Zhentish soldiers have a hideout in the northwest corner of the caverns.

4. At one point (usually while trying to leave Orlumber or Mintur), Jarbarkas or Siulajia will be kidnapped. There's nothing

you can do to prevent this from happening, but you can rescue either in Luskan. Before you can perform the rescue though, you must complete the missions in Minturn and Orlumber and at least pass through Port Liast and Neverwinter. The order of these events doesn't matter, but I recommend the following: Go to Neverwinter and let yourself be captured by the guards. Lord Nasher will sentence you to Farr Windward, a special colony on Orlumber. In Farr Windward, a strange man named Ougo will want to join the party—let him. After completing the mission in Farr Windward, find the Hidden Temple of Talos. When you defeat the enemy there, you'll have completed the Orlumber mission (the temple is Orlumber itself). When you try to leave Orlumber, your character's beloved will be kidnapped. Go to Mintarn. You'll meet Jagaerda from *Gateway to the Savage Frontier*. Let her join you. To finish the mission, clear out Southclaw Fort and all of the warehouses. Now go to Port Llast. At 9:00 A.M., go on the Trackless Sea Tour. The ship will be attacked by pirates. You have three choices: abandon ship (your reputation will suffer), hide (the pirates take the ship to Luskan), or defeat the pirates. This battle is tough! The first wave is pirates, then Luskan Captains, then Host Tower Mages. If you win, you'll be richly rewarded. Finally, go to Luskan. Go directly to the door at 5,9. Go in and go through the door to the north. Now, travel east-northeast. Stop, save the game, and cast preparatory spells. Go north and fight the bad guys. Be careful; they have two Stone Golems! Go through the door to the northeast—there's another combat—and you have rescued your beloved!

5. When you camp after rescuing your lover, both characters declare their love and ask for your blessing. Give it, otherwise, the NPC will leave and your heartbroken character will perform badly from that point on.

6. When your character and his beloved have declared their love, their performance in battle improves. But watch out! If either of them are killed, the other will go into a mad frenzy and be totally under computer control and you won't regain control until the next battle!

Sheila Jenkins
Rogersville TN

1. At the beginning of the game, when Elminster teleports the party to the Realms for the first time, make your way to the Crater of Hulburg which will be just a little northeast of you. When you enter the crater go directly north and join forces with Valla of the Silver Blades, she will give you a Shield +4 for your troubles. She will not leave the crater with the party, however. Then you come across a room with a bunch of coffins in it and vampires in the coffins. Take care of them and go to the room to the south. If you

search you will find some booty.

2. When you're finished with the crater, start making your way towards Zhentil Keep so you can advance the PCs in your group. Steer clear of Dragon's Horn Gap for the time being, but take the time to investigate all the other places along the way like intersections, farms, etc. There are lots of handy magical items to be had if you can solve problems. When you arrive at Zhentil Keep, you're better off just paying the drow. If you don't, they'll raise the alarm and you'll never get any peace. Taking any bracers after the battles with the drow is a good idea because you get a lot of gold for selling them. There is a magical item shop in the town, and you'll need it.

3. The technique I use for the preparation of planar travel is somewhat faster than the way described in DRAGON issue #179 but is a bit more dangerous. First, pick two characters from your group, a fighter type and a mage. Give any drow weapons that can be used to both of them. Then give all the magical items to the PCs who aren't going on the trip (if they don't have enough room, create two characters for the purpose of holding these items). After this is all done, set the difficulty setting to novice and save the game. Then let Elminster teleport you to the plane you're going. Once you get to your destination you might have an encounter, but it shouldn't be anything a well-placed Delayed Blast Fireball spell and a couple of attacks from fighters can't handle.

Kevin Faenza
Coaldale IL

Ultima VII: The Black Gate (PC/MS-DOS version)

1. By watching all the credits, a new selection called "view quotes" appears on the main menu. At the end of this is something well worth watching, especially if you have a sound card. (Note: you can skip the quote by pressing Escape.)

2. Parrots know a lot of things. For instance, they can tell you where the "treasure" is. If the parrot is reluctant to tell, perhaps a little music might help.

3. You can obtain all the treasure from the cave's entrance, so don't bother fighting the pirate's ghost. This treasure consists of eight gold bars, over 600 gold coins, four glass swords, a lightning whip, two vials of serpent venom, two magical rings, and more! (Notice the caltrops in the entrance.)

4. The Lost Isle of Ambrosia is under the map's compass.

5. Go into caves alone and invisible. Any other way spells suicide for your friends.

6. You have to join the Fellowship to beat the game.

7. Some inns have useful items in their guest rooms. Maybe staying the night isn't such a bad idea.

8. Go west from the Bee Cave entrance and walk the mountainside alone until you come to the sea shore. Hidden under

the debris is a Ring of Invisibility.

9. Follow the river in Paws south. Where it ends in a lake is a pile of debris. Underneath the debris are Magical Gauntlets.

10. Buy the hourglass in Paws. It's needed to complete the game.

11. The bees in Bee Cave won't hurt you if you don't bother them or steal their honey.

12. Don't take Tseramed into the Bee Cave, or the hermits won't talk to you.

13. Shamino has your pocketwatch.

14. Talk to everyone until you can say only "job" or "bye." This produces good information (and items).

15. Only one chunk of caddellite is needed for each helmet.

16. In the Trapezoid Generator, the ethereal monster is easy to defeat with a Glass Sword.

Jamie Belanger
Easthampton MA

A fond farewell

After many years of writing *The Role of Computers*, we have come to the end of an era. This is the last computer-game column we will write for DRAGON Magazine. We began this review column about eight years ago, when Kim Mohan (now the editor of AMAZING® Stories) was the editor of DRAGON Magazine. The intervening years with Kim, Roger Moore, Barbara Young, and Dale Donovan have been enormously fulfilling for us. These editors are highly professional and skilled craftpersons, and they have raised DRAGON Magazine to its leadership role in magazine publishing.

We leave *The Role of Computers* with mixed feelings. We shall miss our loyal readers—gamers all—and your letters. (We've received over 1,000 letters in the past eight years.) We'll miss your insights and thoughts on computer gaming and your enormous generosity in helping other gamers through the quagmires of computer gaming. Your responses to pleas for gaming aid are a testimony to your fortitude and knowledge of the various software entertainment genres.

For us, it's on to new projects. If you are an aficionado of Macintosh gaming, we suggest you take a look at the magazine *Mac Home Journal*. Our review column, *Mac Attack!*, addresses all manner of Mac-based entertainment.

DRAGON Magazine will continue to publish a computer-game review column, and we wish the new columnist much success. To all our gaming friends, we wish to leave you with heartfelt words to spur you on to win all your adventures and vanquish all your adversaries—game on!

Hartley, Pattie, and Kirk Lesser



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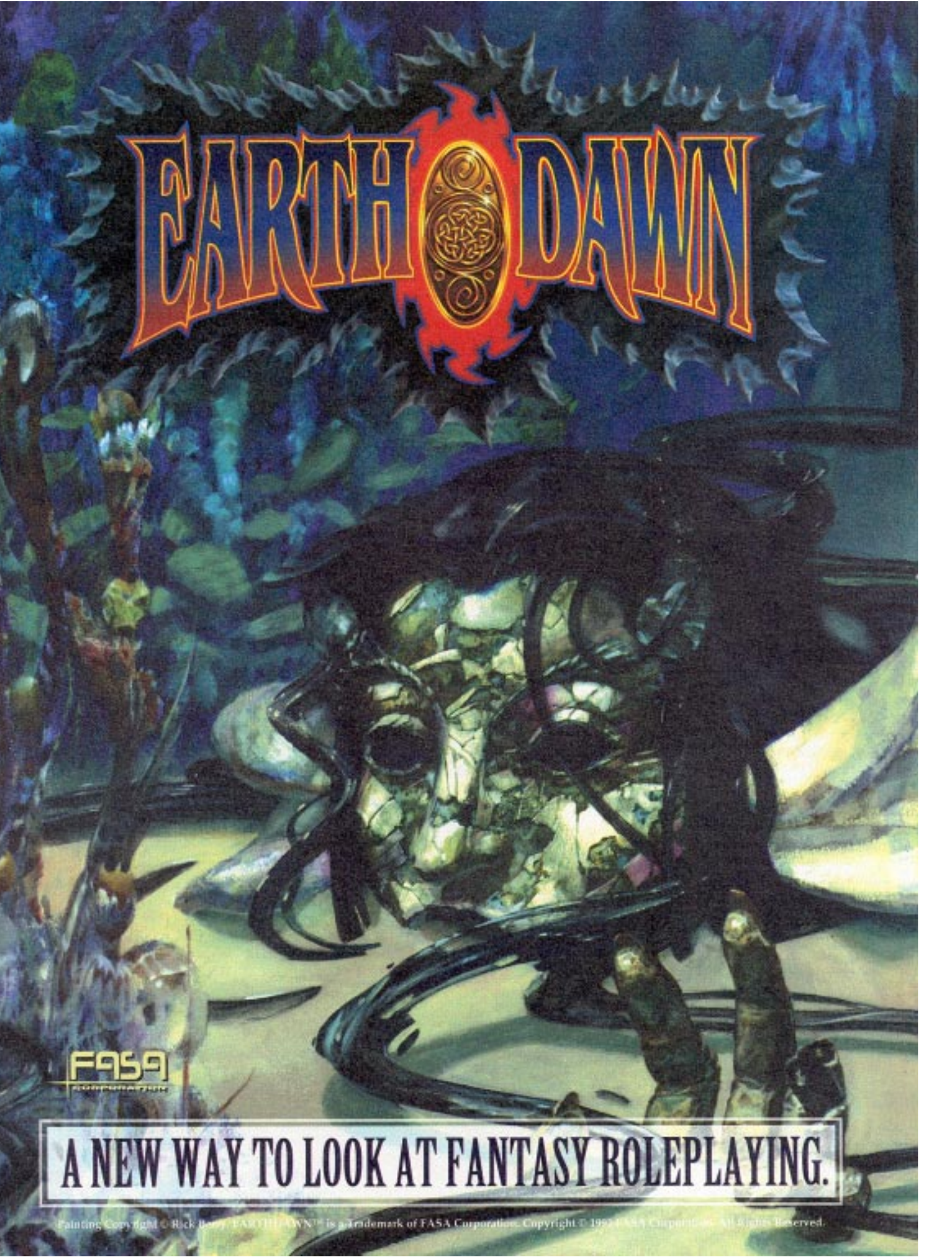
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Days of future passed: a chronology of published FORGOTTEN REALMS® fiction

by James Lowder

Blame it on the Avatar Trilogy.

Back in 1988, when work began on that epic series, there wasn't much of a need for a timeline of Realmsian fiction. Doug Niles was busy chronicling the history of the Moonshaes. R. A. Salvatore had set up camp in the mountains north of Waterdeep. Ed Greenwood and the writing team of Kate Novak and Jeff Grubb had begun to detail life in the Heartlands.

The books created by all these authors had one major thing in common: They featured self-contained stories, tales that really didn't impact upon each other or make overt references to events in other parts of the literary Realms. Drizzt's adventures didn't much affect Elminster, just as Alias's quest to uncover the meaning of her "azure bonds" didn't have a thing to do with the Moonshaes.

The Avatar Trilogy broke that mold. That planet-shaking epic—complete with gods walking the world and a continent-wide quest—featured events that were anything but self-contained. The face of the Realms changed over the course of the trilogy. Suddenly, *when* a story took place became as important as *where*. After all, if you mention Cyric or Midnight as gods, the story must be post-Avatar. If Bane is still slithering around, your tale is clearly pre-Avatar.

For a time, that was how we dealt with placing fiction in the timeline—a novel was either pre- or post-Avatar. All books written before *Shadowdale* were lumped together before DR 1358. All books written after *Waterdeep* were placed either before or after DR 1358, depending upon their content. None of this was official, of course. As editor and project coordinator for Avatar, I kept notes scrawled in my copy of the *Cyclopedia of the Realms*. Unsurprisingly, that soon proved to be about as practical as lighting a night game at Fenway Park with a book of matches.

By the time late 1989 rolled around and work had begun on the Empires Trilogy the next world-spanning Realms series, it became clear that we needed to attach firm dates to each book. More and more, authors were creating intricate histories for characters, histories that quite often mentioned their adventures during the

Time of Troubles. The notes in my *Cyclopedia* just weren't going to be enough.

Three dozen phone calls, a careful reading of Karen Wynn Fonstad's excellent FORGOTTEN REALMS® atlas, and lots of indulgence from the Realms authors led to the creation of a rough timeline. Over the next three years, the chronology was modified regularly. Designers and editors in TSR's book and game departments, and even RPGA™ Network staffers, studied the timeline and offered advice on the inconsistencies that had begun to spring up. The result is what you see here.

All dates on the timeline are in Dale-reckoning (DR). The dates are accompanied by names from the Roll of Years, as drawn from the predictions of Augathra the Mad and the redactions of those prophecies by Alaundo of Candlekeep. Short stories are noted in quotes. Novels are in italics.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------|
| The Year of the Howling Winds | (892 DR) |
| • "One Last Drink" | |
| Year of the Shattered Goblet | (1072 DR) |
| • Chapter 1 of <i>Vampire of the Mists</i> (RAVENLOFT®/FORGOTTEN REALMS crossover) | |
| Year of the Rose | (1098 DR; 475 Ravenloft) |
| • Chapter 2 of <i>Vampire of the Mists</i> (RAVENLOFT/FORGOTTEN REALMS crossover) | |
| Year of the Singing Skull | (1297 DR) |
| • <i>Homeland</i> begins | |
| Year of the Adder | (1328 DR) |
| • <i>Homeland</i> ends | |
| Year of the Snow Winds | (1335 DR) |
| • "The Family Business" | |
| Year of the Wanderer | (1338 DR) |
| • <i>Exile</i> begins | |
| Year of the Lion | (1340 DR) |
| • <i>Pool of Radiance</i> | |
| • <i>Exile</i> ends | |
| • <i>Sojourn</i> begins | |
| Year of the Saddle | (1345 DR) |
| • <i>Darkwalker on Moonshae</i> | |
| Year of the Bloodbird | (1346 DR) |
| • <i>Black Wizards</i> | |
| • <i>Darkwell</i> | |
| Year of the Bright Blade | (1347 DR) |
| • <i>Sojourn</i> ends | |
| Year of the Morningstar | (1350 DR) |
| • <i>Pools of Darkness</i> | |

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Year of the Crown | (1351 DR) |
| • <i>The Crystal Shard</i> begins | |
| Year of the Dragon | (1352 DR) |
| • Prologue of <i>Ironhelm</i> | |
| Year of the Arch | (1353 DR) |
| • "A Virtue by Reflection" | |
| Year of the Harp | (1355 DR) |
| • "Elminster at the Magefair" | |
| Year of the Worm | (1356 DR) |
| • <i>The Crystal Shard</i> ends | |
| • <i>Streams of Silver</i> | |
| • <i>The Halfling's Gem</i> begins | |
| • "The Lord of Lowhill" | |
| Year of the Prince | (1357 DR) |
| * "Dark Mirror" | |
| • <i>The Halfling's Gem</i> ends | |
| • <i>The Legacy</i> | |
| • <i>Starless Night</i> | |



- *Azure Bonds*
- *Spellfire*
- *Crown of Fire*
- FORGOTTEN REALMS comic book begins
- AD&D® comic book begins
- FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set (1987 edition) complete to end of this year
- Year of Shadows (1358 DR)
 - *Wyvern's Spur*: Ches
 - The Avatar Trilogy (Shadowdale, *Tantras*, *Waterdeep*): Kythorn through Marpenoth
 - FORGOTTEN REALMS comic book ends
 - *Song of the Saurials*
- Year of the Serpent (1359 DR)
 - AD&D comic book ends
 - *Horselords*
 - *Dragonwall*
 - The Night Parade
- Year of the Turret (1360 DR)
 - *Crusade*
 - *The Parched Sea*
 - "The Curse of Tegea"
 - "King's Tear"
- Year of Maidens (1361 DR)
 - *Elfshadow*
 - The Cleric Quintet (*Canticle*, *In Sylvan Shadows*, *Night Masks*, *Fallen Fortress*, *The Chaos Curse*) begins
 - *Into the Void* (SPELLJAMMER®/FORGOTTEN REALMS crossover)
- The Maztica Trilogy (*Ironhelm*, *Viperhand*, *Feathered Dragon*) begins
- Year of the Helm (1362 DR)
 - The Cleric Quintet ends
 - The Maztica Trilogy ends
 - Red Magic
- Year of the Wyvern (1363 DR)
 - *The Ring of Winter*
 - "Patronage"
 - "The Bargain"
- Year of the Wave (1364 DR)
 - *Crypt of the Shadowking*
 - "Grandfather's Toys"
 - *Elfsong*
- Year of the Sword (1365 DR)
 - The Druidhome Trilogy (*Prophet of Moonshae*, *The Coral Kingdom*, *The Druid Queen*)
- Year of the Staff (1366 DR)
 - *Soldiers of Ice*
- Year of the Shield (1367 DR)
 - *The Ogre's Pact*
 - Revised FORGOTTEN REALMS boxed set (1993 edition) complete to end of this year
- Year of the Banner (1368 DR)
 - *Prince of Lies*
- Year of Wild Magic (1372 DR)
 - *Pool of Twilight*

There are probably a couple of titles in the timeline you don't recognize. That's because they haven't been published yet. In November 1993, *Pool of twilight* (by

Anne Brown and Jim Ward) concludes the best-selling Heroes of Phlan series. The young son of Tarl and Shal embarks upon a quest for the warhammer of Tyr. His journey will lead him to the ultimate pool, the source of all the others that have plagued the Realms with evil throughout time.

The Harpers novel *Soldiers of Ice*, due out in December 1993, is David Cook's latest addition to Realmslore. In it, Martine of Sembia must fight a horde of gnolls in order to save the gnomes of snowbound Samek.

If you couldn't tell from the title alone, *Elfsong* is Elaine Cunningham's follow-up to her Harpers book, *Elfshadow*. *Elfsong* teams Danilo Thann with the nefarious Elaith Craulnobar and sets them on the trail of the mysterious mage who has ensorcelled all the bards around Waterdeep. The unlikely duo will be solving the puzzle in spring 1994.

Crown of Fire is Ed Greenwood's long-awaited sequel to *Spellfire*. The Zhenitar and their minions have cooked up new schemes for capturing Shandril and her allies, all in hopes of turning her magnificent power to their evil ends. *Crown of Fire* will also hit bookstores early in 1994.

Later in 1994, Troy Denning returns to the Realms after his long stint on Athas, the world of the Dark Sun. *The Ogre's Pact* is the first book in Troy's Twilight Giants Trilogy) which tells of an ancient

Continued on page 73

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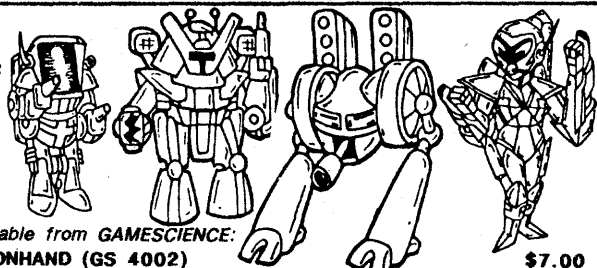
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CONVENTION CALENDAR

Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

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

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

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

Copy deadlines are the last Monday of each month, two months prior to the on-sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the last Monday of October. Announcements for North American and Pacific conventions must be mailed to: Convention Calendar, DRAGON® Magazine, PO. 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 canceled, 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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CAMELOT V, Aug. 13-15 AL

This convention will be held at the Tom Beville Center on the University of Alabama-Huntsville campus. Guests include "Zeb" Cook and Troy Denning. Activities include RPG events, dealers, videos, and open gaming. Registration: \$25 at the door. Write to: SAGA, PO Box 14242, Huntsville AL 35815-0242; or call: (205)461-8827.

GOLD CON II, Aug. 14 NJ

This convention will be held at the American Legion Post in Clark, NJ. Events include role-playing, miniatures, board, and RPGA® Network events. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$10 at the door. There are no event fees. Write to: AU Gamers, PO. Box 81, Whippany NJ 07981; or call: (201) 402-9239.

1993 GEN CON® Game Fair WI Aug. 19-22

For information on the worlds largest game fair, turn to page 33!

BUBONICON 25, Aug. 20-22 NM

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Lodge in Albuquerque, N.M. Guests include Kevin J. Anderson and Robert C. Cornett. Activities include gaming, panels, signings, movies, a masquerade, an art show, an auction, hucksters, and filking. Registration: \$24 at the door. Write to: NMSF Conference, PO. Box 37257, Albuquerque NM 87176; or call: (505) 266-8905. No collect calls, please.

WARZONE NORTH '93, Aug. 20-22 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn East in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$19/weekend or \$7/day at the door. Write to: WARZONE NORTH, c/o Wolf Entertainment, PO. Box 1256, Deland FL 32721-1256; or call: (904) 822-9653.

GAMESDAY '93, Aug. 22 NL

This convention will be held in Tilburg, Holland. Events include role-playing, board, and war games, plus dealers. Write to: Farotil, St. Marcusstraat 9, 5046DT Tilburg, HOLLAND.

OMEGACON '93, Aug. 27-29 FL

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Universal Tower in Orlando, Fla. Guests include John M. Hurt. Other activities include workshops, a costume contest, videos, and board games. Registration: \$5. Write to: John Martello, 2415 Silverwood Dr., Pine Hills FL 32808-2847; or call: (407) 293-1739.

NANCON XV/TEXICON '93

Sept. 3-6 TX

This convention will be held at the Adams Mark hotel in Houston, Texas. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, a video room, and open gaming. Registration: \$25 thereafter. Single-day passes will be available at the door. Send an SASE to: Greater Houston Gaming, PO. Box 631462, Houston TX 77263-1462.

PACIFICON '93, Sept. 3-6 CA

This convention will be held at the Dunfey hotel in San Mateo, Calif. Events include role-playing and board games. Other activities include a flea market, dealers, seminars, movies, painting contests, and open and miniatures gaming. Write to: PACIFICON, P.O. Box 2625, Fremont CA 94536.

SIOUX CITY GAME CON VIII NE Sept. 3-5

This convention will be held at the Marina Inn in South Sioux City, Nebr. Events include a wide variety of gaming events. Registration: \$10/weekend. Send an SASE to: Kurt Lyons, 2801 Jennings, Sioux City IA 51104.

NOWSCON '93, Sept. 11-12 OH

This convention will be held at the ONG Armory in Brook Park, Ohio. Activities include role-playing, board, and miniatures games, plus an auction. Registration: \$15/weekend or \$10/day preregistered; \$17/weekend or \$11/day at the door. Write to: NOWSCON, c/o Dennis Alvarez, 21574 Ivan Ave., Euclid OH; or call: (216) 731-4360 evenings.

SUMMIT CITY CON '93, Sept. 11-12 IN

This convention will be held at the Indiana National Guard Armory in Ft. Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a flea market, and a painting contest. Write to: Phoenix Rising Game Shop, 6252 St. Joseph Rd., Ft. Wayne IN 46835; or call: (219) 485-6807.

MAELSTROM I, Sept. 17-19 NE

This convention will be held at the UNL East Campus and Super 8 hotel in Lincoln, Nebr. Guests include Richard A. Knaak, Mickey Zucker Reichert, and Erin McKee. Activities include gaming, anime, panels, and a writer's contest. Registration: \$20. Write to: MAELSTROM I, PO. Box 82844, Lincoln NE 68501-2844; or call: (402) 477-8430.

ANDCON 93, Sept. 24-26 OH

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Independence, Ohio. Guests include Jean Rabe, Peter Bromley, Rick Loomis, Colin McComb, Tim Beach, and "Slade" Henson. Activities include 23 RPGA® Network events, miniatures games, the national PBM convention, and over 200 other events. Registration: \$17.95/weekend. Daily and visitor passes are available. Write to: ANDCON '93 HQ, PO. Box 3100, Kent OH 44240; or call: (800) 529-EXPO.

CONTACT XI, Sept. 24-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Evansville, Ind. Guests include Missouri Smith and Dr. Bill Breuer. Activities include gaming, discussions, a dealers' room, an art show and auction, a hospitality suite, and a video room. Registration: \$15 until Sept. 1; \$20 thereafter. Write to: CONTACT XI, PO. Box 3884, Evansville IN 47737; or call: (812) 473-3109.

- ◆ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
- indicates a European convention.
- ◇ indicates a South American convention.

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DEMICON 4, Sept. 24-26 MD

This gaming convention will be held at the Sheraton Conference hotel in Towson, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, a game auction, a painted-miniatures contest, and dealers. Registration: \$25. Send an SASE to: Harford Adventure Society, c/o Strategic Castle, 114 N. Toll Gate Rd., Bel Air MD 21014; or call: (410) 638-2400.

EPSILON ALPHA '93, Sept. 24-26 IL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Collinsville, Ill. Guests include Todd Bryant and John Haymes. Activities include dealers, banquets, an art show, movies, a costume contest, and a masquerade. Registration: \$35/weekend or \$20/day. Write to: MASFA, Inc., PO. Box 23167, Belleville IL 62223; or call: (913) 677-6537.

TACTICON '93, Sept. 24-26 CO

This convention will be held at the Sheraton hotel of Lakewood, Colo. Events include over 150 events in all types of gaming. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered. Write to: Denver Gamers' Assoc., P.O. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044; or call: (303) 665-7062.

EARTH '93, Sept. 25-26

This convention will be held at the Freizeitheim Stocken in Hannover, Germany. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a costume contest, demos, and writing contests. Write to: Arne Rassek, Berliner Str. 23, D-W 3005 Hemmingen 1, GERMANY.

EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY '93, Sept. 25-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Century Center in South Bend, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: Mark Schumaker, 1621 Frances Av., Elkhart IN 46514; or call: (219) 294-7019.

GAMECON '93, Sept. 25-26 IN

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn South in Indianapolis, Ind. Guests include Steve Lortz. Activities include a painted-miniatures contest, seminars, and dealers. Registration: \$12 preregistered; \$15 at the door. Game masters are welcome. Send an SASE to: GAMECON, PO. Box 39035, Indianapolis IN 46239-0035; or call: (317) 862-3982.

GAME DAY '93, Sept. 25 IL

This convention will be held at Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include miniatures and art contests. Registration: \$4. Write to: Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor, Student Center SIU, Carbondale IL 62901-4425; or call Joel at: (618) 529-4630.

VENCON '93, Sept. 25-26 ✧

This convention will be held at Simon Bolivar University's Student House in Caracas, Venezuela. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies and dealers. Registration: Bs. 200/day. Write to: Tito Labastidas, Fundacion Caracas, Av. Universidad, Esq. Monroy, Caracas, VENEZUELA.

COUNCIL OF FIVE NATIONS 19 Oct. 1-3 NY

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in Schenectady, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars, demos, an auction, contests, and a benefit breakfast. Registration:

\$20 before Sept. 30; \$25 at the door. GMs are welcome. Write to: Schenectady Wargamers' Assoc., C.O.F.N., PO. Box 9429, Schenectady NY 12309; or call: (518) 664-9451.

WOLF-CON III, Oct. 1-3 MS

This convention will be held at Colvard Student Union of Mississippi State University's campus in Starkville, Miss. Guests include Mike Stackpole, Liz Danforth, and Mark O'Green. Activities include gaming, dealers, an art room and auction, a costume contest, and a dance. Registration: \$20. Write to: Clayton Bain, Rt. 3, Box 178, Starkville MS 39759; or call: (601) 323-9407.

GAMEMASTER '93, Oct. 2 ID

This convention will be held at the Student Union of Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. The guest of honor is Gary Thomas. Activities include gaming, a miniatures-painting competition, and an auction. Registration: \$2/game preregistered. Write to: Gamemasters' Guild, PO. Box 8823, Boise ID 83707; or call (208) 343-4288.

NOVAG VIII, Oct. 2-3 VA

This convention will be held at the Elks' Lodge in Fairfax, Va. Events include role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Registration: \$10. Write to: NOVAG, PO. Box 729, Sterling VA 20167.

TOL-CON XI, Oct. 2-3 OH

This convention will be held at the University of Toledo's Scott Park campus in Toledo, Ohio. Events include over 200 role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Other activities include an auction, demos, painting contests, dealers, and open gaming. Send an SASE to: TOL-CON, c/o Mind Games, 2115 N. Reynolds Rd., Toledo OH 43615.

COSCON '93, Oct. 8-10 PA

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Beaver Falls, Pa. Guest of honor is Jean Rabe. Activities include gaming, dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, and game demos. Registration: \$15 before Sept. 30; \$20 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, PO. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003; or call: (412) 283-1159.

QUAD CON '93, Oct. 8-10 IA

This convention will be held at the Palmer Alumni Auditorium in Davenport, Iowa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, a miniatures-painting contest, and a silent auction. Registration: \$9/weekend or \$4/day preregistered; \$12/weekend or \$6/day at the door. Game fees are \$2-3 per game. Send a long SASE with extra postage to: Game Emporium, 3213 23rd Av., Moline IL 61265; or call: (309) 762-5577. No collect calls, please.

RALLY 'ROUND THE FLAG '93 Oct. 8-10 OH

This convention will be held at the Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. Events include miniatures, war, board, and role-playing games. Other activities include game and miniatures dealers. Write to: HMGSNT, PO. Box 14272, Columbus OH 43214; or call: (614) 267-1957.

ARTYCON V, Oct. 9-11 OK

This convention will be held at the Caisson Recreation Center at Fort Sill, Okla. Events include role-playing, board, and all types of miniatures games. Registration: \$5/day at the door. Write to: The Game Shack, 2114 Ft. Sill Blvd., Lawton OK 73507; or call: (405) 353- 5006.

NUKE-CON III, Oct. 9-10 NE

This convention will be held at St. Bernard's school in Omaha, Nebr. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$8/ weekend or \$5/day. Write to: NUKE-CON, PO. Box 1561, Omaha NE 68005; or call: (402) 733-5937.

NECRONOMICON '93, Oct. 15-17 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn-Airport in Tampa, Fla. Guests include Lois McMaster Bujold and Peter David. Activities include panels, an art show, gaming, a masquerade, videos, a charity auction, and dealers. Registration: \$20. Write to: NECRONOMICON, PO. Box 2076, Riverview FL 33569.

RUDICON 9, Oct. 15-17 NY

This convention will be held at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include art and costume contests, anime, guests, and dealers. Registration: \$6 for students; \$8 for non-students. Send an SASE to: RUDICON 9, c/o Student Directorate, 1 Lomb Memorial Dr., Rochester NY 14623.

TOTALLY TUBULAR CON '93 Oct. 15-17 CA

This convention will be held at the Jolly Roger Inn in Anaheim, Calif. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Write to: TOTALLY TUBULAR CON, PO. Box 18791, Anaheim Hills CA 92817-8791,

P. E. W. KHAN-U II, Oct. 16-17 PA

This convention will be held at the Embers in Carlisle, Pa. Events include only political, economic, and historical board and war games. Write to: M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 3rd St., New Cumberland PA 17070; or call: (717) 774-6676.

TACTICON '93, Oct. 16-17 CT

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Norwalk, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies and dealers. Write to: Jim Wiley, Gaming Guild, 100 Hoyt St., #2C, Stamford CT 06905; or call: (203) 969-2396.

RUCON III, Oct. 23 PA

This convention will be held at Lock Haven's University's Parsons Union Building in Lock Haven, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include contests, discussions, and dealers. Registration: \$7 before Oct. 7; \$10 at the door. Send an SASE to: Ken Newquist, 14 Tinc Rd., Flanders NJ 07836. After Sept. 1, send an SASE to: Role-playing Underground, Parsons Union Bldg., LHU, Lock Haven PA 17745.

U-CON '93, Oct. 29-31 MI

This convention will be held at the University of Michigan campus in Ann Arbor, Mich. Our guest of honor is Keith Herber. Activities include gaming, seminars, a special Halloween horror tournament and costume contest. Registration: \$9 preregistered; \$12 at the door. Write to: U-CON, P.O. Box 4491, Ann Arbor MI 48106-4491.

UMF-CON XIII, Oct. 29-31 ME

This convention will be held at the University of Maine in Farmington, Maine. Events include role-playing and miniatures games. Registration: \$8/ weekend preregistered or \$12/weekend at the door. Single-day rates are available. Write to: Table Gaming Club, 5 South St., UMF Farmington ME 04938.

Continued on page 73

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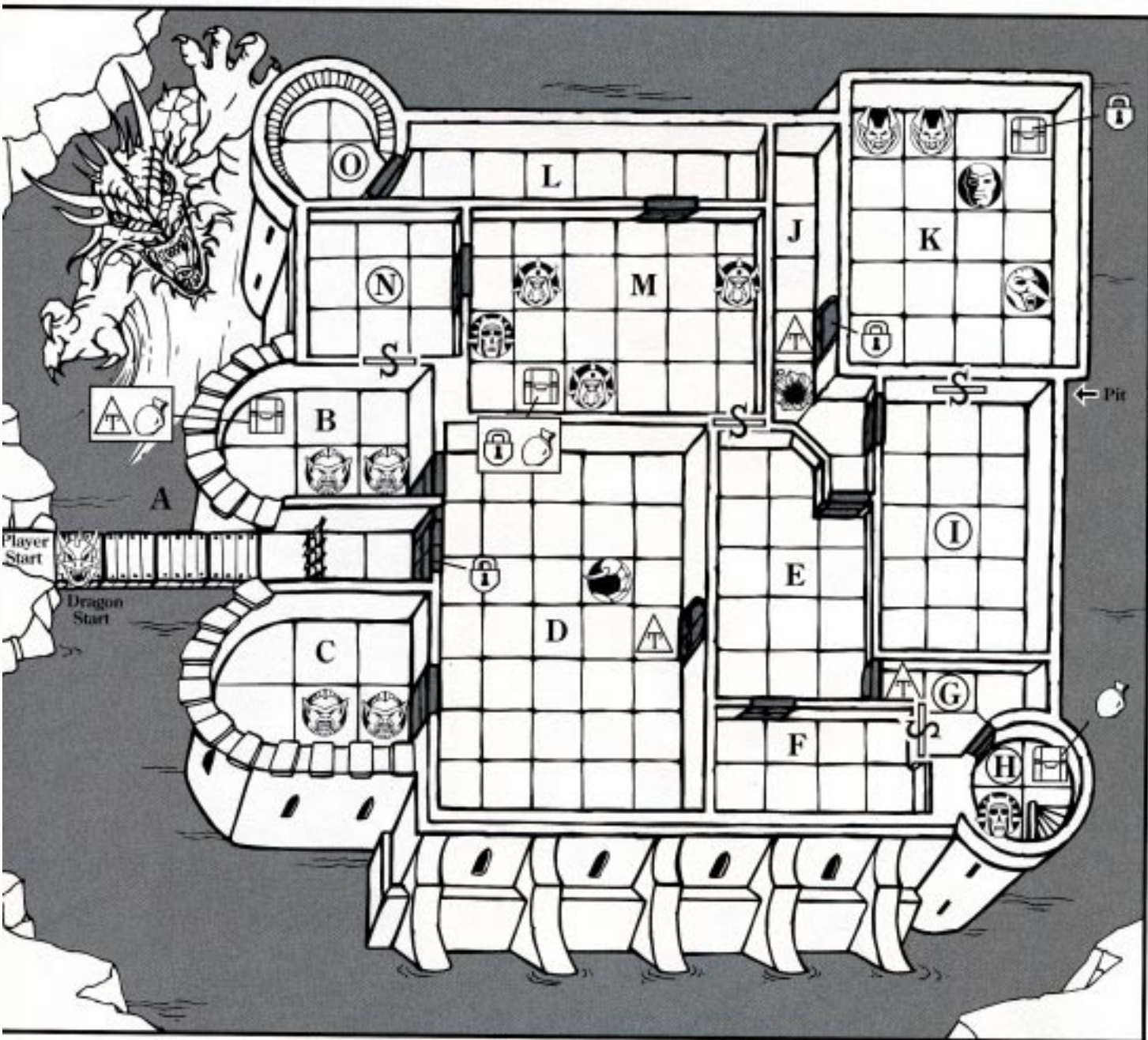
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The Game Wizards



The DRAGON STRIKE™ game: more for new gamers

by Bruce Nesmith

The DRAGON STRIKE™ board game is here! By now, many of you own a copy and some of you have undoubtedly played through all of the scenarios. Since you can

never have too much of this game, I've decided to put together another DRAGON STRIKE adventure. (It will also give those of you who haven't gotten the game yet a

taste of the fun you're missing.) If your players think they know all the scenarios, throw this one at them. Have fun!



12 • Castle

For 2 to 3 Heroes • Very Difficult

Lord Narran is worried. He paces the floor as he explains. "Teraptus is endangering the whole kingdom again. He has unearthed one of the lost Dragon Orbs. This magical device lets him control Darkfyre the dragon. You must go to the evil wizard's castle, find the Orb, and destroy it. The only problem is that nobody knows how to destroy the Orb. It cannot be smashed by swords or spells."

Starting Treasure: 3 cards per hero (4 cards each if only two heroes are playing).

Goal: Find the Dragon Orb and destroy it—then get out of the castle alive.

Setup

- Pit Marker
 - Crystal Ball Marker
- (1) Use the Crystal Ball marker to represent the Dragon Orb.
 - (2) Place the Dragon Orb in H, N or O. Put the Fire Elemental in G, I, or N. The Fire Elemental can be placed in the same room as the Orb if you want. If it is, the Orb is inside the fire elemental, and the monster must be destroyed before the heroes can get the Orb.
 - (3) Place the Pit Marker at J.

Special Rules

- (1) The Dragon Orb can be destroyed only by the dragon's fiery breath.
- (2) Since Darkfyre doesn't want to be a slave to Teraptus, he must breathe fire on the Orb each turn he can see it. A hero can hold it out to be seen as a special action.

An Apology

I must apologize for my ignorance, resulting in my use of a nasty racial slur in my "Game Wizards" article in my DRAGON® issue #195, concerning the FOR FAERIE, QUEEN, AND COUNTRY game. The word in question, which I shall not repeat here, was one that I associated with the word "pollywog," meaning a tadpole—a young frog. I'm very sorry that this offended some of our readers. I thank the caller from England who enlightened all of us to this *faux pas*.

Karen S. Boomgarden

The editors of DRAGON Magazine, who also missed the reference, add their apologies as well.

Roger E. Moore

- (3) When Darkfyre arrives, Teraptus is riding on his back. The evil wizard can cast spells but cannot attack while riding the dragon.
- (4) As soon as the Dragon Orb is destroyed, Teraptus must get off the dragon. Place his figure in the free space closest to the dragon.

Adventure Key

(A) Drawbridge. The gate is locked, but the portcullis is up and out of the way.

(B) & (C) Guard Towers. The bugbears in here come out when they hear noises in the courtyard. On the second turn of combat with the manscorpion, the Dragon Master can open the doors and bring out the bugbears.

(D) Courtyard. The manscorpion is not interested in talking.

(E) Foyer. Empty.

(F) Barracks. Empty.

(G) Nook. Empty unless you've put the fire elemental here.

(H) Wizard's Tower. If the Dragon Orb is here, it is in the chest along with a randomly drawn treasure.

(I) Great Banquet Hall. Empty unless you've put the fire elemental here.

(J) Corridor. There is a pit marker here. It takes a feat of strength to jump over the pit.

(K) Dungeon. Lay the figure of the giant on its back. Read this to the players when the first enter:

A noble-looking giant lies chained to the floor. To the side is a troll sharpening a dagger. In the corner are two gargoyles stirring a boiling pot over a fire.

The troll and the gargoyles are jailers. The giant is named Cloudscraper and is a good creature, not like his evil cousins. He will talk to the heroes only if he is set free.

- If asked why he is imprisoned, Cloudscraper says, "Teraptus stole the Dragon Orb from me. Now he is trying get me to tell him all its secrets."
- If asked where the Dragon Orb is, Cloudscraper says, "I don't know where it is."
- If asked how the Dragon Orb can be destroyed, Cloudscraper says, "Only the fire of a dragon's breath can destroy the Orb. Darkfyre hates the Orb so much he will breathe on it as soon as he sees it."

When the heroes leave the dungeon, remove Cloudscraper from the board. He

will not go with the heroes or help them fight Teraptus and Darkfyre.

(L) Corridor. Empty.

(M) Throne Room. If the orcs are asked about the Dragon Orb, one of the says, "Oh, that hunk of glass we stole from Cloudscraper? Now he's in the dungeon, where you're gonna be soon!"

(N) Private Chambers. Empty, unless you've put either the fire elemental or the Dragon Orb here.

(O) Tower. Empty, unless you've put the Dragon Orb here. Ω

Novel Ideas

Continued from page 67

civilization of giants and their struggle to survive in the inhospitable Ice Mountains.

TSR has other Realms novels in store for 1994, including two books by R. A. Salvatore—a Drizzt hardcover titled *Siege of Darkness* and book five of the Cleric Quintet, *The Chaos Curse*—as well as the first in a new series of stand-alone novels called the Nobles, which—as you might guess—features characters of noble birth. You'll certainly hear more about those titles in the months to come.

In the meantime, drop me a note if you have any comments about or—shudder—corrections for the timeline. I can be reached c/o TSR's book department, PO. Box 756, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. Ω

Convention Calendar

Continued from page 70

WARZONE WEST '93, Oct. 29-31 FL

This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Ashley Plaza in Tampa, Fla. Events include gaming, dealers, a flea market, and an auction. Registration: \$13 before Oct. 1; \$17/weekend or \$7/day at the door. Write to: WARZONE WEST, c/o Wolf Entertainment, PO. Box 1256, Deland FL 32721-1256; or call: (904) 822-9653.

Important: To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that your notice was received. You might also send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please avoid sending convention notices by fax, as this method has not proved to be reliable.

Role-playing reviews

Do novels and movies make good games? Well, sometimes . . .

©1993 by Rick Swan



Role-playing games' ratings

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

By nature, I'm lazy, which is why I dread games based on movies, books, and other media. If I'm not familiar with the source material, then I have homework to do. And I hate homework.

Here I was, for instance, all ready to dig into the stack of New Republic material for West End's second-edition STAR WARS* game, when I came across this advisory at the beginning of the *Dark Force Rising Sourcebook*: "If you haven't yet read *Dark Force Rising* [the Timothy Zahn novel], do so now. Then come back to this book . . ." Okay, I will. Meanwhile, the STAR WARS game goes on the back burner for a couple of months until I find the time get through the novel.

I've been down this road before. I put off playing Phage Press's AMBER* game until I read some of Roger Zelazny's *Chronicles of Amber* series (Lester Smith, who knew the source material a lot better than I did, handled the review in DRAGON® issue #182). I dug up some of Spider Robinson's stories to get the feel of the Callahan's *Crosstime Saloon* GURPS* game supplement (see DRAGON issue #190), and even endured the two *Alien* movie sequels for the ALIENS* game review (DRAGON issue #183). Under different circumstances, I might have read the novels and screened the films just for fun. But as far as we slothful types are concerned, anything you *have* to do is homework, even watching monster movies. And I hate homework.

So I was tickled pink with this month's games, a batch of licensed products that required no homework whatsoever. They're entirely self-contained, existing independently of the novels and film that inspired them. And guess what? After making my way through the *When Gravity Fails* supplement and the DREAM PARK* game, I bought the Effinger and Niven/Barnes novels and read them of my own free will. And it didn't feel like homework. After all, anything you do because *you want* to do it is recreation.

When Gravity Fails

* * * 1/2

CYBERPUNK 2020* game supplement
104-page softcover book
R. Talsorian Games, Inc. \$12

Design: David Ackerman, William Moss,

Chris Williams, and Chris Nockabout

Development: Michael MacDonald

Editing: George Alec Effinger, Derek

Quintanar, Will Moss, and Michael

MacDonald

Art direction: Matthew Anacleto

Illustrations: B. J. West, Bob Giadrosich,

Darryl Midgette, and Shon Nowell

Cover: Doug Anderson

Is it just me, or do cyberpunk games seem stuck in neutral? With genre-bending novels like *The Difference Engine*, authors William Gibson and Bruce Sterling have nudged cyberpunk into interesting new directions. Game designers, on the other hand, seem content to recycle the same

old corrupt corporations and cybernetic renegades. If I have to navigate one more burned-out city or haywire computer program, I may upchuck my implants.

Welcome relief arrives in the form of *When Gravity Fails*, a CYBERPUNK 2020* game supplement based on George Alec Effinger's novel of the same name. Instead of the usual European or American landscape, *When Gravity Fails* details an exotic setting in the Middle East, where high technology locks horns with Islamic tradition. The blend of old-world intrigue and dark-future nihilism casts cyberpunk in a refreshing new light. Imagine a netrunning James Bond or Indiana Jones with a cybernetic sidekick, and you've got an idea of the possibilities.

So unusual is the setting of *When Gravity Fails* that it exists outside the world described in the original CYBERPUNK game. The primary locale, known only as "The City," rests on the edge of a nameless desert near the former Arab Federate, a Muslim conglomerate that collapsed from social unrest in the late 22nd century. With a population in excess of two million, the City comprises a maze of bustling streets and crowded neighborhoods. The ancient and the ultramodern exist side by side. Hovertanks cruise past horse carts. Rug peddlers haggle with computer programmers. Corporate towers of steel and glass rise beside peasant shacks of mud and clay. Tourists can visit the Medinah 2000 mall, a gaudy hodgepodge of neon signs and open-air shops, or stop for a drink at Big Al's Old Chicago, a seedy night spot with an Elliot Ness dart board and a Thompson submachine gun mounted over the bar. The evocative descriptions ooze paranoia and gloom, providing a feast of unforgettable images.

The thoughtful treatment of Islamic tradition adds considerably to the book's appeal. An insightful overview traces the development of Islam from the Prophet Muhammed through the rise of the two great sects, the Sunnis and Shiites. The Five Pillars of Faith and their effects on Arabic society are outlined and analyzed. The 23rd century finds the Muslims at odds with modern technology, pitting the rigid traditionalists against their more open-minded brethren. Traditionalists balk at cyberware and biotechnic devices, dismissing them as unnatural and seductive, harbingers of Western decadence. The liberal faction views technology as just another tool, useful and benign in the hands of the prudent. As evidence, they point to the computerized holy book, an electronic device that displays sacred passages from the Koran on a video screen to the accompaniment of digitized Arabic music. In all, *When Gravity Fails* serves as a textbook example of how an unfamiliar culture—unfamiliar, at least, to most Western players—can be used as a basis for intelligent, imaginative role-playing.

The equipment chapters augment the CYBERPUNK gear lists with a bounty of

new gadgets. Most, however, are unmemorable. While needle guns, pulse lasers, and smart missiles may be necessary to recreate the feel of the novel, veteran role-players have seen them all before. But amid this routine inventory is a strikingly inventive device called the *moddy*, short for modular personality. Plugged into a character's brain, the moddy makes his behavior conform to a preprogrammed template. In essence, the moddy convinces the character that he's someone else. A male character under the influence of the Marilyn Monroe moddy will behave like a beautiful female movie star. A shy character who implants the James Bond moddy will become imbued with self-confidence and the urge to seduce the nearest femme fatale (but not the Marilyn Monroe moddy character; though the latter believes himself to be a female, he still looks like a man to everyone else).

Naturally, there's a downside. Moddies produce vivid, sensual experiences that many find addictive. Should a user fail his Cool roll, he suffers withdrawal symptoms, similar to those associated with addictive drugs. Excessive dependence on moddies result in bouts of psychotic rage, irrational fear, or incapacitating catatonia. Extreme abusers may require treatment in a mental hospital (where, presumably, they become roommates with insane Investigators from Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game). While novices may find it difficult to juggle multiple personalities, experienced players should have a ball. What happens when a scrawny PC thinks he's Genghis Khan? Or when a computer hacker becomes addicted to the Robin Hood moddy? Or when every PC in the party decides to become Marilyn Monroe?

The book's standards sink a bit with the "Silken Nights" adventure, which features a good premise, awkwardly executed. Players assume the roles of three outcasts with severe identity crises (let's just say that in the 23rd century, gender isn't what it used to be). Efforts to unravel their pasts lead the PCs to an underground moddy operation, controlled by one of the region's most powerful—and dangerous—families. Despite some interesting showdowns with a thug plugged into a demon moddy, the muddled structure makes the adventure frustrating to run and hard to enjoy. To move the plot along, the PCs must "remember" key pieces of information at opportune moments, or acquire timely tips from compliant non-player characters. Dead ends and irrelevant encounters hinder the story's momentum. And the text reads like a first draft, replete with knotted syntax and butchered grammar. Consider: "The characters would do well to remember one thing at this point: they are two men and three girls, nor do they have access to special weapons or vehicles." Or: "This is Gravity, and big, climactic combat is not the way to do business." You'd think that with four editors at work, somebody

would've cleaned this up.

Evaluation: Many sourcebooks take a paragraphs worth of ideas and bloat them into entire chapters. *When Gravity Fails* suffers from the opposite problem: there's too much ground to cover in 104 pages. The Islamic material is fascinating but barely scratches the surface; there's little discussion, for example, of religious festivals, prayer rituals, or the significant distinctions between the Sunnis and Shites. The Arabic culture sections skimp on local politics and economics, as well as the day-to-day experiences of average citizens. The three pages of random encounters seem like afterthoughts, as many are underdeveloped (a camel wanders through the city—so what?) and some are flat-out 'dumb (a pack of goats carries the PCs for six blocks against their will? How strong are Arabic goats, anyway?).

Even with its shortcomings, *When Gravity Fails* turns cyberpunk conventions upside down while still retaining the gritty atmosphere demanded by hardcore players. Steeped in centuries of turbulence, the Middle East makes for a riveting setting, one that will linger in the memory long after the campaign has ended. With its provocative contrast of the old and the new, and uncompromising depiction of a culture at war, *When Gravity Fails* may be the most unsettling cyberpunk arena to date.

DREAM PARK* game * * *½

128-page softcover book

R. Talsorian Games, Inc. \$16

Design: Mike Pondsmith

Editing: Derek Quintanar, Mike

MacDonald, and Lisa Pondsmith

Cover: Bill Eaken

Illustrations: C. A. Bates, Tim Eldred, Gary T. Washington, Shon Howell, and Mike Ebert

Graphics: Mike Pondsmith and Matt Anacleto

Art direction: Mike Pondsmith

The DREAM PARK game occupies the opposite side of the universe from *When Gravity Fails*. It is a place where player characters never die, whimsy presides over logic, and contradictions are dismissed with a shrug. And when it comes to settings, designer Mike Pondsmith, the mastermind of the loony TEENAGERS FROM OUTER SPACE* game, prefers playgrounds to battlefields. With the DREAM PARK game, he's come up with his most unusual playground to date: a surrealist Disneyland where a spear-wielding super-hero and a tank-driving wizard can battle a tyrannosaur and a psionic street gang in the same adventure.

Based on the novel series by Larry Niven and Steve Barnes, the DREAM PARK game presents a futuristic amusement park where thrill-seekers can experience their wildest fantasies in a lifelike but harmless imaginary environment. Using holograms

and virtual reality techniques, the Dream Park staff outfits its customers as the heroic archetypes of their choice, complete with gizmos to simulate super powers and magical spells, then sets them loose in a computerized Astrodome to role-play to their hearts' content.

Unlike *When Gravity Fails*, the DREAM PARK system is a complete role-playing game. More precisely, it's a game within a game. The referee assumes the duties of the amusement park staff, and the players become the customers, experiencing a series of multigenre adventures as characters with ever-changing abilities and resources. The format not only allows the referee to stage adventures in any locale or historical era, it also allows him to adjust the rules as necessary to fit the situation. Since it's only a "game," it doesn't matter if a laser gun beam outpowers a magical lightning bolt, or if a helicopter maneuvers more easily than a pegasus—they're all just special effects.

Characters: The DREAM PARK system strips character creation to the bone. Characters don't have ability statistics. Instead, they're defined by 10 general skills, such as Melee Weapon and Tinkering, rated from 1 to 4 depending on the character's Profession. Players choose from 10 standard Professions, such as Magic User and Engineer; simple rules are available for designing additional Professions. Impatient players may use the Quik Start Character Cards in the back of the book, which come complete with skill ratings, background summaries, and attractive illustrations.

To supplement a character's basic skills, the player receives 20 Game Points to spend on Options, including magic spells, super powers, weapons, and even animal sidekicks. Aside from a few limits (e.g., an Engineer pays less than other Professions for the Electronics skill, and Bioengineering isn't available in a Renaissance scenario), the player may customize his character any way he likes. He may, for instance, buy the Speak to Animals ability, the Reading Minds power, and an automatic rifle. Since neither the equipment nor the powers are "real," the player can cash in everything at the end of an adventure, replacing them with, say, an energy sword and a Small Fuzzy Animal Companion.

Mechanics: A single roll of the die resolves most noncombat actions. The referee determines the difficulty rating of the attempted task, expressed as a number that the player must beat. Easy tasks, like starting a lawn mower, have a difficulty rating of 6. Hard tasks, like building a lawn mower, are rated at 14. If the sum of a six-sided die-roll plus the relevant skill score exceeds the difficulty rating, the attempt succeeds. It's as easy as flossing your teeth, presuming the referee is sufficiently self-reliant to assign difficulty ratings on his own; the rules aren't much help.

Combat resolution follows a similar

procedure. An attacker within range of a target rolls against the appropriate skill (either a standard skill such as Melee Weapon, or a specialized ability like Bull-whip), adds modifiers for distance, target size, and visual impairment, and compares the result to the target's Dodge or Parry score. A higher roll means the attack hits. A roll on the Wound Table determines how much damage the target suffers, which can be reduced or negated by the target's armor. A character suffering his full allotment of wounds doesn't die. Instead, he's removed from the game and sent to the bench, like a basketball player who's tallied one too many fouls.

Adventures: The DREAM PARK game encourages adventures with outrageous genre combinations. The book offers a gloriously deranged example in "The Big Zombie Pirate Game," which serves up swashbucklers, futuristic submarines, and undead dinosaurs in six dizzying pages. A helpful chapter on story construction tells how to mix and match elements from fantasy, cyberpunk, and 10 other settings to create a variety of eccentric scenarios.

Characters who complete "Zombie Pirate" in one piece, or achieve the goals of any of the other DREAM PARK adventures, earn Game Points that can be exchanged for new Options or spent to improve basic skills. In a nice twist on standard RPG rules, characters who perform poorly *lose* Game Points at the referee's discretion, a simple but effective method to ensure good sportsmanship and enthusiastic participation.

Evaluation: The DREAM PARK game is not a serious simulation, nor is it suited for long-term play. The quirky premise sacrifices character development and strong narratives in favor of action and elementary problem-solving. Role-playing has little place in these cartoonish scenarios, and it's unlikely that players will become attached to characters who change their skills as often as they change their clothes.

However, in small doses, this game can be a lot of fun. It offers unprecedented flexibility in character design, and the free-form style guarantees fast play and countless surprises. Think of it as a computer game on paper, or a laboratory for conducting genre experiments that more serious-minded RPGs can't tolerate. You wouldn't want to live in Dream Park, but it's a great place to visit.

WIZARDS* game * * ½

136-page softcover book

Whit Publications, Inc. \$17

Design: Edward Bolme with Steve Heckt, Brett Maddox, Ken Whitman, and Jeff Zitomer

Illustrations: Edward Bolme, Martin Cannon, Rusty Gardner, Rick Lenz, John Parks, Kevin Raley, and Eddie Rifkind

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I hadn't read the *Dream Park* and *When Gravity Falls* novels before playing the games. But I saw the Wizards movie (upon which this RPG is based) a few years ago in an animation festival. To put it charitably, it's not one of director Ralph (*Heavy Metal* and *Fritz the Cat*) Bakshi's better efforts. A labored, predictable fable, the film traces the conflict between rival wizards in an apocalyptic wasteland. The fantasy and science-fiction elements blend like ketchup and toothpaste. The cardboard characters, murky script, and lifeless animation don't help. Maybe Whit Productions won the license in a card game, which would explain why they chose to base a game on such a dismal source.

In any event, the designers seem more impressed with the movie's title than its content, as they devote most of the WIZARDS book to role-playing rules rather than background material. Despite the film's trite concepts, they came up with a credible game system, an uneven but interesting alternative to run-of-the-mill fantasy RPGs.

Characters: The character-creation rules require players to choose alter egos from nine generic archetypes. The archetypes include gnomes, dwarves, and fairies, but exclude humans, a race as dead as dodos in the world of the WIZARDS game.

Each archetype comes with fixed scores for Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity, Size, and four other primary attributes; Dwarves have a Strength rating of 15, Mountain Fairies have only 3. Players receive 40 character points to improve their primary attributes, with the restriction that no attribute may be boosted more than 5 points from the racial standard. Leftover points may be spent on advantages; Animal Empathy costs 4 points, Fearlessness costs 3. Secondary attributes, such as Movement Rate and Reaction Speed, derive from the primary attribute ratings; a character's Movement Rate, for example, equals half the sum of his Dexterity and Size ratings. Players can pick up a few extra character points by accepting a disadvantage or two; Laziness provides 2 extra points, Cowardice supplies 5.

The base ratings for the game's 70-plus skills also derive from the primary attributes. If a character has a Charisma score of 10, he receives a base rating of 3 in Oratory, Seduction, and 10 other related skills. A character may be experienced in as many as three of the nearly three dozen career options, with each providing a set of skill modifiers. The Archaeologist career gives bonuses in Alertness and Ancient Lore, the Archer career increases the Tactics and Melee ratings. A smooth albeit derivative system—the rules read

like a mutant hybrid of the AD&D®, RUNEQUEST®, and GURPS games—character generation is the game's most entertaining feature. How many other RPGs let you play an Archaeologist-Minstrel-Sheriff Fairy?

Mechanics: When a character attempts an action, a 20-sided die-roll determines the outcome. If the roll is less than or equal to the applicable skill rating, the action succeeds. The referee assesses penalties and bonuses, depending on the complexity of the situation.

So far, so good, until we reach the combat rules. Absurdly convoluted, combat favors formulas over role-playing in a misguided effort to simulate reality. It's the kind of system that requires a sprinting character to make a stamina roll every combat round and gun-wielding characters to determine how long it takes to reload a clip (a character's Dexterity Skill Base plus 3 equals the number of bullets loaded every five seconds). Some of the rules defy common sense. Initiative bonuses available to melee weapons but not to missiles mean that swords can strike before guns. A foot bow appears to inflict the same amount of damage as a semiautomatic rifle or a hand grenade. And if Ken the Elf, the rulebook's sample character, fails his stamina rolls, he could theoretically collapse into unconsciousness after sprinting for 25 seconds. A diligent referee



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can probably sift the usable rules from the junk, but along the way he'll have to translate directives like: "Melee combat is any fight that takes place at arm's length or closer, usually using some sort of modified kitchen utensil." Kitchen utensil?

Compared to combat, the magic system is simplicity personified. Casting a spell involves the expenditure of spirit points and a die-roll made against the caster's magic skill. If the roll is less than or equal to the spell's cost, the spell succeeds and the caster loses a number of spirit points equal to the number on the die. If the roll exceeds the caster's magic rating, the spell fails, and he loses a number of spirit points equal to the cost of the spell. Every 30 hours, a caster recovers a number of spirit points equal to his Recovery attribute. Well-written rules allow a caster to improve his technique through practice, and to increase the odds of success by expending additional spirit points.

Unfortunately, the text furnishes descriptions for only a handful of spells, providing instead some general guidelines for designing spells from scratch. In theory, the guidelines allow players to invent unique spell lists, customized to fit the needs of a particular adventure. In practice, it's easier said than done. The guidelines are too vague ("The exact results of an evocation attempt are up to the game master. Generally speaking, the

greater the success . . . the more drastic the results") and there aren't nearly enough examples.

Adventures: Two brief scenarios, one solitaire and one multiplayer, give the rules a reasonable workout but don't do much with characterization or setting. A chapter devoted to Halcionia, the game's primary locale, summarizes its cultural evolution and gives statistics for a few of its notable inhabitants. A cursory section on adventure design lists a dozen or so obvious plot hooks along the lines of espionage missions and assassination attempts. Throughout, the designers seem straight-jacketed by the source material, struggling to pump life into the film's dull creations. Meanwhile, the best stuff slips between the cracks, such as a passing reference to *technomancy* ("the dark fusion of magic and technology"). I bet designers this resourceful could get a whole book out of *technomancy* alone.

Evaluation: The WIZARDS game has potential, but as presented it's best described as a work in progress. The magic system, diceless character creation rules, and juxtaposition of fantasy and science show promise, but need development. The PC races require an overhaul (there's only a few sentences of difference between the red, yellow, and brown elves), and the combat rules beg for streamlining. And if I were in charge, I think I'd give back the

license and graft the rules onto an original setting. Designers, take note: if you're determined to use a film as inspiration, you're better off picking a good one. Ω

Rick Swan has had his hand in more than 40 role-playing products as designer or editor, and has written game reviews for nearly a decade. You can contact him at: 2620 30th Street, Des Moines IA 50310. A self-addressed stamped envelope increases the chance of a response.

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Where Credit is Due

Lester Smith, TSR's BUGHUNTERSTTM game designer, reports that the names of three of the playtesters were accidentally left off the credits page in that game book. Steve Bryant, Patty Bryant, and Steve Maggi also contributed their own player characters to the descriptive copy on the game book's back cover. TSR apologizes for the omission and thanks the three for their assistance in creating this wonderful game.



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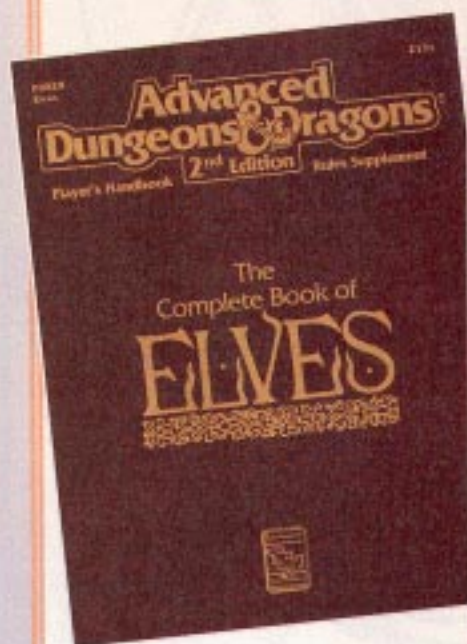
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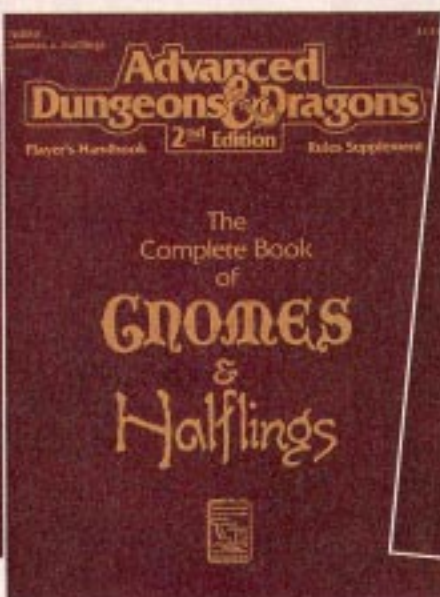
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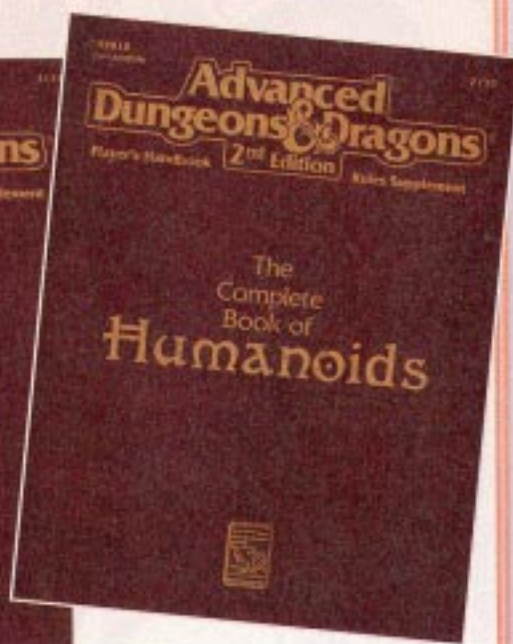
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3 Wizards Too Many

Tricks and tips from the archmages of three worlds

by Ed Greenwood

Artwork by Dan Burr

The armor seemed more cramped than last time. Elminster gave my nose a playful tweak and adjusted the helm so it was open just a crack. The dented visor was stiff with rust, but at least it wouldn't fall open by accident and alert two powerful archmages to my presence—in my own home, no less.

The Old Mage amused himself by blowing smoke rings at the crackling fire. Deciding to levitate a few more logs onto it, he watched sparks fly across my carpet amid the resulting roar. I was helpless in the armor, hanging from hooks on the wall; Elminster bent a twinkling eye my way as he wagged a finger and made each spark dance and loop in the air before returning to the fireplace.

"So this is what wizards do, when

they're old and in their dotage," purred a low, husky voice that was new to me, yet somehow familiar.

Elminster turned and nodded an unconcerned hello. "Ye might like to try the mint-wine in the tallest decanter. 'Twas made by a friend of mine: a gold dragon by the name of Galgrentor."

The newcomer raised a shapely eyebrow. I stared.

She was slim and sleek, with great glistening eyes and long, wavy, dark hair. I tried to swallow quietly; I'd never seen anyone so beautiful before. Her daring gown displayed long, slim legs as she took a chair with catlike grace, wrapped slim fingers about Dalamar's goblet, and pouted. "Are dragons and wine all you can talk about?"

"Dancing hobgoblins!" Mordenkainen sounded as startled as I had been, as he spun into being out of a small whirlwind of silver sparkles. Rings glinted as he raised wary hands, ready to work magic. "What is your name, lady, and how came you here?"

Dark eyes danced as the lady smirked at him over Dalamar's goblet. "Can't you guess?" she asked teasingly. The glistening eyes glanced sideways and irritation flashed briefly across that striking face. "Elminster knew right away," she added, glaring at the Old Mage.

Elminster grinned at her through smoke rings that were curling into little waving men. One of them gestured rudely at her before dissipating into nothingness. The lady snorted in amusement.

Mordenkainen caught on and sighed heavily. "Dalamar! Of all the fool tricks—"

The lady regarded him coldly. Her face swam and spun, and suddenly Dalamar's fine-edged features looked back at the wizard of Greyhawk. The dark elf had kept his cold stare steady throughout the transformation. "I'd thought one who survived to become mighty in magic might have clung to a few shreds of a sense of humor, but I seem to be mistaken."

Mordenkainen shook his head and helped himself to the bottle of firewine Elminster had brought. He didn't bother with a glass.

"My apologies, Dalamar," the mage of Greyhawk said wearily, taking his seat, "but I'm on blade's edge these days. A great war rages in my world."

Elminster and Dalamar raised eyebrows in unison. The dark elf spoke first, choosing his words carefully so they did not sound as stinging as they might have. "Isn't there always war somewhere on Oerth? It seems almost sport to some folk of your world."

Mordenkainen nodded. "This . . . is different. Whole kingdoms march and fall, led by. . ." He waved a hand, as if to clear away such matters. "But enough. It seems I bring gloom with me whenever we three meet. I'd like a chance to smile from time to time." He regarded the bottle in his hand thoughtfully. It seemed to have emptied itself.

Dalamar plucked at a bottle drifting in the air nearby, caught it without looking at its contents, and slid it across the table towards Mordenkainen. "Here, have another. Individually, they seem too small for you."

There was a moment of tense silence, then a smile grew on Mordenkainen's face. He nodded his head in thanks. "Was it mere whimsy, the shape you were wearing when I arrived? Or are you playing some, ah, 'deeper' game?"

Dalamar smiled in return. "Yes," he said. "Before I came here, I was spying, not to put fine words on it, on some rivals in the Black Robes. They think a certain beautiful lady mage is going to help them bring down one Dalamar."

"Ah," Elminster and Mordenkainen said together, in deep tones of satisfaction. "A very old game," the Mage of Shadowdale added, letting go of his pipe, "yet it usually works."

Mordenkainen nodded agreement and added dryly, "A disguise too clever for me, by far."

As he spoke, I saw Elminster's pipe, still spitting green sparks, float serenely off to one side to await the Old Mage's future attention. "As host," the Old Mage said mildly, "I'll begin spouting the news of magic." He fixed Dalamar with one eye and added, "After the thrill—and disappointment—ye gave me earlier, it seems fitting to talk of deceptions. I'll be brief."

"Elminster? Brief?" Mordenkainen mur-

mured. "We shouldn't be here longer than a fortnight, then."

That set the mages off. Wine spilled amid the mirth, and shoulders shook around the table. Years fell from Elminster's face as he laughed.

Elminster settled back at last, wiping his eyes. "I've a treat for us tonight." A silver tray glided into view, bearing a small forest of mugs. Some were filled with steaming apple cider, and some held a darker liquid. Dalamar took one of the second sort, sipped, sputtered, and glared down at it. "What is this?"

Elminster regarded him fondly. "I knew ye'd like it. 'Tis a root beer float, but despite the name it has nothing to do with beer. Use the straw to stir and melt the cold stuff—ice cream, they call it, and sip slowly. Let the tastes combine."

"Does it stop tasting like soap near the bottom?" Dalamar asked, in aggrieved tones.

"Aye," Elminster said grandly, as another tray slid in from the kitchen with the thick smell of hot cheese. "Here, now, the square things pass for toasted bread in this world. On them are tomatoes and slabs of a cheese they call cheddar, all warmed. The white cubelike things around the rim of the tray are called marshmallows. Warning: They're sweet, but there's nothing stickier this side of pine gum!"

"Umm," Dalamar agreed, struggling to get his teeth free of the one he'd sampled. Fear grew on his face. I didn't understand until it dawned on me that Dalamar couldn't speak—or work any spells if he was attacked. Elminster waved a reassuring hand at him and added gently, "It passes, lad. Easy, ye're safe here."

"Never safe," Dalamar managed to snarl around the white goo in his mouth. He tried vainly to spit it out, swallowed mightily, and glared at the Old Mage, red-faced. "Never try that again, old man!" he shouted, pointing a furious finger at Elminster. "Never!"

"So, don't take another," Elminster said mildly, folding his hands.

"Aye. Sit down, lad," Mordenkainen said, exasperated. "Your temper's far too sharp to buy you old age!"

Dalamar turned that angry glare on him, but Mordenkainen merely shook his head. "Oh, no. That doesn't work on me. I've been glared at by Rary in my time, and by more than a few high-and-mighty ladies of Greyhawk, too!" He turned to Elminster and held up a fluffy white marshmallow. "Who makes these, anyway?"

Elminster chuckled. "Gnomes who come in the night."

Mordenkainen raised his eyebrows. "On this world, too?"

Dalamar grew tired of pointing angrily at men who weren't paying the proper attention to his fury. He glared at the table, then muttered, "My apologies to both of you. Let's talk magic."

Mordenkainen nodded and asked abruptly, "Have either of you any useful divination magicks to spare?"

"The old probes not showing you enough?" Dalamar teased, his shoulders shifting briefly into feminine semblance. He added quietly as his appearance returned to normal, "As it happens, I do have a spell I call the 'barrier reaver' with me. Here." He reached down by his side for a pouch, flipped open the leather lid to reveal a row of scrolls, selected one, and slid it across the table.

Elminster nodded approvingly. "Generously done." Then he looked at the mage from Greyhawk. "I'll have to find ye something for our next meeting, I'm afraid." He regarded his cheese-and-tomato melt with a critical eye. "I'm afraid I've rather neglected that school of magic, over the years. I believe I really don't like to know what's coming next."

"Ah," Dalamar said teasingly, "but snooping, now. . ."

Elminster grinned. "All right, lad; ye've struck home there." He bit into the cheddar, murmured approvingly, and added, "Accordingly, ye choose a subject, and I'll spout what I know."

"Well," Dalamar began, "I've just been asked by a merchant of Palanthus—a fat oaf who fancies himself a warrior—if I can do something about his favorite sword, an heirloom. He nicked it while showing off, I've no doubt, then let it rust. Ordinarily, I'd not bother with such a trivial request, but he's willing to pay handsomely for new gardens around the Tower, so. . ."

Elminster waved a hand. "My turn to dispense gifts. I've just the thing." He crooked a finger, and out of one of the dim corners of my study something came sailing: a small, gray, metal hand. Elminster caught it and tossed it across the table to Dalamar, who caught it and looked at it curiously.

"Balacer's Hand," Elminster said. "A little bauble—thine, now—that aids blades. If ye waggle the little finger like so, ye'll see a little compartment. Pull out the scrip therein, and ye'll find complete details of its usage. As ye might expect, it has limited power, diminished whenever ye employ it."

Dalamar looked up. "Can its power be replenished?"

Elminster nodded. "Ye must have a priest cast upon the hand the metal-heating spell common to all our worlds—the one ye use to cook arrogant warriors inside their armor. But the priest must say the prayer *backwards*. Immediately after he casts, ye must hurl lightning into the hand. Together, that gains back two to five charges; just how many is up to the gods."

The Old Mage stroked his beard. "A priest can also perform the whole process without a mage," he added, "by calling lightning from a stormy sky, either at a safe distance from the hand, or using magical protection against harm from the

bolts."

Dalamar nodded. "And if a wizard works on the hand alone, without clergy? The priests of my world are often a bit too holy for trivial matters."

"More difficult, indeed. The mage must cast around the hand the minor spell known in Faerun as 'glitterdust,' then lay a 'mending' magic on it—which sucks the material conjured by the first spell into the hand—then seal everything with a bolt of lightning. All of these must be cast one after the other, as fast as ye can. Each trio of magicks wins back two to five charges."

"Sounds almost more trouble than it's worth," Mordenkainen grunted, licking his fingers.

"To us, aye. To one who can't work magic, the hand's rather more useful."

"If you don't mind telling," Dalamar asked, turning the hand over and hefting its cold weight, "where was this when you found it?"

Elminster's pipe had drifted back to its master's lips. He shooed it away, blew smoke out in a long, coiling billow, and said quietly, "A place in Faerun called Myth Drannor."

The elven mage leaned forward, interest lighting his dark eyes like cold fires. "In the ruins? What are they like? Crawling with tanar'ri and worse, I've heard."

Pipe smoke drifted into the semblance of a tiny ship and sailed away across the room, pitching and rolling in unseen waves. Elminster watched it go with a little smile on his lips and said dryly, "The lady who gave it to me would've hardly appreciated being called that." His smile slipped away, and he added softly, "She's been dust these four hundred and forty-odd winters."

Dalamar stared at him, eyes large. "You can't mean Myth Drannor before its fall! Why, that's . . ."

Elminster's white-bearded face spun and twisted for an instant. Then a slim half-elven lass was curled up where the Old Mage had been, dew-eyed and smiling at Dalamar seductively. She sat up with lithe, smooth movements, looking about twenty summers old, and murmured, "So, Dark One, just how old d'ye think I am?"

The blood ran suddenly out of Dalamar's face, leaving it white and pinched. He sat with his mouth a little open, but seemed lost for words to come out of it.

Mordenkainen chuckled and said to the maiden (who spun back into Elminster again), "It does every wizard good to be shocked—at least once each day, I think."

We watched Dalamar struggle with his disbelief, then Elminster leaned forward, extending an empty hand towards the Master of the Conclave. A moment later, a parchment scroll appeared in it.

"Parlor tricks?" Dalamar said, raising an eyebrow. He regarded the scroll suspiciously. "What is it?"

"Rolled-up paper, ye dolt," Elminster said mildly. "The treatise on death kiss

spawn I promised ye, when last we met."

"Oh," Dalamar said, extending his own hand to take the scroll. "Ah. My thanks."

Mordenkainen extended his own hand. Something gleamed in it: not a scroll, but an oval of polished glass. "My turn for gifting, I think." He placed the glass—which was gently curved, like a shallow bowl—on the table, and spun his wrist. A second, identical glass appeared in his hand. He let it rise gently out of his palm and float over to Dalamar, as the first glass rose and drifted towards Elminster.

Dalamar's glass drifted to a stop about a foot away from his nose and turned slowly, catching the firelight. "Interesting," said the dark elf without expression. "And this is a . . . ?"

"A spell mirror. Rare, but used in Greyhawk seemingly as long as there've been mages. They don't fly by themselves, and your touch will end my magic, so take care. They're as fragile as they look."

"Just silvered glass?" Elminster asked, innocently waggling his mirror so it flashed moving reflections off the study ceiling.

Mordenkainen nodded. "Just glass. Each one guards against a single specific spell, named when the mirror is created—and reflects it away from the bearer, wherever the mirror's stored. It'll work even deep in your bag of components or shoulder-sack."

Dalamar inclined his head. "Back at the source?"

"At a random area."

Dalamar cupped his mirror carefully in his slim hands. "Hmm. This one's set against which spell?"

"The unerring bolts known as 'magic missiles' in all our worlds. Oh, they'll turn back the same missiles hurled by items, too, without limit—but only that exact sort of bolt, not every damaging magical energy pulse."

Mordenkainen fell silent, as all three mages watched Elminster skillfully fly a slice of bread around a ball of crackling flames above the table, pursued by a squeeze-bottle of mustard. When he was done, the slice broke away from the flames, did a jaunty loop-the-loop in midair, and glided to Elminster's waiting mouth. Dalamar watched the Old Mage chew and said, "That reminds me of a very useful spell created by—a wizard now dead, one Fistandantilus."

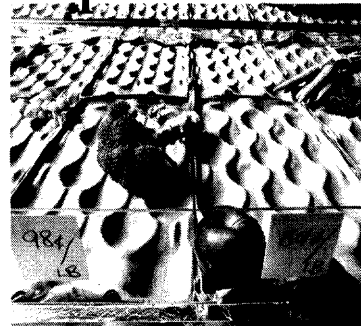
Both the other mages nodded; Dalamar looked surprised. "You knew him?"

"Slightly," Mordenkainen said coldly. "The memory of our meeting is not a happy one."

"For a time, he took to traveling the worlds, seizing what magic he could from those weak enough for him to destroy," Elminster said. "He also took their lives, through his Bloodstone."

Dalamar's brows lifted. "His life-stealing, yes—but I never heard he'd journeyed beyond Krynn . . . except, a few times, to the Outer Planes."

Food Fight Erupts in Neighborhood Supermarket



Produce section after recent food fight.

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Public Service Message

"I taught him the wisdom of staying closer to home," Mordenkainen said softly. "What spell is this?"

"One that would be popular were it better known," Dalamar said. "It's known as his 'firequench,' though I'd heard Raistlin call it 'the fireproofing spell'—you can cast it before a fiery attack you know is coming, to prevent balls of magical fire from bursting or flaming arrows from setting a roof alight." He opened his robe again and drew forth another scroll. Five sheets were rolled up together, obviously identical; Dalamar slid one towards each archwizard and replaced the others.

"Our thanks," Elminster said. "That makes it my turn again. Your mention of old Fist reminds me of a spell I used on him when last we met. It's a powerful spell indeed, but has one small complication." Elminster smiled archly. "Its casting requires the tooth of a dragon . . ."

"So, it's a rare spell indeed, too," Mordenkainen said with a smile.

Elminster nodded, snapped his fingers, and muttered something. A small oval of darkness appeared in the air in front of his nose. He reached out, palm raised. There was a silent pulse of dark radiance as the oval reshaped itself into an ordinary-looking wooden drawer-front, with a knob. The Old Mage pulled it, and the drawer grated open, appearing out of nothingness elsewhere into sharp, clear solidity in front of him. Inside was a small forest of scrolls on end; Elminster rummaged for a moment, selected two clipped together with a small pewter pin shaped like a dragon's head, and passed them out.

"This lets ye breathe like a dragon, thrice—but ye must breathe three times in succession, without other spell-casting, for the magic is short. The difficulties with this spell are the lack of easily procured dragon teeth, though the teeth of long-dead wyrms will work, and the rarity of the wording. Note the third paragraph, between the two gilded runes; I've set down here the words for blue, black, green, and white dragons. The other wordings are harder to find, though I must admit I've the passages for red and copper wyrms somewhere in my library. Don't, I must caution ye, try to combine the types by using more than one set of words—the result is always an explosion, akin to several dozen magic-missile spells lashing out in all directions from the scroll."

The other wizards both made thoughtful "mmm-hmm" noises. Dalamar's eyes went to a bottle of sherry, high on a shelf where I'd hoped it would escape attention, next to a skull (a friend, but that's another story) and a pair of gauntlets (I always like to be prepared). His face brightened—and the bottle began a smooth descent.

Elminster whisked the ball of flames back into the fireplace, as a trio of glasses flew onto the table. Dalamar smiled. "You

seem to know where everything is here, Old Mage. This place wouldn't be one of your own refuges, would it?"

"No. To think that would be reading me a-wrong," Elminster said shortly, lifting a warning eyebrow. "It belongs to a mortal unable to work magic—one of the reasons I chose it. I did peer about rather thoroughly before first showing myself here, of course."

"Of course," Mordenkainen echoed, sipping my best sherry appreciatively. "This is good."

"I found it," Dalamar said, "so kindly refrain from making off with the bottle."

"Yes, dear," Mordenkainen said in a hen-pecked voice, and that set off all three wizards snorting and chuckling again. When they quieted, the mage of Greyhawk asked, "So whose turn is it now?"

"Yours," Dalamar said sweetly, like a small but highly poisonous snake.

Mordenkainen raised a hand, transferred his glass into it—and a third hand appeared out of the archmage's robes, holding a wooden case. Mordenkainen saw the other mages' interest and said, "No, I'm not going to teach you that one. A man must have some secrets."

"A wizard must have some secrets, ye mean," Elminster said. "Mere men had best avoid such things, lest the secret gnaw at their innards and twist their selves—or escape at the worst times, and ruin their careers."

"Enough philosophy," Dalamar said, watching Mordenkainen select two scrolls from the case and the third hand vanish back into his robes. "There is a saying in Kryn: 'secrets are the spice.'"

"There's an older saying on Oerth," Mordenkainen replied dryly. "'Secrets kill.'"

Dalamar took his proffered scroll warily. "Is this, then, one of those deadly secrets?"

Mordenkainen shook his head. "It's a spell of Oerth, very old but very rare, called 'bloodglass.' Watch."

He gestured. One wall of my study became a window, looking into a movielike scene. We heard the clash and ring of steel. Two armed men swirled into our view, locked in blade-to-blade combat, in a castle courtyard on a bright morning. In the foreground was a balcony; an old man in robes came up hurrying, to stop and look down over it. Behind him scurried something small that looked like a mushroom, bent around something that shone like metal. It waddled up to one boot-heel and stopped, as the wizard raised a hand, obviously to hurl a spell down into the fray.

There was an angry shout from below. "You stay out of this, wizard!" Steel rang loudly. "I don't need your help!"

The wizard bowed. "As you command, milord." His hands gestured behind his back, though, and we all saw a miniature hourglass plucked from his belt. It vanished in a twinkling of tiny lights, and the larger image of an hourglass appeared by

the wizard's head. He stepped back from the parapet hastily and sat down. The little mushroom-thing waddled over and rolled into his lap. The wizard ignored it, his concentration bent on the conjured glass—which seemed to be filled with blood. There was renewed clangor from the courtyard below, a snarl of pain and a triumphant shout, and abruptly a stream of blood flowed from the top of the hourglass into the bottom.

The wizard started up, tumbling the little mushroom from his lap, but steel swirled in the courtyard again, followed by a groan. By the time the wizard reached the parapet, only one man in mail still stood, wiping his blade. He looked up and said shortly, "See? When I need your aid, wizard, I'll command it!"

"As you wish, milord," the old man said smoothly. "Shall I call on the priests to heal you?"

"I am not hurt," was the curt reply.

"Lie not to me, milord," the old man said wearily, eyeing the trickling blood in the hourglass. "It demeans you."

The man in the courtyard swayed, then said gruffly, "Get the healers, then." Then he turned, lurched, and fell on his face on the cobbles.

The scene faded. "He was no wiser than most sword-swingers, I see," Dalamar commented. "Nice show-spell, though. Do you happen to have the—"

Mordenkainen smiled. "Another time, perhaps. You saw the bloodglass?"

The Old Mage nodded. "How precise is it?"

"It shows the proportion of life-force left, not exact amounts of blood spilled," the mage of Greyhawk replied.

"What was the little mushroom-thing?" Dalamar asked.

Mordenkainen smiled. "We call it a 'friendly fungus.' Their use has fallen out of favor in recent years. Wizards today want more intelligent and more capable familiars."

"That was a familiar?"

"Not in the sense that a spell was needed to summon or bind it, no," Elminster put in. "Nor does it have a direct mind-link with its master. It hasn't enough mind for that. It scuttles about carrying things and following the being it's linked to—not just wizards, mind ye, but anyone—and can fetch things ye visualize while touching it, like things nearby it's seen before. A wizard of my acquaintance in Faerun, Boots the Lucky, has one."

"It's a sort of pet, then?"

Mordenkainen and Elminster both nodded. "Don't some wizards of Kryn keep something similar—stelurges?"

"Ah, yes. Similar in that they're not magically linked, but serve from wild, rather stupid devotion?"

Both archmages nodded again, and Dalamar joined them. "Yes, I suppose they are alike, though I never saw it that way before. It's a bit of a stretch from a wad-



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dling mushroom to a stirge with a stinging tail."

"Not if you use a polymorph spell," Mordenkainen said, with a deadpan look.

The Master of the Black Robes stretched and took something from his belt. "I've something almost as frivolous as that mushroom, but as useful, too," Dalamar said, raising what he held over the table. He let go of it and sat back.

It was a human-sized hand, fashioned of some dark, dull metal. As I watched, it pointed, crooked its fingers in a beckoning gesture, then rolled over to tap an imaginary person on the shoulder.

"It can't hold or carry anything," Dalamar remarked, "but I've used it more than once to strike at a foe's eyes when he was aiming something at me—or tapped him from behind, to tear his attack away from me for a critical instant or two. It can also, as you can see, give directions." In the air in front of him, the hand made a rude gesture.

"Useful indeed," Elminster said dryly, watching the metal hand sink down.

Dalamar shook hands with it solemnly. "These are called 'helping hands,' as you might guess."

"Who devised them?" the Old Mage asked, as the hand scuttled along the tabletop like a hurrying crab into one of Dalamar's sleeves.

"The gnomes who come in the night, of course," Dalamar said with a wink.

"I might have known," Mordenkainen said dryly. "Speaking of your world's gnomes, I had a ride in a whooshwagon once."

Dalamar smirked. "Still have the bruises?"

Mordenkainen nodded. "Speaking of which," he said, turning to Elminster, "I saw you hurl a thief away from you in Waterdeep once, long ago—a lad with a poisoned blade, I seem to recall. You smashed him through a window into an inn, where he landed atop someone's dinner roast."

Elminster nodded. "I hadn't time for subtle magic; in those days, one scratch and I'd have been carrion."

"In those days?" Dalamar echoed. "Poison fails against you now?"

"Most poisons, thanks to my spells," Elminster said calmly. "Aren't you immune to most, too?"

Dalamar hesitated a few moments before answering, appearing to be in deep thought. "I'm afraid not, though I have, um, contingencies in case of emergencies."

The Old Mage grinned with understanding. "Right, then—one last spell and I must be going. The spell's called 'Thultaan's thrust,' after the archmage who created it, long before I was born." He turned to Mordenkainen. "It does just what you saw, but I'm afraid I haven't a scroll of it to hand. Next time, I promise; scrolls for both of ye."

He stood and stretched. Dalamar also

rose, looked at both older men, and said quietly, "It is good to relax in the presence of wizards. I can trust you both, something I've rarely been able to do with mages before, even in the Order. Magic is everything, but sometimes other priorities take over. My thanks."

Both the others nodded, unspeaking but smiling. Light whirled, and Dalamar was gone.

Elminster said, "I'm off, then," and took a step forward into nothingness, and was gone.

Mordenkainen got up and looked around the room. He leaned forward to peer at one of my books, shrugged, and turned away. I saw the firelight through him as he walked silently past, and was gone.

Alone, I stared out into the study. In the flickering firelight it seemed warm, welcoming, and yet mysterious. I started to relax—then stiffened as my visor suddenly squealed firmly downwards. It clanked shut, leave me staring into darkness.

I hadn't seen or heard anyone approach, or heard any spell spoken—but the visor had been pushed down, past the rusty resistance where the old helm bulged. There was no way it could have fallen past that obstruction, by itself. I hung helpless, blank metal inches from my nose, and tasted fear as I struggled to keep silent. I don't know how long I waited. It seemed like forever, as I strained to hear sounds nearby over the faint pops, hissing, and crackle of the fire.

Then I heard a whoosh of air and a familiar cough. Elminster had returned.

"What kept you?" I said, keeping my voice very steady. I was proud of that.

"Diligent work as an apprentice, for years," Elminster replied, "and, since then—a little of this, a little of that. And Mystra's favor, of course. Why d'ye ask?"

"It seemed a long time since the meeting broke up, inside this armor," I replied, as magic boosted me off the hooks.

"Well, of course it did if ye had your visor closed with nothing to look at," the Old Mage said. "Ye folk have so little in your heads to keep ye company—ye need to see about."

"Why'd you push it shut on me, then?" I asked rather testily, as Elminster brought me down with a clank onto the carpet.

"I did nothing of the sort, lad," came the reply. "Ye were staring out at me when I took my leave. It must have fallen afterwards."

"If you'd already gone," I asked, chill fingers of fear still a-crawl up my spine, "just who shut my visor?"

There was a note of deep satisfaction in his voice, through the closed helm. "The gnomes who come in the night. Of course."

For your campaign

Readers familiar with Oerth will deduce that this evening took place shortly after the beginning of the events detailed in the **GREYHAWK® Wars** boxed set. Gnome whooshwagons are detailed in the **DRAGONLANCE® Adventures** sourcebook.

After the get-together ended, I managed to get enough information out of Elminster to lay relevant AD&D® game details of some of the matters discussed before you, as follows. Mordenkainen's "third hand" was the result of a spell, not Dalamar's *helping hand* detailed below.

Wizard spells

Bloodglass (Greater Divination, Necromancy)

Level: 2

Range: 5 yards/level

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 round + 2 rounds/level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: Neg.

This spell allows a wizard to roughly gauge the life-force remaining in any one living creature (including himself). The spell uses a small hourglass as its material component; this is thrown into the air as the incantation is murmured, and is consumed (amid twinkling motes of light) whether or not the spell succeeds.

The chosen creature, even if it is weak, spellbound, or otherwise unaware that a spell is being cast on it, receives a saving throw against the spell at -3. The only exception to this is the caster himself, who need not save against his own spell.

If *bloodglass* is successfully cast, the intangible image of an hourglass appears floating in the air near the caster's head. It seems to contain blood that drips from the upper compartment (the "healthy being") into the lower compartment ("blood spilled"). The dripping liquid is luminous—about equal to *faerie fire*—and can be clearly seen from up to 50' distant even in darkness.

The hourglass image is visible to all creatures, can be moved about as the caster desires, and need not be concentrated on to remain in existence (i.e., the caster can perform other spell-casting without causing the image to disappear). If the image and caster ever get farther apart than the spell range, the image disappears, ending the spell. The image will not automatically move to accompany the caster, moving only in accordance with the caster's conscious will.

It is important to note that this spell does not measure the precise hit points remaining to a creature, but rather the proportion of total vitality and life-force remaining (e.g., if the subject has only one-quarter of its hit points remaining, the hourglass image reflects this). Damage

taken by the surveyed being shows up in the glass as trickling or streaming blood, but observers can't accurately count individual hit points as they are expended.

Fistandantilus's firequench (Abjuration, Alteration)

Level: 4

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 4 rounds

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: 40'-radius sphere

Saving Throw: Special

This spell extinguishes fire and prevents combustible materials from igniting. Normal fires get no saving throw to avoid the spell; blazing arrows, campfires, even burning trees or thatched roofs simply go out when *firequench* is cast.

Magical fires get a save to resist the spell, as do the fiery powers of beings from the elemental plane of Fire and all creatures having a natural fire-related power, including fire resistance. Creatures get a normal save vs. spells; for magically induced fires, such as those making up the body of a fire elemental, roll 1d20; the result must be equal to or less than the spell level of the fire's cause for it to ignite or remain alight, or it fails or is extinguished (for this determination only, treat magical items as 6th level unless their powers are specifically stated to be otherwise). Note that fires caused by a *fireball* or similar spell or effect, once the spell or effect itself has ended or been removed, are considered to be normal fires.

This spell can be cast before anticipated fiery attacks reach an area, to prevent them taking effect. The area of effect is fixed once the spell is cast; it can't be moved or travel with the caster. (However, Elminster suspects Dalamar uses a sixth-level variant of this spell that can do just that.)

The material component of *firequench* can be a piece of ice, a cupped handful of water, a pinch of sand, or a drop of the caster's spittle.

Thultaan's thrust (Abjuration, Evocation)

Level: 5

Range: 5 yards/level

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Neg.

By casting this spell, a wizard creates a powerful, invisible magical force emanating from his own body. It can be directed against only one chosen creature, who must save against the spell to avoid being hurled away.

An affected target being is snatched off its feet and shot through the air, along a straight line away from the caster, up to 80' distant or until it strikes a solid barrier. Damage from the tumbling is 2d4 hp damage, and a saving throw vs. crushing

blow is forced on all fragile items worn or carried by the target being. If a solid barrier is struck, the hurled being takes 5d4 damage and may (at the DM's option) harm the barrier. If the barrier is another being, this second being takes 2d4 hp damage, must make a Strength check on 1d20 to avoid being knocked down, and all of its fragile worn or carried items must make saving throws vs. crushing blow. Neither a tumbling target being or any being it strikes can successfully cast spells while being affected by this spell.

Target beings receive a base saving throw against the spell of -5, modified cumulatively as follows: +1 if the target is undead, +1 if the target has a Strength of 17 or better, +2 if the target is at least L-sized or weighs more than 400 lbs., and +3 if the target is gaseous or incorporeal (such as many undead). Creatures that successfully save against the spell are completely unaffected; the spell is wasted and cannot be directed against an alternative foe.

The material component of this spell is a small carved fist or hand, which must be made from an organic substance such as bone, ivory, or wood.

Barrier reaver (Alteration)

Level: 6

Range: 10 yards/level

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 6

Area of Effect: Cylinder, 1'/level in diameter and length

Saving Throw: None

This spell forces an opening in any magical barrier, including an *anti-magic shell*, a layer of a *prismatic sphere*, or a conjured physical barrier such as a *wall of iron*. The opening comes into being at the end of the round of casting and lasts for the entire next round.

During this time, spells and other attacks can be launched through the opening, creatures who can fit through it can pass the barrier, and what is beyond the opening can be observed. The caster of the *barrier reaver* is free to cast another spell during the round in which the opening exists. This spell does not destroy the barrier; the opening closes at the end of the round, doing 6d6 hp shearing damage to any creature caught within it and forcibly expelling them or their remains on either side of the barrier (the DM should choose which side at random).

The material component of this spell is a small metal key.

Dragon breath (Evocation)

Level: 7

Range: Varies

Components: V,S,M

Duration: 3 rounds

Casting Time: 3

Area of Effect: Varies

Saving Throw: Special

This powerful spell is rarely used because its material component is the tooth of a dragon. Any type, size, and age of dragon may be the source—even teeth taken from a dragon's skeletal remains or undead form will work. The spell enables the wizard to unleash a breath weapon up to three times (once per round, if no other spell-casting is undertaken) as if the wizard was a dragon of the same sort as once possessed the tooth used. The wizard must have the proper incantation for the type of dragon chosen, as different wordings exist for the different dragon types, the most widely known being blue, black, green, and white. Red and copper are hard to find, and the incantations for other dragon types are very rare indeed.

The precise effects of each breath weapon—range, area of effect, and saving-throw details—are as given in the *Monstrous Compendium*, Volume 1, under "Dragon." The damage dealt by each breath is as given therein, but the wizard's experience level is used to find which dragon age the damage corresponds to. Divide the wizard's level by three, rounding down, to find the assumed "age" and thus the amount damage done. For example, a 14th-level mage (the lowest level at which this spell can be cast) spitting acid as a black dragon does 8d4+4 damage, as if he were a juvenile, or age category 4, dragon.

If a mage tries to combine attributes of various dragon breath weapons during the casting by altering or 'doubling up' the incantation, the result is always the explosion of the tooth (which the caster must hold in his hand during casting) into 36 *magic missiles* erupting in all directions. These unguided magical bolts, each doing 1d4+1 hp damage, travel for 120' before dissipating; all beings within range should save vs. spells to see if they get hit. If struck, roll any die to see how many times: an odd roll equals one missile, an even roll equals two. All beings within 30' of the caster must save four times; the caster must save 10 times (for all failures, roll even/odd to see how many bolts strike).

Magical items

"XP Value" is the experience point total gained by a being who makes (enchants) 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 in the Realms do not normally know the 'going market rate' for any magic.

Balacer's Hand

First known in long-ago Cormanthor (in the city later known as Myth Drannor), this metallic item takes the shape of a human hand about 4" long. When touched to the hilt of any blade weapon, it

can be willed to function in various ways:

- At a cost of one charge, a *Balacer's hand* can razor-sharpen a blade and remove all rust from it in one round.
- At a cost of two charges, it can straighten a bent blade in one round.
- At a cost of two charges, it can fill in all nicks and notches in a blade in two rounds.
- At a cost of four charges, it can restore missing metal to a blade that has severely rusted or been corroded (by acid, for example) away, and halt any ongoing corrosion, in four rounds.
- At a cost of six charges, it can permanently mend a broken (snapped off) blade in six rounds (however, it can't restore any lost magical powers to a broken magical weapon).
- At a cost of 10 charges, *Balacer's hand* can temporarily make any blade a +1 magical weapon. This augmentation takes only one round and lasts 1+1d4 rounds thereafter (the randomly determined time is never known to the wielder).
- At a cost of 20 charges, it can temporarily make a blade a +2 weapon (the details are the same as for a +1 augmentation).

- At a cost of 25 charges, *Balacer's hand* will temporarily make a blade weapon +1 to attack (details as for a +1 augmentation above), except that the blade deals its full normal damage at each strike. Thus, a short sword would have a +1 attack bonus and would do 6 hp damage, plus any Strength bonuses of its user, with each attack until the effect fades.

All of these powers can be used on the same weapon at different times, and all except the three augmentation magicks are cumulative (e.g., a bent, broken, and rusted blade can be made like new by expending 11 charges, then augmented in only one of three ways, not two or three ways at once). None of the augmentation powers of *Balacer's hand* work on functioning magical weapons.

Some 10% of such items have a tiny storage compartment (usually home to written instructions and messages, but sometimes holding lockpicks or jewelry) reached by bending back the hand's little finger.

A *Balacer's hand* typically has 1d12+40 charges when found. It can be recharged by having a priest cast *heat metal* with the verbal component uttered backwards, and in the round immediately after having a wizard cast *lightning bolt* or *chain lightning* into the item. This restores 2-5 charges. In the open under a stormy sky, a priest or priests can recharge a *Balacer's hand* by casting *two heat metal* spells with the prayers read backwards in successive rounds, then in the turn immediately following using *call lightning* to bring down electricity into the item. If one priest maintains the concentration necessary for *call lightning*, those bolts can restore charges to a hand; for each bolt to work,

two heat metal spells must first be cast on the hand by other priests. These methods, too, will restore 2-5 charges.

A wizard acting alone can recharge a hand by casting the spells *glitterdust*, *mending*, and either *lightning bolt* or *chain lightning* on it in three successive rounds. The wording of the *mending* doesn't matter; it causes the hand to absorb the whirling glitter-cloud, so the caster can see it to hurl lightning.

Each attempt at restoring charges has the usual chances of accidentally destroying the item, which must save vs. spells at -1 using the best spell saving throw of all casters involved as a base. Failure means the *Balacer's hand* crumbles to useless dust. A *Balacer's hand* can never rust or corrode, and metallic weapons can't harm it (it is AC-2 and has 100 hp).

XP Value: 2,500, **GP Value:** 12,000

Helping hand

This old, rare item of Krynn is also found on other planes. It is a life-sized, lifelike disembodied human hand fashioned of an iron alloy. A *helping hand's* enchantment makes it move and flex fluidly, and it flies about at the direction of its wielder, who is considered to be the last being to speak a secret binding word while touching it.

A *helping hand* resists rust and all magic (saving as metal but with a +4 bonus on saving throws), is AC 0, can withstand 29 hp damage before shattering (natural and magical electrical discharges heal it on a 1 hp to 1 hp basis), and flies about at MV 16 (A) at the wielder's bidding. It can't pass more than 600' from the wielder without control ceasing; if it ever gets beyond range, the *helping hand* falls to the ground.

Unless another being takes control of a *helping hand* by touching it and uttering its command word, control over a hand that's passed out of range can be restored whenever the wielder moves into range again. A wielder who concentrates on a *helping hand* whose control hasn't passed to someone else will have a vague idea of how distant the hand is and in what direction. (A rare few *helping hand's* can be located by any being who has ever controlled them.) A being can only control one *helping hand* at a time.

A *helping hand* can't carry anything or make spell-casting gestures, but it can point, hold open books, push small objects up to dagger size along a fairly smooth surface, tug at knots, and so on. A hand can fly at beings, attacking at THAC0 11 for 1d2 points damage. Its strike can break eggs, glass, pottery, or other fragile objects, or spoil the aim of a being readying a spell or missile weapon, as the DM adjudges. *Helping hand's* are often used to punch or slap warning gongs and sometimes to trigger traps (overturning a lit candle or lamp into a pool of oil, for example, or pulling the trigger-cord of a

cocked, loaded, and mounted crossbow).

The wielder of a *helping hand* can 'see' from the hand with a spherical, 20' range vision, and can use this ability to spy on foes, watch over strategic areas, or use the hand to signal directions and intentions. Operating a *helping hand* requires mental concentration that precludes spell-casting in the same round but allows normal physical activity. If a hand-wielder is climbing, swimming, or balancing precariously while operating the hand, all Dexterity checks are made at a one-point penalty; if engaged in combat, all hand-wielder attack rolls are at -1. A *helping hand* can be commanded to "go on as it was before" (e.g., flying in the same direction and speed) when concentration ceases; if no instructions are given, it hangs (or lies on a surface) motionless.

XP Value: 1,000, **GP Value:** 2,500

Spell mirror

This hand-sized oval of polished glass is attuned to a specific spell when made. While carried anywhere on the person of a being (living, dead, or undead), it deflects that one specific type of attack away from the being in a random direction (from 45° to the left of the attack arrival path, to 45° right of it: roll 1d8 to determine which 10° angle occurs: 1 = 45° to the left, 2 = 10° to the right of that, and so on, with the attacks arrival path being skipped over), and to the same distance away that it traveled to reach the mirror-bearer, unless it encounters obstacles.

This item only guards against a specific magical effect, which can never be changed once set. For example, a *spell mirror* might protect against a *lightning bolt* coming from both spells or magical items, but not *chain lightning* or other electrical discharge effects; or against a *fireball* hurled by spell or an item, but not any other fiery magic.

Functioning even if at the bottom of a backpack or strapped inside armor, a *spell mirror* protects its bearer from all effects of the specific magic it is attuned to, even if the bearer wasn't the primary target of such attacks (a *chain lightning* spell that struck another being first, then arced to strike others, would bypass a mirror-bearer, if that was the magic the mirror defended against).

This item's protection against the chosen magic is automatic and can never be turned off, regardless of the bearer's wishes, but other magicks, even if similar to the attack protected against, don't make the mirror function. Each time the mirror's use is triggered, there is a 1 in 12 chance of breakage. Magical attacks never affect a *spell mirror* directly: even *fireball* blasts or blows from a *ring of the ram* won't force item saving throws on a *spell mirror*. However, it is fragile and can be shattered by being dropped, its bearer falling, or the mirror being struck by a solid object.

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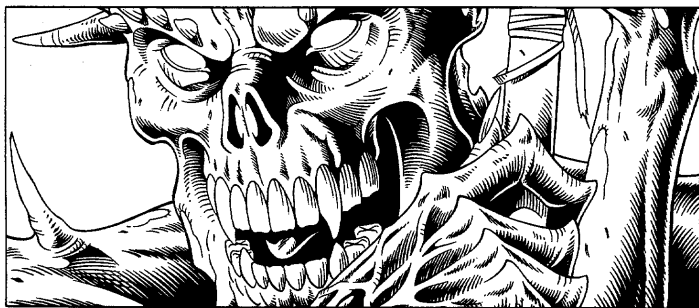
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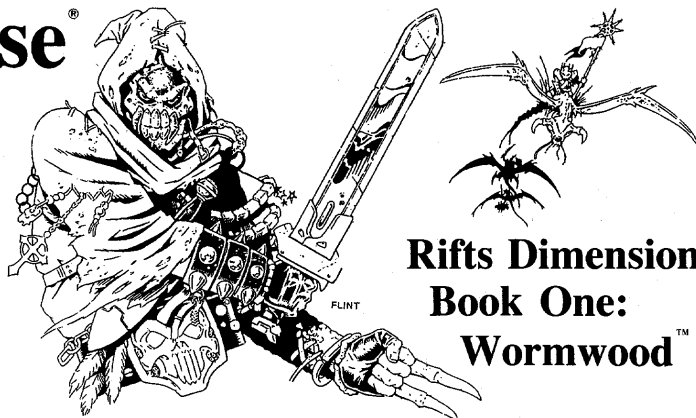
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Available at hobby shops and comic stores everywhere!

Breaking a *spell mirror* ends its magic, does 1d4+ 1 hp burst damage to all within 3' of it (the mirror turns to dust, not shards), and releases an entrapped creature that 'powered' the item's magic. The creature is violently expelled from an extradimensional space, appearing within 10' of where the mirror was when it broke, and will be hostile to all nearby beings. It is always a creature that uses or manipulates energy, such as a firestar (MC3 *Monstrous Compendium*, Volume 3), will-o-wisp (MC1), volt (MC14), or similar creature.

XP Value: 5,000, **GP Value:** 18,000

Monster notes

Friendly fungi: These little mobile mushrooms never grow more than 1' high or 5" in diameter. They range in hue from a deep blue to a russet red; most are brown or tan in color. Like many other mushrooms, they have a caplike 'head' and a stalklike body, but their lower end is amorphous, able to grow short tentacles, pseudopods, and the like.

Any part of a friendly fungus can bend or twist so that its body can wrap around and carry objects like a mitten-covered man's hand wraps around the handle of a shovel or weapon. It can also exude a very sticky substance at will, enabling the

mobile mushrooms to walk and hang on walls, ceilings, and level ground alike.

Friendly fungi can carry things up to 70 lbs. in weight (far heavier than they are) and can 'see' in a continuous 60' spherical field with infravision through countless body pores, not by means of visible eyes. Each attaches itself devotedly to a single larger being that is kind to it, feeding and stroking it on occasion. Friendly fungi rub themselves against objects to scratch their itches, and are most beholden to any creature who gently scratches them. They absorb water and food through body pores, needing sugar and plant sap from time to time.

Friendly fungi can make little squeaks of contentment or warning, or sputtering "raspberry" sounds; they use such sounds to indicate disgust, aversion, dislike, or taunting. They can understand speech, can recognize locations and items by description, and can retain and recognize mental images passed on by beings touching them directly (an elf who passes a mental picture of his wife to a fungi could expect it to pick her out in a tent full of sleeping elven women).

Friendly fungi often befriend hermits or other quiet, solitary folk, and they will carry drinks, pipes, slippers, books and similar items around for that being. They

readily understand the concepts of 'go and fetch' or 'find,' and aren't easily distracted from unfinished missions.

A friendly fungus could bring keys and water to an imprisoned being; all friendly fungi can absorb and carry water like a sponge, exuding it at will. Their natural processes neutralize poison and alcohol in all liquids taken in (they cannot become intoxicated). Some rulers use a friendly fungi as a 'filter' to protect them from poisoned drinks. These creatures appear obviously related to both myconids (MC2) and campestris (DUNGEON® Adventures issue #41, page 70).

Friendly fungus: INT 6; AL LN; AC 9; MV 14 (12 on walls and ceilings); HD ½; typically 4 hp each; THAC0 20; #AT 1 (corrosive secretion); Dmg 1; SD neutralize poison, immune to poison, acid, and venom effects, spherical infravision makes surprise very unlikely (1 in 12 chance); SZ T; ML 17; XP 35.

Stelurge: These rare relatives of the stirge (itself fully detailed in volume 2 of the *Monstrous Compendium*) are identical to stirges except for their greater strength and blood-draining capacity, and their prehensile, bone-barb-ended tails. They often rest hanging head-down from branches or vines, as bats do, only stelurges achieve this position by wrapping their tails around their perch. Unlike stirges, stelurges will detach from a victim they are draining if threatened with likely death, then swoop around to gain another chance to strike and drain. The chances of inadvertently harming a victim that a stelurge is draining, while attacking the attached stelurge, are the same as for a stirge.

Stelurge: INT 4; AL NE; AC 7; MV 3, Fl 18 (C); HD 2+4; THAC0 17; #AT 2; Dmg 1-3 proboscis (plus 1d4 blood drain per round thereafter, until satiated at 20 hp) and 2d4 razor-sharp stabbing tail; SZ S (wingspan to 4'); ML 12; XP 270. Ω



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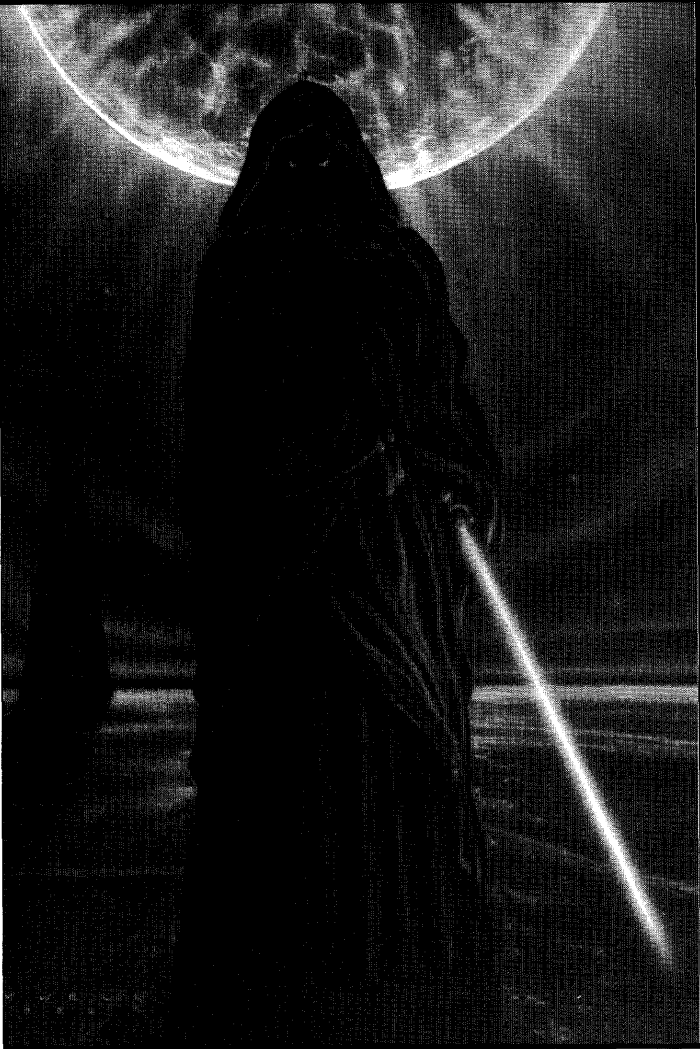
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BAZAAR Of the BIZARRE

Wonderful & powerful, indeed—
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by Teeuwynn Woodruff and Tim Beach

Artwork by Bob Klasnich

Among the adventuring guilds, stories have been told of much amazing magic, including several small figurines as wondrous as those found in the AD&D® 2nd Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide*. We hereby present the gaming details on these new discoveries.

Note that in statuette form, each figurine saves as crystal +4. If destroyed in statuette form, a figurine is forever useless, though if "killed" (reduced to zero hit points) in animated form it merely becomes a statuette again, ready for later use. Unless noted otherwise, *dispel magic* causes an animated figurine to take on statuette form again.

Amber monkeys

Each of this trio of long-tailed monkey figures stands 3" high. The monkeys may be found individually or in a set, and each comes to life and activates a special attack power when a given command word is

spoken.

A monkey in either animated or statuette form can be hit only by magical weapons; it has AC 8 and 1 HD when animated. Nonmagical weapons pass through the monkey, striking its victim instead during combat (see the combat details that follow). Unless the victim holds absolutely still, 50% of hits with magical weapons strike the victim rather than the monkey.

An animated monkey may attack three times per round for 1-2 hp damage per attack, if so commanded. All monkeys have a movement rate of 12, swinging through trees as quickly as they run on the ground. They obey simple commands once animated (one command at a time, of up to eight words), but they have other abilities, as follow. Each monkey may be used once per day for up to one turn per activation. At the end of this time, the monkey reverts to statuette form and, if the owner is within 30', *blinks* back to its

owner. An *amber monkey* follows the orders of the person who activated it, but rumors state that a few (5%) are cursed to attack the user.

Monkey of blinding: This monkey is carved with its hands covering its eyes. When the proper command word is spoken, the monkey grows to the size of a chimpanzee and becomes active. If the item's owner points to an intended target up to 30' away and utters a second command word, the monkey *blinks* away and reappears on top of the target's shoulders with its hands clasped firmly over the target's eyes (the arms lengthen magically to cover giants' or dragons' eyes). This blindness puts the target at -4 on its attack rolls. While the victim has a monkey on his back, the creature's weight and position add a further -2 penalty to all the victim's attacks, for a total of -6. Additionally, the victim must make a saving throw vs. spells (with a -2 penalty due to the power

of the enchantment) or else be permanently, magically blinded, a condition that can be removed by *cure blindness* or *dispel magic*.

There are three ways to remove an active monkey from its victim, "killing" it with magical weapons being the most hazardous and *dispel magic* being the least. A successful bend bars/lift gates roll by the victim also breaks the monkey's grasp, but the monkey covers its victim's eyes again on the following round.

Xp Value: 500

Monkey of deafening: This monkey is carved with its hands covering its ears and operates similarly to the *monkey of blinding*. When this monkey lands on its target, it clasps its hands over the target's ears. The target must make a successful saving throw vs. spells at -2 or be permanently deafened until *dispel magic* or *cure deafness* is cast on the victim. Even if the saving throw is made, the victim cannot hear unless the monkey's hands are removed from his ears. While mounted, the monkey gives its victim a -2 penalty to attack, due to its weight and position. The *monkey of deafening* can be removed in the same ways as the *monkey of blinding*.

XP Value: 500

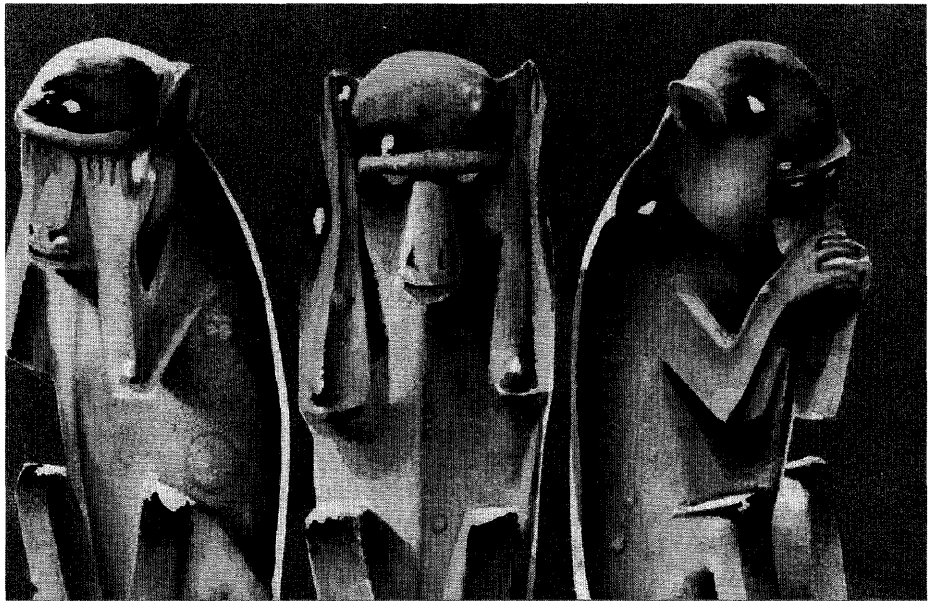
Monkey of muting: This monkey is carved with its hands covering its mouth. When a command word is spoken, the monkey grows to the size of a capuchin monkey (about 2' high). Once a target has been indicated, the monkey *blinks* up to 30' away, reappearing with its tail wrapped about the target's neck, allowing the victim to breathe but stopping all vocalizations. The victim must make a saving throw vs. spells (with a -2 penalty) or become permanently mute. The *monkey of muting* may be removed in the same ways as the other monkeys, but it is light enough not to cause any attack penalties for its victim.

If the owner wishes, a second command word can be spoken, causing the monkey to use its tail for a strangling attack. This attack automatically hits and causes 1d6 hp strangulation damage per round. While attacking, the monkey may be removed in the same three ways as a *monkey of blindness*, but it is AC 0 during the attack because its skin is as hard as amber. If the monkey succeeds in killing its opponent, it immediately crumbles into dust, becoming useless.

Xp Value: 800

Coral dragon

This is a delicate, multicolored carving of an Oriental dragon, approximately 1' long. When its command word is spoken, the dragon animates and grows to about 3' long. Once animated, it remains so for four hours, until "killed," until *dispel magic* is cast on it, or until the command



word is spoken again. The dragon may be used once each week for scouting, combat, or conversation.

These figurines are especially rare and usually quite old. They often accumulate much wisdom over the course of their long lives and can act as advisors to the person who activates them. Though specific knowledge is left to the Dungeon Master to decide, *coral dragons* often know about philosophy, religion, and history; the latter gives them a 25% chance to identify the general purpose and function of any magical item.

The *coral dragon* has 8 HD, AC 3, and Intelligence and Wisdom of 15. The dragon has MV 12 on the ground, 24 flying, and 36 swimming. Most have a neutral alignment, though some have leanings toward law, chaos, good, or evil. A *coral dragon* may attack with two claws and one bite each round, with successful hits causing 1d10 damage per claw and 2d6 damage per bite.

A *coral dragon* follow the orders of the person who activated it, though those dragons with alignments opposed to the alignment of the activator will try to find loopholes in the orders given them. Once per activation, the *coral dragon* can cast *gust of wind*, *airy water*, and *create water*.

XP Value: 1,500

Emerald frog

This tiny carving, less than 1" long, animates into a frog of the same size when the command word is spoken. While animated, the frog maintains a mental link with the person who activated it; this allows the activator to see through the frog's eyes with 270° vision as long as the frog remains within 100 yards.

The frog has 1 hp and AC 0. Because of powerful enchantments, it is immune to all attacks by insects and arachnids, including their poisons, or those creatures with insect or arachnid components (such as driders and ettercaps, but not drow). It attacks insectoid or arachnoid creatures of any sort when so commanded, attacking once each round with THAC0 10, its tongue lashing out as far as 5'. If the frog successfully hits, the victim shrinks drastically in size. The frog swallows its shrunken targets whole, killing them; this includes even giant insects and spiders. An individual with an Intelligence greater than 1 or having more than 6 HD gets a saving throw vs. death to break free from the frog's tongue before being captured, shrunk, and swallowed. The *emerald frog* has the usual vulnerabilities of these figurines.

XP Value: 700

Jade snakes

These two figurines are always found together, each of the pair twined about the other. One, the *snake of striking*, is carved from green jade, while the other, the *snake of soothing*, is carved from white jade. The figurines are 2" long and may be worn as a pendent suspended from a chain.

If both snakes are animated at the same time, the *snake of striking* immediately attacks the *snake of soothing* to destroy it. If either snake is destroyed, the other snake crumbles into jade dust, because neither snake can be sustained without its opposite.

Snake of striking: When its command word is spoken, this green snake uncoils from its mate, transforms into a 12'-long anaconda, and attacks the nearest creature. This transformation takes a full round, during which the item's possessor can hurl the snake at the desired target. If the activator of the snake misses with the throw, the snake attacks the nearest living target (use the grenade-like missile rules from the *DMG*, pages 62-63, to resolve missed attacks). The snake has 50 hp, THAC0 13, and AC 5. It bites for 1d4 hp damage or constricts for 2d6 hp damage, attacking as a 10-HD monster. The snake attacks until reduced to zero hit points, *dispel magic* is cast on it, or the command word is spoken again; any of these occurrences causes the snake to revert to figurine form. The snake may be used once per day.

XP Value: 800

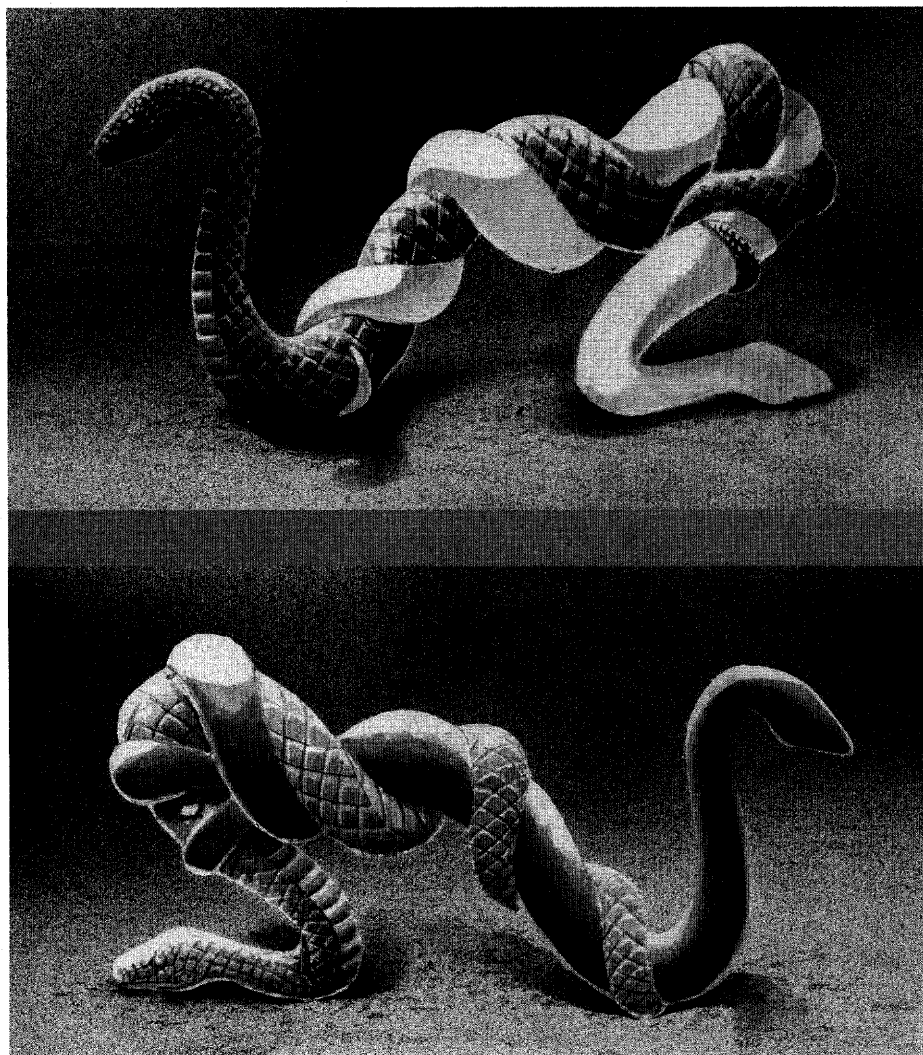
Snake of soothing: When its command word is spoken, this white snake uncoils from its fellow snake, transforms into a 6' long python, and coils around the nearest living creature. The transformation takes a full round, during which the snake's activator can place the snake on an individual. The snake will not coil about a resistant target, instead reverting to figurine form, wasting its use.

Once the snake has wrapped itself around the target, it begins to vibrate. When the snake's tongue touches the subject's wounds, the wounds close and heal. The snake 'may perform one *cure serious wounds*, one *neutralize poison*, and one *cure disease* on its subject, casting any and all which the subject needs. Being killed," having *dispel magic* cast upon it, or pronunciation of the command word causes the snake to revert to figurine form. The snake has 50 hp and AC 5, but will not attack nor heal its own wounds. The snake may be used once per day.

XP Value: 900

Moonstone rabbit

When commanded,) this 2"-tall figurine grows to the size of a normal rabbit, with 1 HD and AC 8. Once transformed, the





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rabbit burrows into earth of any sort, as per a *dig* spell cast by a 12th-level wizard. The rabbit burrows until commanded to

stop or the spell duration runs out, then reverts to figurine form. If commanded, the rabbit can also dig through stone at

the same rate. However, after three such uses against stone, the rabbit loses its magical abilities forever. The rabbit may be used once per day.

XP Value: 300

Opal cats

There are three of these figurines, two kittens and a mother cat. They are normally found in a complete set of three.

Mother cat: This 1"-tall cat is made from a black opal. When commanded, the cat grows into a slightly shimmering black panther with the same statistics as a mountain lion (AC 6; MY 12; HD 3+1; hp 25; THAC0 17; #AT 3; Dmg 1-3/1-3/1-6; AL N; SA rear claws 1-4 each; SD surprised only on a 1; ML 10). It has the usual vulnerabilities of these figurines.

XP Value: 400

Kitten of caterwauling: This Y-tall kitten is carved from a fire opal. When commanded, the figurine transforms into a scruffy kitten with orange-yellow fur. The round after the kitten transforms, it begins a piercing wail. This cry creates a cone of sound 120' long and 30' wide at the base. All within the area of effect must make a successful saving throw vs. spells or take 2d6 hp damage, be stunned and unable to act for two rounds, and be deafened for four rounds. Those who make a successful saving throw are stunned for one round and deafened for two. This kitten has 1 HD and is AC 8. It may be used once per week and has the usual vulnerabilities of these figurines.

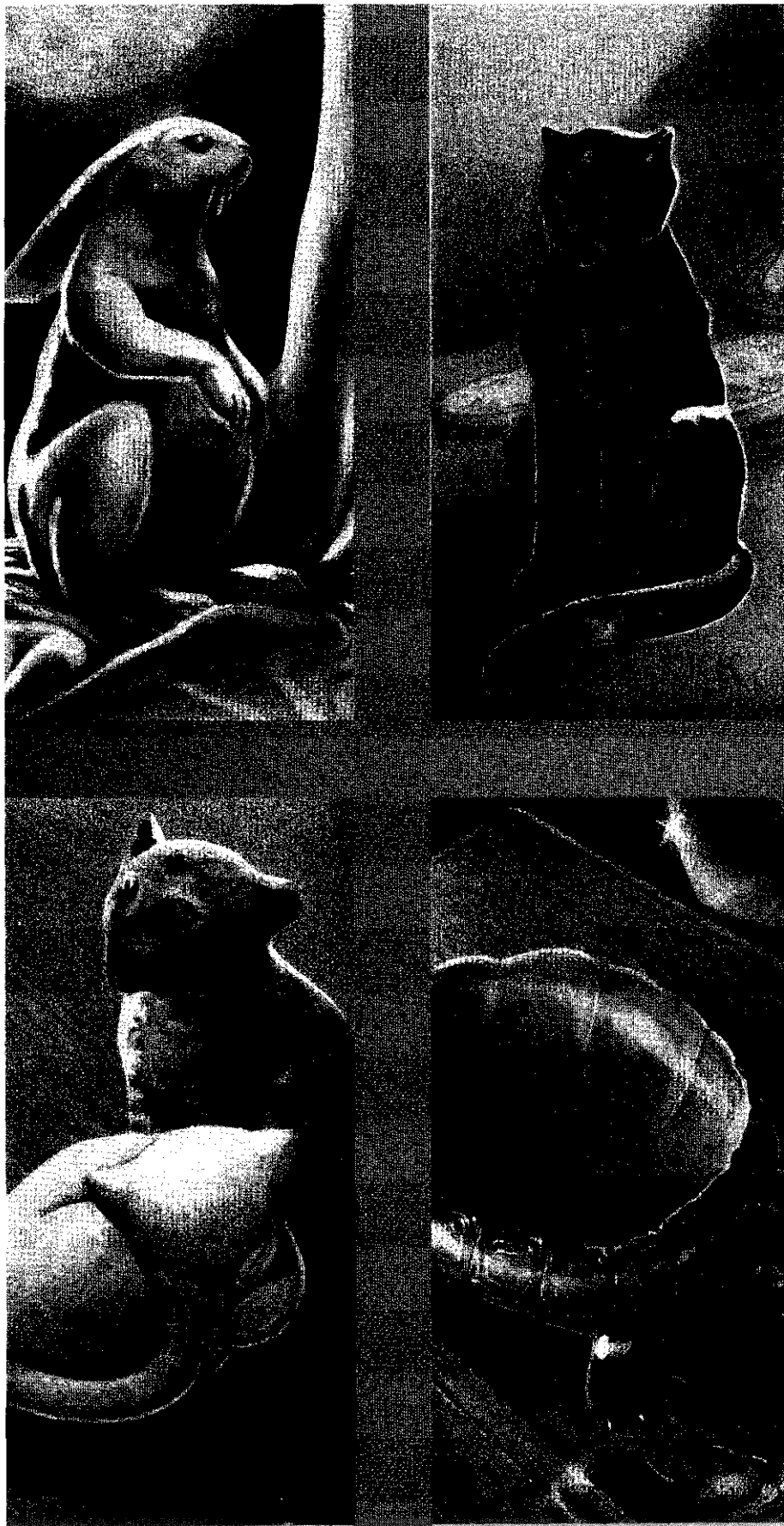
XP Value: 300

Kitten of contemplation: This Y-tall kitten is carved from a white opal. When the command word is spoken, the figurine becomes a fluffy white kitten, apparently only a few weeks old. The kitten immediately sits on the lap of its activator and begins purring. Due to the soothing and hypnotic nature of the kitten's purr, a spellcaster in contact with the kitten needs only half the normal time to memorize spells. The kitten may be used only by the individual who commanded its transformation. The kitten's purr also permanently breaks the effects of a *confusion* spell. This figurine may be used once per day and stays in animated form for up to eight hours before automatically reverting to a statuette. It has 1 HD and is AC 8, and has the usual vulnerabilities of these figurines.

XP Value: 300

Silver carp

When its command word is spoken, this 4" carp animates and grows to a length of 2'. The animated carp has beautiful, scintillating scales of many colors. If placed in water, the carp purifies up to 100 gallons. If held in the air, the carp produce a stream of fresh water from its mouth,



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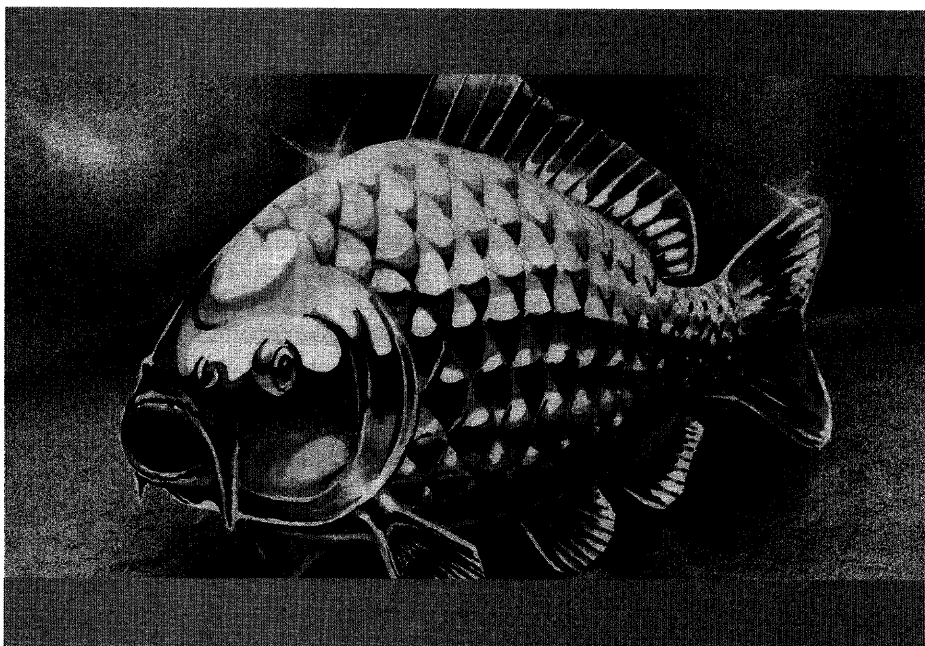
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pouring out one gallon per round. If a second command word is spoken, the carp writhes, whether held, on the ground, or in the water. Unless the carp is in total darkness when this occurs, light then reflects brilliantly from its scales. Any sighted creature within 10' of the carp must make a saving throw vs. spells or be blinded for 2d4 rounds (a successful saving throw indicates that the individual turned away or was not looking). While animated, the carp has 1 HD and AC 5, and has the usual vulnerabilities of these figurines. The carp may be used for up to one hour once per day.

XP Value: 400

Tourmaline turtle

This elegant stone carving, approximately 6" long, looks much like a normal sea turtle but has a concave, bowl-like back. When the turtle is placed in water and the command word is spoken, it transforms into a giant, animated turtle nearly 20' long. It follows the commands of the being who activated it and remains animated for up to 12 hours. It can carry as many as eight human-sized creatures through water at MV 36 (or MV 3 on land). Though *dispel magic* causes the turtle to stop moving, only repetition of the command word or reduction of the turtle to



zero hit points causes it to revert to statuette form. The turtle has AC 0, 60 hp, and a THAC0 of 13; it can bite once per round for 4d12 hp damage (damaging even creatures that can be struck only by magical weapons of +1 or +2 enchantment), acting at the command of its user. The *tourmaline turtle* can be used once per week.

Some 10% of these turtles are enchanted with another ability. With the pronunciation of a second command word, such a turtle can submerge to any depth. Its passenger compartment is enchanted with an *airy water* effect.

XP Value: 1,100

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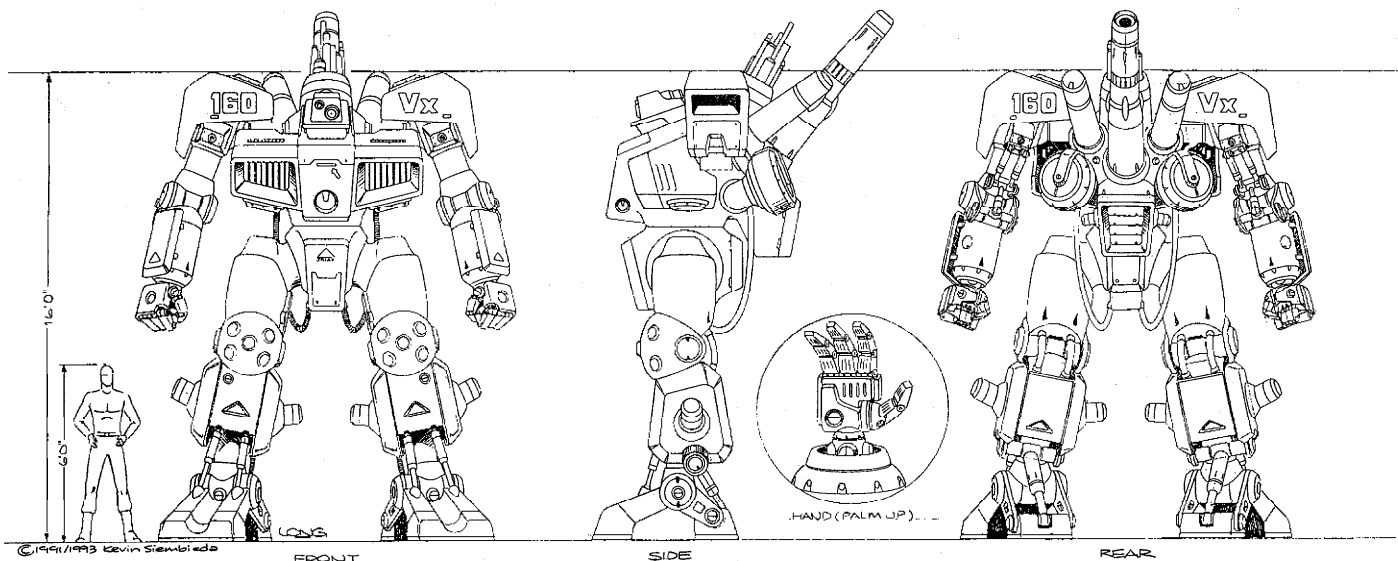
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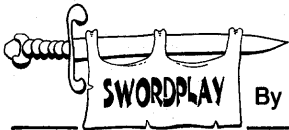
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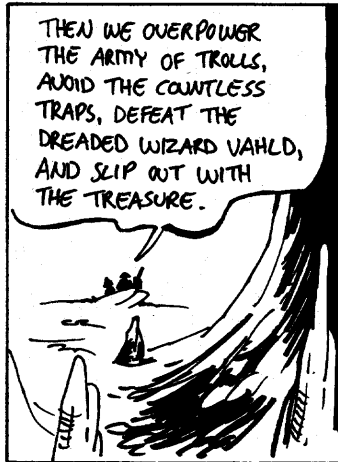
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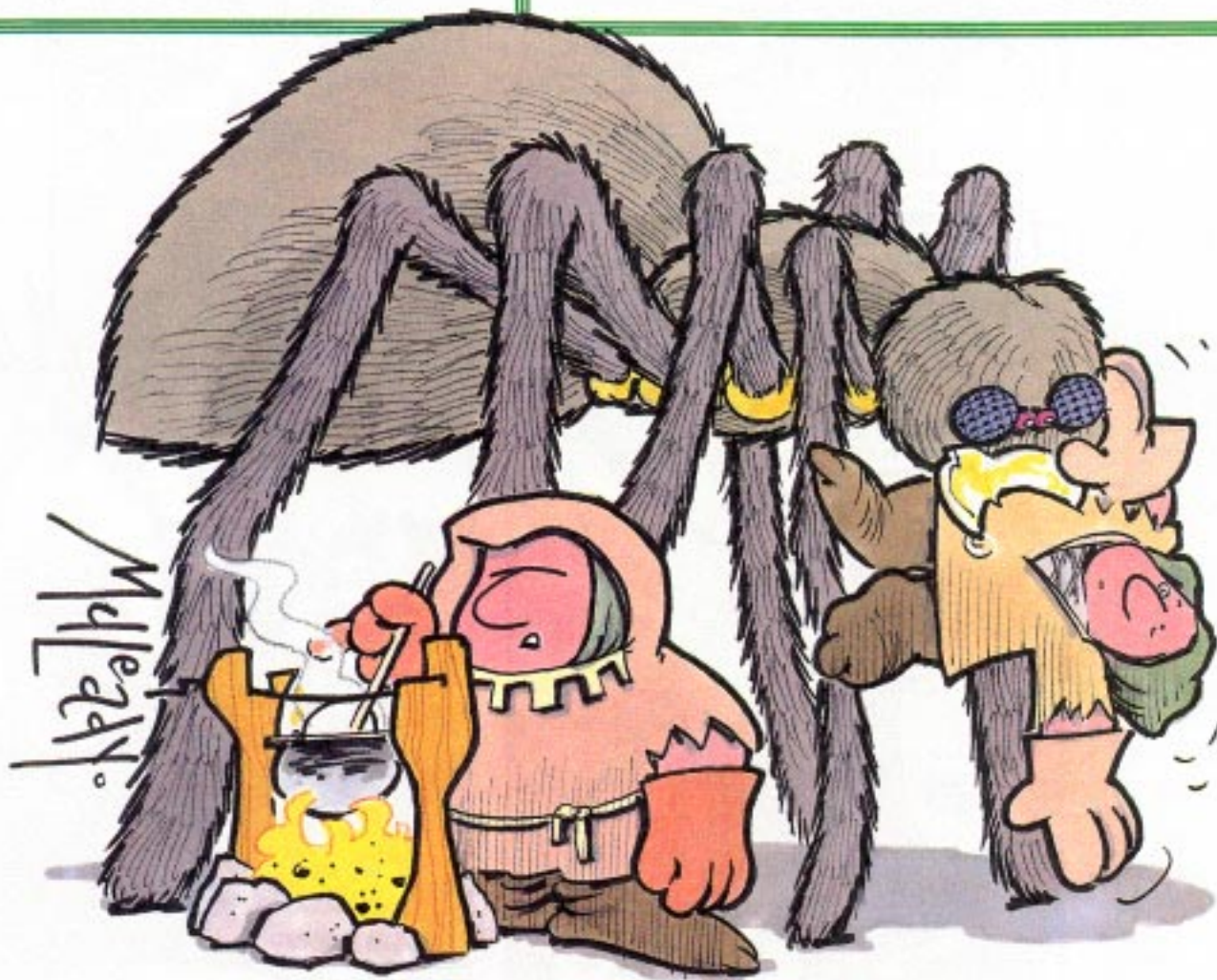


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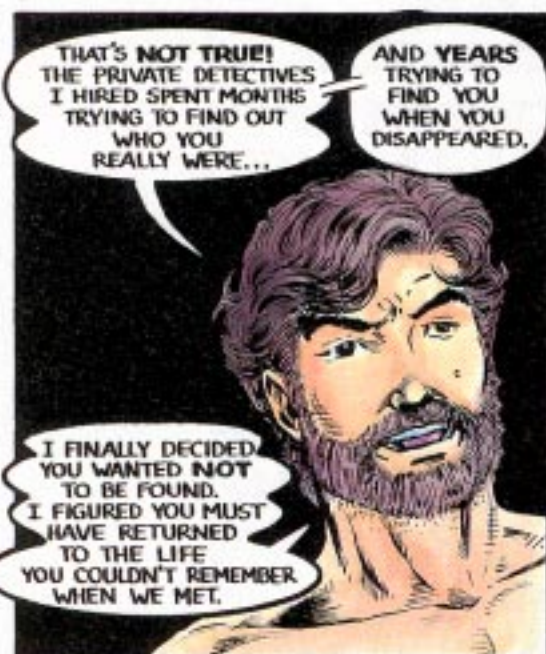
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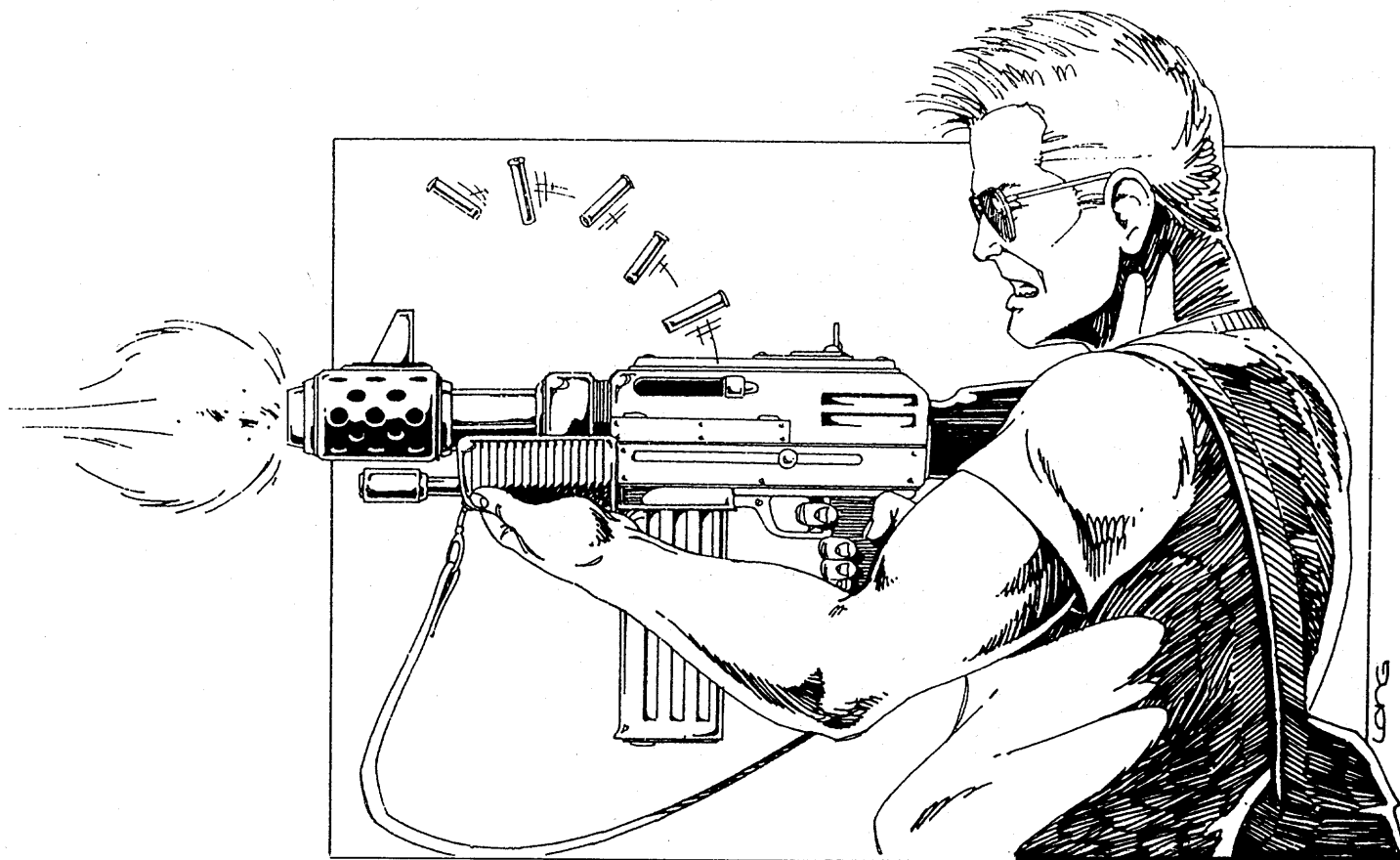
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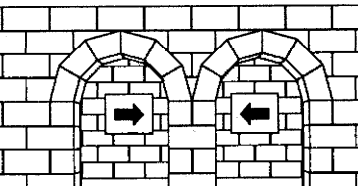
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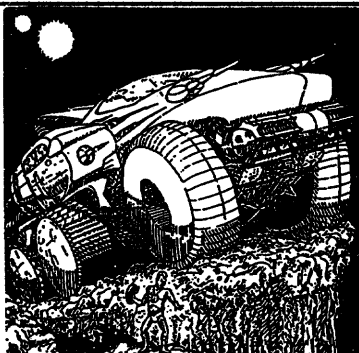
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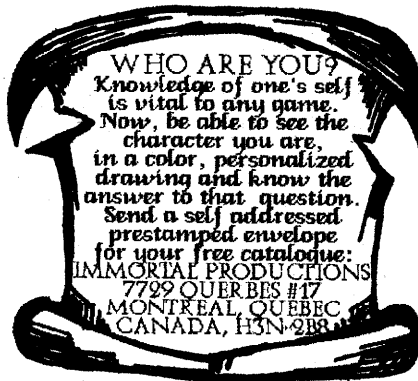
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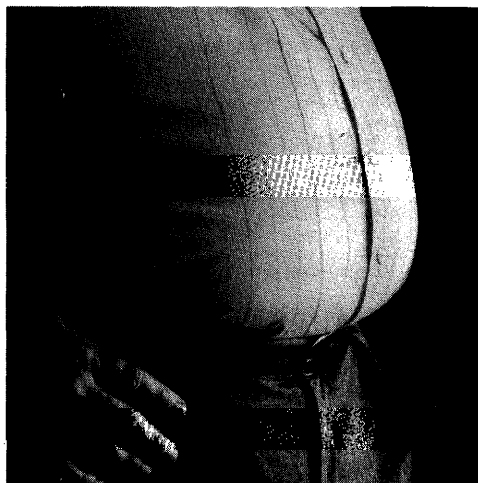
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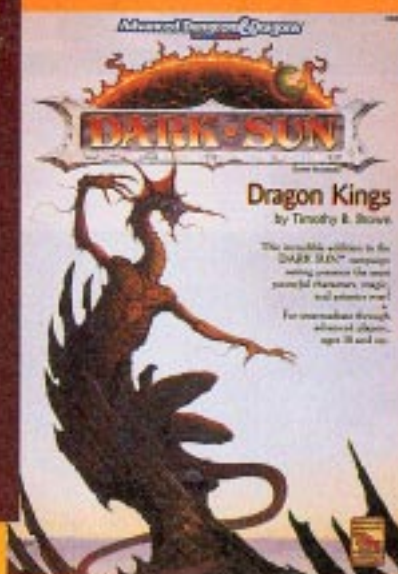
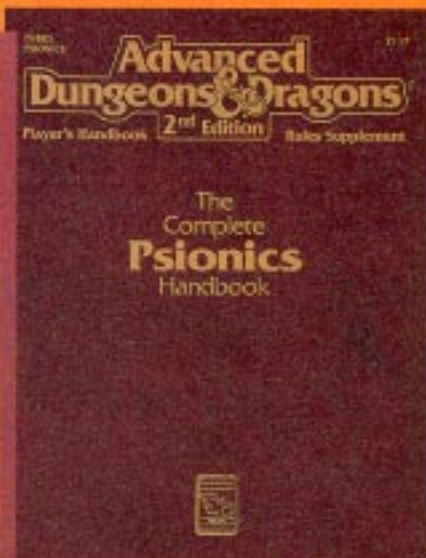


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Through the LOOKING Glass

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Basic Pack 1 (Soldiers and Swords)

A "Mecca" for miniatures gamers

The focus of this month's reviews is on products that should be available at the GEN CON® Game Fair at the MECCA Convention Center in Milwaukee, Wis., August 19th-22nd. For those who have not attended the convention before, this annual attraction provides the best of historical, fantasy, and science-fiction miniatures games. The miniatures area comprises one huge hall and many separate gaming areas hosted by several clubs. Many of you have called me to ask for information about the best rules to use, or what genre is the best to play in. Many of the games run are directed specifically to new gamers and novices, which gives you hands-on experience with different historical periods and rules that interest you without having to spend large sums of money.

These four days will also provide a huge selection of gaming materials to a wise shopper. Our reviews this month will cover products from some of the companies that will be exhibiting merchandise. I

apologize in advance if I missed anyone. Space is limited in a regular column, and there will be a lot of companies attending the game fair. Also note that some companies will more than likely have new merchandise that is not available to me as I write this.

I want to thank Erik Peterson for his work on the Thunderbolt Mountain's Merlyon and the Giants set. Erik also did the Lance and Laser's Mounted Knight figure. Soldiers and Swords' figures were painted by Jay Wirth of Soldier and Swords. Kelly Johnson assembled the building.

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

Reviews

Soldiers and Swords

25 Fayette St.
Binghamton NY 13901

DP-001 Basic Pack 1

***** 1/2

The three 25 mm figures in this set are all dedicated to modern or cyberpunk adventures for R. Talsorian's DREAM PARK* game. Each figure rests on an oval undetailed base, and the figures are lead-free.

The male in the set is tall at just over 26 mm tall to the eyes. He is dressed in a T-shirt and tight pants, knee-high boots, knee shields, and a long, open raincoat. His right hand holds a large-caliber machine gun with shoulder strap; a belt of ammo snakes into an ammo pack. Facial detail is good, but the eyes are covered by a visor or sun glasses. There was no flash on the figure, and the mold lines were easy to clean.

Female #1 is 26 mm tall. She is dressed in a tight, multipocketed jump suit with the zipper open to mid-abdomen, and she wears gloves and a belt as well. Facial features are slightly flat with angular cheeks, giving her a Slavic look. No weapons are visible.

Female #2 is dressed in a body stocking, high-heeled boots, and a tight miniskirt. Her tight top is outfitted with cyberlinks and lines. Both arms appear to be either artificial or heavily enhanced, complete with exo-framing from shoulder to finger tips. A pistol holster is on her hip. Her hair is swept back, and she wears glasses. Her look is one of defiance. A little work was needed on the mold line and a slight nub on the hand of this figure.

These figures can be used with any of the near-future RPGs such as the CYBERPUNK 2020*, SHADOWRUN*, or DREAM PARK* games. It is interesting to note that most of the packs have two female and one male character. These figures are worth the \$4.95 price per pack.

BS-2503 Two-story dwelling ****

Most of the small-scale buildings commercially available are made of either resin or plaster. This building is scaled for 25 mm and is made of brightly colored paper sealed to foam artist's board. The pieces come on two sheets and must be cut out with a sharp knife and straight-edge. The roof and side walls come on one sheet and the front, back, and chimney on the other, so all parts must be cut out to be assembled.

The house is 100 mm deep X 95 mm deep X 152 mm tall. The foam board did not crumble but did require two blades to cut through it. The directions were clear with good illustrations. The chimney was a sore spot, and its construction resulted in a nick in the finger from working around the small parts. The result does assemble well, albeit slowly.

The building is impressive and should survive much better than other paper buildings. This is worth its \$8.50 price, though patience and a steady hand are needed.

Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

656 E. McMillan
Cincinnati OH 45206-1971

3003 Merlyon the Sorcerer *****

These mounted and standing figures are scaled for 25 mm, cast from a lead-free alloy. The bases are separate and show rocky surfaces. The standing and riding Merlyons are identical in garb and almost identical in positioning.

Merlyon is dressed in a floor-length pleated robe with ornate trim at the hem and bell-shaped sleeves. His knotted, braided sash supports pouches that hang by a throng on his right side. His head is covered by a small cone-shaped hat, inscribed

with a star and other symbols. His left hand is curled in a spellcasting position; his right hand supports a long, ball-capped staff. On this staff perches his owl familiar talons tightly gripping the ball. Individual feathers may be discerned.

Merlyon's gnarled hands match his wrinkled face. Large bushy eyebrows frame eyes set over gaunt cheeks. His mouth is open as if chanting. A hooded cape stretches to the ground, where its hem lays wrinkled on the ground. On horseback, the cape flies out behind him; he casts a spell as his owl tilts into the breeze.

The horse is unbridled. Its tail hangs relatively straight down, unlike the condition of the cloak, but the mane does flow backward. No flash was present on either of these figures. They are well worth the \$6.95 total cost.

The Giants: Taulard and Taulas of Cornwall ***** 1/2

I want to start by thanking Chaosium for printing the *King Arthur Companion*, used with the PENDRAGON* system. I could not remember which giant was which, but I found the proper reference on page 98.

Both of these figures are in 25-mm scale and are of lead-free alloy. Both figures have separate bases and are posed in fighting stances. Taulard is just over 39 mm high and wears plate-mail armor from foot to head. A mailed right hand holds a spiked club, and his left hand supports a large shield. His head is covered by a full helm. His large belly overhangs a plain belt; he also wears a long surcoat and chain mail under the surcoat. There was no flash, and the mold lines blended without work.

Taulas is 39 mm high and covered in jazeraint-style armor except for his right hand and face. The remains of a glove

hang at his wrist; his hand holds a spiked ball military flail. A knee-length surcoat accents his large stomach. An ugly, scowling face with a jutting nose and chin adorn this figure. Flabby cheeks, long upper teeth, and big lips present the appearance of a large ogre rather than a man.

Both figures were excellent, but at least one of the figures was oversized or overweight (Taulard was too big for horses, while Taulas could still ride them). These figures are still worth the \$6.75 price tag as villains or bodyguards.



Two-story dwelling (Soldiers and Swords)



Merlyon the Sorcerer (Thunderbolt Mountain)



Taulard and Taulas of Cornwall
(Thunderbolt Mountain)



Cyberlegger (Lance and Laser Models)



Mounted Knight (Lance and Laser Models)

Lance and Laser Models, Inc.

P.O. Box 14491
Columbus OH 43214

P-007 Mounted Knight

This figure is a three-piece casting made of pewter and is scaled for use with the 25-mm scale PENDRAGON line. The figure is of a knight likely out on a hunt. The figure is dressed in a juponlike outer garment over a fluffed shirt with bell sleeves. High fur-trimmed boots with pointed toes cover both feet. A long, fur-lined cloak is secured by a chain and falls to the horse's back. The knight wears gloves, one hand clutching a twin-pointed spear as the other holds his reins. His face is adorned with a neatly cut mustache and a beard that

comes to a point. His facial expression is neutral. Atop his trimmed hair is a soft cap.

The horse is mounted to an undetailed oval base. The body measures just over 30 mm tall and 35 mm long. The horse is cantering and its tack is showy rather than merely functional. The saddle is strapped on top of a long blanket that flows in the same direction as the mane and tail, denoting speed. Facial detail on the horse is clear, and there was no obscuring mold lines or flash.

While this is not a fighting man per se, he could be excellent as a messenger or as an advisor for a command group. You could also use him in a hunting scene. This is very pricey at \$4.85 each, though. The rating would have been higher if the price had been lower.

TORG 019 Cyberlegger

**** ½

This pewter-based figure is exactly 25-mm scale on a plain oval base. This figure is of a bald, visored, heavily armed man who reminds me of Grimjack's right-hand man in the original comic-book series from First Comics. High boots cover stretched pants, with cartridge holders strapped in place. The flak vest has several pockets and a holder dangling from it. Both arms are covered with strap-on flexible armor and display more bulging pockets. A heavy assault rifle is in his right hand and a knife is in his left. His expression is pure business. This figure is usable in any modern or near-future SF game. It costs \$2.15.

Fortress Figures

P.O. Box 66
Jonesboro IN 46938

WWI Bogey

These figures are scaled to the larger 28 mm size but remain the size of goblins. The figures are lead and mounted on plain

oval bases. Combat boots, complete with visible eyes and laces, adorn his feet; slightly ballooned fatigue pants disappear under the armor on the figure's chest, back, and shoulders. Both gloved hands grip an assault rifle with a cleaver-sized bayonet, crude telescopic sights, and a strangely shaped stock. A jet pack or oxygen bottle is bolted to the armor. A provisions bag hangs from his left hip and a power disk from his right hip. The figure comes with two heads. The first head is very definitely goblinoid and wears a gas mask. His eyes peek from above the mask, while his ears stick straight out. The other head has a snarl, buggy eyes, and a long nose. His ears stick out and his head is capped by a pill-shaped cossack's cap.

There was no flash on the figure. Its strangeness appeals to me. At \$1.50 a figure, it is almost worth it to make several units of these troops.

XL-27 Mummy

*** ½

This lead figure is scaled to 25 mm and based on a rough-topped oval base. Several bandaged areas droop and bandage ends hang down, adding to the effect of decay. Sections of the chest and the face are exposed. The face is flattened and has little detail except for a protruding jaw; it does not bear much resemblance to a human.

This mummy looks like it has been hit by a truck head-on. While details are good, the figure has almost the appearance of an old-fashioned metal flat. The mummy is just worth its \$1.50 price.



Bogey (Fortress Figures)



Mummy (Fortress Figures)



Night Brood ships (Iron Crown)

Iron Crown Enterprises, Inc.

P.O. Box 1605
Charlottesville VA 22902

7013 Night Brood: Expansion Set for SILENT DEATH* game * * * * 1/2

Night Brood is a boxed supplement for the SILENT DEATH space-combat game and introduces a new race to an otherwise stable universe. The box art is crisp, with a built-in painting guide for one of the six lead miniatures included with the set. The

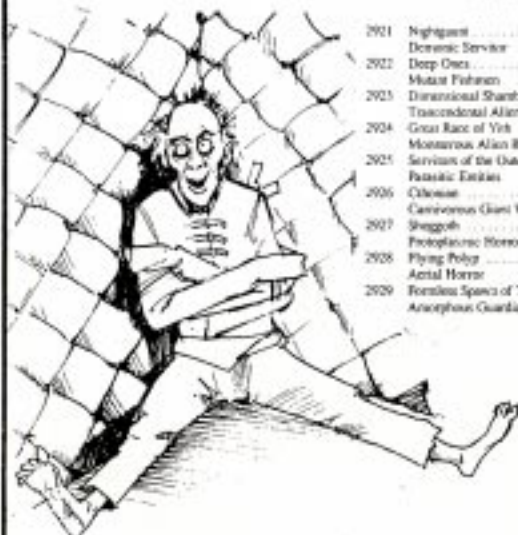
box contains a sourcebook that includes historical data, rule updates, and introductions and starcraft displays for new vessels. (Since this is a bound book, you must copy the display-sheet pages while keeping the book intact. Be careful, as our binding is already showing signs of loosening.) The book also presents a number of game scenarios.

Lots of colorful counters depicting torps, ships, targets, and drones are included. I suggest that you buy a counter tray to

store these. You probably need a sharp knife handy when you remove the counters from their frames. This set also contains the counters for the Black Guard supplement.

Six miniatures of the alien ships are also included: two larva, two remora, one squid, and one manta ship. I found some problems with the miniatures. They follow almost exactly the descriptions in the book, but they are nightmares to mount. The holes were not big enough in the

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Thief (Metal Magic)

remora figure, and the squidge and manta ships are too front-heavy.

I dry-tested the game myself, then turned it over to my playtesters. They include but are not limited to: Bill Remig, Patty Jones, John Cook, Ralph Cooper, Ralph Williams, and Matt. Their consensus was that this expansion presents a deviation from the game. The history and the quotes in the rules given lend a certain seriousness to the setting. Systems are well presented, and the diagrams spread throughout the book are informative and easy to learn. Be sure to read all new equipment rules thoroughly before playing. While this is always good advice, the alien weapon systems are so strange that the scenarios may seem to be completely out of balance unless you understand the intricacies of the system. The annex weapons, when used by an experienced player, can devastate a less-experienced player's forces.

We enjoyed the game; some of the counters are already getting frayed around the edges. I strongly recommend this game, even at the \$20 price tag.

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Hilltop, East Wood
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UNITED KINGDOM

GWS-0141 MAN O' WAR* game

**** ½

The MAN O' WAR game depicts fantasy combat on the high seas, involving all the races from the WARHAMMER FANTASY

ROLEPLAY* game. The game system is very simple, especially if you have ever played any Napoleonic-era sailing games. You must worry about wind direction (unless you have galleys or paddlewheels) and determine what the best angle is to deliver the most damage to the opposition while receiving none yourself. Game components include counters (get counter trays instead of bags), templates, two decks of cards, range rulers, fleet lists, terrain markers, dice, and a 78-page instruction booklet with a section on how to design campaign games.

The monkey wrenches in this game for long-time players are the magic phase and the dice tables. There is also a command requirement that requires some concentration. Ship moves are by squadrons, with a squadron finishing its action before the enemy can react; ships out of command range can only defend. Fires can be started and must be fought, and magic fills the air. Even the record-keeping is not difficult.

The system moves well but not always quickly, depending on the wind. Our newcomers to miniatures were about evenly split on whether they liked it. The most common complaints were about the limited playability, using only the box's components, and the extremely fickle tables, especially the captain's table, where nothing goes right. Fire is even deadlier here than in real life.

I enjoy the game as a whole but have some reservations, as expressed above. The game is a good cross-over for historical-miniatures players to get a taste of fantasy, or vice versa. Prepare to spend money, as this is a game that only gets better with the addition of different types of ships. Even with the bad points, I highly recommend the game and plan to use a slightly modified version in my fantasy miniatures campaign. The components are sturdy and should last a long time. The game's list price is \$54.99.

Xeno Games

P.O. Box 7130
Jacksonville FL 32238-7130

Xen-200 SEEKRIEG* 4th Edition game

This naval miniatures game simulates the period of 1890 through World War II in three books. Book #1 is the ships' data book and gives deck armor, numbers and types of guns, and more for hundreds of ships and planes. It's printed on medium-weight paper and is easy to copy. Book #2 contains the results of almost any conceivable type of combat, from magazine explosions to dud shells. Book #3 contains rules covering everything for sea warfare, including damage control and submarines.

The system is made for a referee and two or more players. The referee sets out the parameters of the game and any necessary information for opposing commanders. The fleets then search for each



Cleric (Metal Magic)

other using a modified grid. This search can include planes or other ships. When contact is made, the battle begins.

Target estimation or actual measurement can be used to determine hits. This part is the one down side to the game; until you get used to it, it will be like playing a warship game that uses ICE's ROLEMASTER* rules to determine damage.

With a little work, you'll be able to stage World War I or World War II naval battles. There are other, less-complicated rule sets, but many of them have holes big enough to slip a battleship through. I highly recommend this set even at its \$24.95 price. (You may also want to stop by Xeno Games' booth at the game fair to take a look at its AXIS & ALLIES* Expansion Sets.)

Metal Magic

c/o Wargames
PO. Box 278, Rt. 40 East
Tridelfia WV 26059

Hobby Products

Postfach 10, 1020
4200 Oberhausen
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C-1005C Thief

**** ½

This 25-mm lead figure is the personification of most rogues encountered during an AD&D® game adventure. He is dressed in high, fur-lined boots, a breechcloth, and an upper body vest made of studded leather and secured by a wide belt with a simple buckle. This belt supports a short sword on the left and a bag of coins. Both arms are bare except for bracelets, and both hands are wrapped around a studded club. The face is determined, and unruly hair is kept back by the band supporting an eyepiece. Even the man's beard looks



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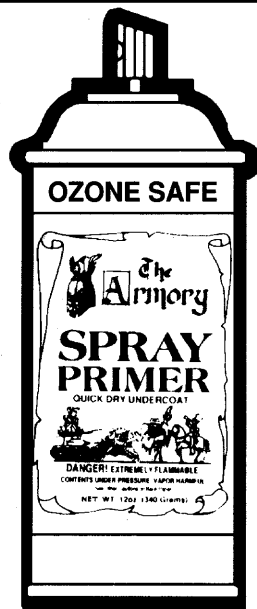


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High Elf Noble (Heartbreaker)



Goblin War Chief (Heartbreaker)

unkempt. There was some flash on the inner legs and on the club, but it cleaned easily. This figure is highly recommended, especially at \$1.79 each.

C-1014C Cleric

**** 1/2

This female figure is made of lead and scaled for 25 mm. The figure is molded as if stalking an enemy. A mace is raised in her gloved right hand. Her feet are covered by open-toed high boots. A long-sleeved shift extends to her knees, covered by a jazeraint suit split in front and on both sides to the waist. Facial detail shows exertion and surprise evident, as the cheeks are slightly puffed and the mouth drawn. The only flash was on the feet and the base, and it was easily cleaned up. I recommend this figure at \$1.79 each.

Heartbreaker

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5015 High Elf Noble

**** 1/2

The High Elf Noble is a lead miniature scaled to the larger 28-mm scale and stands on a square, slotted base. The figure wears high soft boots folded over, tights, and a long surcoat. The sword he holds with both bare hands is slightly lopsided and twisted to the left. The figure's face is obscured by a cowl; the visible part of the face is slightly marred, with little detail visible. No flash or mold lines detracted from the miniature. This figure is destined to lead my high elf swordsmen. I recommend this at \$1.75 each.

5017 Goblin War Chief


This lead figure is scaled for 28-mm size and measures up to just under 25 mm. His feet and legs are bare to above the knees. A chain-mail undergarment is pushed away by what looks like a very hairy belly; the open shirt confirms its girth. His vest and top garment are of studded leather and cloth. A long, fur-lined cap is joined at his throat by a clasp. Both arms are bare except for a buckler on the left arm. His right hand rests on a studded club, and his left holds a knife with a serrated edge. The face is classic goblin, with long, wide, pointed ears (complete with an earring) and a hooked nose. The eyes are thoughtful, the sideburns well groomed. With the well-done topknot and the rest, the figure is a must. It costs \$1.75 each.

I hope you enjoyed this article and invite you to visit with Game Masters Guild and myself at the game fair. We will be located at the miniatures area at the top of the escalator. If I'm not running a game, I'll be

glad to help you.

If you can't get to the game fair, you can still reach me at my normal address and phone. If you want to write, the address is: Robert Bigelow, c/o Friends Hobby Shop, 1411 Washington St., Waukegan IL 60085. Please have patience, as my time for replies is limited. If you want to talk, you can call me at: (708) 336-0790, 2-10 P.M. M,W,Th,Fr; or 10 A.M.-5 P.M. Sa,Su CDT, and I will be happy to help you however I can.

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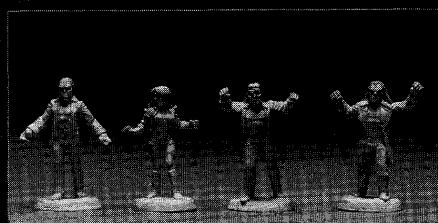
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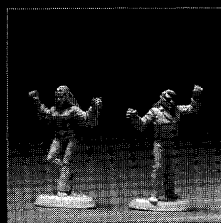
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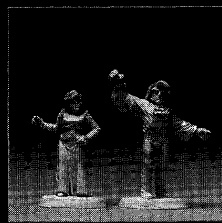
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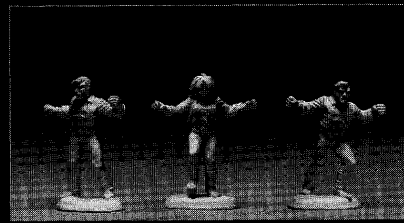
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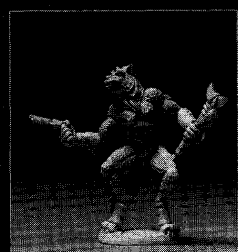


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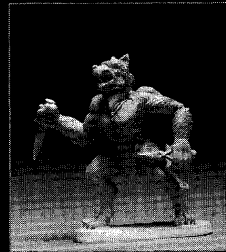
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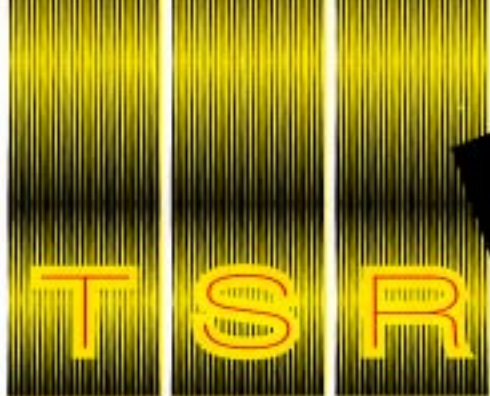


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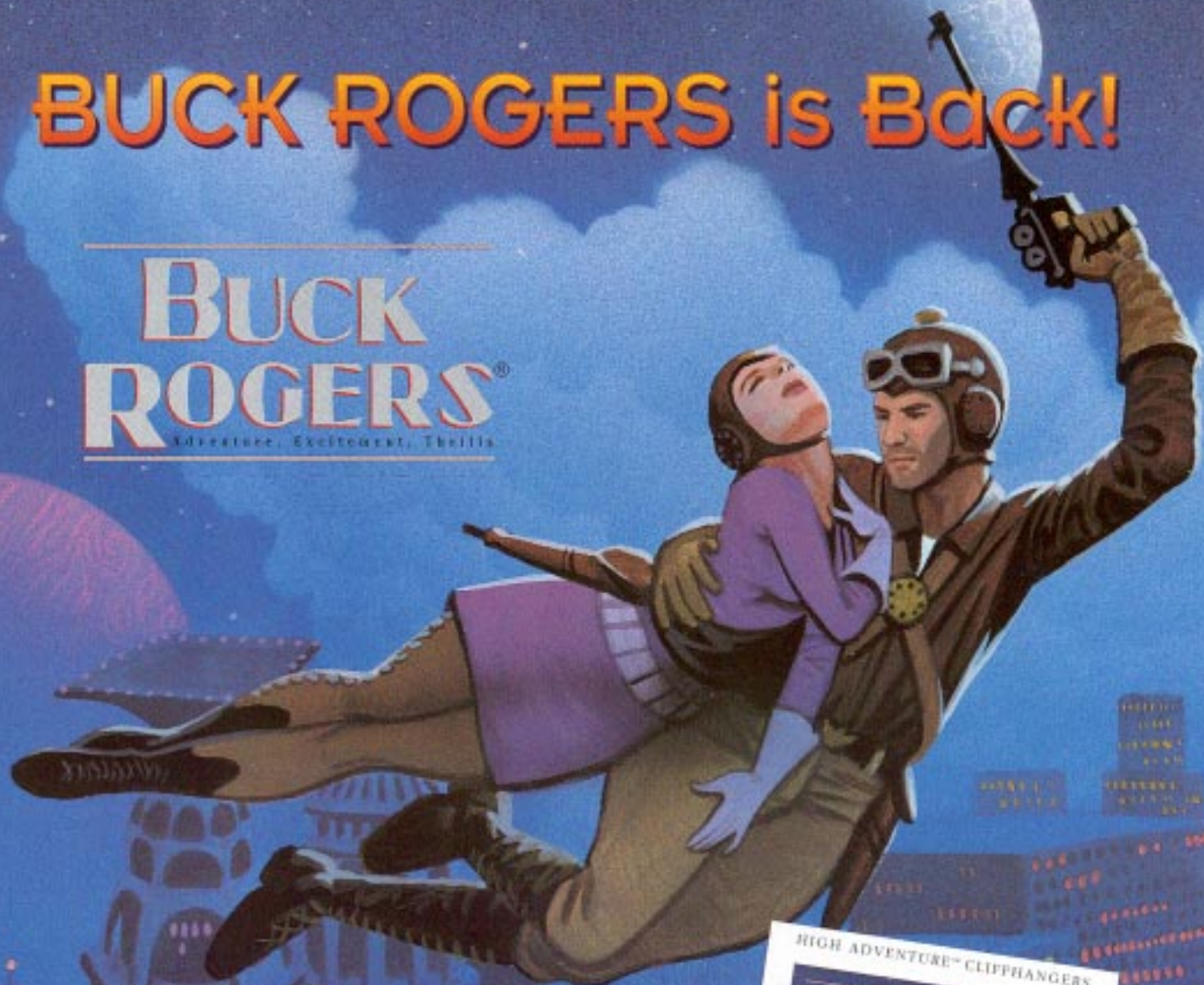
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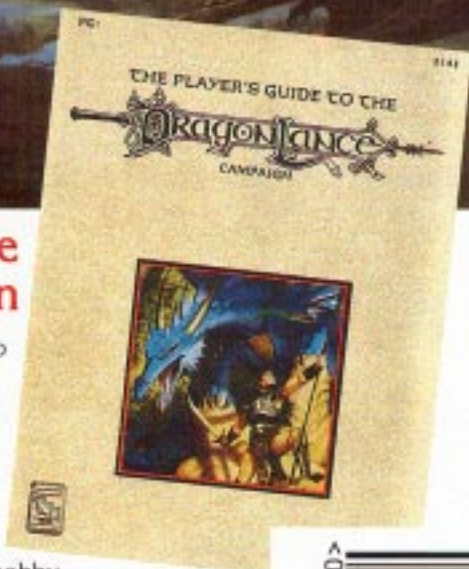
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