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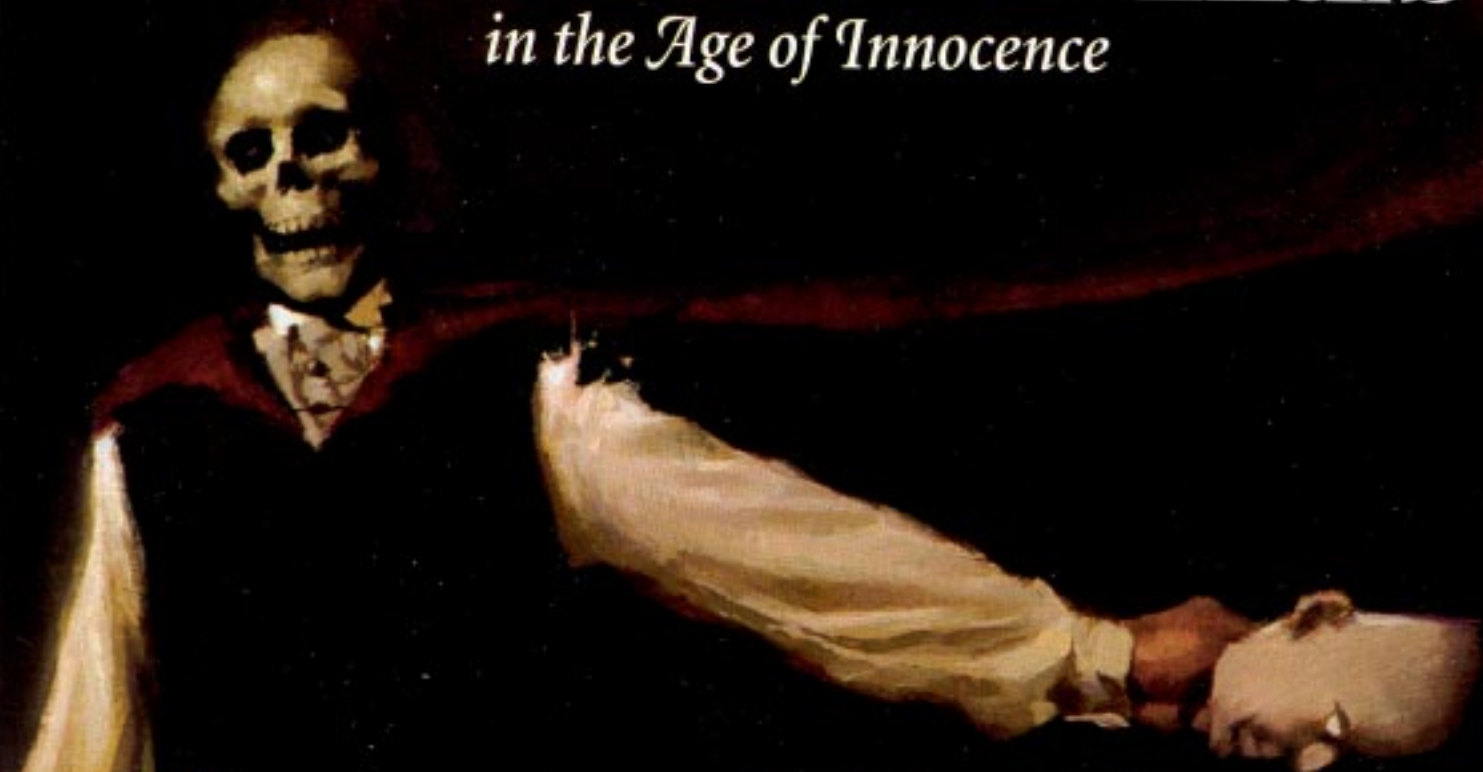
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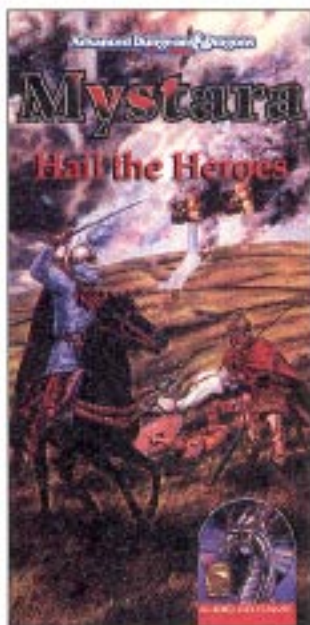
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C o n t e n t s

SPECIAL ATTRACTIONS

10

The Ecology of the Dungeon

— Buck Deason Holmes

Bring your dungeons alive with this advice.

16

Sight in the Darkness — Roger E. Moore

Open your eyes to the possibilities of infravision.

24

Fungi of the Underdark — Chris Perry

More grows in the Underdark than just dwarves and drow.

FICTION

74

Lifegiver — Darren C. Cummings

Can a cursed magical sword renounce its own evil?

REVIEWS

39

Eye of the Monitor — Dee & Jay

Join two new columnists as they review some of their all-time favorite games.

88

Role-playing Reviews — Kick Swan

Check out these cyberpunk game products for folks who hate cyberpunk.



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2 NOVEMBER 1994

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98 **Role of Books** — John C. Bunnell
Readers of this month's novels should expect the unexpected.

112 **Through the Looking Glass** — Bob Bigelow
The Holidays are approaching—start browsing now.

FEATURES

8 **First Quest** — Jeff Grubb
Return with Jeff to a time when dinosaurs walked the Earth.

29 **"I Sing a Song by the Deep-Water Bay"**
— Steven E. Schend
Learn how the Harpers operate in Waterdeep.

48 **D-Day in Milwaukee** — Roger E. Moore
Read Roger's debut as a war correspondent as he covers the 1994 GEN CON® Game Fair.

60 **Topkapi Palace** — Steve Kurtz
Spice up your fantasy castles with bits of history.

72 **Rumblings** — The staff
Catch up on the latest news of the gaming industry.

82 **The Wizards Three** — Ed Greenwood
Ed gets another visit from those mirthful mages.

95 **Sage Advice** — Skip Williams
This month, Skip expounds on the COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ setting and the SPELLFIRE™ game.

DEPARTMENTS

4 Letters

6 Editorial

45 Convention Calendar

68 Forum

103 Libram X

106 Dragonmirth

108 Gamers Guide

120 TSR Previews



COVER

The figure in this month's cover painting by Brom appears to have been on guard duty for a long time. Despite that, I don't think I'd want to attempt getting past him, regardless of what wealth the dungeon beyond the door holds. After all, the only weapon I'm proficient with is the editor's red pen.

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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. If you wish your letter to be published, you must sign it. We will not publish anonymous letters. We will withhold your name if you request it.

“Where is this from?”

Dear Dragon,

I've been playing the AD&D® game for over 10 years and I do most of my gaming in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting of Toril. I recently became a father to a lovely daughter, and named her Alustriel after the High Lady of Silverymoon.

Her mother neither plays the game nor reads the novels, but she really wants to know what the name means. When she asked me, I had to admit that I didn't know. I did tell her, though, that I would write to you and ask.

Greg Moore

I contacted Ed Greenwood, the co-creator of the FR setting, and he put Greg's question to that Realmsian Mage-About-Town, Elminster. El's (less than illuminating) response follows:

“In the Realms, there are certain things you don't ask a lady, especially a lady mage. There be power in names, and a mage must be ever watchful over giving away too much personal information. There is power in all knowledge.” (Ed's personal opinion is that El didn't have the guts to ask Alustriel about the derivation of her name.)

Seriously, Ed admits that the name Alustriel doesn't mean anything. He just made it up. Sorry, Greg, but we can't help you. You can find out other important information on Alustriel and her sisters in The Seven Sisters, due out in May 1995.

—Dale

“And where is it now?”

Dear Dragon,

Recently, I've been leafing through my back issues of DRAGON Magazine, and in issue #150, I came across the article, “A Final Frontier of Your Own,” by John J. Terra. The article per-

tained to STAR TREK®: THE RPG by FASA. As I read the article, I wondered if there was an RPG for *The Next Generation* series. I thought to ask you. Is there a TNG role-playing game?

Mick Mathews
Dover OH

No, Mick, there is no ST:TNG role-playing game currently on the market. Before FASA's licensing arrangement with Paramount Pictures (the owner of all things Trek) ran out, at least one TNG supplement was produced, though. The First Season Sourcebook detailed the characters and the 1701-D Enterprise according to FASA's game rules for the original Trek. The FASA game and its supplements still may be available on the dusty back shelves of some game and hobby stores, but you'll likely have to hunt for them. Also check auctions and flea markets at game conventions.

Other Trek games do exist. Task Force Games, the producer of the STAR FLEET BATTLES® board game, also publishes the PRIME DIRECTIVE® role-playing game, but neither game deals with any TNG material. For more information, write to: Task Force Games, P.O. Box 50145, Amarillo TX 79159-0145.

Decipher Games produces three TNG games, but none are role-playing games in the traditional sense. The HOW TO HOST A MYSTERY: STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION GAME®, the STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION VCR BOARD GAME®, and the STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION CUSTOMIZABLE CARD GAME® are all available. Write to: Decipher Games, P.O. Box 56, Norfolk VA 23501-0056.

—Dale

Game Fair friends

Dear Dragon,

I attended the 1994 GEN CON® Game Fair and had an amazing time. I met some really outstanding players in a game I ran. I'm writing to you in an attempt to locate them. The people I'm trying to find advanced to the third round of the “Cubeworld: Grave Consequences AD&D® 2nd Edition Game Variant” event that I judged. If you're out there, please get in touch with me. Thanks.

Richie Procopio
110 Waterfountain Way, #103
Glen Burnie MD 21060

Glad to be of service, Richie—but “Waterfountain Way”? Is that anywhere near “Bubbler Boulevard”?

—Dale

Subscription vs. Newsstand

Dear Dragon,

Hey! I noticed that, beginning with issue #201, the cover price of an issue of DRAGON Magazine went up from \$3.50 to \$3.95. Now, I can understand rising costs and so forth, but won't this price increase cause newsstand sales to drop, resulting in lower circulation and lower profits for the magazine, thus defeating the purpose of the price increase—to make more money?

Song Palmese
Oakland CA

That's a good question. (By the way before issue #201, DRAGON Magazine hadn't raised its cover price since 1986—and the subscription price hasn't gone up since 1985). The best answer I can give you is this: Don't worry about us. We want you to subscribe—and considering the price break you get, you should want to subscribe too.

Twelve issues of the magazine, bought at the newsstand price of \$3.95 each, costs (3.95 x 12) \$47.40. A twelve-issue (one-year) subscription cost \$30, or (30 ÷ 12) \$2.50 each. If you know you're going to buy more than seven issues of DRAGON Magazine during a year; you can save money by becoming a subscriber—and you get all 12 issues delivered direct to your mailbox. (Multiple-year subscriptions can save you even more money).

The advantage of buying the magazine at the newsstand, of course, is that you can see what's in it before you put down your money. Some people like being able to do that, and that's fine with us. But even if you are a subscriber, we want you to keep visiting that game, book, hobby, or comics store every month—because that's the only way you can keep up with all the other cool stuff that TSR, Inc., and all the other publishers are cranking out.

—Dale

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Cut-&-Paste Campaigns

DRAGON® Magazine is one of the few products published by TSR, Inc., that is produced without using desktop-publishing software. DRAGON Magazine (and DUNGEON® Adventures) are output from a typesetting machine that spits out the articles I send it on sheets of silvered film paper—something roughly analogous to the paper your snapshots are printed on. After the film is output, our Art Director Larry Smith draws forth his X-Acto knife from its rusty scabbard and cuts the film into page-size pieces and then applies wax as an adhesive so all the pieces stay where they belong, creating the magazine you see before you. This arduous procedure is referred to as the “cut-&-paste” process, meaning Larry cuts a whole (an article) into small pieces, and reassembles all the pieces of all the articles into a new form (the magazine).

Gamers can perform a similar cut-&-paste process by combining parts of different games into one. That’s what this column is about—taking favorite elements from various games and combining them into a new, hybrid game.

I can give a simple example from a campaign I’m playing in now. A coworker is running a game using West End Games’ STAR WARS® rules. A while back, several of the players wanted to experiment with characters other than the PCs we normally ran. In an effort to be completely different, I asked if I could play an Aslan, a member of a bipedal catlike race from GDW’s TRAVELLER® game. After I provided the GM with background information and explaining my concept for the character, he okayed my choice. I followed the STAR WARS character-creation rules, and Feyla the Aslan was soon leaping onto the heads of various villains.

That “cut-&-paste” was relatively simple in that both games were science-fiction RPGs, and all the information I “cut” from the TRAVELLER game was background and history on the Aslan—no game mechanics. I tinkered with the background to make it better fit the STAR WARS universe, but that was all the work I needed to do. You can cut-&-paste most easily when the games being drawn from share some mechanics, a theme, or at least emulate the same genre. However, many games have elements that, if you ignore the game’s nomenclature, cross genre

boundaries.

For example, the TRAVELLER RPG also has a race of psionic humans called the Zhodani. The AD&D® fantasy game has psionics, too. Why not use AD&D game psionic powers to flesh out a Zhodani NPC, villain, or even a PC? Numerous games have mental powers or mutations, psi-skills, or magic. Browse through these games and cut-&-paste your favorite skills, powers, or spells into your game.

Longtime readers of this magazine probably know I’m a big fan of superhero comics and games. I’ve collected every supers RPG I can find. Do I intend to play them all at some point? No. But I can cut-&-paste any components (powers, background elements, story hooks, etc.) that I like into the next superhero campaign that I run.

Speaking of comics (and other media), why not cut-&-paste ideas from other sources right into your campaign? About two years ago, another coworker was running a campaign of Marquee Press’ LOST SOULS® game. I created a Medium PC—a living person who can interact with ghostly PCs. I cut-&-pasted much of my PC’s personality from the character John Constantine of DC’s *Hellblazer* comic book (and drove the rest of the players nuts, I’m sure). You can cut-&-paste ideas from your favorite novel, movie, play, song, or whatever inspires you. You also can borrow from mythology. See DRAGON issue #210’s article, “A Monster in the Classical Tradition” by Steve Berman. In it, Steve took a creature from Greek mythology, the echidna, and cut-&-pasted it into a monster for Chaosium’s CALL OF CTHULHU® horror RPG.

I’m also a big fan of the Victorian era, and as such, one of my favorite games of 1994 is R. Talsorian’s CASTLE FALKENSTEIN® game. It’s a terrifically inventive Victorian-era RPG, but as of my writing this editorial, only the basic rule book has been published. How can I expand the world of CASTLE FALKENSTEIN now? Several RPGs have been published over the years that deal with the same basic era. One of the newest is TSR’s new *Masque of the Red Death* campaign, which is set on GOTHIC EARTH, a Victorian setting. I can cut-&-paste history, characters, or even some of the MASQUE OF THE RED DEATH setting’s mentalist

powers. I also can use information from Chaosium’s *Cthulhu by Gaslight* Victorian-era supplement, or even use Cthulhuoid beasts as particularly nasty members of the faerie Unseelie Court (a major force for evil in the FALKENSTEIN game). Speaking of faeries, the FALKENSTEIN rules don’t have much detailed information on types of faeries and the Unseelie and Seelie (the good-guy faeries) Courts. If I care to expand that part of my game world, I can cut-&-paste a ton of faerie-related details from the *For Faerie, Queen, and Country* setting for TSR’s AMAZING ENGINE® rules. If you like the technological aspects of the FALKENSTEIN game, get your hands on a copy of GDW’s SPACE: 1889® game, which is chock full of items such as electric rifles, air cannons, and iron-and-rivets spaceships. You can cut-&-paste to expand your fantasy, SF, horror, or other RPG as well.

I mentioned the AMAZING ENGINE line above; both it and SJG’s GURPS® line of “generic” books are excellent sources to cut-&-paste ideas from. (In fact, though I don’t own the GURPS rule book, I do have over a dozen source or “world books.”) Another place to look for inspiration is the multigenre RPGs such as Palladium’s RIFTS® or West End’s TORQ® games that already have blended ideas from numerous genres into a single setting.

You don’t need to own 50 games to able to cut-&-paste ideas from one to another. Borrow your friends’ RPGs. Lend out your games. Swap favorite or “inspirational” books, videos, and magazines among your fellow gamers. If you belong to a game club, have all the members chip in a few bucks each, head down to the game store, and start a club library of games.

In short, there are a lot of games out there with a lot of good ideas in them. Don’t limit your game campaign by limiting your sources. Cut-&-paste a few ideas into your game, and have fun!

Ω

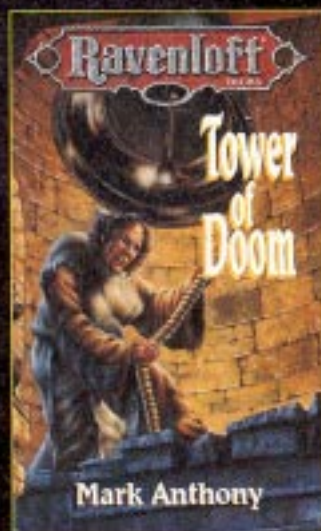
Dale A. Donovan

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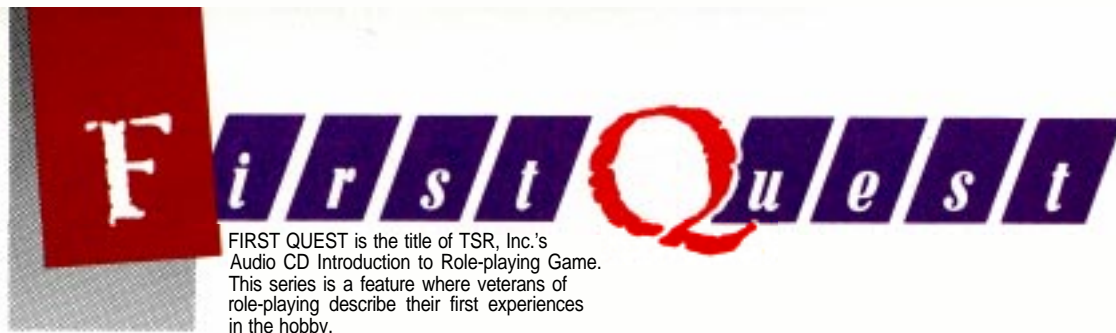
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FIRST QUEST is the title of TSR, Inc.'s Audio CD Introduction to Role-playing Game. This series is a feature where veterans of role-playing describe their first experiences in the hobby.

Mammals and Dinosaurs

by Jeff Grubb

Okay, it's my turn.

Long ago, when the Earth was new and dinosaurs roamed the midwestern plains in great thundering herds, people played war games. Hex-map wonders with arcane rules simulating this historical battle or that imaginary campaign or some theory of combined arms. BLITZKRIEG* and PANZER BLITZ* from Avalon Hill. All the multitude of (relatively) cheap paper-board games from SPI. *Strategy & Tactics* magazine. I had gotten into them in high school. They were intricate, they were exact, they often were complex and obtuse, and they were fun.

My first week of college (back in 1975), I visited the Purdue Wargaming Club. There was a multitude of games spread out in a wide lecture room in the Stewart Center, our student union. Here were board gamers. John Hill, the creator of the SQUAD LEADER* game, ran the local hobby shop. Board games ruled. There were miniaturists as well, grizzled old veterans hunched over their copies of the TRACTICS* rules and muttering about how they were the true descendants of the hobby created by H.G. Wells (who used miniature soldiers to simulate his "little wars"), not these wimpy "paper gamers." (To be fair, the board gamers in turn complained that the guys with their miniature tanks always had to hog four or five tables for one of their games.)

And there was a group of guys in the corner shouting at each other and rolling dice. Without a board. Without counters. Without miniatures. Without a game of any kind that I could see.

I wandered over, and one of them turned to me, shoved three six-sided dice in my hand, and said, "Quick, we need a cleric." It was all downhill from there.

Old role-players date themselves by what their first D&D® game set looked like. *Chainmail* rules. The original wood-grained box. The GREYHAWK® supplement (that's when I arrived). The BLACKMOOR® supplement. The white box, the blue Basic, the red Basic, and so on. The rules were obtuse and clunky. They were filled with errors and unclear wording (one DM, due to a typo in the original book, read "% Liar" as the chance

a monster would lie to you, not the chance of it being in its lair). The rules needed continual house rulings and interpretations. Of course, the game was a lot of fun.

It also was intensely disliked by the more traditional gamers in the club. This upstart, this fashion, this fad, this phenomenon hopefully would pass and let them return to refighting Gettysburg in peace. Local legend has it that the D&D game was offered to the "big" gaming companies of the day, and laughed out of their offices. It didn't have a hex map, so how could it be a *real* game?

Well, it was a real game, and attracted real gamers, and flourished quite nicely. More people came into the hobby, drawn by the lure of dragons and heroes and imagination. Role-playing was more appealing than war games to women, which boosted its allure to young male college students with nothing else to do on a Friday night.

My first dungeon was created during a boring math lecture—a sprawling monstrosity with no plan and no reason. Monsters hung out in their rooms just waiting for the door to open and the adventurers to wade into combat. The dungeon was huge—three sheets of 10 squares-to-the-inch graph paper, with corridors spilling from one side of the paper and curving around to rejoin on the other side. As a result, I put a number of entrances all over my surface map all connected to this same complex. Dungeon entrances A, B, C, and E became the cities of American Pie (as in the Don McLean song), Bellvue (a suburb of Pittsburgh where my grandparents lived), Cooper's Rock (a state park in Pennsylvania), and Emerson (on Lake Palmer). There was a lack of seriousness in the names, and, though I could run a world-shaking epic with the best of them, many of my adventures were filled with bad jokes, worse puns, and general fun.

I did the D&D game thing through college, and met a lot of friends whom I still hang out with today. They're teachers and programmers and vice presidents and experts in artificial intelligence and rock lyricists. The parents of one friend, Dave Collins, had a house in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin (where TSR and the old Dungeon

Hobby Shop was! Wow!) and a sister, Susan, who was a fantasy artist (check out the old DRAGON® Magazine covers on issues #51, #61, #73, and #85 for her work). On one occasion Dave took me along when he was dropping off one of her pieces at the DRAGON Magazine office, which at that point was located in a crumbling old house across from Pizza Hut. I met my first official TSR person, Kim Mohan, there, and I think that Roger Moore was busting away on a deadline as well. I was, of course, thrilled and amazed. They, of course, don't remember me, since I was just one more wide-eyed fan stopping in.

I graduated as a civil engineer and worked for a short while designing air-pollution equipment. I continued to play the D&D game with my Pittsburgh group (which included my eventual bride and co-writer, Kate Novak) and helped with the AD&D® Open under Bob Blake at the GEN CON® Game Fair. After an unsatisfying event, one of my friends loudly proclaimed that we could write better adventures. Bob called our bluff, and I became the lead designer and organizer of the 1982 GEN CON Open.

On the strength of my design work—and the fact that we delivered a playtested and ready version six months in advance—I was hired as a full-time game designer by TSR. You know the rest of the story. A lot of designs I've worked on have been ideas which did not attract a lot of attention or approval when they began, but when they finally arrived they were critically (and occasionally financially) successful. I always called such projects my "mammals"—small scurrying things that stayed out of the way of larger, more official projects until the time was right. Then they moved in and established themselves and thrived.

Many of the things I did way back in college crept in all around my work. My pantheon of gods traveled over to the DRAGONLANCE® setting. The name for my original campaign was Toril, which became the name of the planet on which the FORGOTTEN REALMS® campaign is set. (Compleatists should note that Faerun is Ed Greenwood's name and refers to the continent that the core of the Realms

Continued on page 22

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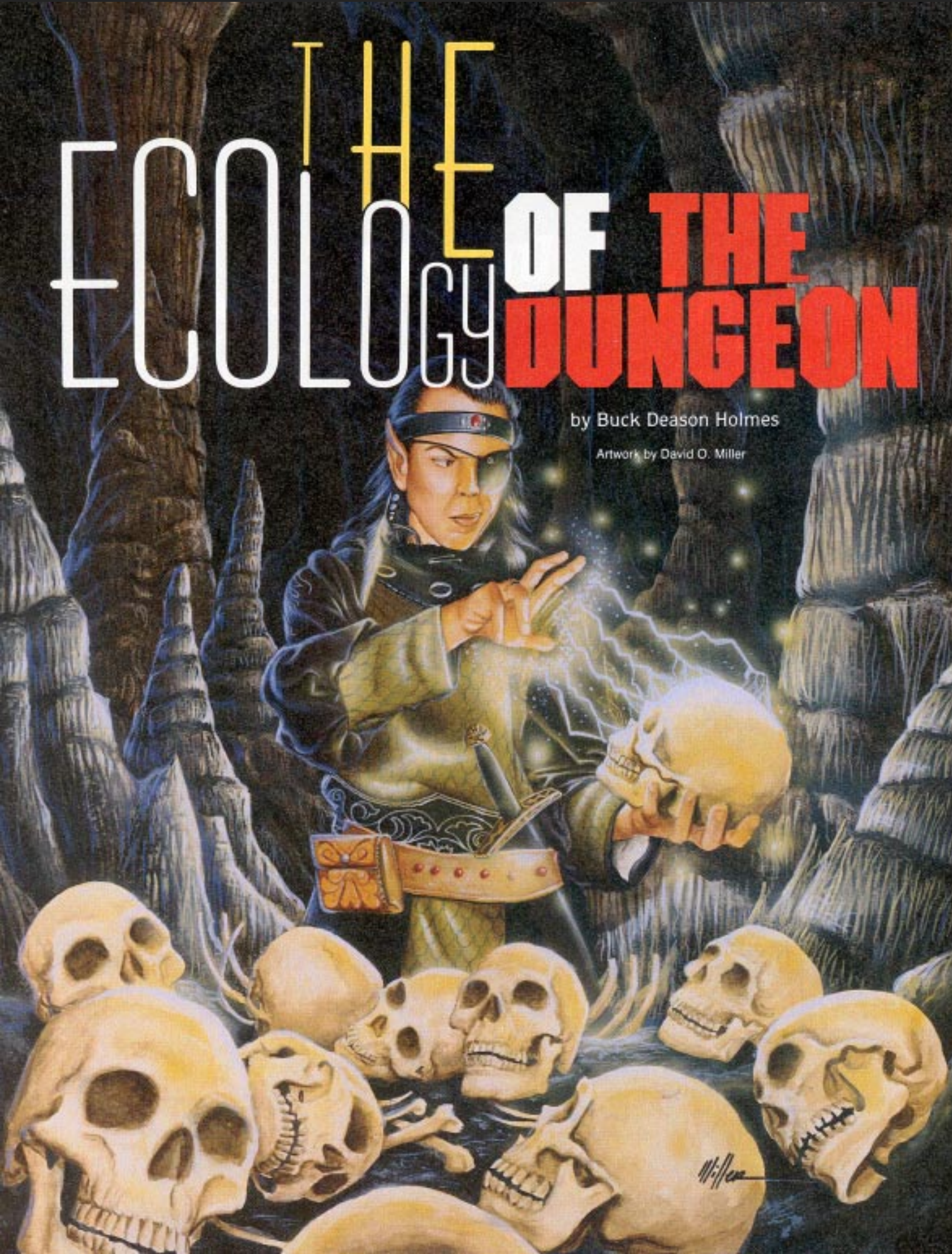
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THE ECOLOGY OF THE DUNGEON

by Buck Deason Holmes

Artwork by David O. Miller



Make your underground adventures unique

Every developed PC and NPC has physical and emotional characteristics that make each of them interesting. Cities and villages have atmosphere and unique shops. A magical blade described as *Velinora's Gladius Bellum* is more valued than +1 sword. While people, towns, and even magical items are thought to have character, players do not generally think about dungeons as being "individuals." However, with a little extra detail, a dungeon can become very interesting and unique—not just because of the monsters, magicks, and traps found within it, but because of the dungeon itself; the way it looks and feels, the way it winds and flows. If one can create a dungeon with character, then one can make adventuring fun and new.

Bored with running the same old dungeon over and over, I thought about how I could make such a place fresh and enjoyable. After some contemplation and research, I came up with the following guidelines. While the basic principles listed below can be used for any setting (from forests to starships), I have focused on fantasy dungeon caverns. Cave-dungeons, I feel, are the settings that are usually the least interesting. If one can make a cave intriguing, one can easily make tombs and castles exciting.

The first thing to remember is that a dungeon is a miniature ecosystem. Life, geology, time, and weather affect and change it. All places populated by living creatures are animated and intricate, not just the places that happen to be above ground. A DM should make any adventuring area have this sort of feel about it. To help do that, one needs to think about the following topics.

How was it made?

Just as a player creates the childhood and ancestry of a character, the DM should figure out (basically) how a place was made and how it developed. What used to be there, and how did what is there now get there?

Caverns on our planet are created either

by erosion or magma flow. Erosion caves are old underground rivers and lakes; they wind and flow, with passages forking, turning and changing. Magma caves are tubelike, smoother than erosion caves, and straight; they generally do not split off in more than one direction. However, one need not make a cavern realistic; on another world, caverns could be created by other forces, such as giant monsters and uncontrolled magic.

In any event, interesting caves contain areas of different sizes and shapes. They are filled with small crawlways and huge rooms. These changes in dimension are very useful to a DM. How can a party flee or fight in an area only 3' in diameter? How can they navigate up and down all the passageways and cliffs while they are looking for treasure and monsters?

Think "treacherous terrain." One can create many encounters like the following: A group of five hobgoblins are on the other side of a 30' room and are shooting arrows at the PCs. No problem, right? Well, those hobgoblins could have 75% cover from the terrain while the PCs have no cover at all. Also, the floor of the room could be 20' below the ledge on which the party is standing. Now the PCs must either use up their magic and arrows on some lowly hobgoblins, or they must cross a very dangerous piece of terrain to get to the hobgoblins. The landscape makes this generally minor encounter into a major encounter.

Strange formations can add greatly to a dungeon. Many real caves have more than one opening to the outside. The party might have to travel in and out of the dungeon, fighting their way through a wooded area that separates two entrances. Instead of having a few forest encounters before going to a cave and having cave encounters thereafter, a half-in and half-out dungeon adventure could have both mixed together. This would make most of the PCs equally useful throughout the adventure.

Small holes that can develop between rooms can become natural murder holes

and arrow slits. These holes also could be a safe way to talk with creatures within the cave or spy on them. Natural columns, large stalagmites, crevices, and multiple entrances can fill a room with hiding places and areas to explore. A room with two large rocks in the center, with the path around them forming a figure-eight, would be an excellent place for a chase. (I can see the PCs running around and around looking for a thieving goblin who is hiding on top of a boulder.)

A cave also could be somewhat like a canyon, with parts of the top exposed to the surface. Now the party must decide if they should walk along the top and possibly miss some of the openings, travel the bottom and possibly be ambushed, or split up the group and explore both areas at the same time. Most players know how to have their characters maneuver through a smooth, cylindrical tunnel, so don't make it easy for them by making a dungeon with nothing but 10'-diameter tunnels and 30' rooms.

Combat is not the only activity that can be affected by terrain. Stalactites, stalagmites, flowstones, cave pearls, and other formations can be used to spice up many scenarios for many reasons. A certain rock formation might just happen to look kind of like a priest's holy symbol. Or the characters might be awed by the beauty of certain rooms. Giving a deserving description of such features would be a great task for a DM. If the DM could make the PCs imagine a room filled with gleaming columns and snowlike gypsum flowers, then the cave could become "alive" and memorable. An ingenious PC could make such an area into a temple or, if the character is more materialistic, a tourist attraction.

What is it made of?

As important as how the surrounding area was made is of what material(s) the surrounding area is made. One can quickly understand the importance of knowing what substances are present in a dungeon if one stumbles across a cavern with veins of gold and silver in it. But other substances also are important. Deposits of zinc (needed for brass), iron, coal, and tin would be very useful for the construction of weapons and trade goods. A wise dwarf may notice that all the kobolds' pots and tools are made out of copper, and she might go looking for their copper mine (not as exciting as a platinum mine, but still profitable).

The materials that make up a cavern may be important for other reasons. Limestone caverns would have a tendency to develop (maybe quite suddenly) sink holes. Areas with lead or mercury could be harmful to the creatures that live nearby; a resourceful PC might make friends of those creatures by helping to cure them of their poisoning. ("The spirits wish for you to move to a new location; then the curse on your people will be lifted.") Even more interesting and dangerous, a cave might

have uranium or other highly radioactive elements in it, which could cause native creatures to be deformed or changed in some way (attack of the giant mutant killer kobolds?).

This last example brings up another interesting point: A fantasy world does not have to follow the known laws of physics or chemistry. Certain substances found in a dungeon environment could enhance, alter, or nullify magic or psionics. Rocks could be highly magnetic, combustible, explosive, or influenced by other forces. Think up a new substance with strange and challenging properties: For instance, a cave could contain pockets of etherium, an element that becomes ethereal and solid again at random, causing natural secret and shifting doors. A prized metal in my campaign world is "float," a metal that repels gravitons (thus, it is nearly weightless); not only does this metal create weird natural phenomena, such as floating rocks, but also lessens the weight of weapons and armor, making it a prized material indeed.

What stories does it tell?

History, natural and documented, is a great tool for bringing life to a dungeon. While the PCs are exploring a cave, they could find bones, weapons, or equipment that tell a story about the cave. Fossils and ancient tools could indicate who lived in the cave long ago. The walls could be adorned with paintings or carvings from a race long dead. The PCs might make an anthropological discovery that causes sages to argue for decades.

Recorded history, told to the PCs by local villagers or even by the creatures within the cave, could set the tone for the dungeon. Many players like to have their characters look for maps or information about a place: let them look, and give them the information, but tailor it to suit the needs of the scenario or the campaign. The PCs might rush to a dungeon reported to be the location of the treasure of King Sloth but be less eager to enter a cave where Vstin the Great, the hero of Aldwic, was killed by some unknown evil. Such information doesn't have to be important to the plot, it only has to give character to the dungeon. And, of course, any information given to the PCs doesn't have to be true.

How stable is it?

Not every dangerous room has to be a trap that was specially created. Deadfalls, cave-ins, and weak pathways could be the results of natural processes. Unstable caves have caused injuries and drama in the real world; so can they in a fantasy world.

For example, a group of kobolds (each weighing no more than 80 pounds) might cross a natural bridge as they are fleeing from adventurers. This bridge will collapse if more than 200 pounds is put in one small area. The kobolds might not

even realize that the bridge will fall, but the human fighter in full plate armor will learn about it soon enough.

One need not have a floor fall out beneath the party to make the characters paranoid. The PCs could hear the sounds of another part of the cave collapsing and then begin anticipating a cave-in that will never happen. They might start to hurry, trying to make it out before the cavern collapses, and then panic when a few pebbles or some sand falls on them.

Physical changes to the cave also could result from the actions of the PCs. The use of powerful magic (*fireball*, *lightning bolt*, *rock to mud*, *dig*) could cause a local disaster. Pushing a boulder down on an attacking Lernaean hydra might seem like a good idea at the time, but when that boulder causes the floor to collapse, the PCs are going to wish they hadn't done that.

Another thing to remember is that a place changes if someone is around or not. The water level might drop, revealing more caverns. Caves might collapse or open up due to erosion or earthquakes. These changes can make a previously explored cavern into something entirely new. An adventure might center on hunting down a group of orcs that have moved into a previously explored cavern. The party confidently walks into the cave opening, sure in their maps and their knowledge. They know that the orcs would camp in the big room next to the well. They know about the shriekers in the third alcove. But as they move into the cave, they find that the passage to the big room has collapsed and a new passage has opened to the south. Even though the PCs have been through this dungeon before, they don't know what to expect now. Surprised, they might even become shaken and start to panic. The cave is physically different, so the party must stay on their toes.

How's the weather down there?

Weather affects everything, even underground environments. Rainfall and subsequent flooding may cause some caverns to fill with water. Imagine a group of heroes who go adventuring into a cave while a torrential downpour is starting outside. One passage (the only one that leads back outside) is steep, but the party can walk down it. However, when they return, this passage has become a stream, slick and treacherous. Now they have to crawl through the water to get out, and if they fall, they'll be washed back down 30 feet.

Cave temperatures do not change as dramatically as outside temperatures. Caverns isolated from the outside air will generally stay at a constant temperature, about 65° Fahrenheit. But even slight changes in the temperature can cause wind movement or fog. Rivers that are frozen outside the cave might prevent water from reaching a cavern. Areas in the cave but near the outside will be af-

fectured by temperature changes; water could freeze, causing areas to become slick or frozen over.

A flood or a heavy rainstorm can change an area quickly. If a cave entrance is positioned in just the right way, hurricane-level winds could boom down the caverns. Mud, avalanches, or timbers thrown by a tornado could cover an exit and trap characters. Animals that do not normally live in caves may seek shelter underground in harsh weather, causing problems for the PCs. And since the party is underground, they might not know about adverse weather conditions until it is too late.

What lives there?

Any lifeform that lives in an area must have access to the following necessities: water, food, air, and some measure of safety. Every elementary-school biology class teaches that, but many DMs forget it. My characters have entered many dungeons populated by enormous numbers of "living" monsters that had no way of getting the necessities of life. I have been guilty of such blunders myself: I remember one goblin cave that I located five miles from the nearest river (now I think of the poor goblins that had to carry water five miles every day to keep the settlement alive).

The first necessity is water. Make sure that a cave has wells, underground rivers, a lake, or some such source for the living creatures to get water from. If water is in short supply, certain smart creatures could control the source and then sell the water for protection or profit. Since most real caverns are made by water erosion, most of them do have water somewhere within.

Just as every lifeform needs water, every lifeform needs food. A "living" dungeon should contain or be located close to edible plant and animal life. Since fungi do not need sunlight, edible mushrooms are probably a staple of most underground humanoids. Smaller creatures, such as burrowing mammals, rats, bats, fish, and large insects, would supplement the diet of most beasts. Not only can these creatures add realism to your dungeon, but the noises and motions they make will keep the player characters antsy. If every part of a cavern is alive, then PCs will be cautious as they enter each room.

Life generally breeds life, so a fantasy cave might have as much life as a real rain forest. A cavern could be filled with different types of fungi, insects, and animals. These creatures might have developed defenses such as thorns, poisons, or bioluminescence. Another world could have millions of species of fungi that we do not have, especially a magical world. These fungi would be the food for other animals and would gain nourishment from the humus caused by other fungi and animals. Thus, a very complex life cycle could develop underground.

Airflow is another concern within a

cave. When orcs roast their victims, where does the smoke go? It will follow the wind and be dispersed throughout the cavern system. Particles of ash will blacken cave walls and leave deposits along the floor. This smoke might be so thick that anyone entering a "chimney" tunnel will not be able to see or breathe. An intelligent group of entities could design their fires so that the smoke will go into a trapped room.

Remember that (most) animals don't just come into existence when the party arrives. They live in the cave. They eat, build lairs, and carry on other life functions. Source books for many games, including the AD&D® game's MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® appendices, give ecological data: try to use this information. Any facts about eating habits, activity cycles, reproduction, and gender interaction will help a DM. If a village of norkers has baby norkers in it, then it becomes a more believable place. These younglings also can create many strategic and moral dilemmas for the PCs.

Another aspect of life is refuse. Anyone who has been to a waste dump can see how trash can affect an area. Where do humanoids that live underground dump their waste? Well, they would probably have a special dump pit far downwind of their home caverns. They would throw everything down into the pit, including but not limited to biological waste, rotten

plants and fungi, dead animals, broken tools, and rusted weapons. Crafty humanoids might put a hidden trap door above the trash pit. Anyone walking on this trap would fall into the dump pit.

Not all the trash, however, would make it to the dump pit. Many humanoids are lazy and environmentally unconscious. Garbage of the most unpleasant kind may be found throughout the caverns of a dungeon. Piles of gunk and carcasses are in many rooms, a few covering secret chests of "treasure." When dealing with refuse, remember that any mention of trash makes experienced players think of rot grubs, otyughs, and other unpleasant monsters. In many adventures, I have casually stated that the player characters can see wormlike creatures moving through the filth. While these things were nothing more than normal worms, maggots, grubs, and carrion slugs (gross but not deadly), the PCs didn't know this. To my amusement, they went through all kinds of trouble to destroy these beasties and sort through the trash. ("If there are rot grubs, then there must be some kind of treasure.") Simple parasites can cause as much fear and worry in a group of PCs as a lair of trolls.

A DM also should think about how dungeon denizens interact. Why do the pixies live in room 14 and the hook horrors live in room 15? Do they share food,

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or play games together, or are they trying to rip out each other's throats? Would a small tribe of goblins live next door to a lair of ghastrs?

The best way to plan interactions between dungeon natives is to imagine what it would be like to live next to a monster. Before you design your next dungeon, think about the people you have lived with or neighbors you have had trouble with. Maybe they were misanthropes and wanted complete silence. Maybe they partied too loud for too long. Maybe you thought they were casing your place for robbery. Now imagine that those same neighbors or ex-roommates considered you a food source. If you thought that Mr. Rogers next door would eat your friends and take your gold, you might be a little reluctant to live near him. You would at least take precautions to make sure he wouldn't bother you.

As most people who have lived in a dormitory or a thin-walled apartment building know, a place develops "political" alliances. An ogre who is trying to catch some sleep after a long night of pillaging is not going to be very happy about a kobold midday festival; in fact, he is going to "ask" the kobolds to hold the noise down a bit, and he isn't going to be very polite. Perhaps such "political intrigue" could be useful to the party. Those kobolds, upset at being "evicted" from their residence, might show the PCs the best way into and around a cavern. They also might tell the party the strength and power of the ogre "landlord" and his friends.

These territorial battles need not be between intelligent races. Those same kobolds might have been pushed out by a big sabertooth cat or a cave bear. Animals have territory, too. Most creatures mark their territory in some fashion. Many apply their scent to the area, but others (especially intelligent creatures) will define their area with visible markers. Natural boundaries, such as pits and streams, also act as territory lines. Animals can sense these boundaries and respect them. If trolls like the taste of cave crickets, then the troll's lair will be devoid of crickets. Experienced parties might learn these signs and be able to identify territories, and thus be better prepared for upcoming encounters.

Finally, animals that have lived in caves will slowly adapt to survive in that sort of environment. Creatures in caves are generally smaller and lighter than their above-ground counterparts. While they may lose some sensitivity in their sight, they may develop better senses of smell and touch. Some underground versions of above-ground creatures may lose their pigmentation and become white or translucent. Some other creatures, however, might develop the "drow" adaptation: dark skin that acts as camouflage against creatures carrying light sources and allows the creatures to naturally hide in shadows.

Conclusion

The key to developing a cave or dungeon environment is interaction—between geology and life, between hunters and prey. A DM can create many interesting scenarios just by imagining how animals, plants, geology, and weather affect one another. For example, we decide that a cavern contains a vein of silver. It makes sense that someone would be mining the silver, so we add a few drow with their slaves. The drow would have spiders around as pets and guards. The spiders need to eat, so the cavern has insects in it. The insects also need something to eat, so we could put in some giant mushrooms. Now we have a cave full of interactions, a place with possibilities for intriguing adventures.

Not only will this type of creative work help make a dungeon seem real, but it also could help create more adventures. Imagine that the party destroys all the kobolds in a dungeon. Well, it so happens that these kobolds ate the bats that live in the cave. Now that the kobolds are dead, the bats quickly grow in population. Their number becomes so great that some of the bats are forced to leave the cave and move elsewhere. Also, these bats feed on the little skinks that live around the cave; in a short time there are so many bats that all the skinks are devoured. The skinks ate the itoya, a tiny fly whose bite carries a nasty virus lethal to humans. Now, because of the destruction of the kobolds, the nearby town of Shellow is plagued by bats and itoya flies. Imagine the shock the PCs will get when the priests of Shellow, after receiving a message from their deity, tell the characters that they must "restock" the cave with kobolds so that the bats and bugs will not plague the town.

Of course, one needs to be careful not to overdo it. Use the scenery to develop the setting. When writing a story, a good author must create an in-depth and interesting setting. So too, must the good DM. Each does this the same way: by adding details. One should try to make many of the details important: things that someone in the party will find interesting. However, a few mood-setting descriptions—detail just for the sake of detail, to add realism—are good to use and will help players put themselves into character.

Books, conversations with professionals, and even TV are great sources for further ideas. You can't go wrong with an issue of *National Geographic* or an hour of the Discovery channel. TSR's DMGR1 *Campaign Sourcebook* and *Catacomb Guide* talks about water, air, and loadstone; it also gives tips on creating atmosphere and pacing. Of course, the best way to understand a type of scenery is to visit it. Travel to Mammoth Caves or Carlsbad Caverns if you have the chance (both are really impressive). If you are feeling adventurous, go spelunking. Experiencing a real adventure will help you create hundreds of imaginative imaginary ones.

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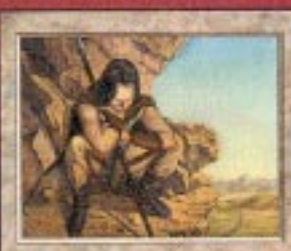
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Sight in the Darkness

An open-eyed look at infravision, the Underdark, and your PCs

by Roger E. Moore

What would it be like to see in the dark?

My interest in this topic was sparked years ago when I tried to figure out just what my half-orc AD&D® game characters could see using infravision in a dungeon. I wanted every advantage there was for those obnoxious little guys. Additionally, I wanted to know just how well infravision-using monsters could see in the dark, because I wanted my characters to avoid being seen and promptly eaten, as a number of them were.

This interest was sparked again recently by an article in a science magazine on infrared vision. Some very intriguing points came to light, and the results are offered here in the hopes that AD&D and D&D® game players everywhere will find them useful. (Certainly, my half-orcs would have gotten a longer leash on life with this information.)

How infravision “works”

We should really start with a look at real-world infrared light and infravision. This makes certain game aspects of this sensory power clearer, and also highlights inaccurate, contradictory, and problematic aspects of infravision in game play (which will be discussed in depth later).

The science article that fired me up for this topic was “Seeing the World Through Infrared Eyes,” by Neil F. Comins (*Astronomy Magazine*, June 1991, pages 50-55). This excellent piece covers the basics of how infravision would work in realistic terms. It’s worth hunting for this article in your local library and copying it for refer-

ence. That and a few encyclopedic entries are the basis for the information that follows.

Infrared radiation is normally invisible, lying just below red on the electromagnetic spectrum. It is given off by hot objects; the hotter the object, the more infrared light it gives off. Very hot objects eventually give off visible light—red light at first, then orange, yellow, and white as the heat increases. We can sense heat radiation on our skin, the largest sensory organ we have, but we cannot detect more than a general direction of the heat source and an idea of how hot the source must be.

Certain snakes called pit vipers are able to detect infrared light more accurately than we can, though only within a short range. Several sense organs called pit organs lie to either side of a pit viper’s head, between the eye and nostril. Changes in heat radiation as little as 1° can be detected. The snake senses the direction of the heat source by moving its head back and forth, noting the direction and intensity of the heat it senses.

We’ve known about heat for eons, but infrared light itself was discovered by an English astronomer, Sir William Herschel, in 1800. A very practical use for infrared light was found during World War II, when electric sniperscopes were invented. Sniperscopes were attached to rifles and gathered distant infrared light coming from the bodies of soldiers, converting it to visible light for the sharpshooter. This allowed sharpshooters to fire on enemy positions at night. (As will become appar-

ent, some versions of infravision in the AD&D game were based on sniperscope characteristics.)

Infrared light has less energy than visible light, but it behaves in much the same way. Some infrared radiation is absorbed by molecules in the air. However, near-infrared light, which is the part of the infrared spectrum closest to visible red light, is reflected by most objects and thus can be used to detect them. We see a chair by the light reflected from it; a pit viper can detect nearby objects by the near-infrared heat reflected or emitted from them.

Our ability to actually see infrared heat in detail is blocked by several major problems. Because infrared light is less energetic than visible light, a human able to see near-infrared light clearly would need eyes about 5-10 times larger than normal. Worse, heat is emitted from many objects all around us; stoves, furnaces, living beings, light bulbs, hot car engines, and sun-warmed rocks, concrete, bricks, and asphalt, for example. Almost everything with any warmth would glow as if it were a light bulb, though with an intensity proportionate to how hot it was. (Thus an oven will be "brighter" than a warm rock.)

What this means, of course, is that anyone able to see infrared light also will see his own body warmth. We have body temperatures just below 100°F, which is enough to blind us with heat radiation. It's like trying to take a picture when the camera itself emits light inside and out, which ruins the film.

To prevent such heat blindness, an infravision-using creature would need some sort of insulation around its eyeballs to keep the body's heat out of them, and some kind of refrigerant to keep the eyeballs cool so they become sensitive to outside light. This insulation and refrigeration would be done biologically. (Don't ask me exactly how, but I'm sure Mother Nature would figure out a way.) However, let's face it: We're dealing with magic, not science, and magic can do anything. Our problems are solved at a stroke, even if it doesn't please the scientists among us.

Another option (useful for beholders, giant snails, and crabs) is to put the eyeballs on stalks, separating them from the rest of the body. The eyes are then air cooled, so no other refrigerant is needed. I don't think beholders and so forth have infravision, though (as is noted later) if they've lived underground for a long time, they've probably developed it.

In some ways, the way that infravision is described in the AD&D game rules implies that it works in the same way that our night vision normally works. Rod-shaped cells in the retina of your eyes can detect very dim light after a short period of adjustment to darkness, which you should be familiar with each time you go into a dark room. At first you can't see a thing, but over a period of minutes you start to see more and more objects in what little

light there is. Eventually, faint light sources like the full moon, digital clocks, and even pure starlight can seem quite bright, even painfully so. However, because rod cells are not color-sensitive like the eye's cone cells, night vision is mostly black-and-white vision; maybe "shades of gray" vision is more accurate. (Infravision was described as being like black-and-white vision in the original AD&D game, too, as noted later.)

Night vision can be instantly spoiled by bright normal light, which is why driving experts tell you to look away from oncoming cars at night, to preserve your eyes' sensitivity. Infravision in the AD&D game is spoiled by bright visible light, extremely hot objects like fires, and magical light. Perhaps fantasy creatures with infravision have magical cells in their eyes that work like rods, but pick up heat instead of faint visible light. Who knows?

So much for how infravision works. What can you see with it?

The infravision world: Aboveground

We'll assume that your campaign world resembles our own Earth in that it has a normal day-night cycle with a sun like our own. (If this is not the case, you can make adjustments as we go along.) What would your heat/infrared picture of the world look like, then? Let's use some logic as we look around.

In the daytime in summer, everything bathed in sunlight is warm. Things that retain heat well, like large rocks, will be warmer and stay warmer longer than things that lose heat rapidly in cool winds, like thin leaves or blades of grass. The greatest normal heat source is the sun, which we can easily assume is too bright to look at with any form of infravision. Sunlight in fact ruins AD&D game infravision, so we would rely on normal vision alone. Air is assumed to be invisible, whatever its temperature, unless it is extremely hot (see below).

So infravision is useless in broad daylight. Once darkness falls, however, the landscape is still hot. Objects retain heat from the sun and radiate it slowly away, which keeps the night side of the world from freezing. (Even magical worlds need thermodynamic physics!) With the sun gone, a creature with very good infravision could see almost normally right after full darkness falls, since the terrain will radiate light. We can assume that a combination of rod-based night vision and magic-based infravision would be a potent mix, allowing vision about equal to normal sight in full daylight. Distant images would be fuzzier and less distinct than usual, so a far-away orc might look like an ogre or a halfling, but it beats seeing nothing at all.

Different parts of the landscape will cool off at different rates, so things will look strange. Rocks would be "brighter" than trees, for instance. Water is generally cooler than land, but water also retains

heat better than land; thus lakes and seas might seem "brighter" than the shoreline, especially late at night. Very hot air, such as that escaping from chimneys or fires, will glow faintly like a luminescent cloud.

Other warm things in the world include live animals, especially the warm-blooded ones, and fire. A deer, a human, and a chipmunk all radiate heat—more heat when they are ill or physically exerting themselves, less heat when standing still or asleep. Certain magical animals, such as salamanders and red dragons, can be assumed to produce much more heat than other creatures their size. I recall reading that drinking alcohol causes the body to radiate more heat than usual, so a drunkard could be detected by being "brighter" than other people.

Objects in close contact with living beings, like clothing, weapons, tools, chairs, and beds, will radiate some heat after the beings leave or discard them. In time, of course, those objects will completely cool off. Standing on a spot or leaning against a wall for a while also will leave residual heat behind, which could be noticed. Scuffing or shuffling feet would leave infrared "footprints" that could be tracked, though not for long. Friction from dragged objects, like heavy sacks or combat victims, also could be detected, as could places where surfaces have been rubbed together for long periods of time (machine gears, gristmill stones, axle joints, spinning wheels, etc.). Physical blows, like being smacked with an open hand or a blacksmith's hammer, also raise the temperature of solid surfaces for short periods of time.

Fires produce vastly more heat than living beings. Seeing a living being hiding next to a blast furnace in a dark room would be almost impossible, like seeing a firefly's light next to the sun's. Manmade and natural sources of fire include matches, pipes, cigars, candles, torches, campfires, bonfires, hearths, furnaces, forest fires, lava, and embers. All flame sources are assumed to emit enough infrared and visible light to ruin infravision near them. Note however, that a "dead" fire would radiate heat long after the last ember has vanished, and likely would be detectable at a great distance. A forest fire would "light up" the landscape for many hours after the flames are gone.

Remember, too, that infravision also detects the lack of heat, just as normal vision detects the lack of light. Snow and ice will look very dark in infravision if seen without visual light from moons or stars. A cold-producing object like a refrigerator also will look darker than objects around it. Cold-producing creatures like brown mold will look very "black."

It's worth a word on what sorts of creatures could not be seen with infravision. Creatures that are normally able to turn invisible, like pixies, should also be invisible to infravision (but not to other senses like smell). Any creature that is roughly

the same temperature as its surroundings, like a cold-blooded insect, fish, amphibian, or reptile, would be harder to see at night, though even cold-blooded creatures aren't always exactly the same temperature as the environment around them. (Live things move and generate friction from moving, for one thing.) Magical beings that radiate no heat at all, like undead skeletons and zombies, would be almost invisible to infravision unless revealed by reflected infrared light or else blocking a hot source, revealing their outline.

With so many heat sources at night, and so many things that will reflect infrared light, there will be a multitude of infrared-light shadows. The landscape will lack clarity and seem a bit out of focus (even more so at greater distances), as well as painted in shades of gray. It's a confusing, alien world, but any creature born with infravision would be quite accustomed to it and might instantly recognize any critical feature it sees.

Neil Comins' article notes that the night sky itself would change when seen through infravision, but modern-world astronomy is considerably different from the AD&D game's SPELLJAMMER® setting's "physics." In essence, any heat source in Wildspace will glow fuzzily in infravision, but it's up to the Dungeon Master to choose which things seen in the night sky are heat-emitters and which are not. Stars, for instance, might radiate only visible light and no heat at all, thus being invisible in infravision (but not to normal or night vision), while planets might put out huge amounts of heat, turning into big fuzzy balls in the sky. You'll have to be the judge.

The infravision world: Underground

Infravision is remarkable enough to surface-dwelling creatures. Let's look at what it's like for subterranean beings, and what advantages and disadvantages they gain from it. (After all, this is the underground-exploration issue of DRAGON® Magazine!)

In the real world, deep caverns tend to have a uniform temperature, around 65° F. This seems to make everything look the same, bland shade of gray to an infravision user, but there is plenty of hope here for diversity. For one thing, large openings radiate only faint heat (from objects beyond them), so such openings will look dark. More distant objects radiate less visible heat than closer ones, so distant objects are dimmer and darker. You could thus pick out the shape and direction of an unused tunnel with little trouble.

Running water underground is often extremely cold, so cave water will seem very black, as will the rocks surrounding it. If a cavern complex is near a geothermal heat source, like a geyser or (heavens forbid) volcanic magma, the entire cavern will grow warmer and "brighter" as an infravision-user gets closer to the heat

source.

Caves often have a variety of life in them, especially in fantasy worlds, and living beings will radiate enough heat to "infra-illuminate" their surroundings. The more beings, the brighter their living space; a thousand goblins should be able to see their underground lair quite clearly with no other "light" than the heat from their own crowded bodies.

Heat-producing magical creatures, like red dragons, will of course radiate vast amounts of infrared light. A red dragon would have an advantage, too, in that one short puff of flame will ruin the infravision of any approaching creature, with fatal results for the blinded ambushers. Some cold-blooded creatures like slithering trackers would be invisible to infravision, again with fatal results for cocky adventurers. The special dangers of skeletons, clay golems, and other "heatless" monsters becomes highly apparent.

Some undead, however, radiate cold. Liches, for instance, cause damage from their chilly touch; they and their hands should "glow black" in infravision, standing out against warmer backgrounds, even cave walls. Read the descriptions of monsters carefully if you want to produce a more detailed and intriguing picture of underworld life to adventuring dwarves, gnomes, and elves.

Speaking of fantasy races, a short histo-

ry of infravision, as it appears in TSR's fantasy games, is in order.

Infravision and the AD&D game

References to infravision are scattered throughout the AD&D and D&D game rules, but it becomes obvious that the concept underwent much expansion and refinement over the years since either game first appeared. It would help to start out with a look at what infravision used to do in fantasy games, and what it does now—as well as collect the rules on infravision together in one spot for ease of reference. A few areas of omission and contradiction that have confused the playing of infravision also will become apparent.

Certain races in the *Chainmail* rules (the war-gaming rules from which role-playing sprang) were able to "see well in dimness or dark." Dwarves, gnomes, goblins, kobolds, and orcs, as subterranean races, needed the ability to get around in caves and mines when candles and oil lanterns weren't available. If you dumped the infravision concept entirely, this sort of vision could be either light-intensifying vision, making the most of every visible-light photon in the area, or a form of magical radar, allowing for an accurate map of local surroundings without recognition of color or "flat" things like paintings, handwriting, etc. It could even be magical

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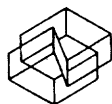
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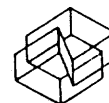
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vision that makes dark areas seem to be lit by sourceless light, so there are no shadows (color is optional). Take your pick.

Hard on the *Chainmail* game's heels in 1974 came the D&D Original Set, those three tan booklets in the white box. There, the *infravision* spell first appeared. The original version of the spell allowed the user to "see infra-red light waves, thus enabling him to see in total darkness." (Of course, you still might not see in total darkness if there were no heat sources around.) The spell lasted for one day and had a range of 40-60 feet. Interestingly, it wasn't until a later D&D supplement appeared (the *Greyhawk*® book) that dwarves, gnomes, and elves were noted as having infravision allowing them to see monsters up to 60 feet away in the dark. (Elves were probably allowed this so they could see at night, though light-intensifying vision would have been more logical.)

The original AD&D game's *Player's Handbook* and assorted monster descriptions gave infravision to many creatures, including every demihuman PC race except certain halflings. Different types of infravision began to appear, too, defined by range. Poor infravision was effective only out to 30', and was found in certain halflings and derro, an evil dwarflike race. Normal or standard infravision, good out to 60', was the most common variety. Superior infravision extended out to 90', as was the case with trolls and troglodytes, or 120', for drow and duergar (evil dwarves). In one place (page 102), the *Player's Handbook* says that monsters living in dungeons have infravision out to 120'; why then do some have shorter ranges? Hmmmm.

Superior infravision, however, involved more than simply receiving heat radiation. Creatures with long-distance infravision were noted in the original *Dungeon Master's Guide* (page 59) as emitting infrared light from their eyes (magically, of course), then seeing the reflected radiation. (This would not be possible in normal science, as noted earlier, but this is a magical universe we're talking about.) The eyes of any creature with infravision out to 90' or more are noted as glowing red quite brightly when seen by any other creature with standard infravision. Most monsters in underground areas were said to have superior infravision.

This brings up a curious point: How far away can an adventurer with standard infravision detect one with superior infravision? Can the adventurer see danger coming before the dangerous creature sees him? Well, if you get picky about it, you can say that the standard range of 60' is fixed; you can't see farther than that, no matter what heat source is out there. On the other hand, it is clear that the original intent of the rules was to have the 60' range be that at which the body-heat radiation from monsters (and normal people) could be seen. The implication is

that stronger sources of infrared light could be seen if they were farther away.

A liberal DM should note that a creature with 90' or 120' infravision is actually emitting infrared beams out to 180' or 240', respectively. All infrared light going out from its eyes must be reflected back to its eyes to be seen, so in theory those eye beams should be detectable by infravision out to those doubled ranges (assuming those eye beams don't first encounter a surface that causes them to be reflected). Furthermore, near-infrared light reflects from most normal surfaces just like normal light. A monster with superior infravision "paints" everything it sees with powerful heat rays, just as if it were carrying a double-beam flashlight. (Perhaps dwarves and gnomes have appropriate expressions like, "That troll was so close that its eyes could've burned the skin off my arm!")

Thus, a gnome wandering an abandoned mine tunnel might see the corridor ahead of her "light up" with faint infrared light if there was a duergar 240' ahead of her. The duergar has the advantage in having a much broader range of accurate vision, but the gnome has the advantage of early detection. The gnome can immediately flee or hide, unseen by the approaching duergar.

This argument is buttressed (and contradicted) by the note in the original *DMG* (page 59) that, outdoors, infravision allows for detection of warm or cold figures at a range of 100-300'. Vision is said to otherwise be equal to "a bright, starry night, with full moonlight." Cannot the duergar then see the gnome at 240'? What heat sources are present that allow for this greater range of vision? And if you can see up to 300' outdoors, why can't you see that far indoors? Game logic breaks down at this point.

To the rescue, perhaps, comes the earlier notes about a sun-warmed landscape and rod-based night vision. As a rule of thumb, let's say that a creature with infravision can see three times as far outdoors at night as it can in a deep cavern, because the landscape is warmer and radiates more infrared light. A halfling with poor infravision thus can see most outdoor objects out to 90', and a duergar (with infrared eye beams) can see out to 360'. The gnome in the earlier example should obviously avoid meeting duergar at night in open fields; the duergar will see the gnome first.

In the original *PHB* (page 102), things seen with infravision are described as appearing in a colorless way to an observer. Warm things look bright, as if they were emitting light. Cooler things look progressively more gray, and cold things appear black. This fits with the black-and-white view of infravision developed earlier. Recent versions of the D&D game have instead substituted certain colors for different heat temperatures (*D&D Cyclopedic*, pages 24-25), and there is that nagging

PHB note about the red-glowing eyes of a creature with superior infravision. The optional rules for infravision in the AD&D 2nd Edition game *DMG* (page 119) also allow for "pseudo-color" infravision, as typically appears in a thermogram. I'll still opt for the simpler no-color view, which makes it just like the view you get from a sniperscope.

Does infravision work underwater? Yes, but badly. Water is a very poor conductor of heat, despite what any game rules say. Though the original *DMG* allowed infravision to work underwater to a limited extent, but it would be more accurate to cut it off completely. Cool water will dampen out nearly all heat radiation, and warm water will obscure it. I'm no scientist, but I'd give infravision an underwater range of about 1', no more. Very hot sources, like a volcanic vent, will boil all the water near them and make an infravision view of them merely bright, fuzzy blobs that fill your field of vision. If you are liberal, you can keep the limits set by the original or AD&D 2nd Edition rules (i.e., normal underground ranges).

Getting clever with infravision

What new tricks can infravision bring to a typical AD&D game? Here are some possibilities:

Given that infravision is not as precise and focused as normal vision, the chances for mistaken identity increase when only infravision is used. An orc at a distance looks like a human or a hobgoblin; long experience and closer inspection (at great risk) will tell the difference. DMs should play up on this at every opportunity.

As a rule of thumb, a DM could say that accurate identification of a creature can be made using infravision only when the target being is one-third the distance of the spotter's infravision range. Thus, a dwarf can accurately identify a comrade at a range of 20' (one-third of 60'), and a duergar can identify a fellow monster at a distance of 40'.

Can you read by reflected infravision? For the record, we will assume not, unless the heat source is very strong and the writing is only inches from one's eyes.

Thieves with infravision can learn to hide themselves from other creatures with the same power. A very powerful, blinding source of heat or the presence of many separate, man-sized sources of heat (like a group of bodies immediately after a battle) can conceal the thief's presence quite well. However, simply hiding behind a rock is no help at all, as the thief's own heat radiation will be seen around the rock's edges and "painted" over background objects. Wrapping up in a blanket might help at first, but the blanket will slowly grow warmer (and brighter). Hiding against a cold object will make the warmer thief stand out as if he were in a spotlight. If you are playing a thief (as a player or DM), imagine that character is a permanent, glowing light source. How can you hide



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that light? Magical *invisibility* might be the only foolproof recourse—but even that can be challenged by creatures with superb senses of hearing or smell.

The descriptions of monsters should be carefully examined to determine if any being might radiate more or less than the “usual” amount of heat. Considerable leeway is given for the DM here. A dragon turtle, which breathes steam, and a remorhaz, which is incredibly hot, are likely to put out enormous amounts of infrared light. What about a *flametongue* long sword or a *necklace of missiles*? Though it is tempting to rule otherwise, magical items might not put out any heat at all, no matter their powers, unless the description of them in the *DMG* says they do.

Everything that a dwarf knows about infravision is likely known by a goblin, and vice versa. Creatures who have no infravision are likely to fall for certain traps set by those who can see heat. For instance, a goblin stonework trap that was recently used or tested will be visible to a dwarf, who can detect the heat from the friction of stones sliding across each other. An ambush site will radiate enormous heat from the bodies of the gathered ambushers, tipping off other experienced dark-dwellers. A tank of cold water, set over a thin, wooden ceiling, will made the area around it very dark. A corridor recently hit by a *fireball* spell will radiate much heat (and probably smell burnt as well). Fresh blood and body wastes will retain high temperatures for a short time. You get the idea. Dwarf-kin and goblin-kin love battling the ignorant armies of surface dwellers who enter their realms, but hate battling each other, since they already know all the best tricks.

Certain “clean-up crew” monsters, like gelatinous cubes, take on special significance for infravision-users. A ‘cube is assumed here to radiate no heat, and it likely blocks heat transmission as well. It might become “visible” to a dwarf or goblin because it cuts off the normally expected scenery down a corridor, as if the corridor ended abruptly in a cold wall. Humans wouldn’t figure it out, but a clever dark-dweller would stop, probe, then go another direction.

Newly discarded items like clothing, armor, and weapons would reveal much to infravision, like how long they had been abandoned (depending on how cool they were) and whether the item had been used (any warm blood on the blade?). A newly set underground trap, placed by a human who was unaware of his own heat effects, would be avoided with laughable ease by a hobgoblin or gnome.

A few new magical spells suggest themselves for dark-dwellers and wizards. If there can be *light* and *continual light*, why not *infrared light* and *continual infrared light*, at the same levels of ability and with the same restrictions? A pebble with *continual infrared light* would make a dandy lantern that no human could see, though it

would immediately give away itself and its user to any other infravision-using being within range.

A “light bomb” can be created by enchanting a pebble with *continual light*, then coating it with mud. Once dried, the pebble can be carried in a pouch, emitting no heat at all, until a group of infravision-using foes is met. The pebble can then be thrown against a wall as the “bomb”-carrier retreats; the burst of light will temporarily blind the foes and allow for escape. Optionally, an adventurer with the blind-fighting proficiency could close his eyes, throw the pebble (probably by the bunch), then attack, unaffected by the burst of light.

A pebble enchanted with *continual infrared light* could be used as a signalling device invisible to normal sight. Placed inside a lantern with a shutter, the pebble’s radiance can be blocked or revealed by opening and closing the shutter. Given a form of Morse code, underground creatures could signal to each other, silently and unseen, if surface dwellers approach them. (A scary thought: In total darkness, a drow can communicate in Morse code with another drow 240’ away merely by *blinking her eyes*.)

A pouch full of *cold dust* would be useful for detecting approaching foes. When scattered on the ground, the perpetually low-temperature *cold dust* would quickly reveal the exact location of any being walking over it, even if the being were cold-blooded. (The *cold dust* would be much colder than the surrounding environment, providing great contrast.)

Finally, a game rules variant: sighting ranges for different sizes of target creatures. This will complicate the game a bit, but I’ve tried to keep the basics simple.

First, find the infravision range of the spotter (30’, 60’, etc.). Next, find the size category of the target (Tiny, Small, Man-sized, Large, etc.). Multiply the infravision range by the sighting range modifier, and that’s how far the target must be before it is normally seen. It’s thus harder to spot a rat with infravision than it is to spot an ogre, and you can see the ogre coming from farther away.

Target’s size category	Spotter’s sighting range modifier
Tiny	1/3
Small	normal
Man-sized	normal
Large	normal
Huge	4
Gargantuan	10

Using this table, a dwarf can see a hill giant (Huge) coming from 240’ away, since the giant is so big and puts out so much heat. A goblin won’t be able to see a rat (Tiny), however, until the rat is 20’ away.

Last thoughts

Infravision is not the only special sense that real-world and fantasy creatures

have. Minotaurs and hell hounds have superb senses of smell (as do normal canines), bats use ultrasonic sonar, certain fish sense pressure changes in the water, and electric eels sense nearby electric fields, such as those from other fish. A little research and some imagination could bring these other peculiar senses to life just as this article has hopefully done for infravision. It’s a strange world, and fantasy makes it all the stranger (and more fun).

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First Quest

Continued from page 8

occupies.) The personalities of many of my friends have influenced the characters in our novels. The concept of an infinitely large dungeon with multiple entrances resurfaced in the *Libram X* comic strip in these very pages. And Dave Collins’s spell created in my campaign became “Snilloc’s Snowball” in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS Adventures* Book. Thanks, Dave.

All in all, it’s been a very exciting couple decades. And it looks like it’s going to get even more exciting.

About a year ago (as I write this on Labor Day weekend), now-VP Jim Ward brought in a new game he had discovered from a small company on the west coast. It was a collectible card game, where no two decks were the same. It needed a little development. The rules were a bit cludgy. We developed a number of house rulings and interpretations. We all got decks. Of course, it was a lot of fun.

In the year since its initial release, a lot of people have discovered this game, and other deck games, including TSR’s *SPELLFIRE™* game. And a lot of other people have called the entire “deck gaming” genre a phenomenon. A fad. A fashion. An upstart. It doesn’t even have character stats; how can it be a *real* game?

I see deck gaming as the next great revolution in our hobby, and were it to all disappear tomorrow, it will have profoundly changed how we look at games. It’s going through its birth pains still, learning many hard lessons that the D&D game also had to learn. I see the deck gaming experience as an evolution of that which we do. If we fail to recognize the power and opportunity of this new idea, we’ll be no better than the board gamers who laughed at the D&D game players all those years ago. Those hardcore war gamers are still with us, and still a vibrant part of the hobby, but are not the dominant force.

Once more the dinosaurs are threatened by the mammals. This is an exciting time. The ground rules are changing. Evolve or perish.

Me, I’m looking to grow feathers.

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by Chris Perry

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

Add these to your dungeons and see what sprouts

Trillimac

Appearance: A cultivated Trillimac mushroom grows to a height of 4-5', with a grayish-green cap and a light gray stalk. The cap is flat and measures 28" to 42" across, while its fibrous stalk is 5" in diameter. In the wild, it rarely grows beyond 3' and has a cap measuring 14" to 33" across, with a 3-1/2" diameter stalk.

Frequency: Rare in civilized regions (Uncommon in the wilds). The reason for this is simply that in civilized areas creatures can't resist using them as a free source of food (as opposed to paying for it in the bazaars) and will therefore not be found growing anywhere near settlements, except on local fungus farms. In the wild they can be found in clumps of 3-30, while on the farms there's a minimum of 20-50 plants.

Trillimacs are sometimes called "Corpse Caps," a nickname that refers to the fact that the drow, in order to encourage the fungi to grow large, "fertilize" their Trillimac fields with the bodies of slaves and enemies unsuitable for use in creating undead. Neither the gnomes nor the dwarves (derro excepted) do this, relying instead upon other waste materials.

Practical use: Trillimac has two uses. One, the cap's leathery surface can be cut and cleaned for use in making maps, hats, and magical scrolls (its surface takes on dyes and inks very well). Secondly, the stalk, after being cleaned, soaked in water for an hour and then placed by a fire to dry, makes for a palatable meal (akin to bread, some seem to think). Each linear foot of its stalk can feed a man for two

days, and the best part is that unlike bread it'll stay edible for up to four weeks (very useful when the Underdark's armies are on the march). Trillimacs grow to maturity within three weeks and can be grown year-round, given the constant humidity and lack of temperature variations in the Underdark.

It costs 4 gp for one linear foot of Trillimac stalk, and a 2' by 2' piece of Trillimac cap sells for 50 gp.

Nimergan

Appearance: Nimergan look like frayed umbrellas, barely standing 3" in height. They're beige in color, with dark brown bumps along the stalk, and they grow in irregular patches 8'-12' in diameter.

Frequency: Uncommon.

Practical use: Nimergan are used in the making of alcoholic beverages. When they grow to maturity (taking two weeks), they're sealed in wooden casks and die. The brown "bumps," which are actually a parasitic type of fungus that feed upon the Nimergan itself, consume the Nimergan and form a fermented liquid (also called Nimergan) that can then be drunk. If allowed to ferment too long it becomes extremely potent, such that one glassful requires the imbiber to save vs. poison or fall into a coma for 1-3 hours. Each additional glassful requires a saving throw with a -1 penalty, with the coma lasting 1-3 hours longer per additional drink. Lastly, there's a 40% chance (minus the character's Constitution score) that instead of waking up from the coma the imbiber

actually dies. The duergar, who have some resistance to its effects, often dare non-dwarves to drink tankards of Nimergeran with them, just to test their resolve (and to have themselves a good laugh, if the outsider keels over). The price for normal Nimergeran is 1 ep a glass, 10 gp for the "killer" version (only a 5% chance that an Underdark establishment carries the "killer" version, 20% chance in Duergar communities).

Ormu

Appearance: Ormu is a fluorescent green moss that grows in damp tunnels and steamy caverns, usually near steam vents in the earth. It grows in large clumps that measure up to 4' x 12', though it usually grows only to 3' x 6'.

Frequency: Common.

Practical use: Ormu is utilized for its dyes, which are used in all forms of fabric, and the powder on its surface is used as eyeshadow by drow women. When mixed with glow worm juice, it's painted onto signs, shields, and flags in glowing designs, ensuring that the owner or bearer is recognized (even by "blind" surface-dwellers). Wizards like to use Ormu when inscribing their scrolls and spell books, as such books can be read without resorting to the use of painful light sources, such as candles and torches.

A jar of Ormu paint sells for 6 sp, a

pouch of Ormu eyeshadow for 5 cp, and an ounce of Ormu inscription ink (enough for one spell) sells for 25 gp.

Askume

Appearance: Askumes are reddish-orange lichen that grow on warm cavern walls. They grow in patches 1"-3" in diameter.

Frequency: Rare.

Practical use: Askume is crushed and used as a poison. When blown into someone's face, it causes an allergic reaction. The victim's tongue and windpipe swell within 1-2 rounds of exposure, causing death if a save vs. poison (at - 3) is failed. If the save is made, the victim is merely incapacitated for 1 turn, and suffers a -2 penalty on all Strength and Constitution rolls for 24 hours.

Enough Askume poison can be collected from a patch for 2-4 applications worth 150 gp each. Since even a short cavern passage can host a dozen such patches on average, each site is protected vigorously by those who make a living selling it.

Timmask

Appearance: Timmask is a vile-smelling, bulbous mushroom with orange and red flaring stripes across its dark beige surface. They grow to be 2' in diameter and 2' high. They're usually found in numbers of 1-4.

Frequency: Very rare.

Practical use: Timmask is useful in two different ways. One, many creatures from the lower planes love the Timmask and delight in eating it. Tanar'ri suffer a -3 penalty on saving throws when trying to resist a wizard or priest's summons or commands provided that Timmask is used as an enticement, - 1 if it used as a material component of the spell. Its second usage is in augmenting necromantic spells. When used as a material component, the targets of such spells suffer a - 1 penalty to their saving throws, or a + 1 bonus if the spell is meant to benefit the target. It also should be noted that such spells have double the normal duration, unless, of course the normal duration of the spell is instantaneous or permanent.

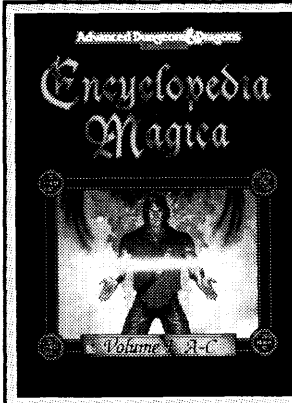
One Timmask mushroom has enough material for use as material components in 21-30 spells. They're usually ground to powder and sold in small sealed jars, containing enough for 5 uses (150 gp a jar). Whole, intact Timmask mushrooms (which are preferred by the tanar'ri) can be bought, but only for 5,000 to 8,000 gp. Consequently, many priests and wizards go looking on their own for Timmask and attempt to cultivate it for themselves, rather than pay the steep prices the merchants charge. The prices listed above are for Timmask sold in the Underdark, twice that if sold on the surface.

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The Harpers & Waterdeep

by Steven E. Schend

The early dawn notwithstanding, the Blackstaff's exhaustion kept him abed quite later than his usual wont. It had only been the smell of warm rolls that woke Khelben that morning. A refreshing change, to be sure. His last few weeks had been a never-ending series of plots-within-plots that left him little time or energy for life's simple pleasures. He dressed swiftly, a rare smile sneaking beneath his distinctive beard as he heard his lady's voice raised in song in the rooms below. Descending the stairs, he paused only to conjure a rose of deepest scarlet behind his back. "Khelben 'Blackstaff' Arunsun, High Mage of Waterdeep I may be, but none can gainsay me in the affairs of romance," he thought to himself as he crept quietly behind a high-backed chair in the sitting room. With a sparkle of light, the rose wafted from his palm, spiralling as it sank onto the pile of parchments on the lap of the woman seated in the chair before him. "Good morning, my love. How fares the Lady Mage of Waterdeep on this bright day?"

The woman, not yet looking up from her missives, grasped the rose and brought it closer, sniffing its fragrance while idly brushing a stray strand of silver hair away from her face. "Passing fair, milord, passing fair. Our allies, on other matters, have kpf—

"You shouldst know full well that the Blackstaff is even less a romantic than I am an early riser, chronicler. Still, 'twould be an interesting morning, all said, if my dear Khelben were to have such inclinations with the dawn." The silken voice startled me, having come from behind me while I typed.

I really hate it when people sneak up on me late at night when I'm working. Really. Even if the intruder—the beautiful Laeral Silverhand Arunsun, Lady Mage of Waterdeep, Chosen of Mystra, and one of the illustrious Seven Sisters—has *teleported* across worlds to visit. No, better make that especially. "What is it about Faerunian mages that compel you all to do their humble best to unnerve us at every turn?" I asked.

"We like to engender as much mischief as you and yours do with your words,

such as that bit of fiction you were penning just now." Smiling, Laeral waved a hand at an itinerant pile of papers on the extra chair in my office (from which they promptly floated away), and sat down.

Despite my initial surprise (and irritation), it is always a good idea to remain cordial to those who can turn you into dust with an idle gesture. Besides, Laeral's presence meant news and information of the Realms, which I dutifully send off to DRAGON® Magazine's readership. As I expectantly cleared a file on my computer, I asked, "And to what do I owe the pleasure of your visit, my lady? More news of the North and Waterdeep?"

Laeral sighed, "Direct and to the point—I like that, as does Khelben. You shouldst take the time to meet him sometime soon, methinks. You may just make a favorable impression, though he thought too much was said of Waterdeep's secrets in your *City of Splendors*; as always, I believe his reaction was 'Too many eyes set too many loose tongues to wagging.' He is a dear, but he is far too close-fisted with his confidences. Today, I thought we might discuss those natives and friends of Waterdeep who are just as careful with secrets but hold an open hand to their friends and allies—the Harpers."

Harper activities within Waterdeep

Despite the hearsay and gossip that usually accompanies the reputation of a secretive group, the Harpers do not actively operate everywhere in the Realms at every given moment. This is not for the lack of desire or help on the Harpers' part, but based on need. Waterdeep is one of the largest cities of the Realms where the Harpers need not take an active part in keeping the peace, thanks to the vigilance of the Lords and their agents in the city watch, city guard, and other various forces for good and order in the City of Splendors.

Does this mean there are no Harpers in Waterdeep? Of course not; at any given time, there are at least seven Harpers (including two Master Harpers) in Waterdeep actively working for the group. For every Harper, there are at least a score or two individual contacts, Harper friends,

and secret allies who count themselves to be on the side of Those Who Harp. All told, there is most likely a clandestine network of over 100 individuals within the walls of Waterdeep aiding the Harper cause, though there are very few who know more than one or two other individuals within that network. The secrecy with which the Harpers hold their contacts and informants is rivalled only by the secrecy of the Lords of Waterdeep themselves. With this vast network of people, what do those affiliated with the Harpers' cause do in the City of Splendors?

Knowledge is power

"Information and knowledge gained is half the battle won against any foe," is a typical Harper maxim, and they live to its message everywhere they go. In Waterdeep, information and news from across the Savage Frontier, the Sword Coast, and the entire Realms eventually reaches the notice of a Harper or her agent. Since Waterdeep is one of the major ports of the northern Sword Coast (as well as the seat of power for Master Harpers Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun and his lady, Laeral Silverhand), it has become a center for information trading and a meeting place for many of the widely scattered Harper agents. After all, it is difficult to track down a single person in the madding throng that populates Waterdeep, making the city a safe place for many Harpers to temporarily relax and join a comrade or two for a momentary respite from their vigilant work.

The Harper agents who are officially set up in Waterdeep have little direct traffic with each other to avoid any connections being made between them by their enemies. Agents and allies are approached by one or two different contacts at pre-arranged locations (usually a shop or tavern) and verbally pass on information about such matters as who is shipping what to whom, any suspicious rumors overheard, and the like. These intermediaries then meet up with their respective accomplices and pass on the information in a similar fashion, adding any further details that they might know. This method, while having the potential to have facts change with each telling, is highly accu-

rate and precise, as each contact often has the means to double-check on facts before relaying them to their informant. Finally, after having gone through at least three agents (One Harper's contact network goes through twelve people before reaching her!), the word reaches a Harper or a direct Harper agent.

Once the information is in the hands of a Harper, it often demonstrates a picture other than what is seen by the individuals who contribute to the intelligence gathering. Keep in mind that few of the contacts have an inkling of who they are working for, other than a general assurance that they work toward the common good, and thus few of them see or understand the whole plots behind whatever piece of it stumbled across their paths; only Harpers and some direct agents close at hand have all the information cobbled together from a wide variety of sources and can see whole conspiracies where fifteen other people only heard rumors, saw something suspicious, or got information thirdhand about someone. At that point, the Harper either takes steps to handle a situation herself or assigns a number of her agents to the task of interrupting a particular plot; often in Waterdeep, though, a simple anonymous tip to the local watchpost or a guard contingent is enough to bring them into play and break the back of many an insidious scheme, most times without even informing the constabulary of the whole truth.

One plot recently uncovered was a move by a powerful mining clan in Mirabar to drive a number of smiths in Waterdeep out of business so they could be replaced by their own smiths to act as deep-cover contacts and covert agents for the Zhentilar. This was pieced together by the Harper Bensyl Iyirivvin, who also works as a courtesan at the Blushing Mermaid. A few pointed words to Hawkun Orsund, guildmaster of the blacksmiths' guild, (She mentioned that honest guild members were being pressed by politically powerful smiths and that she worried their poor work might reflect badly on the guild in general.) and Lorkas Ermaxis, a worshiper of Tyr (Taking him into her confidence, she innocently asked where a coin was from, showing him a coin minted in Zhen-til Keep, and admitting that she got it and more like it from certain smiths new to the city.) saw the Zhent agents denied guild membership and fleeing from the city once the clergy of Tyr found them out. A Zhentarim aphorism overheard often is "Strike quickly and without mercy when you fight a Harper; they need not land many blows to fell you as they choose their strikes well."

Once the information reaches the Harper or Harpers involved and the situation is well in hand, those Harpers write reports, often in code or with messages magically encrypted into the sealing wax, to the one person who keeps tabs on all Harper activities within the city and the Savage

Frontier—Laeral Silverhand. Laeral, with Khelben's and others' aid, has established a number of drop-points throughout the city where information can be left and it will be picked up manually by a trusted servant. Some of the drop-points are magical and can *teleport* any messages or small items directly to Blackstaff Tower; these will not *teleport* anything larger than a dagger or heavier than a pound or two. The various drop-points throughout the city are known only by true Harpers, not their agents. Of the series of mundane and magical drop-points throughout the city (Laeral hints that there are over 30 in all, used at varying times), these are the once most used:

- * A rooftop minaret on the Palace of Waterdeep conceals a drop-point, and is easily reached from one of the gabled windows near the base of one of the Palace's many towers.

- * There is a loose flagstone at the southeastern corner of the Thomm Warehouse on Sambril Lane (D49 in Dock Ward by *City of Splendors* reckoning; Bldg. #233 by old FR1 reckoning) where it meets a cheese shop to its south. When lifted up, the flagstone is found to be lighter than expected, and a hollow is found beneath it; items placed there are teleported away to Blackstaff Tower as soon as the stone falls back into place.

- * The Coin Alley dock (second from the west and inside the Naval Harbor) has a piling (3rd eastern one, half way out on the dock) with a hollow cavity for depositing messages. A number of Harper friends within the Dock Ward guard contingents make sure these messages are retrieved three times a day and delivered to a particular room off the Lord's Court where they are left on a desk; once placed there, items cannot be touched or removed by anyone without a Harper's pin and a Lord's ring (either Danilo Thann or Khelben retrieve these).

- * One of the beds in an upper room at the Smiling Siren festhall in Castle Ward (C10/#31) has a box built into the bedframe that is accessible only through the headboard. The woman whose room it is does not know of the information drop there; she only knows that once a week someone else (whose name she doesn't know or ask) rents the room for an afternoon. That agent then retrieves anything left in that box, transcribes any notes into coded runes known only to the Harpers and Heralds, and destroys the original notes.

- * There is a gutter along the roof edge of the Wyvern's Rest tavern in Sea Ward (\$2) leading down a drainpipe to a cellar cistern. Any sealed scroll tubes, waxcloth bundles, or other waterproofed items can be hidden inside the drainpipe just below the roof's edge; a sturdy but small bit of net is inside the drain to catch any dropped items, and it can be pulled up easily to retrieve any items left there.

- * Atop the south wall surrounding Lord

Maernos' estate (N16/#115) are a row of carved lions' head, all roaring with mouths agape and facing Sidle Street. The central lion's mouth contains a magical drop-point. When small items are placed within the lion's mouth and its right eye is touched, they teleport into a sealed desk in Erusyl Eraneth's rooms in the Deepfires Inn of Skullport, the subterranean hideaway of one of Laeral's aliases.

That all said, the Harpers tend to focus on the larger picture of activity surrounding Waterdeep and how the various enemies of the Harpers' and enemies of the common good interact with Waterdeep. They keep their ears open for any information or news tied to known agents of every and any major power group from the Knights of the Shield to the Red Wizards and the Zhentarim. Harpers also keep tabs on fledgling and veteran adventuring companies, as such groups of hardy (or simply foolhardy) adventurers often inadvertently uncover major doings of one vile group or another.

Harpers also keep a watchful eye on the northern frontiers, making sure that if and when the orc hordes tumble out of the northern mountains, the civilized lands to the south are protected. They and their agents patrol the High Road and the other trails to Luskan, Mirabar, Silverymoon, and other settlements, protecting many merchant caravans and the like. In general, the Harpers continue their good works as they do all around the Realms, and they all use Waterdeep as a resting place, an information gathering and retrieval point, and the best spot west of Suzail to link up with many ports and plots.

Harpers' Hold

Though there are a number of wilderness areas close to Waterdeep that serve as refuges for the Harpers (in the Ardeep Forest and the Westwood), Harpers' Hold is by far more secure, more useful, and much more secretive. True Harpers native to the North learn of its existence with their membership, though a few Harpers across the Realms know of it as well. Contrary to the others, Harpers' Hold is almost totally inaccessible unless one is with a Harper; this refuge is hidden high in Mount Waterdeep, and was once part of the legendary Citadel of the Bloody Hand, the former headquarters of the Shadow Thieves. While extremely dangerous, the Hold can be reached without the use of magic by finding a small cavern entrance on the western face of Mount Waterdeep about 30' above the ocean. (A secret door in New Olamn's southern wall leads down to a cave and path that can lead to it, though it is still a very precarious walk along the surf-slick stone.) Bear in mind that ancient (though still deadly) traps and wards guard this passageway as it leads through the heart of the old Citadel of the Bloody Hand and to a trap door treated with *wizard lock*, *alarm*, and a number of

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glyphs, all of which can be bypassed by singing a particular tune. (Laeral refused to divulge the tune's name, but hinted that it was allegedly one of Khelben's favorites when he was young—this makes the song anywhere from 35 to 600 years old!) Some of the traps in the Long Climb (as it was titled by Coune Suerk) include areas of *reverse gravity*, undead roppers, pressure-sensitive and light-sensitive murder gauntlets (walls firing arrows, darts, and spears), and a number of dangerous pit traps (the worst of which is a miles-long steep slide that deposits the unfortunate persons into the fourth "sewers" level of Undermountain!).

Harpers' Hold is an isolated series of approximately 15 rooms somewhere within the slopes of Mount Waterdeep; there are no direct accessways to the outside, as all the main entrances to the Citadel are strictly controlled by Waterdeep's guard, and they haven't a clue that this set of rooms exists. Some postulate that these were once the private rooms of the Shadow Thieve's guildmaster and his staff, but that was some time ago, and all that remains is evidence of the Harpers' good deeds.

Each of the rooms, with the exceptions of the bedchambers, are lit with *continual light* spells; if the person in the room wishes to brighten or dim the light, she simply needs to state such and the light will respond accordingly. The bedchambers normally are unlit; with a simple verbal request, they can be faintly lit with *faerie fire*.

Like all Harper refuges, any healing spells cast operate at maximum efficiency, natural healing occurs at double the normal rate, and any mental compulsions or *charms* are rendered inoperative by the Hold.

The entry room is a small 10' square room devoid of any decoration, on the off chance that someone stumbles across one of the few teleport areas that blink the user directly into this room (see below for more information). The entry has one door on each of its walls, and the doors are all magically enspelled to act as *wizard locked* to anyone unless they bear a Harper's pin. The doors themselves are nondescript, and do not even have doorknobs; they open with a simple push, provided that person has a Harper's pin, otherwise they are as unyielding as the stone walls around them.

The western door leads simply to an exiting *teleport* chamber (a Harper's seal set in mosaics in the floor, the stars within the seal faintly glowing with azure radiance), and from the room beyond it (reachable through an arch on that room's southern wall) one can manipulate the magical mechanisms to send someone to any one of three locations within Waterdeep and four more dotted across the Realms.

The northern door off the entry room is the central meeting room for any Harpers

should they have need of a large assembly area totally removed from others' eyes. The room's walls are draped with banners bearing the Harpers' seal, and the room is dominated by a large round table of polished duskwood. The table and its 10 high-back chairs (of the same wood and style as the table) are enchanted to resist dust, and thus remain shining and new despite their age. In the 40-odd years the Hold has been in existence, this room has been used only twice for such a gathering. One use the room does have more frequently is as an information storehouse; two entire walls (west and north) are covered with shelves filled to brimming with logbooks, scrolls, parchments, and maps; by tradition, any new information (data less than one year old) is left on one particular shelf at the center of the northern wall, the contents wrapped in blue ribbon or bound in some simple form. Each Harper, when visiting, often makes this room her first stop, collecting any new notes or reports from that shelf and taking it to a sitting room.

The eastern door leads to another central room with doors on all facing walls; each of these leads to individual sitting rooms with adjoining bedchambers, each complete with fireplaces (smoke is magically dissipated at the top of their shallow chimneys), desks, writing implements, comfortable chairs, etc. These three suites are used at various times to hide important personages, allow some badly wounded Harpers a chance to heal, or simply provide a quiet place for study for some away from the rigors of the road.

The southern door directly behind anyone who *teleports* into the Hold leads to a large kitchen. A pantry is reachable through the kitchen's western wall, with a small anteroom beyond that permanently enspelled with some particular cold magics, allowing frozen storage of many types of food. Off the southern wall of the kitchen is an elegantly furnished dining room, its long rectangular cherry table enspelled as the meeting room furnishings. Just about every herb, spice, or cooking garnish that exists in the Realms can be found in the Hold's kitchen and one high shelf contains a number of cookbooks with recipes from across the Realms (and Oerth, Krynn, and the Rock of Bral), including the ever-rare and treasured Cookbook of Nemalas, a long-fabled ancient text on exotic Netherese dishes (a singular gift from Elminster to the Harpers).

Unknown to all but Khelben, Elminster, and the Seven Sisters, there is one chamber above the Hold, and it is reachable only by Mystra's Chosen. A secret door in the ceiling of the central entry room allows the Chosen to pass through it as if immaterial into a sumptuously furnished cavern above. Lit by *continual light*, it contains the same amenities as the sitting rooms below. However, this is a sickroom for Storm Silverhand and her sisters. Certain contingencies the Sisters have on themselves automatically teleport them

here when severely wounded or "killed"; if anyone arrives in this room and is wounded, warnings sound at Elminster's tower in Shadowdale, Blackstaff Tower in Waterdeep, Alustriel's chambers in Silvermoon, and Twilight Hall.

Teleports: The Harpers' Hold can be reached through a number of teleports across Waterdeep and (though very rare) the Realms itself. Below are the number of places that reach or can be reached from the Harpers' Hold of Waterdeep.

To the Hold: Elminster's Tower, Twilight Hall, a small cavern on an island in the Sea of Fallen Stars (uncharted by all save the Harpers), a hollow tree at the center of a faerie glen in the Ardeep Forest, an isolated cavern along the underground river in Undermountain (the northeastern quadrant of Level 3), and five teleports from secret rooms within Harper-owned safehouses in Waterdeep proper (a bakery on the Street of Lances and Seawind Alley (Sea Ward), one of the rowhouses facing Delzorin Street and backing onto Trollskull Alley (North Ward), a silversmith's shop and home on Lamp Street and Elsambul's Lane (Castle Ward), a mortuary on Ironpost Street and Wall Way (Trades Ward), and The Medusa's Glare, a sculptor's shop on the southern end of Slop Street near the Jade Dancer (S15/#208; South Ward).

From the Hold: A little-traveled path along the southern edge of the High Forest along the Unicorn Run, a Harpers' safehouse in Llorbauth along the Deepwash, a rowhouse in the heart of Suzail, Moongleam Tower, and the Watchful Wheels, Wagons & Gear shop in Tantras (owned and operated by Harper Lightal Barnshyn); in Waterdeep, exit points are at a warehouse on Coin Alley (Dock Ward), a caravan outfitter's shop on Fillet Lane near Slop Street, and a harp-maker's shop on the eastern side of Golden Serpent Street (Millomyr Harps, owned by Harper Jhandess Millomyr, who is also a itinerant tutor at the New Olamn bards' college).

Selected Harper NPCs

Tioch (LN hm F3)

Tioch is a valued Harper ally of long years despite the fact that he appears as little more than a blind beggar. Earlier in life, Tioch was a warrior of some promise and he was a rising star among the Waterdeep guard; his career ended in a battle with a Zhentish wizard 40 years ago. (He managed to unknowingly save the life of Bran Skorsun and another Harper from an ambush, but the wizard cast *burning hands* directly into Tioch's eyes while he protected the mage's targets.) While he could have had his eyesight restored, Tioch refused, accepting this fate, and chose to work with the Harpers as an information collector on the streets; few notice a blind beggar sitting on a stoop waiting for coins, and thus Tioch overhears many rumors that the Harpers pay him well to gain. About 10 years ago, Tioch was offered a *wish* if he wanted his

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eyesight restored; having accepted and grown accustomed to his blindness, he chose a particular form of sight: He can see normally under the light of the full moon, and he can always see the sign of the Harpers if someone bearing a pin is within 100' of him.

The Defenders Three

Amstor "the Grim" (LG halfm C6; Wis 16)

Pithar "the Bold" (CG halfm F4; Str 17, Cha 16)

Asohs "the Daring" (CG halfm T5; Dex 18, Int 15)

These three daredevil halflings are Harper allies, while not for lack of trying to join the ranks officially. Natives of Waterdeep and all brothers to the same halfling clan, they spent their early years working in the family vintner's shop and whitesmith's shop (light metalwork) in South Ward.

Amstor, the eldest of the three, soon left to join an adventuring party to learn of the world (and follow the halfling woman he had fallen in love with at first sight). Within a year, he had returned as a journeyman cleric, but his former good nature had soured due to his love's betrayal of him and his other comrades to an evil wizard. Since his return to the city, he has worked with other clerics at the Plinth as well as training young clerics and priests (particularly those short in stature) in his peculiar form of defensive fighting with a staff or rod. He often draws a crowd at the Field of Triumph when he shows his pupils advanced tactics, such as swinging the staff long to clear some space in front of enemies and vaulting into them, using your own weight to topple them (and Amstor's weight is considerable, having grown in girth since returning to the city).

Pithar was a strong halfling from the start, and he ended up acting as an impromptu bouncer at some local taverns. For a brief two-year stint, he was also a member of the watch, though he left in disgust after enduring much patronizing behavior from his superiors in Trades Ward. Still, with his commissions and a few small adventures (including a successful foray into the Dungeon of the Crypt after a fleeing suspect that granted him a number of precious gems and a *ring of protection* +3), he managed to have three special swords made (two for him and one for his younger brother Asohs, crafted by Brian the Swordmaster); these swords were sized like short swords, but were crafted to be wielded more like long swords (long, slashing blows instead of limiting the blade to more typical short sword stabs). Within a year, Pithar had managed to master his new swords, and he wields one in each hand; more than one opponent has been surprised by Pithar's ability to block even broad swords and two-handed human swords with his small, thin blades.

Asohs, the youngest of the trio, always had a rebellious streak and a hot temper

that led him into more than enough trouble. Running away from home early, he became a rogue and was employed as a spy and saboteur by a number of less-than-scrupulous merchants and traders. After a number of arrests and bails posted by his older brothers, Asohs finally came clean and swore off such work (but not until he exposed two major smuggling rings operating out of Dock Ward).

For the past two years, the trio has banded together and gained the name (through tavern talk, not by choice) of the Defenders Three, as they have worked as guards for Lord Ultras Maernos. Amstor was the first to meet and be impressed by this pious human; overhearing his enemies badmouthing both his piety and his wish to provide his lands and fortunes to create a nonhuman site of worship, Amstor recruited his brothers and offered their services to the lord as his guards and defenders. While Lord Maernos was initially skeptical, he was swayed by Amstor's reverence and his brothers' boldness. During their trial period, the trio saved his life from an assassin, and managed to foil a number of plots brewed by, among others of the nobility, Lord Nimor Lathkule and Lady Stelar Nesher of the Thorp clan. While many among the nobles giggle about Lord Maernos' short champions, none can argue that they are any less effective than human guards, and they are certainly more loyal about their duties than many others. Indeed, many younger nobles enjoy the Defenders Three's company, though their parents and elders sniff at the idea of halflings acclimating themselves within noble society—to their horror, Lord Maernos actually treats the halflings as honored, trusted friends, rather than just servants!

The Defenders Three have done some minor work for the Harpers whenever Lord Maernos, another long-standing ally and friend, sends them on missions outside the city. They often ferry messages and information to a number of Harpers in Mirabar, Luskan, and Baldur's Gate, though only Asohs understands who and what these packages and missives are for (he deduced it himself, and surprised the lord with his insight; Asohs has not shared this with his brothers, as he and Lord Maernos agreed to keep their involvement as quiet as possible).

Plots & current clack

A number of Waterdhavian ship captains and traders who frequently travel the Calimport to Waterdeep sealandes are being murdered; five have been killed within Waterdeep's walls, and others have been murdered by various and sundry methods in Baldur's Gate and other ports on the Sword Coast. Along with this, a larger number of ships and traders from Calimshan are making the trek north, and the Harpers suspect the two sets of activities are related. Laeral and Jhandess Millomyr are arranging for agents to infiltrate some

of the Calishite ships and the companies of the murdered traders to seek out more information.

Laeral has discovered that the Crown of Horns is active once again, having spotted it from afar on a yuan-ti unknown to her in Skullport; due to her vow to Khelben that she would never again touch or involve herself with the Crown, she has assigned her trusted partner and Harper ally Kylia (CG gf W(Sp) 12-Illusionist) to keep watch over his activities and find out what the Crown is now able to do.

Coril's book of notes and information for the Harpers has been stolen! He and Shalar Simgulphin are putting word out to all the Harpers in general that a number of recent plots may be compromised due to this, and are warning everyone to stay on their toes. Coril's assailants who stole the book were unidentified and are still unknown currently.

Some isolated reports mention a larger than normal number of kobold, gnom, and goblin war tribes actively wandering the lands north and west of Luskan and Mirabar. Curiously, some are even allied; a number of agents are looking for information on what or who is behind these alliances and these unexpected growths in forces.

Agents are starting to hear of less-than-goodly activities of the many hundreds of converted Tyr-worshippers that are centered in Waterdeep. There is talk, but no current action, of sending someone on the inside to investigate the activities of the overzealous Tyrite warriors.

Ω



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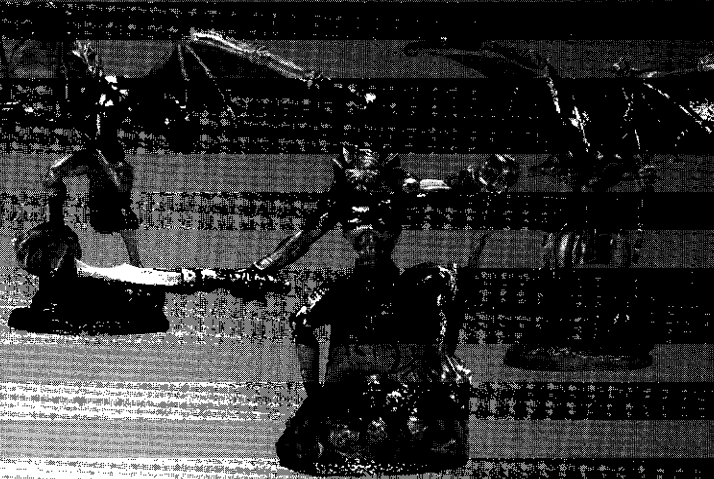
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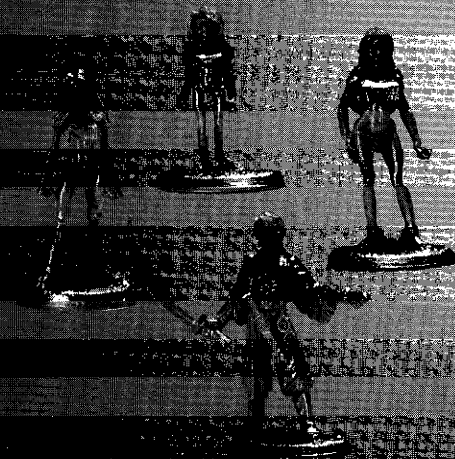
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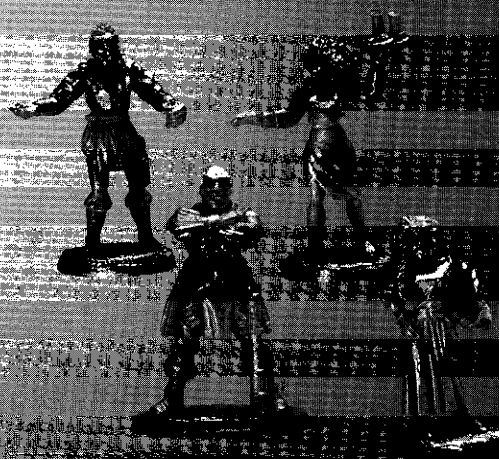
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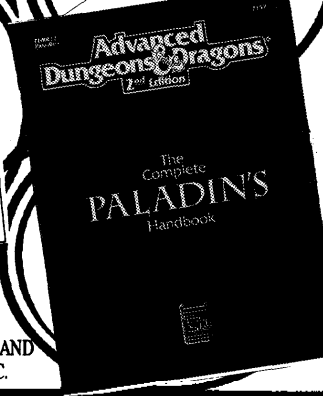
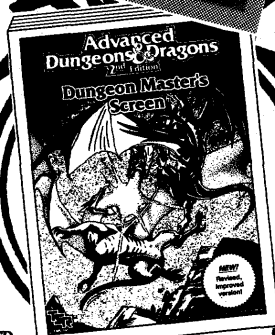
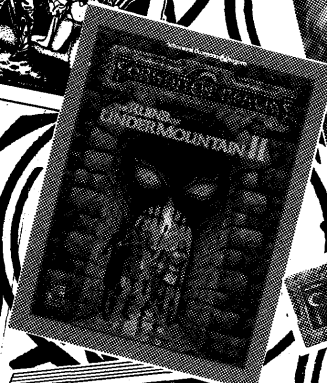
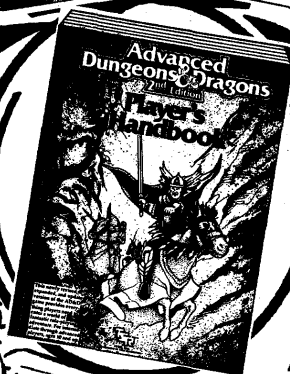
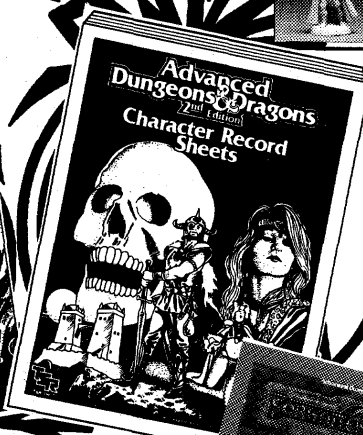
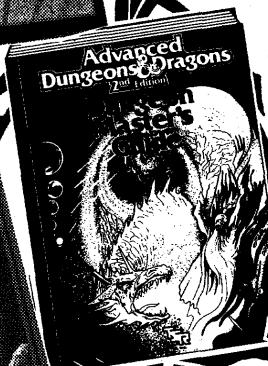
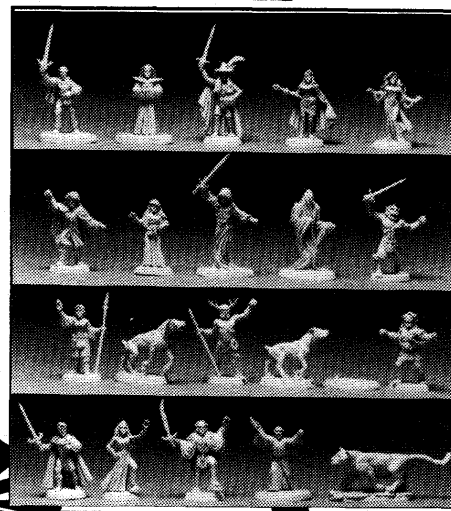
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Picks & nix for your Xmas list

Editor's Note: Welcome back to the Eye of the Monitor! Two new columnists join the ranks of DRAGON® Magazine reviewers with this column. Jay and Dee are the pseudonyms of two people who work in the computer-gaming field. Dee is a designer/producer for a major software entertainment company; Jay has worked with several hobby game companies, and is currently a free-lance writer and editor for, among others, TSR, Inc.

Reviews



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Jay & Dee's ratings at a glance

Game	Jay	Dee
<i>Civilization</i>	5	5
<i>Heaven & Earth</i>	4	3½
<i>Reach for the Stars</i>	-	3½
<i>Bandit Kings of Ancient China</i>	3½	3½
<i>Jewel Box</i>	-	3½
<i>Pipe Dream</i>	-	2½/4½
<i>Aladdin</i>	5	5

Dee: Greetings, and welcome to our first computer-game review column. We'll be with you every other month for awhile, and we thought that for this November issue, we'd give you a quick overview of our favorite games of years past—to help you fill out your Christmas shopping list.

Jay: Why a greatest hits column? As Dee suggests, perhaps you've got a computer user or three on your list, and want a few tips. Equally important, you'll get a grasp on what we're like by seeing what we choose to call great. A reviewer who likes what you do is great, but one who dislikes all your favorite stuff can be valuable, too—"She hated it, so it must be good!" We'll cover a number of games this month, and we hope you're familiar with at least a few of them.

Computer games' ratings

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

Dee: I'll start with one of my all time favorites, *Civilization* from MicroProse Software. In case you've never played it, I recommend rushing right out and finding yourself a copy. It has to be one of the best computer games ever invented—and without fancy graphics or 20 disks full of digitized sound effects, either. *Civilization* is what the industry calls a "god game" because you play the role of the leader of an entire culture (you're called the Emperor, but whoever heard of an Emperor living 4,000 years?). Without going into a lot of detail, I can tell you that this is one of those games you won't be able to stop playing: there's always something important just about to happen, so you just have to stay up "a few more minutes, Mom," until it does. Add in intricately connected (but simple to grasp) commodities such as technology, military power, and economic growth, and you have a game where every decision you make feels important, but no single wrong decision can lose you the game.

Dee's rating: *****

Jay: *Civilization* is one of my favorite games, too, but it's a different game for me. You see, Dee plays *Civilization* to conquer the world, whereas I'm much more interested in economic strategies. The cool thing about this game is that you're not limited to only one way to win—all sorts of approaches work. Sometimes I send diplomats to my rival cities and buy them, sometimes I sneak in and encourage revolutions. I've played games where I just wanted to explore the world completely,

and others where I was racing to develop space flight before 1500 (it can be done!). Even more telling: I've been playing *Civilization* since it first came out in 1991. Not many games last that long on my hard drive.

Jay's rating: *****

Okay, my turn to pick one. I'm recommending *Heaven & Earth* by Buena Vista Software. This isn't only a game: as the designers inform you in the introduction, it's an integrated triad of toy, puzzle, and game all based on a single fantasy legend. You may have been bitten by the collectible card game bug that has so many folks spending their lunch money on plastic-coated paper. If so, you need to play with the animated cards in *Heaven & Earth*. The moons rise and change phase, stars streak across the sky—and the cards change value when the phenomena change! The game is as fun as the art is gorgeous—you try to score tricks of the highest value, working against a random draw. When your head starts to explode from too many calculations, you can go back to the Gateway between the three parts, and choose puzzles to manipulate. There are a dozen options, from sliders and mazes to 3-D illusions that I have happily noodled away hours manipulating. Finally, try your hand at picking off gems with a swinging pendulum (the "toy" in the trio). Frankly, the pendulum is my least favorite section, but maybe that's because my hand-eye coordination isn't up to arcade standards.

Jay's rating: *****

Dee: I like *Heaven & Earth* too, though I'm less patient with the puzzles. The "solitaire" card game is actually something Jay and I play together, working to make the highest-value tricks, and switching off on who gets the keyboard and who the mouse. It's fun (we play *Civilization* as partners, too).

Dee's rating: * * * ½

My next pick is a game I played on the Macintosh years ago. It's still available, I think, but it hasn't been updated with a new version for a long time. It's called *Reach for the Stars* and it's another god game, this time with a science-fiction theme. You start with one planet and send colonists to nearby worlds, while building increasingly powerful starships and bases. The graphics are almost nonexistent, and the gameplay is a little dated (*Master of Orion* from MicroProse is essentially the same game, only more so), but the simplicity and speed of it bring me back to play it time and again.

Dee's rating: * * * ½

Jay: Usually I'm not too interested in beating the tar out of opponents, so I like god games where the violence is minimized or avoidable. Koei's *Bandit Kings of Ancient China* includes a lot of fighting—but interspersed with the battles are train-

ing, hiring heroes, and dealing with marauding tigers. The game's black-and-white only, but the heroes' nicknames are plenty colorful. There's lots of fun to be had recruiting bandit-heroes to join you in your fight against the corrupt Gao Qiu, and the board-game like battles are exciting in an abstract way (no *Doom* gore here!). This can be a fairly involved game (the rules are simple but the choices are many), and perhaps a bit more tedious than *Civilization*. The Chinese "Robin Hood" atmosphere makes it a standout for me. This is another one that Dee and I play together.

Jay's rating: * * * ½

Dee: I agree—I love the mythos of ancient China, and Koei definitely delivers. I don't know that the game has the replay value of *Civilization*, but we sure racked up hours while trying to figure out how to win! And we loved every minute of it.

Dee's rating: * * * ½

I'm the Mac aficionado of the household, so my next recommendation is another Mac game, though I'm certain there's an IBM version as well. It's called *Jewel Box* (by Varcon Systems) and it comes as part of a three-game package of arcade challenges. It's so good that I have yet to tire of it, and still haven't looked at the other two games that came with the package. Game-

play is vaguely similar to that of *Tetris* from Spectrum Holobyte, in that colored gems fall from the top of the screen and you must manipulate them to form patterns that erase themselves. When the playing area fills up with gems, the round is over. But *Jewel Box* is not just a clone—it has intriguing rules all its own, including special gems that cause amazing things to happen, and beautiful sound and graphics.

Dee's rating: * * * ½

While I'm talking about arcade-style games, I might as well mention *Pipe Dream* from LucasArts. I've played both the Mac and Windows versions, and I'm ashamed to admit that the Windows version is vastly superior. The mouse interface is better used, and the bonus rounds are much more fun on the Windows version. I highly recommend *Pipe Dream* as an arcade challenge that involves lots of fast thinking and rewards cleverness. Be warned: if you get good, it can take a long time to play a game.

Dee's ratings: Mac: * * ½;

Windows: * * * * ½

Jay: If you like arcade-style games with a clever twist, you probably already have a copy of *Aladdin* for the Sega Genesis. If you don't, get one. The graphics are great, the movement surprisingly lifelike; the music—straight from the movie—is additively catchy, and there are great little details like throwing apples at the palace guards to make them drop their drawers. Even with my less-than-lightning reflexes, I still got plenty of mileage putting Aladdin and Abu (in the bonus rounds) through their paces. Question for the designers: where's darling Princess Jasmine?

Jay's rating: * * * * *

Dee: I also loved *Aladdin*, though I got stymied on the second-to-last round. It's still a blast just to play the earlier rounds and try to rack up the biggest possible score.

Dee's rating: * * * * *

Jay: To finish up our picks, here are some other games that have been favorites down through the years: *Strategic Conquest* from Delta Tao (pretty much the same game as *Empire* from New World), a war game with lots of little tanks, ships and airplanes; *Command HQ* from MicroProse, a similar game that runs in real time (both these games can be played over a modem against a live opponent); *Dungeon of Doom* and *Rogue*, great little dungeon-crawl games with lots of monsters, potions and magic (these games inspired *Dungeon Hack* from SSI, which is still pretty hot on the charts); and of course, no list of picks would be complete without *Doom* from id Software, the hottest game on the market today (reviewed in DRAGON issue #203). Sandy talked about violence in computer games in DRAGON issue #207, so I won't rehash the

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issue. Think of it as Roadrunner and Coyote in 3-D if it helps. The guys at work find network *Doom* as good as paintball wars for settling their aggressions. Look for *Doom II* at a game store near you!

Dee: Now for some nix, games that have gotten good press but for one reason or another didn't impress us. This is not to say they are bad games, but be forewarned: there are things about them certain players might not like. The first of these is *Sim Ant* from Maxis. I was very eager to play this game—I loved watching ants and ant farms when I was a kid, and I was fascinated by ant culture and society—but was quickly disappointed. You can run only a little bit of your colony at a time, so the computer has most of the fun in the game—and does far better than you do at expanding. There are some nice touches, but much of the game is repetitious, and a lot of effort was put into making "tools" you can use to "customize" your ant hill and amuse yourself—i.e., the gameplay is lacking.

Dee's rating: X

Jay: I know I'm a bad reviewer when I say that as a class, I don't much like games where you pick stuff up and put it in your backpack, only to discover that you have too much stuff in your backpack, so you take some stuff out, and then fifteen twists

down the corridor discover you need it again, and have to go back, take out something else, and pick up the necessary thing. This is dungeon-crawling, the folks who adore it argue in defense. This is strategy, and puzzle-solving (why would I possibly need this thing?!), and limited-resource management—and I just don't like it. So I was disappointed when *King's Quest VI* had so much of the same old thing. I also was a little annoyed at the "you took a wrong turn two hours ago, so you'll have to restart your game" mentality, and the one-pixel-sized treasures you just had to have. Sigh.

Dee: I also did not enjoy *Privateer* from Origins Systems. The flight-sim aspects were exciting, but the back story was not as interesting as in *Wing Commander*, and the game quickly got too hard for me: it pretends to offer the options of going "all combat" or "all merchant," but choosing merchant is a quick way to suicide. If you like sci-fi flight-sim fighting, go for *Privateer*. If you want a space merchant game, try *Star Control* instead.

Jay: I didn't even give it a try—I'm not interested in games where you have to die six times just learning how to land, or in this case die six times just trying to get out of the system you start in.

Dee: Enough negative stuff. I want to close this month with preview review of a

game I think will be of special interest to DRAGON readers: *Master of Magic* by Simtex, the designers of *Master of Orion*. Published by MicroProse, *MoM* promises to be a mega-combination of *Civilization*, the D&D® game, *KINGS & THINGS**, *TITAN**, *MAGIC: THE GATHERING**, and *TALISMAN** just to name a few of the seminal fantasy board, role-playing, and computer games it owes allegiance to. *MoM* is filled with hundreds of spells and monsters, dozens of heroes, custom-designed wizards (so that every game is different), diplomacy, war, parthenons, fantastic stables—you name it, I salivate. I can't wait.

The last word

Jay: So there you have it: a checklist to measure your own collection by, or to inspire holiday generosity. Because some of our choices are "old chestnuts" (can any thing less than five years old be considered classic, even in the nanosecond world of computing?), you even may find them in the bargain bins as software stores make room for new releases. You know our biases now, too, at least some of them. See if you can predict what we'll say about *Ghengis Khan II* and *Space Hulk* in January!

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- ⇒ **Dealer Room Hours:** 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday, and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.
- ⇒ There is a parking garage adjacent to the Hyatt Regency. The hotel features three restaurants, and there are other restaurants and sandwich shops within a few blocks of the Hyatt.
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- ⇒ **Don't delay!** For more information and a registration form, write to:
RPGA Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI., 53147

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	Friday				Saturday				Sun
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
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RPGA Network AD&D Special/Masters <i>Piper's Hill</i> by Carla Hollar and Nicky Rea		★		★	★		F		
RPGA Network AD&D Grand Masters Members 5th level and up <i>Marius the Majestyk</i> by T. Steed & T. Lambertson	★					★			
RPGA Network AD&D Benefit (\$5 charity event) <i>Only Halflings Need Apply</i> by John D. Rateliff		★		★	★		★		
RPGA Network AD&D Survival of the Fittest Event <i>Sands of Fire</i> by Kevin Melka			★			★		★	★
RPGA Network AD&D Surprise <i>Great Gumballs</i> , by Jeff Grigsby and Mike Dever				★				★	★
RPGA Network AD&D Club Event <i>Tensions</i> by David Baker		★					★		
RPGA Network Living City Platinum Members only <i>Mansion of the Mad Wizard Ren</i> by James Ward				★	★		★		
RPGA Network Living City Gold Members only <i>Slugfest</i> by James Alan	★		★			★		★	
RPGA Network Living City Silver <i>An Ape for Mr. Mooney</i> by Jean Rabe		★			★				★
RPGA Network Paranoia <i>Undocumented Features</i> by Scott Nicholson			★				★		★
RPGA Network MALATRA™ The Living Jungle I Members only <i>From the Gods of Fire Mountain</i> by Kevin Melka	★			★			★		
RPGA Network MALATRA The Living Jungle II Members only <i>Along the River of the Laughing Idol</i> by Tom Prusa		★			★			★	
RPGA Network MALATRA The Living Jungle III Members only <i>Into the Valley of Spirits</i> by Dave Gross (\$5 charity event)			★			★			★
SPELLFIRE™ Championship Two-round elimination event			★	★	★	★		F	F
Axis & Allies Battle Royale Two-round advancement competition							★		F
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HMGS Sponsored Introwars Miniature Bash A wahoo introduction to wargaming		★		★	★		★		★

★ = single round
or first of two rounds
F = final round

Plus, many other events will be available on site!

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Fees: ☐ Preregistration \$15 ☐ OR Judge preregistration \$10
☐ Benefit tournaments: \$5 each ☐ Network Breakfast: \$15

Total fees I have enclosed (Check or Money Order only): _____

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☐ I want to run my own event. I've attached a description and marked the times I want the event to run.

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Mail this form and your payment to: RPGA Network, P.O. Box 515, Lake Geneva, WI 53147

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) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

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

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

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

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

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Important: DRAGON® Magazine no longer publishes phone numbers for conventions. Publishing incorrect numbers is always possible and is a nuisance to both the caller and those receiving the misdirected call. Be certain that any address given is complete and correct.

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 also might 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.

CONTRARY '94, Nov. 10-13 MA

This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn in West Springfield, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, seminars, demos, dealers, and a charity miniature-painting contest. Registration: \$25. Send an SASE to: CONTRARY '94, P.O. Box 628, West Warren MA 01092.

WAR!ZONE CENTRAL '94, Nov. 11-13 FL

This convention will be held at Holiday Inn-Main Gate at Universal Studios in Orlando, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a flea market, an auction, and open gaming. Registration: \$19/weekend or \$7/day on site. Write to: WAR!ZONE CENTRAL, c/o Wolf Ent., P.O. Box 1256 DeLand FL 32721-1256.

LEGENDS-GAINESVILLE, Nov. 12-13 GA

This convention will be held at Lakeshore Mall in Gainesville, Ga. Guests include David Prowse, Mart Nodell, and Barry Kitson. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers. Registration: Free. Event fees: \$2 each. Write to: Legends Ent. Group Inc., 514 Broad St., Rome GA 30161.

PENTACON X, Nov. 12-13 IN

This convention will be held at Grand Wayne Center in Fort Wayne, Ind. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer and war games. GMs are welcome. Write to: Steve & Linda Smith, 836 Himes St., Huntington IN 46750.

SAGA 3, Nov. 12 LA

This gaming-only convention will be held at Howard Johnson Hotel in Metairie, La. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include cash-prize tour-

naments, and open gaming. Registration: \$10. Write to: SAGA 3, 800 Sena Dr., Metairie LA 70005.

IMMACULATE CONVENTION '94

Nov. 13

This convention will be held at the Chelsea Old Town Hall in Chelsea, London, England. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers and a figure-painting competition. Registration: £3 preregistered; £4 on site. Write (and make checks payable) to: Killjoy, Ltd., Dep't. DR, P.O. Box 425, Kingston, Surrey, ENGLAND KT2 7ZD.

EYECON '94, Nov. 18-20

This convention will be held at the Emporium in London, Ontario. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$15 (Canadian) preregistered; \$20 on site. Write to: The Emporium, 123 King St., London, Ontario, CANADA N6A 1C3.

SHAUNCON IX, Nov. 18-20 MO

This convention will be held at the Howard Johnson Central in Kansas City, Mo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, a charity auction, dealers, and seminars. Write to: SHAUNCON IX, P.O. Box 7457, Kansas City MO 64116-0157.

ELLIS CON VI, Nov. 19 CT

This convention will be held in the cafeteria of H.H. Ellis Tech School in Danielson, Conn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include movies and prizes. Registration: \$5. Write to: John Haskell, 613 Upper Maple St., Danielson CT 06239.

LAGACON 17, Nov. 19 PA

This convention will be held at the Eagles' Hall in Lebanon, Pa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, and painted-figure and costume contests. Registration: \$5 preregistered; \$7.50 on site. Write to: Lebanon Area Gamers' Assoc., 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon PA 17042.

WARP'DCON V, Dec. 3 NJ

This convention will be held at Drew University in Madison, N.J. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a miniatures-painting contest, a raffle, an auction, and door prizes. Registration: \$3. Write to: Richard Ditullio, P.O. Box 802, C.M. Box 1405, Madison NJ 07940.

SOUTHWEST COMIC FESTIVAL

Dec. 9-11 TX

This convention will be held at the Austin Convention Center in Austin Tex. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a costume contest, art and miniatures contests, films, anime, and panels. Registration: \$25 preregistered, plus \$10 for a comprehensive gaming pass. Write to: SWCF, P.O. Box 650201, Austin TX 78765-0201.

- ♦ indicates an Australian convention.
- * indicates a Canadian convention.
- ✱ indicates a European convention.
- ◇ indicates an African convention

DARCON II, Jan. 7-8, 1995

This convention will be held at the Danie Van Zyl Recreation Centre in Newlands, Johannesburg, Republic of South Africa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include demos, competitions, and dealers. Registration: R10 plus variable event fees. Write to: Evan Dembsky, 24 Vincent Rd., Rosettenville ext, Johannesburg, Transvaal, Republic of South Africa, 2197.

GAMES UNIVERSITY, Jan. 13-16

CA

This demo-oriented game convention will be held at the Red Lion Hotel in Ontario, Calif. Events include family and adventure role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer and video games, seminars, and dealers. Registration: \$15/weekend preregistered; \$20/weekend or \$10/day on site. Write to: GAMES UNIV c/o Ultraviolet Prod., P.O. Box 668, Upland CA 91785.

RUNEQUEST*CON 2, Jan. 13-16

CA

This convention will be held at the San Francisco Clarion Hotel in San Francisco, Calif. Guests include Greg Stafford, Sandy Petersen, and Steve Perrin. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and an auction. Registration: \$30/weekend or \$15/day. Write to: RENEQUEST*CON 2, 2520 Hilleglass Ave. #101, Berkeley CA 94707.

CONSTITUTION III, Jan. 20-22

MD

This convention will be held at the Best Western Maryland Inn in Laurel, Md. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events.

Registration: \$17 preregistered; \$22 on site. Write to: Chesapeake Games, P.O. Box 13607, Silver Spring MD 20911-3607.

ROUNDCON '95, Jan. 27-29

SC

This convention will be held at the Quality Inn N.E. in Columbia, S.C. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include dealers, contests, a scavenger hunt, and a charity auction. Registration: \$10 before Dec. 15; \$15 on site. Write to: Trella Wilhite, Round Table Gaming Soc., USC P.O. Box 80018, Columbia SC 29225.

WARPCON V, Jan. 27-29

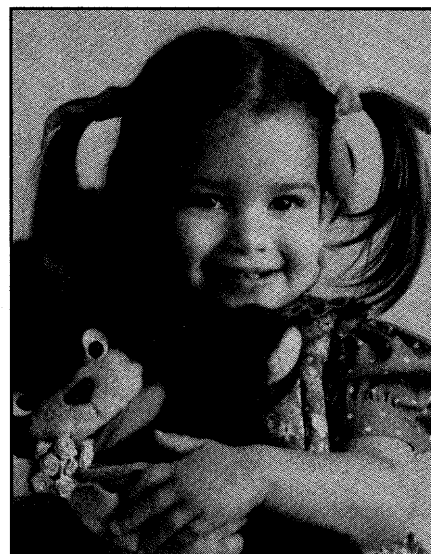
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This convention will be held at University College, Cork, Ireland. Guests include Bill Bridges. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include seminars and contests. Write to: Convention Director, WARPCON V, Office of Residence and Student Activities, University College, Cork, IRELAND; or e-mail: ARHN6001@Iruccvax.ucc.ie.

GAMEFEST II, Jan. 28

IL

This convention will be held at Holy Innocents Church, Fr. Pajak Hall, in Chicago, Ill. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events and raffles. Registration: \$3/general; \$5/tournament. All proceeds go to Holy Innocents Church. Write to: John Kavain, 857 N. Hermitage, Chicago IL 60622.



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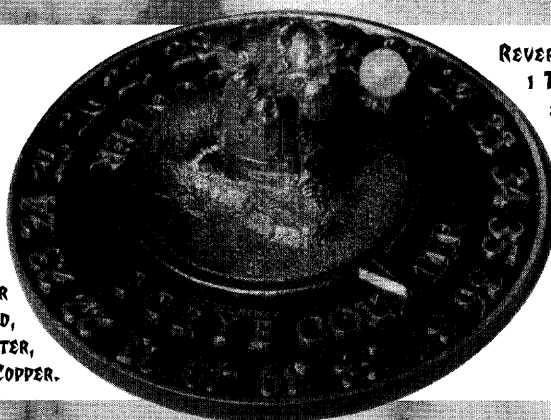
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D-DAY



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—poster seen in many places
at the game fair

There were grave omens that the 1994 Gen Con® Game Fair would be more than the usual titanic, gargantuan, bigger-than-ever affair it had been in the past. First, there was the prolonged media coverage of all things Klingon in local newspapers and TV shows. The 50th anniversary of the D-Day invasion was just two months earlier, TSR reorganized itself on the Monday before the convention, and an elephant rampaged through downtown Honolulu. But the most terrible omen of all, seen right before the show began, was Jim Ward dancing through the halls of TSR with a rapier and a frilled shirt. The mind boggles.

Grave omens indeed. I pondered their





in Milwaukee!

**A look back
at the 1994 GEN CON®
Game Fair**

by Roger E. Moore

meaning aloud Tuesday evening as I drove toward Williams Bay with my adopted "son," Bud, a mannequin I bought at a company auction years ago. Bud ignored me and kept on smiling his secret smile, since we were heading out to Margaret Weis' famous barn-house for her Must Be The Fourth Or So Annual Pre-Convention Madness Party, which every year more closely resembles the original Woodstock in terms of the number of oddballs it attracts and the number of tents pitched in Margaret's back yard. Soon they will add mud.

Bud and I arrived at Margaret's in time to see the ceremonial Taking Out Of The Garbage by one of Margaret's lackies. Then I carried Bud up to the house where a large number of Minneapolians, Canadians, and the other social outcasts hung over the deck railing and yelled for me to come just a little closer.

"Do you have squirt guns? Are you armed?" I said, a bit untrusting since this was the same group who for two years running has thrown paper airplanes at



me. "No!" they yelled back.

So I came closer, and they all threw paper airplanes at me. Bud could have had his eye put out, but luckily he was wearing his glasses. I gave the group a friendly greeting that is best not repeated here, then went inside, placing Bud in the living room to watch *Ghostbusters* on the TV with a few other mannequin-like guests.

It was a great party, a sort of Woodstock 2.1. Almost a dozen tents crowded the back yard, and an enormous card game (the MAGIC: THE GATHERING* game by Wizards of the Coast) was being played out on the deck (the same deck that almost burned up last year at this time, at this same event). I met many people whose names I can't recall for the life of me, though thanks to Margaret they all seemed to have an intimate knowledge of my alleged criminal past.

The party got rowdy in no time at all. Margaret told Ed Greenwood that Raistlin could kick Elminster's butt any day of the week, the deck almost caught fire again (just like last year), and I learned much about the gaming industry that is best unveiled only after everyone involved has died.

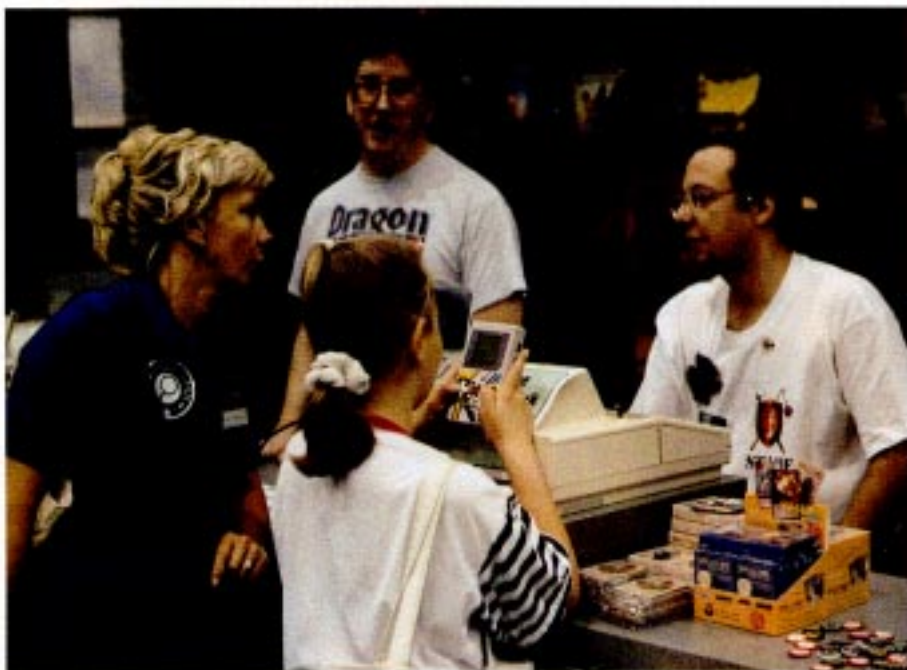
On the good side, Margaret Weis promised not to have me arrested this year for the game fair's Klingon Jail 'n Bail, as she had done last year (with, it seems, the help of your wonderful editor, Dale "Scumsucker" Donovan). [That's Mister Scumsucker to you, bub. —Dale]. Margaret's promise was every bit as meaningful as a Somali warlord's offer of safe passage through Mogadishu, but she is Margaret, after all, so I trusted her. (Background sound FX: "Ah, ha ha ha ha!")

The evening ended all too soon. I finally went downstairs to find Bud watching *The Adventures of Buckaroo Banzai Across the Eighth Dimension* with a wine bottle in his lap. I took his drink away and carried him out to the car, then said goodbye to every one and drove home to rest. As I left, the garbage pile at the driveway's end was the size of the Vehicle Assembly Building at Cape Canaveral. More like Woodstock every year, you bet.

Funny animals, nuclear bombs, killer satellites, and labor camps. What more could you want?

—ad slogan for the KILL EVERYTHING!* game from Crunchy Frog Enterprises

Wednesday found me in a mad panic to finish all the handouts for my seminars, a task I had conveniently put off until the last second. I dropped Bud off in a spare office and began typing away in a Mountain Dew frenzy. When I stopped for a break, I discovered that Bud, with the help of concerned fellow TSR employees, was now "shooting the moon" from his cube at passersby. For a stuffed mannequin, the effect was quite realistic. I hastily fixed his outfit because many employees' families



were touring the TSR building at that very moment. A group of children watched me get Bud dressed again. "That's Bud, right?" one asked.

I finished writing at 4 P.M., then went to MECCA to see what the convention hall looked like. At first, the convention set-up looked to be just as big as last year's, only larger. But the more I looked, it actually seemed even bigger than that.

This year, TSR brought in truckloads of famous figures in the fantasy, comics, and science-fiction worlds, led by Majel "Lwaxana Troi/Nurse Chapel/Number One" Barrett and John "Q" de Lancie (both known for their charitable work with young Klingons and Trekkies), Timothy "Star Wars" Zahn, and Peter "I Do Everything!" David of comics and *Star Trek* fame.

Science-Fiction Saturday was being joined this year by Super-Hero Sunday (followed by Massive-Collapse Monday), and record numbers of events were planned for role-playing, board, miniatures, arcade, computer, virtual reality, interactive, card, strategic, tactical, and thermonuclear games, not to mention actual War College classes, gaming auctions and seminars, writers' workshops, martial-arts demos, slide shows, dramatic readings, fantasy plays, art exhibitions, Jim Ward with armloads of SPELLFIRE™ cards but without his rapier, costume contests and a masquerade, filksinging, anime theaters, and over \$10,000 in game tournament prizes. STAR TREK*, VAMPIRE*, and espionage role-playing events had spilled over into the Hyatt Regency next door and The Safe House, a famous local bar and eatery with a spy theme. There would even be a Klingon musical. A Klingon musical. Think about it.

The list of activities not only suspended disbelief, it wiped it completely out. Other major features included Carel Struycken's Virtual Arcade, Suki's Cybereum, the *Games Magazine* Triathlon, the National Security Decision Making game, the Living City Bazaar, Star Fleet Academy, the CASTLE FALKENSTEIN* Waltz (in full costume, at the Hyatt), Puffing Billy Tournaments, the Weis-Hickman Traveling Road Show, the Desperately Seeking Elvis event, and the Klingon Armada International's Jail 'n Bail, the memory of which caused me great mental duress as I prayed I would not be arrested and tortured by cheerful, grunting Klingon thugs, as happened at last year's game fair.

TSR staffers hoped that the 20,000 attendance record for 1993 would be broken, though we had no clue then that the record would not be broken so much as it would be smashed flatter than a wood-frame building at a Nevada nuclear test site. Blissfully ignorant of the storm to come, we went home and got the last restful sleep we'd know for days.

Have you flogged your crew today?

—bumper sticker seen at the game fair

At 10 A.M., Thursday, I arrived to start my game-fair day. The always remarkable Dori Hein and I gave a seminar called "Toasters as Player Characters." Actually we talked about how to role-play every sort of creature from killer whales and parrots to robots and dragons in every sort of role-playing game. Why can't you be a police dog in a spy game, just for kicks? It was a great seminar, or at least I guess it was since I don't remember any of it now.

The seminar over, I went back downstairs to the main hall. Or I tried to get there. The entire MECCA center was swamped with gamers, billions of them. I squeezed my way into the exhibit hall and was staggered at the sight. Where had all these people come from? We weren't supposed to get this many gamers until Saturday!

The Thursday Surge will live in game-company lore for years to come. All the media attention the convention had been getting apparently had paid off—but at factors of magnitude greater than we'd expected, and much more quickly. Booths ran out of games to sell. Cash registers were hammered until they died. Exhibitors started looking like novice skiers riding down a steep slope ahead of an avalanche. All this in spite of an all-day driving rain outside.

Somewhere in the frenzy and chaos, I thought of Mike, the code name for the first American H-bomb test. Fun-loving scientists had put together a nuclear weapon bigger than a railroad tank car, stuck it on a Pacific island, then set it off. Their math was faulty, so they thought it wouldn't make much of a bang. They were wrong. The blast wiped the island off the face of the earth. (The scientists thought for a while they were going to be wiped out with the island.) We were now apparently having our own Big Mike.

My memories of Thursday are murky but a few stand out. FASA had stunningly realistic computerized animation for its BATTLETECH* videos. TSR's castle had three gargoyles, a smoke-breathing dragon, and an eye-boggling dragon hologram just slightly smaller than a picture window, which stopped onlookers dead in amazement. (It cost \$11,000.) The card booths at Fortress TSR and the great black Parthenon of Wizards of the Coast never lacked for collector-card-maddened gamers, who came in droves for new SPELLFIRE and MAGIC decks. One booth sold gigantic blue dice half a meter high, as well as little tiny empty plastic boxes of "stealth dice."

Perhaps my most shocking memory was the discovery that the soft-drink machines now took \$1 per drink—and gave no change. *Ouch*.

Between an author signing, a FORGOTTEN REALMS® demo, and a stint in the sales booth of Fortress TSR, I got to wander around a bit more and recover my bearings. The CapCom booth had the all-

new *Alien vs. Predator* kill-or-be-killed video game. Several booths revealed that the *Doom* game craze for real-time, big-screen, guns-&-demons, ultraviolent video games was well underway. The White Wolf booth, which last year featured one solitary tombstone, now had a fully stocked graveyard to celebrate its new WRAITH: THE OBLIVION* game. (As one T-shirt slogan reminded us all, "Without life there could be no senseless death.")

I also have to note the individual who came to see me at my otherwise neglected author signing. "Hey," he said. "I really love your stories. You're a great writer. I especially like the one you did about the half-kender who became a knight of Solamnia." He was referring, of course, to a story by another author entirely, namely Nick O'Donohoe. Thanks, guy.

On the upbeat side, I saw many old friends, too many to name here except for the absolutely wonderful Jean Grey, who remembered my love for *velociraptors*, and David Brazil, who asked me a year or two ago to put his name in this column, though I don't have the space to do so until now. Then there were Kimberly and Michael, who gave me some M&Ms last year and gave me some more now, complete with a "Tom Servo"-style M&M dispenser. M&Ms and Mountain Dew—that was my breakfast and lunch three days in a row. Don't try this at home.

The end of my evening came in a seminar jointly conducted by myself, John Rateliff, Skip Williams, and Dave Gross. We were discussing great fantasy literature of the world, and we ended up trying to strangle each other over the issue of whether *The Odyssey* is fantasy or not. (It is, you boogerheads!) (I didn't mean you, Skip.) Then I went home to recover my marbles and get ready for Friday.

Space monsters spit on me.

—quote from the Buckaroo Banzai Excuse Shirt, seen at the game fair

Friday morning was the time of much-heralded RPGA® Network breakfast, which I missed because I was giving a COUNCIL OF WYRMSTM seminar with Bill Slavicsek and Michele Carter. We had the entire audience role-play a council meeting of giant ancient dragons, dividing them into good, neutral, and evil factions. The council was moderated by Bill (a gold dragon), Michele (an amethyst), and me (Bloodtide the Red—oh, yes yes yes!). The council topic was, "What shall we do about those pesky humans?"

I got to open the debate. "War!" I yelled, pounding the table. "Kill for peace!" The audience (the warlike dragon part of it, which was about 90%) cheered me on.

"Now, that's a little extreme," Bill the Good began, as Michele the Neutral made a frowny face and tried to restore order. After a half-hour of richly satisfying bick-

ering, slander, insults, and warmongering, we voted and the war faction won. Yes! Ah, politics.

I ran downstairs with minutes to spare before the doors were opened. The incredible Sue Weinlein popped by at one point and announced, "Good omens today, Roger! I found my Velcro!" I had no adequate reply, so I wandered off to investigate booths featuring gorgeous art trading cards from Jeff Jones, Roger Dean, Rowena, and many artists already famous in the gaming industry. Then Allen Varney, famed game designer/editor, joined me for a demonstration by the truly stunning Val of Khatovar Chainmail concerning the effectiveness of chain-mail whips. I am sworn to secrecy about the rest of the demo.

I got into Fortress TSR just in time, as the doors opened. An unknown exhibitor, upon seeing the 10 A.M. Friday Surge, cried "Oh, my God!" You can imagine the rest. I sold things, talked my head off, and did a seminar with the dynamic duo of Rich Baker and Colin McComb on paladins, whom we all agreed should be shot. Or at least I think we agreed to that. I don't remember any of it.

I'm not obnoxious—I'm tact-challenged!

—bumper sticker in exhibitor's booth

Early Friday afternoon, I took part in a DRAGONLANCE® seminar featuring many of the original "DL" team. I confessed that the entire idea for kender came from a concept I had called "Bunnylance," in which colorful fuzzy bunnies conquered the world, but the rest of the panel took offense and stole my folder with the colorful fuzzy bunnies on the front.

After running an ultimately fatal BUGHUNTERS® game demo, I drove home to change into my tuxedo for the top-secret, by-invitation-only, almost-the-same-place-as-last-year TSR Party. I was only one of two guys who dressed up (the other looked like Colonel Saunders, and I was universally despised by every other guy, who feared I would start a trend. It was great.

It was at the party that I heard some talk from our Fearless Leader of the Games Division, Tim Brown, that something special was planned for Sunday morning. The "something special" would require several trips to a local toy store and maybe cost a few thousand dollars. How wonderful, I thought. It sounded like something sweet and charitable. I could hardly wait. The fuzzy bunnies of Krynn would be proud.

I have no solutions, but I certainly do admire the problem.

—button slogan seen at the fair

There was considerable concern on Saturday that the flood tide of gamers would cause MECCA to slide into the earth

like a car down a Florida sinkhole. I'm here to say that Milwaukee is built on much more solid material than Florida is, though MECCA did drop about a foot toward noontime.

Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman ran their annual Killer Breakfast, during which (so I hear) Buffy went to the RAVENLOFT® setting and over 200 player characters were killed. A mint issue of DRAGON® Magazine issue #1 sold in the auction for over \$200—the first time that's happened. I ran a demo, gave a seminar, and saw part of a bizarre anime film called—so help me — *Dark Schneider*. It made as much sense as the title, from where I was standing. I also got a nose-bleed but haven't a clue how I did. Or was the nosebleed on Friday? I'm not sure. The tornado watch was Friday evening, I think.

In between panels, I got to see a little more of the game fair. While blimping out on the M&Ms that numerous well-meaning people delivered to me, I saw the miniatures gaming area. There were chariot races thundering, BattleMechs blasting, robots bashing, Zulus shouting, tall ships firing, and a gigantic recreation of the assault on Hoth from the second *Star Wars* movie. Hoth took place in "The Arena," a floor gaming area so large you had to walk around on it in your socks to move any pieces. I was sorry I missed the live-action National Security Decision Making Game, in which thoughtful and informed contestants tried to destroy the world, so I don't know if the balloon went up or not.

It had now rained for three days straight, and no one cared. The halls of MECCA were jammed with gamers sitting on the floors trying to lay out their latest collections of MAGIC and SPELLFIRE cards, the personal ownership of which was recently required of every citizen covered by NAFTA. A live medieval-style battle was fought out in front of Fortress TSR, attracting about a trillion onlookers. The computer-games area had two big astronaut-training-style things that I remembered seeing on *Lawnmower Man*, sort of like space-age vomitoriums with cyberspace parts, as well as the usual giant linked-up Doom-style shoot-'em-ups and many BATTLETECH simulators. There was so much to see that my retinas hurt.

I did get a copy of a comic book from the marvelous Phil Foglio, in which Yours Truly appears (look for "007"), and I got a copy of the *Yamara* (yes, that Yamara) comic-compilation book sold by Steve Jackson Games. I also almost visited the science-fiction museum at Starbase 1, but there were 9,300,000,000,000 people standing in line there waiting to get autographs from Majel Barrett and John de Lancie, so I passed and went elsewhere. Besides, there were lots of Klingons around and Margaret had made some snide comment earlier about my imminent arrest, and I was just being careful.

I then did another seminar, then another

seminar, then wound up under the command of the incredible Sue Weinlein, stuck in a small room full of people dressed like Klingons. It looked bad, but then I noticed the Klingons were led by Tim Beach, widely noted TSR designer and notoriously un-Klingon personality, and I knew that I would live.

After patiently listening to various Trekkoid people try to figure out what they were doing, I was off to help set up the Dead Authors Panel, which featured quite realistic live versions of Mary Shelley, H.G. Wells, Edgar A. Poe, and the guy who wrote the Narnia stuff but whose name escapes me right now, maybe you've heard of him. [Editor's Note: Rog is referring to C. S. Lewis. — *The everhelpful Dale.*] I had to leave early to go home and collapse in a sodden heap, so I missed the end of the panel, as well as the much-heralded and justly famed CASTLE FALKENSTEIN Waltz, played out in costume and commanded by the always surprising folks at R. Talsorian Games. Sorry, guys. I heard it was great.

It's not the pace of life that concerns me. It's the sudden stop at the end.

—T-shirt slogan seen at the fair

Sunday I awoke to a beautiful blue sky, the kind that gives your spirit wings and sends your imagination soaring. I felt refreshed and pure. I parked my car in a lucky space right next to MECCA and walked into Fortress TSR at 8:45 with a free and joyful heart.

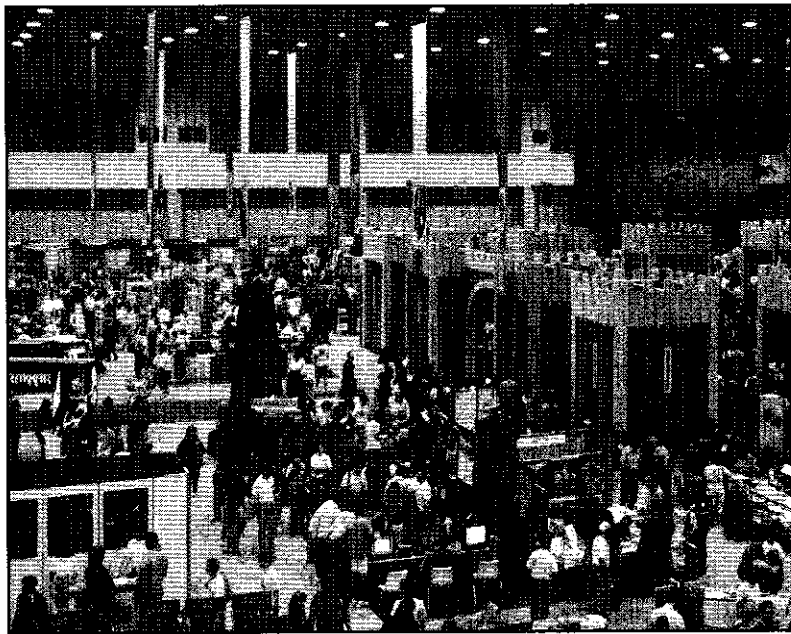
Then I noticed that everyone was armed.

"Here's your weapon," said Fearless Leader Tim, handing me a NERF multibarrel pump bazooka with the firepower of an Apache helicopter. "Don't shoot anyone until Lorraine gets up on the castle wall and orders the attack."

Tim's Secret Plan, it turned out, was to take what probably amounted to TSR's entire earnings for 1994 to date and buy every NERF weapon, from sword to grenade to bow to bazooka to Gatling gun that the local Toys-&-Handguns-R-Us had in stock. Almost the entire TSR staff had shown up in preparation for the first annual TSR Needs More Exhibit Space And Yours Will Do Just Fine demo. Other game companies had talked for years about storming Fortress TSR. This year, TSR was going to storm them.

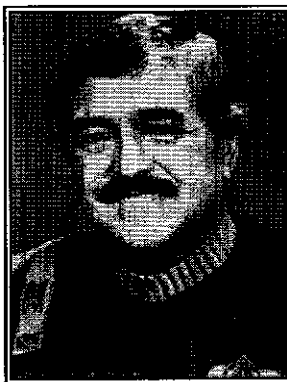
I took the gun, then gave it away to Doug Stewart, who had arrived late and missed the initial handout. I then received about two dozen hand-launched rockets, but gave them away to two other TSR staffers and my son John, who also had arrived late. John was not invited, but it was impossible to keep him away. He took his rockets and began practicing with them on any TSR people he could find. For my part, I took out a pen and paper and became the first-ever quasi-official

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THE AUGUST 10-13 GAME FAIR

DRAGON Magazine war correspondent.

At 9:04 A.M., a spy was caught in the castle and was fired upon by every weapon in existence. He was declared dead 73 times over, though over half the TSR staff was also killed in the attack as a result of "friendly fire." (Mike Stackpole's last words: "Don't shoot! I'm on your side!")

At 9:05, TSR president Lorraine Williams, wearing a red cape and hard hat, took a commanding position on top of a castle wall using a mobile elevator. To the rousing cheers of her bloodthirsty legions, she ordered the annexation of all nearby exhibitor spaces, starting with White Wolf and Wizards of the Coast, then continuing across the hall as far as Ral Partha. Armed staffers charged out and began firing upon stunned exhibitors, managing to take over the R. Talsorian booth briefly before being called back to Fortress TSR to repel a barbarian invasion from the direction of Mayfair Games (whose people had taken off their shirts and hastily constructed shields and weapons from cardboard boxes). Within seconds, a free-for-all battle broke out around Tower 1. Screams and NERF bombs filled the air. I went to work.

"How does it feel to be slain in battle?" I asked one barbarian who was down on his back but still being NERFed by stalwart TSR berserkers. "Inconvenient!" he gasped out. I wrote that down and continued to ask assorted personal and political questions of people who were roaring at the tops of their lungs while firing or hacking their way through titanic NERF melees which soon centered around Towers 7 and 8, on the White Wolf side of the castle.

Most of my notes covering the savage fighting, which actually lasted only 10 minutes, are rather incoherent. I do recall Flint "the Barbarian" Dille holding aloft White Wolf's animal-skull totem, which he had liberated during the fighting, and cries of "No prisoners!" and "TSR will rule!" and "For the Celts!" (curious one, that) rang across the hall. Video footage of the actual fighting was taken by several onlookers, among them Mary Abel of TSR and an attractively fur-clad (but not by much) barbarianette. Famed author Peter David gave a play-by-play commentary on the PA. system, adding in reporter-like asides like "Oh, the humanity!"

At 9:21, "detente" was announced, and the fighting was over. The last warrior to be forcibly made to lay down his arms was, of course, my son John. "Daaaaad!" he protested in disgust, but the cease-fire held. Everyone proclaimed victory, even the losers from White Wolf, and battle scars (all two of them, both belonging to Dori "the Barbarian Who Fell Down" Hein) were displayed to local admirers.

Surreality Just Got Funky!

—banner in exhibitor's booth

After a last pass through the exhibit hall, I ran upstairs to my second "Toasters as





Player Characters" seminar, where Dori and I pointed out the role-playing advantages of being a killer whale while everyone else is a human being (especially if the adventuring party is swimming just before suppertime). Right after that, I ran another seminar on how to handle high-level AD&D® campaigns, then ran back downstairs to run a demo game in the FORGOTTEN REALMS tower (three PCs died, three escaped). That done, I was free to wander one last time before the hall closed at 5 P.M.

Alex Jimenez, justly famous designer from the CapCom area, told me that he was inspired to create some of his most challenging video games because of the grief an old module of mine had given him ("The Dancing Hut," from DRAGON issue #83). I was pleased. The Armory booth held a special event in which hundreds of MAGIC cards were thrown into the air for screaming fanatical gamers to fight over. I thought I would finally, at last see the science-fiction museum at Starbase 1 but stopped when I realized that the Klingons

would see me first. (Better to be safe . . .) I heard later that Margaret Weis herself had been arrested and jailed, apparently on the orders of her own fans, and was forced to sign autographs until her fingers fell off. A pity.

At 4:55, came the long-awaited announcement that the exhibit hall would self-destruct in five minutes. When the fair closed at last, we were too tired to cheer for more than a few seconds. The gamers were herded out, the booths were torn down, the carpet was rolled up, the trash was thrown out, and we took our loot, our frayed nerves, and our incubating viruses and went home.

The apocalypse was over. My fiancée Gail took me to the Milwaukee zoo as my reward. The mosquitoes were tickled to see me.

Dead men can't sue.

—CAR WARS* diorama title
seen at the fair

Monday found all the weary survivors back at work, debating the merits of placing a moat around Fortress TSR in 1995, perhaps with more NERF Gatling guns and a Hawk missile battery. With the generous help of sympathetic co-workers, Bud became a Klingon ("K'Bud") in protest against the baseball strike. I developed a major attack of hay fever combined with an unpleasant intestinal flu that I don't think you want to hear about, and I had one week to rest, sneeze, and visit the bathroom before I flew off to Canada for another convention (WorldCon/ConAdian in Winnipeg—"The Milwaukee of the North").



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**GAMES
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And the final tally on attendance?

25,000+

Some estimates went as high as 27,000. It had been Big Mike, all right. It was a miracle that anything was left of Milwaukee afterward. I can't even imagine what will happen next year.

I had survived the wildest, greatest, and most exhausting of all game fairs in history. But, I reflected, at least this time I wasn't arrested by Klingons. I might be as lucky next year.

Unless . . . but no, K'Bud wouldn't do that to his dad. I hope.

My thanks go out to the makers of Mountain Dew, Allright Parking of Milwaukee (great prices and great parking if you get there early enough), my 1990 Geo Storm (almost 100,000 miles and still running!), and, most importantly, Gail, without whom I would still be a nerd.

See you next year—for sure!

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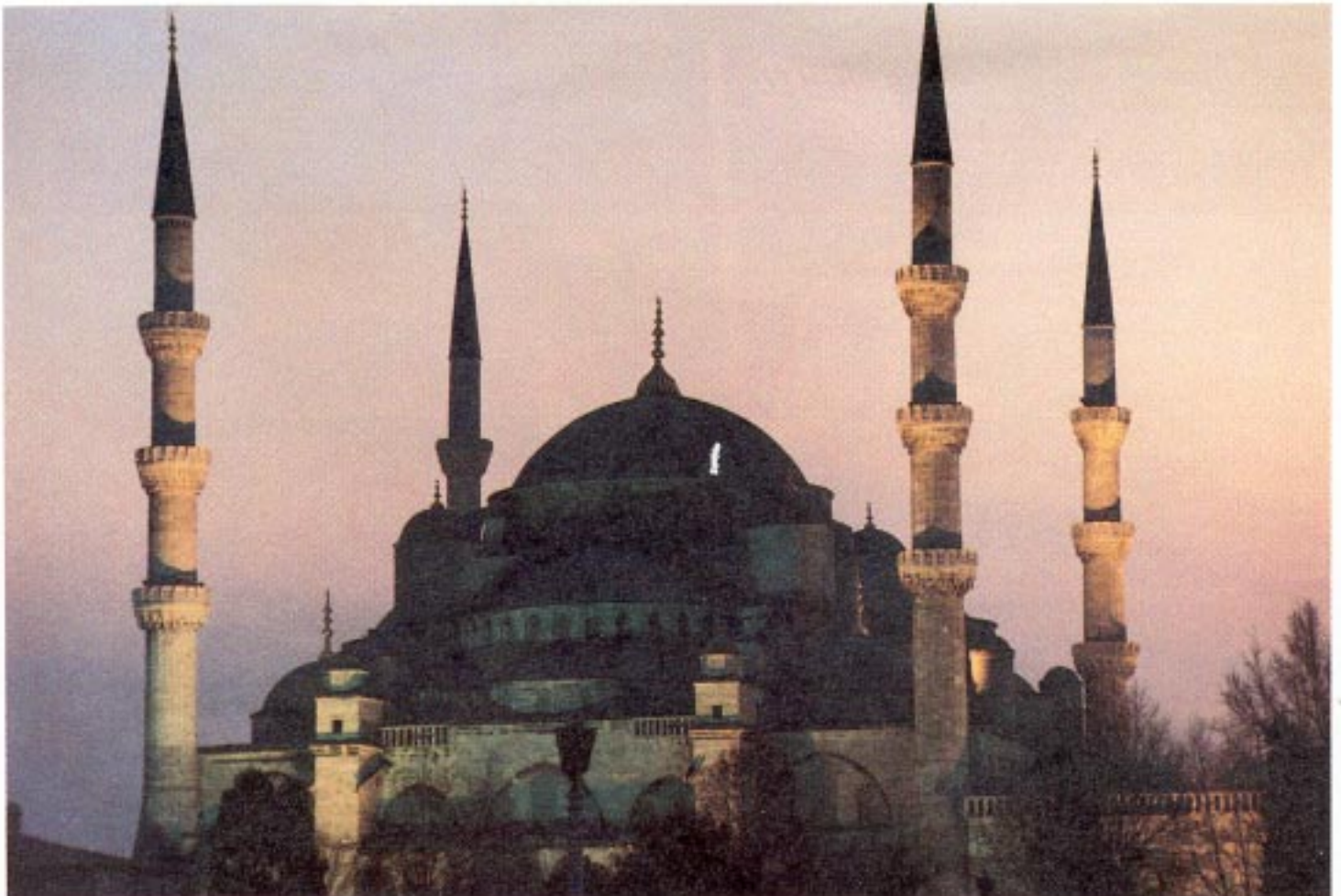
Topkapi *Palace*



by Steve Kurtz

Photography by Karen and Steve Kurtz

Enrich your fantasy castles with a little history



The Ottomans are like unto the sun. Above all they illuminate Europe, but the light of their power shines also on Asia and Africa. They are incomparable to other sultans who are like to stars. All are extinguished in the brilliance of their radiance and splendor. This illustrious, heroic, and intrepid dynasty has been ever victorious, conquering all of Anatolia, Karaman, Diyarbakir, Erzurum, Baghdad, Arabia, Egypt, the Balkans, Hungary, end many other lands, as far as the borders of Germany . . . There is no limit to the power, extent end wealth of their rule.

*—Dedication to Sultan
Suleyman the Magnificent,
by Haci Ahmed of Tunis, 1559*

Adjusting the pack on my shoulders, I peered through the misty morning pale-light on my pilgrimage toward the looming minarets. Topkapi Saray, the legendary Seat of Sultans, the Heart of the Ottoman Empire, the magnificent Palace of the Cannon Gate lay before me enshrouded in the early morning fog. While passage beyond the forebodingly massive gates once may have required permission from the Sultan, I entered bearing only a ripped three-dollar ticket. Within its high, fortified walls, a legion of cooks and servants once attended the powerful Sultan and his entire administration of viziers, ambassadors, and sycophants. In the forbidden, blue-tiled changers of the harem, the Sultan relaxed in the company of his wives, children, and countless concubines. At the height of Ottoman power, Topkapi housed over 4,000 people, a small city in its own right within the Imperial capital.

Today, the renovated palace is a fascinating museum at the center of Istanbul, a monumental display of Turkish art and architecture. Topkapi also contains one of the most astounding collections of riches I have ever witnessed, amassed by 32 Sultans over the past five centuries. The treasures in Western museums do not compare to the staggering opulence of the Sultan's hoard. In retrospect, the Hope diamond and even the Crown Jewels of England are a mere pittance by comparison.

My personal interest in the palace stemmed largely from my work on the ALQADIM® setting for the AD&D® game. In the *City of Delights* boxed set, for example, the Palace of the Grand Caliph in Huzuz was based directly upon the plans of the Topkapi. The palace was already quite vivid in my imagination, long before I set foot in its historic confines. After my visit to Turkey, I looked over the plans of the Grand Caliph's fantasy residence and was amused to note how public chambers were often inter-

preted as private areas of the palace. Sometimes I imagine that Sinan, the court architect of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent, would be mortified.

As any Game Master knows, realistic spaces and objects help breathe life into any role-playing fantasy campaign. In this article, I will explore the history and structure of Topkapi, including some of the treasures and ideas for conducting adventures around the palace. At the very least, I hope to shed some light on Middle Eastern architectural philosophy, so that other Game Masters can devise realistic and exotic palaces for their campaigns.

Locus of antiquity

Topkapi Saray sprawls across one of the largest hills along the Sea of Marmara, overlooking the confluence of the Bosphorus Strait and the Golden Horn, a site of unrivaled geographical importance since ancient times. The waters in this region not only link the Black Sea to the Aegean—providing access to the Mediterranean, the Atlantic, and therefore, all the world's waterways—they also form a bridge between the continents of Europe and Asia. The armies of myriad empires have fought over this strategic location for millennia.

While bearing all the trappings of modernity—from the tram lines and the car-choked streets, to the coal-fire pollution that cloaks the winter skyline in a velvet brown haze—Istanbul also is a living shrine to the ancient past. The city's current name was derived from a corrupted Greek expression (*stin poli*), meaning “to the city.” When “the city” was ruled by last vestiges of the Roman Empire, it was

called Constantinople (from *Konstantinou polis*, meaning Constantine's city). Even before the Romans, as early as the 7th century B.C., the city was called Byzantium—named after the Greek tyrant, Byzas. Although Topkapi was constructed between the 15th and 19th centuries, the structure rests on Byzantine foundations.

By the time the Ottoman Turks conquered Constantinople in 1453, the proud metropolis lay in ruins. Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror was responsible for the renaming and rebuilding of Istanbul. Part of his vision included the construction of the Palace of the Cannon Gate, Topkapi Saray, sometimes simply called the “New Palace” by its contemporaries to differentiate it from Eski Saray, Mehmed's first palace (sometimes called the “Old Palace”). Topkapi was first built between 1465-78, but today nothing remains of the original 15th-century wooden construction. Over the past 500 years, fires and whims of the Sultans have drastically altered the face of the palace. Topkapi was occupied by the Ottoman royal family and imperial administration until the mid-19th century, when the structure was considered “old-fashioned” and abandoned in favor of Dolmabahce, a more modern palace constructed along the north Bosphorus shore in continental French style, with golden fixtures and 14-ton Baccarat crystal chandeliers in every chamber. Some say that the bankrupting opulence of Dolmabahce contributed to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire.

The modern Turkish republic was founded in 1923 by Kemal Ataturk, a tremendously popular figure, whose por-



trait adorns practically every public building in the country. In contrast with many European political upheavals and revolutions, there was no looting and pillaging of the Sultan's palaces. Unlike Versailles, for example, which was stripped clean during the French Revolution, all the imperial residences in Istanbul—including Topkapi and Dolmabahce—were preserved essentially intact with all their original furnishings after the founding of the Republic. Topkapi was opened as a public museum in 1924 and has been under a process of continual restoration ever since. Topkapi contains a wealth of information for game masters and designers alike.

Topkapi Saray

Topkapi's huge, sprawling complex defies simple characterization. Unlike European palaces, which were surrounded by low-lying gardens that accentuated the beauty of the architecture, the palace of Topkapi is obscured by a series of walls, outlying buildings, and tall trees creating an atmosphere of intrigue. As one moves through the courts of Topkapi, architectural elements—domes and minarets—appear and disappear behind the walls. Unless one views Topkapi from the air (or from a map), the overall layout of the palace is difficult to determine and impossible to

capture with a single photograph.

Walking through Topkapi is like peeling away the layers of an onion or uncovering a series of veiled secrets. While the layout of the palace appears to be a chaotic conundrum, with multiple courtyards surrounded by oddly-shaped chambers and crooked corridors, the palace is a surprisingly ordered structure, consisting of four main sections or layers of increasing privacy: the outer First Court, the Court of Ceremonies, the *Enderun* and the Fourth Court, and the celebrated Harem. The First Court and the Court of Ceremonies were used for public purposes. The *Enderun* and the Fourth Court were reserved for the daily activities of the Sultan and his attendants. Finally, the Harem enclosed the Sultan's family in the most private section of the palace. The organization of these four sections was traditionally employed in the layout of all of the imperial Ottoman palaces, and to a certain extent, reflects the design of Middle Eastern palaces. By understanding the role and function of these sections, a Game Master can more easily and realistically incorporate them into adventures.

The First Court

The First Court acted as a protective barrier between the palace and the rest of

the world. Topkapi guarded the entrance to the Golden Horn, and therefore Mehmed the Conqueror massively fortified the outer walls of the First Court, especially along the seaward side, which historically had been the weakest link in the city's defenses. In the 13th century, a flotilla from the Fourth Crusade pulled up to the sea walls during a siege. Crusaders poured into the city by climbing the masts of their ships and surmounting the low adjacent walls. To prevent such a debacle in the future, Mehmed dramatically strengthened the three miles of walls around the palace with numerous cannon emplacements, for which the palace was aptly named (*topkapi* meaning "cannon gate" in Turkish).

The massive Imperial Gate, the main entrance to the First Court, was always guarded by at least 50 Janissaries (imperial guards). Eleven generations after Mehmed the Conqueror, Sultan Murad IV enjoyed firing on pedestrians with his crossbow from atop these gates. Beyond the famous portals, the outer court of the palace contained lush gardens, which were sometimes stocked with wild animals for the Sultan's hunting pleasure. Hagia Irene, one of the oldest Byzantine churches in the world, also was enclosed within the First Court and converted into an armory for the palace garrison.

As many as 500 Janissaries defended the outer fortifications of the First Court in times of peace. These slave warriors, or mamluks, were literally owned by the Ottoman Empire. Hand picked as children from predominantly Christian families and trained in special schools in the art of warfare, they formed the elite corps of the Ottoman army. Despite their official slave status, the Janissaries held a position of considerable prestige in Ottoman society, especially in the Imperial armed forces. They received a regular quarterly wage and could count on fair promotion within their ranks (and perhaps eventually freedom) in exchange for devoted service to the Empire. Unlike other forms of slavery prevalent in Europe and America, the state-sponsored slavery of the Janissaries was not hereditary. The Janissaries could marry, and their children were born free.

The Court of Ceremonies

The inner palace can be reached through the Gate of Salutations, flanked by two octagonal keep towers, where all visitors—including viziers and ambassadors—were required to dismount. Only the Sultan himself could ride a horse into the Court of Ceremonies. Public executions were typically conducted in front of these iron doors, and the severed heads displayed here afterward. In the small fountain outside the gate, executioners would clean the blood from their great scimitars.

A number of Imperial functions were performed in this courtyard, including

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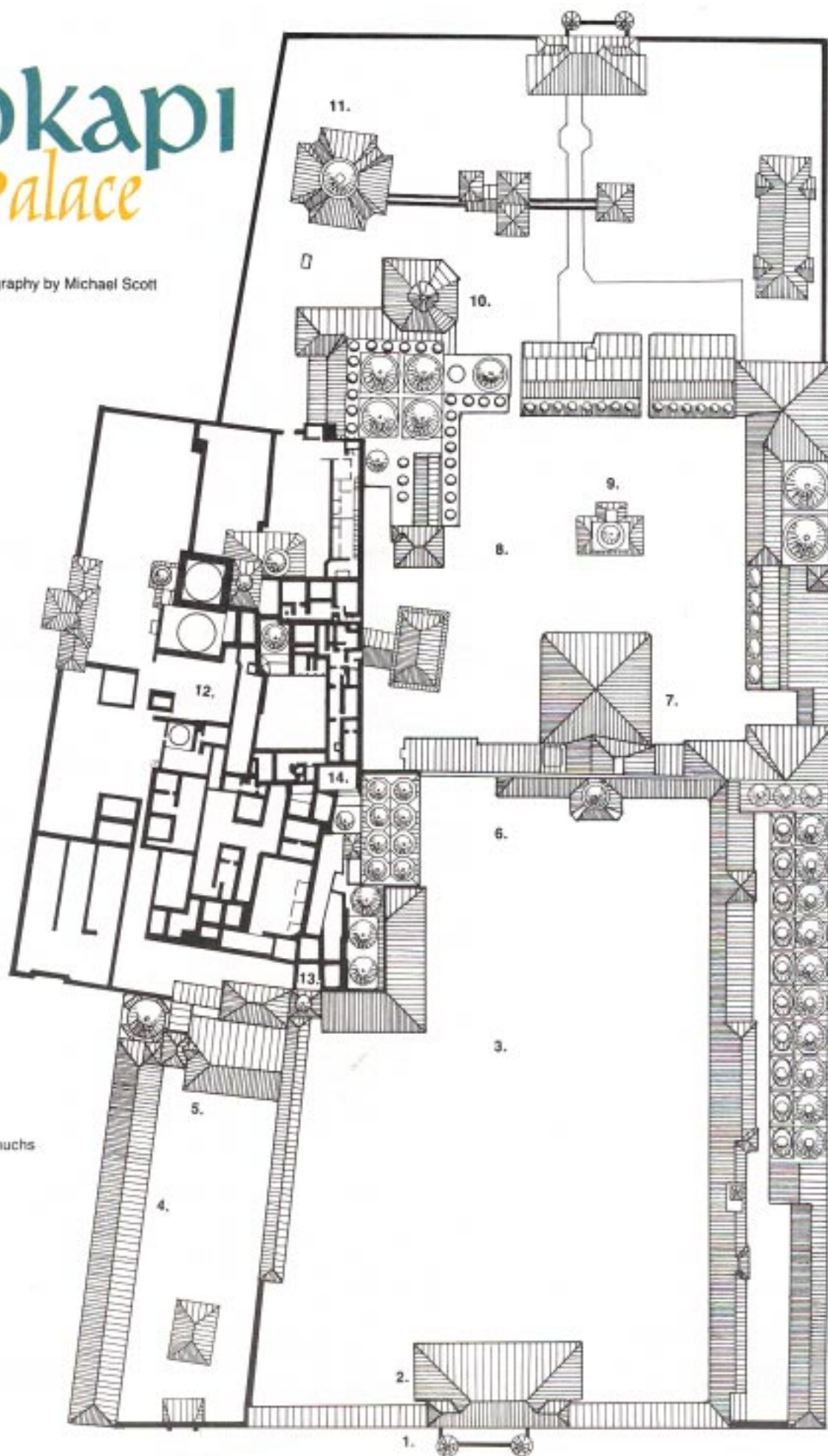


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Topkapi Palace

Cartography by Michael Scott

1. First Court
2. Gate of Salutations
3. Court of Ceremonies
4. Royal Stables
5. Barracks
6. Gate of the White Eunuchs
7. Audience Chamber
8. Enderun
9. Library of Ahmed III
10. Fourth Court
11. Baghdad Pavilion
12. The Harem
13. Entrance to Harem
14. Harem exit



accessions to the throne, declarations of war, religious festivals, and royal circumcisions. The Janissaries were paid their quarterly wages from the treasury in this court. On the occasion of a foreign ambassador's visit, the Sultan would delight in paying the soldiers himself during a public ceremony. Hundreds of soldiers lined up in formation as the viziers brought forward massive trunks, brimming with gold. The display no doubt impressed visitors with the tremendous wealth and military prestige of the Ottomans.

Also known as the Court of Justice, or the Council Square, this section of the palace formed the nucleus of the administration for the Ottoman Empire. The viziers (ministers of state) and the chief vizier (the prime minister) conferred with the Sultan on a weekly basis in the council chambers. One of the meeting rooms was fitted with a large circular window, called the Eye of the Sultan, where the Sultan would sit and eavesdrop on his ministers. In addition to its administrative role, the courtyard always was teeming with visitors, soldiers, and servants who maintained the stables, carriage houses, pantries, food cellars, mosques, barracks, bath houses, and officers' lounges located along the periphery of the court.

The Enderun and the Fourth Court

The entrance to the Enderun from the Court of Ceremonies was guarded by the Gate of White Eunuchs. Crowded with trees and tiny, intricate pavilions, the Enderun gives the impression of intimate privacy. Literally "the Inside" of the palace, the Enderun contained the residence for the Campaign Pages, or Aghas, trained since childhood in courtly arts such as music, poetry, dance, and calligraphy and serving as body servants, guards, and messengers for the personal needs of the Sultan. In this section of Topkapi, one also can find the baths and massage rooms for the Sultan and the Aghas, the lavish Imperial treasuries (detailed later in the article), and the central audience kiosk, where the Sultan would greet visitors of great importance from his wide, golden throne. Aside from the audience chamber, however, the Enderun was typically the exclusive domain of the Sultan and his attendants.

Two stone ramps descend from the Enderun to the tiled terraces of the Fourth Court, the most private of the Sultan's daily living quarters, located farthest from the bustle of Council Square and the confines of the Harem. The court's prominent patio, built around a rectangular pool with a fountain, is surrounded by a number of ornamental kiosks or pavilions, covered with ornate blue, green, and red tiles. From the opulent Baghdad pavilion, the Sultan could sip hot tea from a tulip-shaped glass while contemplating the spectacular panorama of Istanbul spread out below. Other pavilions, perfect sites for reading or reflection, were designed to overlook the tulip gardens and marble

fountains of the courtyard. The Fourth Court was like the royal living room, where the Sultan could withdraw to escape from the responsibilities of Empire and family. Together Enderun and the Fourth Court comprised the personal daily living quarters of the Sultan.

The Harem

In Arabic, the word *harim* means forbidden, and referred specifically to the women's quarters in the household. In Turkey, the harem evolved under somewhat broader lines, consisting of a location reserved exclusively for the family. The harem in Topkapi contained not only the living quarters for the Sultan's wives, servants, and concubines, but also his children and himself. During the Ottoman Empire, the harem developed into a formal, structured institution, with its own strict rules and established hierarchy. After the Sultan, Black Eunuchs were at the summit of the harem hierarchy. Recruited as children in Africa and surgically operated upon in Egypt, they were brought to the harem as children and educated in their duties, which involved not only service and protection, but also the punishment of their female charges. The most powerful Chief of the Black Eunuchs could promote or demote the social standing of any concubine or wife within the harem.

The most powerful of the Sultan's wives, at the summit of the female hierarchy, stood the Valide Sultan, sometimes called the Sultana, the Sultan's Mother, or the First Wife. The Valide Sultan was promoted to her exalted position after giving birth to the Sultan's first male heir. She presided over the harem from the largest suite of apartments, totaling as many as forty rooms, with the best location, ventilation, and sunlight in the palace.

After the Valide Sultan, the Kadineffendis (or Kadins, for short) enjoyed the long-lasting, personal favor of the Sultan. These "Royal Ladies" were ranked by the Chief Eunuch in the Sultan's order of preference, and numbered between four and seven individuals. They shared multi-storied, wooden quarters overlooking a high terraced swimming pool in the harem. Sometimes the Sultan married one or more of the Kadins; more often, however, they remained his most exalted consorts.

The ikbals, or "Lucky Ones," were the Sultan's favored concubines, who shared important duties within the harem. The ikbals received honorific titles, such as the Sultan's Food Taster, the Sultan's Barber, the Sultan's Coffee-maker, etc. which were appropriate to their administrative role. They served the Valide Sultan and cared for the royal children.

Any of the ladies, even the youngest concubine, could look forward to promotion within the harem to the dignified position of the Valide Sultan. If not, after seven years of service in the harem, they were typically married to a powerful

ambassador or a minister in the government. The Sultan's concubines reached the harem from many sources. Some were given as gifts from leaders within the Ottoman Empire, others were presented by foreign ambassadors (blonde-haired girls from Russia were especially favored gifts by the Sultan).

While admittedly fascinating from a male perspective, the harem clearly had its darker aspect. The future of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of women depended entirely on the whim of a single man, with possibly tragic results. One night, Sultan Ibrahim the Mad decided to replace all but one of his 300 concubines. The unfortunate 299 ladies were bound in cloth sacks, wrapped in iron chains, and tossed into the Bosphorus within hours of the Sultan's decision. In the event of a Sultan's death, the entire harem was vacated to the Old Palace (Eski Saray), where they either lived out the remainder of their lives in opulence or were married to eligible public officials.

While the Sultan could leave the harem, his hundreds of concubines were virtual prisoners. All the windows were covered with ornate iron grates. These bars were decorated with intricate honeycomb or octagonal patterns, but they were bars nonetheless. The inhabitants of the harem recognized this fact. One of the harem chambers, for instance, its walls decorated with pure gold, was called the Golden Cage by its inhabitants. The Sultan surrounded the concubines with wealth and showered them with gold, but they could never leave the harem to spend their treasure. If they wanted to go shopping, they had to rely on servants to choose the best goods from the bazaar to suit the tastes of their mistress. In addition, the women of the harem were forbidden male visitors (except doctors and teachers). It was said that even a male fly could not enter the harem without the Sultan's permission. There were rarely exceptions to this rule, since the penalty for adultery according to Islamic law was quite harsh (death by beheading for the man, death by stoning for the woman).

Structurally, the harem is a confusing but intriguing place. Dark, narrow corridors twist at unpredictable junctures and open into bright narrow courtyards. At every turn, stairs lead upward and downward into darkness. After centuries of building, at least two floors of the harem are now completely underground, linking storerooms and cisterns with outdoor pools and fountains. Above the gardens, built upon the terraced roofs of the harem's lower stories, another three levels of predominantly wooden structures were erected in the 18th century. One can become hopelessly lost within the harem's warren of 400 chambers. The stone walls, covered with brightly painted tiles, were recessed with countless alcoves and niches for books, boxes, vases, and turbans. In a few chambers, loud gurgling fountains

were installed to foil eavesdroppers, and secret passages were hidden behind some walls, concealed by panels or revolving mirrors. The entire harem whispers of secrecy, intimacy, and intrigue.

Treasures of the Sultans

In addition to the quarters for the Aghas, the Enderun also contained the repositories for the Sultan's innumerable wealth, a magnificent hoard accumulated by the Ottomans over five centuries. The trade routes of Eastern Europe and Russia were obliged to pass through the Bosphorus Strait, en route to their home ports of call from the Mediterranean Sea. The legendary Silk Road, linking distant China with Persia and Arabia, terminated in Istanbul. Being the inevitable crux of commerce and trade, the Ottoman Empire became fantastically wealthy. One of the Chief Viziers once boasted that the state easily could afford to refit their Imperial Armada with anchors of silver, ropes spun from silk, and sails sewn from satin. The trove on display in Topkapi affirms such arrogance.

The Sultan's hoard contained the following treasures, which the Game Master may care to gradually adapt and perhaps slowly introduce into a campaign to augment monetary booty:

* Collections of antique Chinese porce-

lain with white, green, blue, and red designs, depicting geometric, radial, floral, or animal motifs (over 15,000 pieces, including huge rose medallion serving platters, smaller individual plates, 5' tall vases, and slender decanters);

* Ancient illuminated manuscripts from China and Persia; paper tapestries of religious calligraphy; a writing box and pen holder of carved jade; a coral-hilted pen knife; the first copies of the original 7th-century *Quran*, the holy book of Islam;

* Gilded clocks and music boxes (gifts from European ambassadors); gold and lacquer jewelry coffers inlaid with ivory tortoise shell or mother of pearl and decorated with clover-leaf and floral patterns; a golden box carved in the shape of a fish with ruby eyes;

* Gold-embroidered and gem-studded ceremonial clothing; a jade rose water sprinkler and hand-mirror; egg-shaped perfume vials; golden candle snuffers; spoons carved from tortoise shell, coral, or mother of pearl; zinc flasks and jars inlaid with tortoise and bloodstone; a gold water pipe (narghile) set with intricate floral emblems and geometric designs; a gold-plated cradle for the Imperial heir, massive golden candlesticks measuring 4' tall and weighing over 100 pounds; a collection of five royal thrones;

* Magnificent carriages fashioned from

precious woods and adorned with gold (a fad introduced from Europe in the 19th century); gilded stirrups encrusted with opals, aquamarines, and pale garnets; an emerald-studded horse-crest plumed with white ostrich feathers;

* Ancient religious artifacts of Islam, such as the footprint, hair, tomb soil, and tooth of the Prophet Mohammad; a jeweled case containing the Sword of the Prophet and the scimitars of the first Caliphs, the early political leaders of the Islam; a few Christian artifacts, such as the silver-encased hand and gem encrusted skull of John the Baptist;

* Arms and armor, often engraved with serpent and peacock or eagle motifs or inscribed with elegantly gilded inscriptions from the *Quran*;

—a fabulous jeweled jambiya, the famous Topkapi Dagger, its golden grip studded with brilliant diamonds and adorned with seven huge emeralds;

—a wavy-bladed scimitar with an ivory grip;

—daggers with red coral hilts and grips of carved alabaster, crystal, or horn;

—silver-chased javelins, spears, and halberds;

—a silver-hafted flail with five spherical quartz heads of differing hues;

—a black iron mace from Egypt, topped with a crude lion figurine;



—a gilded *yatagan* (a Turkish short-sword, with a light, single-edged cutting blade);

—lamellar armor with gold-engraved plates and arm guards;

—a mahogany box quiver (for a dozen flight arrows) inlaid with mother of pearl;

—a gilded wooden shield, embossed with rose floral patterns and inlaid with rubies and emeralds;

—a lacquered leather shield, studded with 10 jeweled flowers;

—an embroidered silk bow case, sewn with tiny pearls;

—ivory-inlaid antique firearms, including wheel-lock pistols and heavy arquebuses;

—a heavy footman's mace with a carved head of mottled green jade;

—a black-hafted battle axe, decorated with ripping birds' beaks;

* Vast collections of gems and jewelry: a golden platter heaped with cut peridots and emeralds; the famous Spoon-Maker's diamond (the pear-shaped jewel is almost 2" across and weighs 86 carats); carved jade rings; star-shaped pendants; carved emerald covers for coffee cups; a golden brooch set with a huge mottled pearl; a four-winged turban pendant, set with rubies, emeralds, pearls, and diamonds; a blue enamel pendant shaped like an egg and encrusted with diamonds; wide red velvet belts, covered with amethyst-studded golden buckles; and an ebony walking stick, studded with diamonds.

Certain treasures could be adapted easily into new, exotic magical items. A circular iron shield, covered with four wickedly-spiked bosses and nine blade-catching iron rings, could become a *shield of blade-breaking*, which has the ability to destroy an enemy's weapons. A set of ivory-inlaid bath clogs could provide the wearer with *fire resistance*, and an enchanted rose-water sprinkler, shaped like a perforated egg, might be used to detect the presence of poison in food and beverages. The Game Master is encouraged to adapt the list of treasures to suit the particular needs and flavor of a campaign.

Palaces in a fantasy setting

A palace such as Topkapi would make an ideal setting for a number of adventures and perhaps the focus of an entire campaign. Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the palace is its foundation in an ancient historical context. Excavations in the Court of Ceremonies, for instance, have uncovered huge porphyry sarcophagi, buried since the Byzantine age. The palace was built upon Constantinople's ruined acropolis—what dark, subterranean chambers still remain entombed beneath Topkapi? Some scholars have suggested that Sultan Mehmed the Conqueror abandoned his first palace because it was built on the ruins of a Byzantine monastery and graveyard. Suppose Topkapi were erected over such a site, and unwarranted excavation (for a new well, for instance) disturbed an

ancient vizier's undying repose! Perhaps expansion beneath the harem uncovers a forgotten door, leading to cobwebbed vaults and other mysteries better left undisturbed. In either case, a group of adventurers might be called into the palace to investigate the unusual discovery. Besides ancient tombs, the courageous might discover an abandoned section of the palace, once used as a laboratory or a storeroom for fiendish experiments.

Of course, adventures in Topkapi certainly do not require such subterranean delvings. In one campaign, the characters could be enlisted by one of the Sultan's pages, entrusted with expanding the Imperial collection of exotic treasures or the menagerie of rare monsters. The player characters might even be sucked into a harem intrigue, when the Valide Sultan has a genie or another magically inclined servant collect the party for a special mission against an archrival.

Alternatively, the Sultan can be portrayed as an archnemesis or evil figure in the campaign, in which the Palace becomes a hive for corrupt viziers, vicious mamluks, and depraved executioners. The party might be enlisted by one of the Sultan's enemies in a plot to rescue one of the concubines from the Imperial harem or salvage an important artifact from the treasury. One of the Sultan's victims, before her execution outside the palace, might try to slip one of the PCs a cryptic note: "Tell Kethuda that the Horse has Twenty Fingers and the Moon Sings over a Summer Sky." As the party tries to unravel the enigma of Kethuda's identity, they become embroiled in a conspiracy to destroy the wicked Sultan and replace him with a benevolent prince, who mysteriously disappeared after a "hunting accident" three years ago.

Finally, out in the wilderness, the party might come across the palace in the wreckage of an ancient city. The palace itself might be crumbled into ruins, or somehow been preserved by powerful magic. The littered courtyards, timeworn pavilions, and dark chambers might still contain some remnants of the Sultan's former riches, scattered about the tiny alcoves and secret vaults where mad, gibbering horrors lurk in the darkness. Topkapi can be adapted to each of these visions, baleful and benign, providing a detailed setting for countless adventures in a Middle-Eastern campaign.

Traveling to Topkapi

As Allen Varney pointed out in his article about the Underground Cities of Turkey (DRAGON® issue #201), traveling to Istanbul is relatively easy (Newark-Istanbul fares range from \$750-\$900, depending upon whether you want a direct flight or stop-overs in Europe). Topkapi is located in the Old City of Istanbul, called Sultanahmet, surprisingly close by other major attractions, including the Blue Mosque, Suleymanyen Mosque) the Basilica

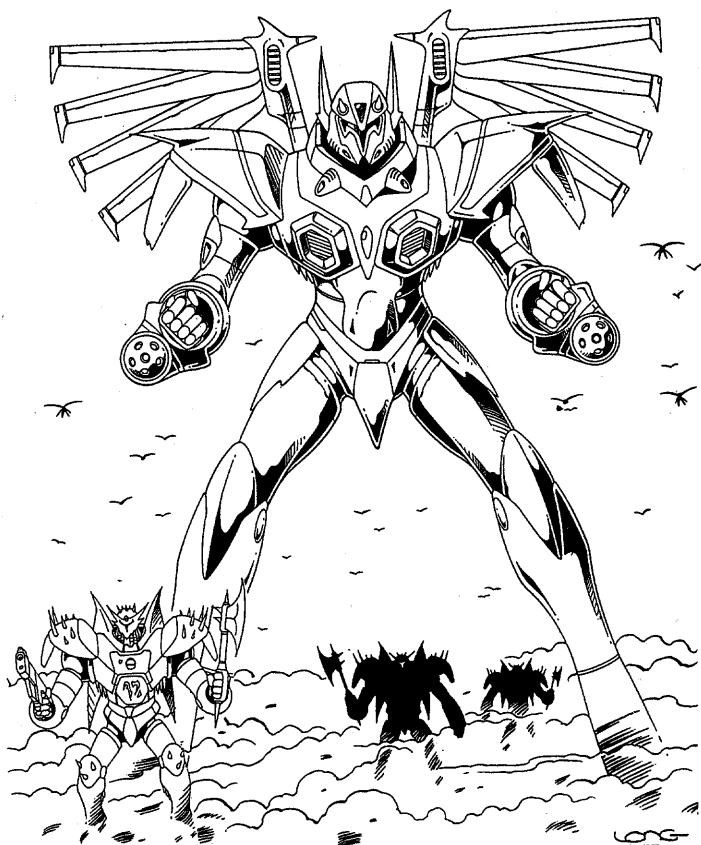
of Hagia Sophia, the Basilica Cistern, the Museums of Archaeology and Turkish and Islamic Art, and (of course) the spectacular Covered Bazaar. For the economically minded, check out the Frommers Guide (Turkey on \$40 a Day), which despite its lousy maps and occasionally poor directions, does manage to highlight cheap locales to eat and sleep.

My wife and I stayed at one of the small bed-and-breakfast hotels in Sultanahmet called the Berk Guest House (\$24 single, \$32 double), which was located within two minutes' walk of Topkapi and eight minutes from the Grand Bazaar. In addition to its wonderful location, the proprietor of the *pension*, a charming young woman named Yeshim, provided us with helpful advice and even included us in her circle of intimate friends for Christmas and New Year's Eve. Yeshim was not the only example of warm Turkish hospitality we encountered during our two weeks in Turkey. In general, we found Turkish people to be exceedingly warm and friendly, perhaps because they have had a long history of dealing with travelers.

Outside the Ottoman and Byzantine heritage of Istanbul, one can explore the underground cities of central Turkey (as reported by Allen Varney) and visit the excavated remains of the Hittite Culture, which dominated central Anatolia many thousands of years before the Byzantines rose to power. Otherwise, one might investigate the western Aegean coast, where ruined Greek cities sprawl magnificently across the acropoli of barren mountains and secluded valleys. Even more ruined cities lie along the southern, Mediterranean coast of Turkey, interspersed with Crusader castles and modern vacation resorts. For the historically and archaeologically inclined, a sojourn in Turkey promises to be a fascinating experience.

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Forum

"Forum" welcomes your comments and opinions on role-playing games. In the United States and Canada, write to: Forum, DRAGON® Magazine, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147 U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Forum, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd, 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We ask that material submitted to "Forum" be either neatly written by hand or typed with a fresh ribbon and clean keys so we can read and understand your comments. You must give us your name and full mailing address if you expect your letter to be printed (we will not consider a letter submitted anonymously), but we will withhold your name if you ask us to do so. We will print your address if you request it.

I read Mr. Kutcherfield's letter in DRAGON issue #203 with some degree of pity. I'm sorry that his experience with "role-players" was a negative one, and it certainly seems, from the example he gives, that the players in question were out of line (at least). I would be among the first to agree that excessive role-playing is injurious to the smooth running of an adventure. However, my own view is that a modicum of role-playing keeps the game interesting, and disruptive behavior of any kind should be quelled by both the GM and the other players.

I have played games in which the adventure was a "mere" tactical exercise (my term for such games). I also have played games in which the players, in character, worked more or less together to achieve their common goals. I have enjoyed both types of games. Which ones do I still remember after twelve years of gaming? Games with interesting characters.

I remember a schizophrenic wild mage named Akbar, whose favorite spell was *Nahal's reckless dweomer*. He would cast this spell in combat so often that I, as GM, had to create 200 new wild surges to keep from repeating results from the table in *Tome of Magic*. Akbar had a funny accent, too. Was Akbar efficient as a tactician? Certainly not. Could Akbar finish fights as fast as a combat-machine wizard? Never. Was Akbar a joy to GM? Yes, wholeheartedly. But the key difference between Akbar's player and the players in Mr. Kutcherfield's letter, I think, is that Akbar's player never stole time from the adventure in order to showcase Akbar's weird-

ness. Akbar was weird in context, and that made him special to us.

Anything, if exaggerated, becomes intrusive. Recently, I played a fighter/fire-elemental wizard named Del, who had a natural dislike of water and cold weather (it's what made him become a fire-elemental wizard). So, not only did he hate boats but also, while adventuring in frozen lands, Del stacked firewood and a lit brazier on a *flying carpet* because of the temperature. If I had "role-played" every aspect of Del's search for wood, choice of brazier, and use of the carpet, I would have been wasting time. If I had expressed Del's woe at traveling on a boat for a half hour of real time, I wouldn't have been doing anything that was "superior" to any other aspect of the game. Instead, I chose to bring out one of Del's character traits with just a brief note to the GM and a brief description to the other players.

I can think of a dozen other examples, but I don't want to waste space. I don't agree that "most gamers" are "sick and tired" of role-playing, and I'm concerned by that assumption. I, for one, can't stand players who use characters like surgical tools instead of using them to drive and enhance a story. "Play-acting" has its place, just as information-gathering tactics and combat have their places as well.

It is the GM's responsibility to keep things moving and not allow the game to bog down in trivial matters. In my campaigns, nobody would have waited for the pompous Lord Alan and Captain Sir Allen; they would have been left behind, and the other characters would have gone on to achieve their own goals. Of course these blowhards shouldn't get any experience points for "role-playing;" they're being silly and disruptive. No GM should create an atmosphere where disruptive behavior is tolerated. A single player in my campaigns would never waste two hours of real time getting a character's costume ready for a party; if a player dared to try, that player would be told to write a description of the costume while I advanced the plot with the other characters. When the costume was ready, I would then tell the "self-indulgent fop" how much it cost and when the character could re-enter the action, based on how much time the costume took.

"Problem role-playing" isn't acceptable in my campaigns. I don't think Mr. Kutcher-

field likes it, either. But I think part of the blame rests with the GM, whoever that was in Mr. Kutcherfield's campaign, for allowing it. However (and this is a big however), some gaming groups find a lack of role-playing to be egregiously bad manners. I don't pretend to tell any of those people how to play, but at the same time they do not control the way I play. The last time I checked, everybody had a right to his own opinion. Problems arise when someone forces that opinion on others.

RPGs are for fun, and it's the GM's responsibility *and privilege* to make sure they remain that way. I'm sorry to hear that Mr. Kutcherfield has had a bad example of, and a bad experience with, one facet of gaming that I like very much. Now, I don't expect Mr. Kutcherfield, or anyone else, to simply take my word for any of this, and I certainly don't expect anyone to abandon the games they enjoy for the ones I enjoy. I don't hold myself out as someone who has the answer to every RPG problem. My point is simply this: "too much" and "enough" are relative concepts, and if you want to keep "too much" out of your games, it's *your* job.

Eric C. Putnam
Arlington VA

"The play-actor spends more than two hours of real time getting the costume ready, talking to various NPC clothiers and hairstylists the GM had to whip up as needed."

"... the play-actor is a self-indulgent fop whose excessive zeal for personal details steals valuable playing time from the rest of the group..."

In issue #203's "Forum," Joe Kutcherfield attempts to prove a point. Unfortunately, his argument misses that point. His thesis consists of the notion that proper role-playing and character development result in wasted time and spoil the fun of RPGs. His reason for this belief is the erroneous suggestion that role-players care only for trivial information (such as the proper spelling of their first names, talking to various NPCs who are of little importance to the scenario's plot, and "yammering in an accent").

Mr. Kutcherfield seems to feel that role-playing games need more emphasis on "achieving the adventure's objective, outsmarting the GM, beating the crud out of the bad guys, etc." and he complains that

XP tables are not geared toward promoting such endeavors. Oddly enough, in many systems the opposite tends to be true.

I do not feel that goal-oriented gaming is wrong. I even think that combat-driven adventures can be enjoyable, but to belittle the importance of role-playing is to deny the potential of RPGs.

In his letter, Mr. Kutcherfield provided an example of how a "play-actor" type of gamer can severely disrupt an RPG. I find it difficult to believe that his example scenario (part of which has been quoted at the opening of this letter) ever took place in a real game. I can, however, cite many examples of how not role-playing can ruin the fun for all those involved. How many GMs out there have not been disappointed when faced with a group of characters that are practically nameless, faceless, generic beings?

I admit that "role-playing is not the alpha and omega of the game," but I truly believe that combat, tactics, and even dice-rolling are only parts of the greater role-playing experience.

While I love problem-solving and combat-oriented scenarios, good role-playing must be at the heart of any RPG. That's what the name means.

Michael Patrick
Pennsauken NJ

In reference to Joe Kutcherfield's letter in issue #203, I can't help but wonder if he would not be happier playing a simple, easily handled tactical game along the lines of, say, Avalon Hill's ADVANCED SQUAD LEADER* game. Mr. Kutcherfield's complaints about "excessive" role-playing are, at the least, a throwback to the 1970s "bash the monster, grab the loot" school of gaming. In the past several years, all the major game producers have come to the realization that combat and adventure are much better when framed by an engaging story line that grabs both the hearts and imaginations of those involved in its unfolding.

If Mr. Kutcherfield's examples are to be taken as true anecdotes, as opposed to hysterical hyperbole, the only thing that I can see ailing his game is a lack of control by the game master. Any GM who would allow two players to spend half an hour arguing about the correct spelling of names is not worthy of the title. In his second example, the Halloween costume party, if one player out of a party of three wants to spend two hours of game time covering every ounce of minutiae, the only way this can be allowed is because of, once again, a lack of game master control.

As a role-player and game master of nearly twenty years' experience, I would never allow one player to so dominate the proceedings. In the aforementioned situation, each player would have been given a brief opportunity to describe her costume and any unusual preparation that she planned to make. Only then, and only if

the situation called for it, would PC/NPC interaction take place. Mr. Kutcherfield's outspoken belief that the objective of an adventure is to "outsmart the GM" and "bash the bad guys" once more speaks of an intellect more disposed to controlling American troops at Bataan than managing human interpersonal relationships.

From my own experience, both as a player and GM, the most memorable moments in two decades of role-playing haven't come as the result of dice rolls or rule interpretations, but rather as the result of people dealing with other people. An example: In a Hero Games' CHAMPIONS* game that I ran, a Russian superhero found himself fighting a German supervillain. In Mr. Kutcherfield's worldview, we should have compared statistics, rolled dice, and applied damage quickly and dispassionately in order to expedite gameplay. However, I would not trade a thousand mechanistic, "efficient" combats for the memory of Gregor rising from the rubble of a shattered conference room, swinging his plasma rifle around, and, in a classically cheesy Russian accent, shouting, "Remember Stalingrad!" as he sent the Teutonic bad guy through the window.

Every set of role-playing rules contains the admonishment that the rules are guidelines. The position of game master needs to be taken quite literally. Not only do you need to take the rules as a guide, but your players

and their preferences need to shape the direction and style of your game as well. If all you want is to "bash the beasties and grab the money," more power to you. But don't complain about those of us who enjoy exploring the cultures and personalities of our characters.

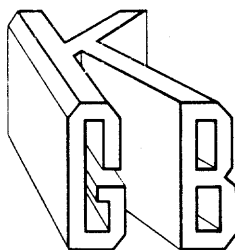
Douglas E. Berry
E. Palo Alto CA

I am writing in response to Joe Kutcherfield's letter in issue #203. In it, he talked of the negatives of the emphasis put on role-playing. Mr. Kutcherfield was correct in his comments about role-playing being excessive at times, but in his examples he went too far into the extreme. No gamer I know of (and I know many) would "argue for half an hour over how to spell the names of their characters" or "two hours deciding on a costume." The baseball metaphor makes sense, but it just doesn't apply to role-playing. Also, he failed to realize the difference between play-acting and role-playing. In play-acting, you play the character, be it in a play, a game, or what-not, to the extent that almost all the elements in its life are played out. In role-playing, however, you play a character by determining what action to make according to what the character's personality dictates, plus a little play-acting here and there when it doesn't interrupt the flow of game time.

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In another comment, Mr. Kutcherfield ridiculed the belief that role-playing is superior to all other aspects of adventure gaming. I believe he might have had the wrong idea about this. From what I've read in the books, this statement only applies when the DM wants to make the game and the world as realistic as possible. Mr. Kutcherfield's example was poor and wouldn't hold up. Unfortunately, he seems to think that it was meant to be used in every game and situation.

In my group, we all like to play out our characters. We also know when our role-playing goes overboard. Whatever the case, though, the group has fun. Mr. Kutcherfield would have fun with it, too, if he'd start to set up limits to role-playing and to hurry things up if role-playing starts to take too long.

Joshua McMillin

The debate over how much emphasis should be put on role-playing that has been going on in these pages seems a bit silly to me. There have been numerous letters written by people who seem to be arguing that theirs is the best way to play an RPG. It seems to me that many of these obviously experienced role-players are missing the point.

I have run and played in a variety of RPGs with equally varied participants. Many of these campaigns were successful,

a few were not. I have found, however, that there is no formula that the successful games followed. One game I witnessed was a traditional AD&D® campaign in which each of the three players played two 20th-level-plus characters in a *Monty Haul* campaign. I cannot honestly say that they had less fun than some other players I ran in a role-playing-oriented vampire game set in Seattle. In the AD&D campaign the players caused a lot of carnage every time they played, and enjoyed every minute of it. In the vampire campaign we rarely got a lot done in less than two hours and spent a lot of time just talking, eating, and making fun of various role-playing systems.

I know many people who get impatient when not much gets done at a role-playing session, but it seems to me that they are more worried about playing the game "right," or even playing the game at all, than having fun. In the vampire campaign I am sure we had a lot more fun than we would have had if we had stuck strictly to the adventure, and the players of the super-powered AD&D campaign certainly had more fun than I did when I played my first "real" AD&D game with a 1st-level character. One doesn't have to do in-depth role-playing to have a good time, nor does one have to play mid-level, moderately powered, perfectly balanced characters. In fact, it is in my experience that good GMs

don't even need to have balanced PCs. The two best campaigns I ever played in featured massively under-and overpowered characters, and just the right amount of role-playing to allow each character a full share of the adventures.

My advice is this: Don't lose track of why you're role-playing when arguing about how to role-play. If you're having the time of your life playing a personality-devoid Immortal in a D&D® game, keep doing it. The most important thing about role-playing games is that while they are much more complicated than most other games, they have the most potential of any kind of game, and can be played so that anybody can get enjoyment from them.

Jason Wright
Brookline MA

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What's your opinion?

What is the future direction of role-playing games? What problems do you have with your role-playing campaign? Turn to this issue's "Forum" and see what others think—then tell us what you think!

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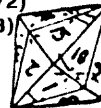
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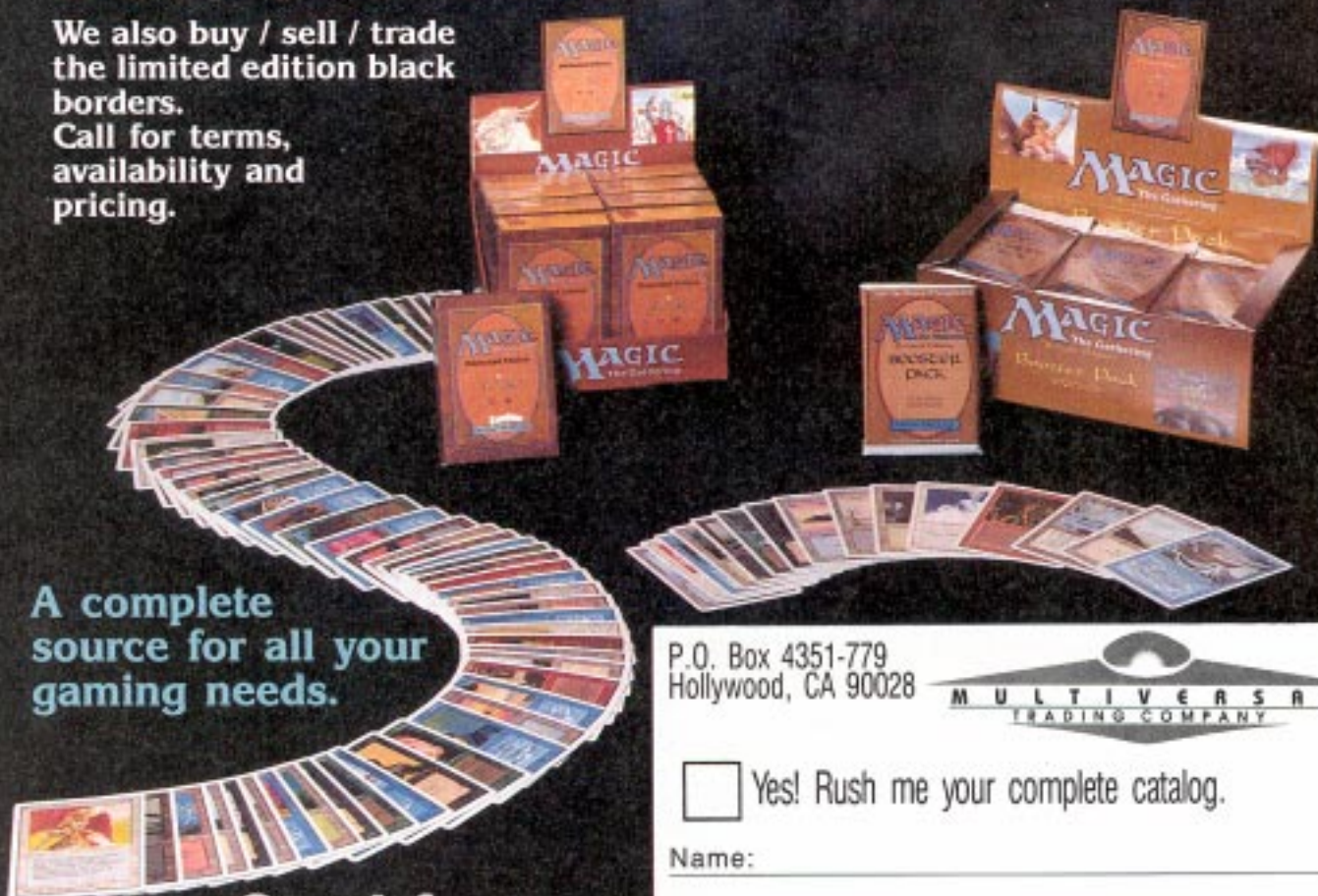
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Lead Story: TSR Announces New Licenses

TSR, Inc., announced several new licensing deals at the 1994 GEN CON® Game Fair. Listed below are just some of the hot new products to look for in the future:

TSR has just signed a licensing agreement with Interplay Productions, Inc., the premier game-software publisher. Interplay now has the exclusive license to produce electronic games set in TSR's FORGOTTEN REALMS® and PLANESCAPE™ settings—including computer, home video (cartridge games), coin-operated, and interactive on-line games. The first products are expected to hit the public in about 18 months.

Also on the electronic frontier, TSR has awarded extended licenses to Strategic Simulations Inc., to produce additional RAVENLOFT® computer games through 1996. SSI also will create a series of additional SLAYER fantasy adventure games (for the 3DO system) in 1995, and further products in 1996.

TSR has received news from Universal Studios in California that the WILDSpace™ adventures have been picked up for syndication on the USA cable network, starting in early 1995. Likely broadcast time is Saturday mornings.

In 1995, Friedlander Publishing Group, Inc., will release two sets of TSR art trading cards. One set will feature the work of Jeff Easley and the other the art of Clyde

Caldwell. Each deck will be composed of 90 cards.

TSR is working on even more licensing agreements. Watch this column in future issues of this magazine for more details.

Off the wire: Electronic update

MicroProse Software has announced an exclusive agreement with the Wizards of the Coast (WotC) to publish an interactive on-line computer version of WotC's MAGIC: THE GATHERING® trading-card game. The game, which will be available only on CD-ROM, will allow stand-alone and interactive on-line play, and will feature the cards from the Revised Edition of the game and the *Arabian Nights*, *Antiquities*, *Legends*, and *The Dark* supplements. Expected minimum requirements include CD-ROM drive, IBM-PC 386 or compatible, 33 MHz, 4 MB RAM, SVGA graphics, and mouse.

The electronic game publisher, ORIGIN, has announced that *Wing Commander III: Heart of the Tiger* will be released this fall. Featuring the acting talents of Mark Hamill, Malcolm McDowell, and John Rhys-Davies, this "interactive movie" comes on two CD-ROM discs for the IBM-PC and compatibles. The IBM version requires a 486/25SX machine, a double-speed CD drive, 8 MB RAM, and 10 MB of hard-drive space. A 3DO version also is planned.

We hear from the FASA Corporation that the release of the BATTLETECH® COMPENDIUM: CD-ROM project has been rescheduled for release in early 1995. "Rumblings" first mentioned the project in DRAGON issue #205. (For those who need a weekly 'Mech fix, check out the BATTLETECH animated TV series that debuted this past September. Check your local listings for details.)

Weis & Hickman return to Krynn

After almost 10 years, Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman are returning to pen another novel set in the world of the DRAGONLANCE® Saga they helped create. "After 10 years, there was still a story to be told," said Weis. "As we accompanied our characters into the future, we discovered a new threat that would bring the world full circle, as fall leads to winter, and spring into summer." *Dragons of Summer Flame* continues the stories of the characters featured in the novella collection, *The Second Generation*, focusing on the survivors of the War of the Lance and the heirs of the Companions. The novel will be published in hardcover, with an initial print run of 200,000 copies. Look for the book in late 1995. Also, *The Second Generation* collection will be available in paperback by March, 1995.

Creators wanted

Event Horizon Publications recently launched the MAGIC FRONTIERS® role-playing system and needs freelance authors and artists to write and illustrate science-fiction books and adventures. New writers and artists are encouraged to submit their work. For free submission guidelines and game catalog, send a #10 SASE to: Guidelines, c/o EHP Box 8275, Omaha NE 68108.

Whispered Dominion, a new SF gaming magazine, is looking for artists and writers. Accepted work will be paid for. If interested, contact: cgreene@julian.uwo.ca or log to GOLDEN EAGLE BBS: (519) 680-7761, Canada's gaming BBS for direct upload of work. Membership is \$2 a year.

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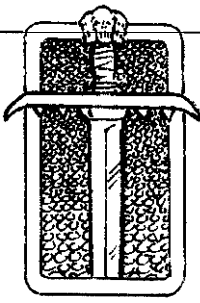
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he rough wood of the bakery felt warm against the boy's rain-soaked back. He flattened against it, absorbing splinters along with heat, and fought to still his shivering. Squinting against the rain, he made certain that no one watched him from the narrow alley.

He shifted sideways, sliding his bare feet through scratchy weeds until an awning blocked most of the drizzle. Here he traded concealment for warmth in the yeasty air that wafted from the bakery's rear window. His flexing hands slowly lost their tremble but began to sting as they thawed, as did his lower lip. He realized that he was biting it.

The window was at his shoulder's height. He lifted his arm and reached backward, edging his fingers in over the sill beside his ear to find and gently grasp a biscuit, crumbly and still warm. His stomach growled.

A massive hot hand clamped down around his, crushing the biscuit between his fingers. He jerked his arm back from the window, but the flour-covered fist held him trapped.

The boy yelped and scrambled, half dragged, through the open window onto a table, into the thick sweet smell of the bakery. The baker loomed like a powdery tower in the bright lamplight. The baker's fist, still locked over his own, hauled him forward and he fell off the table, dragging two trays of biscuits to clang and scatter across the floor. The baker jerked him into the air and shook him until rainwater flicked off to sizzle against the ovens.

The boy stuffed a biscuit into his mouth.

Cursing, the baker carried him out the front door into the damp cold and threw him into the street. The boy sprawled in the mud, gibbering words to lessen the coming beating.

"No more, you little rat!" the baker screamed down at him, punctuating his words with kicks. "You'll not thief my table any more!"

"And was he stealing sweets, Master Baker?" asked a soft voice from out of the rain.

The punishing foot stopped in mid-kick. A man clad in a muddy brown cloak peered down at them from the back of a muddy brown horse. Beneath the cloak glinted worn traveling mail. "Or was it," the man continued in a whisper, "just bread?"

"He's a thief, my lord. He's always—"

"Answer my question."

Sucking sounds came from the horse's hooves as it shifted its weight in the mud. The baker glared down at the boy. "I only caught him with biscuits this time, but—"

"I am wondering something, Master Baker. I am wondering what the report would be if I asked Father Boras up at the shrine how much bread you have contributed to the poor this year."

The boy soon found himself riding the horse up the shrine trail, munching biscuits from a bulging flour bag, the thrill of riding exceeded only by the thrill of eating all that he could hold.

He sat behind the saddle's horn, in front of the man, and shared his cloak. "He was scared," the boy said. "You could've made him give us more."

"His was the greater need," said the soft voice. "More

Lifegiver

By Darren C. Cummings

Illustrations by Charlie Parker

would have hindered his understanding."

"I don't understand."

"I know."

Rain was falling on the biscuits. The boy gathered the cloak about the bag, exposing the pitted pommel of a sword. His eyes widened at the rubied skulls that adorned it. The man covered the weapon.

They had reached the shrine. Autumn's wet had accentuated the old burn scars on the marble columns where dark licks of evil heat had long ago lapped at the smooth whiteness of the stone. Father Boras worked inside, near the Everlit Hearth, hammering together some villager's offering of wood to repair the shrine's shutters before winter.

The man dismounted before the columns, keeping the sword, and embraced the old carpenter-monk. The boy ate another biscuit.

"It's late, Kheth," said Father Boras, his face wrinkling into a smile. "I was wondering if you'd finally miss a year."

"The barons don't stop their squabbings at my convenience. Not even for my trip to the shrine."

"And who is this you've brought me?" They turned to face the boy.

"Someone in need of guidance. And food." The man touched the monk's shoulder and moved alone around the Hearth to the altar.

The monk smiled up at him. "Come in, boy. Have some soup with those biscuits."

The boy dropped off the horse and backed carefully away from it until his muddy feet slipped on the polished marble of the shrine's steps. Father Boras placed a bowl on the edge of his work table and motioned him over to a warm bench.

As the boy slurped up the hot broth, he watched the man called Kheth kneel before the altar, his sword held forward.

Father Boras resumed his shutter mending. "He prays for the soul of a friend," he offered.

The boy whispered, "Why does his sword have skulls in the handle?"

"Ah, that," sighed the monk. "Well, that requires some telling." He paused and glanced to the altar again. Then he set down his shutter, leaned forward, and quietly began.

Kheth reached the fifth trap as dusk was creeping through the stunted trees near the mountain's final ridge. He uttered the last of the sacred words and fifteen feet of the trail ahead shimmered, then disappeared. Where the trail had led now waited a hungry pit whose bottom was piled with bones and rusting metal.

Kheth turned, crouching, and peered down the mountain through the reddening light at the trail snaking away beneath him. The only movement was the rhythm of the scrub junipers and patchy grasses in the evening's new breeze. Once again he memorized the route to the ravine where he had left his horse. Once again he scoured the trail for movement.

No one followed him. Not yet.

Kheth edged around the pit's dry, crumbling lip. He jogged up the steep trail, climbing onto the bare granite of the exposed ridge. The trail ended at a stone forest of

looming boulders.

Then he stood at last before the hovel of Gregor the hermit, keeper of the Lifeleech.

The hermit had chosen to live in a nick on the mountain's granite spine, a crevice between two of the great bare boulders strewn along the ridge top. Odd lengths of wood, woven together, formed an outer wall to seal the crack.

The stick door fell in as Kheth touched it. He jerked his mace free and waited for his eyes to adjust to the gloom.

"Gregor," he growled. "The priests have sent me."

"Hello?" said a bright voice from inside.

"Gregor?" demanded Kheth. "Who speaks?"

"I'm . . ." The voice grew quiet. "Not Gregor. Are you prepared for a shock? Gregor is no longer with us."

"Gregor is dead?"

"Over a year now. I hope you weren't close."

The red dusklight found its way through the warped wall to shine on the shack's interior: a collapsed table, a single stool, a rusting pot in the fire pit, a bunk holding a small bent skeleton.

On the far side, in its own pool of dying light, hung a scabbarded sword.

"I come," Kheth said, "to take the weapon called the Lifeleech."

"Um, sorry," said the voice. "No one here bears that name."

"I come to take it to its destruction."

"Now, listen. There's no one here—"

"So lying is among your dark arts?" Kheth asked, stepping carefully into the shack, his eyes fixed on the sword. "How did you kill the hermit, Lifeleech?"

It answered, the sound forming in the air about it, "Perhaps I should clarify. See, there used to be a sword by that name. In fact, I used to bear that name. But that's not my name now. Now I'm Lifegiver. So you see, you've come a long way for—"

"Silence!"

"That's Life G-I-V-E-R. 'R' as in 'repented,' and—"

Kheth strode forward and reached for the weapon.

"It's a trap! Don't touch me!"

Kheth froze, his hand curled around the scabbard, not quite touching it. His jaws knotted as he considered the deadly magic that Gregor had used to keep this sword hidden from the forces of the Shadowed One.

"It's really horrible," said the sword ominously. "A curse upon him who touches me first. It takes ten, maybe twenty years to kill. A rotting, leprous affliction. Of the groin. And—"

Kheth pulled the weapon off the wall and began to wrap it in a long, spell-proof cloth.

"Very well, I lied about the curse," the sword said.

"But I'm serious about the name. Now I'm called Lifegiver. I've repented." Its voice began to muffle under the folds. "You've got to believe me! I converted. *You* try spending ten years hanging on a wall listening to that old hermit and see if you don't change your ways!"

The cloth ran out as Kheth shrouded the spiked guard and black snakeskin grip, leaving only the skull-bearing counterbalance uncovered: four faces of bone with ruby eyes. The gems flickered up at him and the sword's voice whispered, "Please . . . what can I do to prove myself? I

haven't taken a life in years. I swear it! I—"

Kheth shoved his gauntlet over the skulls and listened to the silence. He moved to peer from the shack's doorway. There were those who desired to repossess the Lifeleech, those whose growing power had caused him to come for it. They may well have tried to follow his path through the sacred traps. If so, he would encounter them on his way back down the mountain.

He glanced back at the hermit's skeleton, frowned, then gave the Sign of Parting. With the shrouded sword in his left hand and his mace in his right, he slipped from the shack and into the darkening forest of windswept junipers.

Kheth ran back along the trail and scuttled around the pit trap. The sky purpled in the west as he raced through the stunted trees, skittering down pebbly slopes. Stumbling, he nearly fell into the dry ravine in which he had left his horse.

He crouched and leaned out over the sandy lip to peer down, squinting into the gloom for landmarks. The streambed's smooth features, twenty feet below, slowly gained texture. At last he found the remembered stump.

He heard a shout behind him.

Kheth scrambled on all fours, searching madly along the ravine's crumbling edge for his hidden rope. He slashed at the thick bushes with his mace.

Something moved to his right. He threw himself prone along the ravine's edge, brambles raking his skin. Torchlight filtered through the thorny bushes. Voices shouted ahead and behind.

With a prayer, he rolled left over the crumbling edge of the ravine and slid into its darkness. He grabbed the bushes' scraggly root-mats, swung free, and both his weapons clattered down into the shadows. He felt sand and rock spew from beneath his boots as he kicked at the wall for a foothold.

Below him a light flickered.

Kheth became still, as part of the roots. He willed his fingers to lock against his weight.

From the lower edge of his vision he watched two riders approach, one bearing a torch, one a cocked crossbow. They passed beneath him. He stared down, watching their torchlight under his boots, and felt his back tighten, anticipating the puncture of a barbed iron bolt.

Through matted roots he glimpsed rubies sparkling in the torchlight. His gauntlet had slipped off the pommel when the sword fell. It could speak. He was trapped.

The soldiers paused to confer, slightly to his right. Leather creaked as one dismounted, whispered, remounted. Kheth's hands began to slip through roots grown muddy from his sweat. He drew a long breath and tensed for the fall.

The soldiers wheeled their horses and galloped back the way they had come.

Kheth fell, scraping a sandy avalanche with him to land in a heap beside the sword.

He lay in the dirt and flexed his hands, listening to the hoofbeats until they grew fainter. Then he rose and shook the sand away.

"Better run," whispered the sword. "They found your mace."

He grabbed the sword. "Why didn't you speak?"

"And your horse, too. I told you. I have converted. Now I would suggest you climb or, at the least, make some haste."

Kheth squinted into the dark in both directions, then turned up the ravine away from the riders, and ran.

His boots thudded against the silty sand. "Torches!" warned the sword, twice, and both times they hid against the wall while riders rumbled by above them.

Labored minutes passed and a sliver of moon rose. The ravine narrowed to become a steep, twisting wash. Kheth was considering climbing out when the wash split before him.

"More torches behind us," said the sword. "Better climb."

"No time," gasped Kheth. He sprinted into the narrower right fork and flattened into the shadows. "They may separate. We'll take them here." He whipped the weapon free of cloth and scabbard. The moon flashed in the mirror of the blade.

"We?" whispered the sword. "Take?"

"Fight and kill. Surely you remember how."

"Actually I, well . . ."

"You had enough practice against our troops."

"Precisely. Which brings up the point I made earlier about having given all that up." They could hear the approaching horses' hooves thudding on the sand. "Remember? Life G-I-V-E-R? 'R' as in—"

"They come."

"I believe you underestimate your climbing abilities."

"Silence!"

"I don't want to do this."

"I said, 'Silence!'"

A knot of horsemen gathered at the fork, their torches flickering on armor and swords. One dismounted and began to study the ground, creeping closer. Twenty feet from where Kheth hid, the man straightened.

Kheth strode out of the shadows, swinging the man's death.

"Lives!" screamed the sword. "Lives! I will feed on you all!" The man bolted. The blade caught only air.

The weapon's maniacal laughter filled the ravine. Evil red light flashed from the skulls' ruby eyes. Horses reared. Men cursed and fought to control their mounts. Torches and weapons fell.

"Hot lives for dinner!" The sword's cackling was madness and fear and pain. "Lives!"

Kheth chased his target forward and the man scrambled back from the sword's point. The skull-lights flashed up into Kheth's eyes, blinding him.

"Fresh lives for feasting!"

Kheth crouched and tried to see, blinking through spotted vision. To his right he heard the twang of a crossbow. The sword twisted in his hand and sparked as it deflected the bolt.

"I'll eat your lives!" The sword twisted again and sparked twice. Its skulls flashed and blinding light flickered over the bowmen's faces.

Then silence fell across the ravine but for the sound of running boots on rock. The only light remaining flickered from two still-lit torches on the sand.

Kheth rose from his crouch and stared at the refuse

about him, then at the thing in his hand.

"I suggest," said the sword, "that you pick up something else if you intend to hurt someone. I'll have none of it."

"Monster," Kheth whispered. "You lying monster."

"I don't follow—"

"I'll fall for no more of your tricks! All to keep me from harming one of them! You sensed my skill, didn't you?" He slammed the sword back into its scabbard. "You still serve them somehow, don't you?"

"I know this is all very difficult—"

"You want to turn me from the Truth!"

"Nothing could be further from my—"

"Silence, monster!"

Kheth collected the fallen bolts and a crossbow and flung them up out of the wash. He wrapped the sword's scabbard again in the spell-proof cloth, then looked at the gleaming pommel. It seemed quiet now and he had much climbing ahead, so he pulled his gauntlet onto his hand. He looked long at a plain sword lying beside one of his attackers but decided against the extra weight; he had his knife. Clambering up, clawing at the dirt, he was already planning his way down the dark mountain.

Dawn had spread through the sky by the time he stumbled upon the winding Pilgrim's Road. Kheth leaned against a tree, finally allowing himself a moment's rest, and looked south along the road. For hundreds of years the road had led the penitent up from the great lowland cities to the temples and shrines nestled in the dry hills. Kheth looked out at the dark smoke clouds of the plain and wondered if he was, indeed, the last of the faithful to make the trek.

He had been sent from his place on the capital's outer wall, where the fighting had been going badly. Now he was one of the chosen to ensure the final destruction of the evil artifacts captured during the war fought in his grandfather's days. The priests had decided that it was time to retrieve the scattered and hidden devices of evil.

Some said that the Shadowed One had risen to wage this new war because He knew that the priests had finally learned how to destroy His creations. If the artifacts could be destroyed, He would have little reason to continue His onslaught. At least this was the hope of those who had sent Kheth for the sword.

Kheth cared not. If the sword was important to the Shadowed One, then Kheth would destroy it, were he the last of his people. He straightened and began to march into the hills as day brightened on his right.

When the sun's dry stare beat down from directly overhead the sword finally whispered. "Would it be treasonous," it asked, "to suggest that you rest?"

Kheth blinked and glanced around, finally finding the road. He, or it, had veered. He was staggering, but he walked on for several minutes, not willing to stop at the sword's suggestion.

He collapsed behind a fallen tree, cradling the crossbow. "Wake up."

His eyes snapped open. Trees, weeds, a log.

"A rider," hissed the sword.

An armored horseman moved along the road. Fear chased away Kheth's sleep, and he began to crawl sideways through the light brush, three-limbed, his right arm

ready with the bow.

"Don't hurt him," whispered the sword from behind the log. "Perhaps you could stun—"

The man screamed, clawing at Kheth's bolt in his chest. Kheth burst upon him, pulling him down before the horse could carry him off. The empty bow proved an effective club. The forest grew silent again.

Kheth cooed softly to the prancing horse and slowly approached it. He eyed the saddlebags and thought of food. The reins dragged along the road's dust and, after much soothing, he put a foot on them.

He ate and drank from his enemy's rations and mounted his enemy's horse. Strength flowed back into his stiff muscles as he rode to the sword and scooped up the weapon to fasten across one saddlebag.

"A few days to the shrine," he said, "and we'll be rid of you forever."

He strapped the crossbow onto the other side of the saddle, then urged the horse to canter through the trees and savored its smooth speed. Fed, armed, mobile, Kheth returned to the road.

His arm exploded in agony.

Another rider bore down upon him, stowing a spent crossbow and drawing a sword. A barbed iron bolt stuck out from Kheth's right arm, and blood spouted from around it to spatter in the dust. Kheth wheeled his horse away, kicking it into a gallop.

Each hoof-strike seemed to twist the barbs deeper into his flesh. Sticky red spread down his tunic. He could hear the hunter gaining behind him.

Kheth jerked his horse away from the road and crashed through limbs that slapped back at him like angry hands. He fought back at the branches until he broke through into a clearing.

Here a trickle of a stream pooled. Reflected in it was a forest of old cottonwoods, their long white trunks like a grove of bones. He splashed through the images and spurred the horse into the trees.

He slid off, lashed the reins to the largest tree, and grappled for the crossbow. He fumbled at the crossbow's cranequin with the bow between his knees, his right arm flopping uselessly.

Branches cracked from across the clearing. He kicked the bow away and wrestled his knife out left-handed.

He took cover behind the cottonwood's thick trunk, but he found himself sagging against it, watching red droplets dribble down the smooth white bark to his feet. He squeezed his eyes shut against the sight and tried to listen for the other man's approach.

From across the stream came the creak of leather as the hunter dismounted. Then Kheth heard the sharp rattle of a cranequin as the other man cranked his crossbow to readiness.

"Draw me," said the sword on the saddlebag.

"The coward speaks?" Kheth whispered. "The Sword of Gentleness wishes to be used? No, I'll die with normal steel in my hand."

"And in your arm. Draw me while you still can."

Kheth glanced around the trunk's side. "Your lights will not dazzle with the sun overhead. Nor, I think, will the laughing avail much. No."

"Listen to me. My name is Lifegiver. Before, in the old days, I took. Now—"

Iron stabbed into Kheth's neck. He gurgled and spun, flopping against the horse.

"Draw me!"

The horse skittered sideways and Kheth fell after it. One bloody hand closed upon the sword and pulled it with him. He tumbled into the brush.

And sat up.

Two bolts fell away to lie beside his hand. He picked them up. They were wet with blood, as were his clothes, but he was whole. The pain was gone.

"Don't kill him, please," said the sword weakly. "I'll not have his death added to my sins."

Kheth stood. The hunter froze halfway across the pool, his crossbow spent. Kheth threw the bloody bolts to splash at the man's feet, shifted the sword to his right hand, and beckoned him forward.

The man stared down at the twin red trails in the water and licked his lips. Then he turned and fled.

"Thank you," murmured the sword. "I thought you'd prove worth it."

Kheth explored his throat and arm and found them completely healed. "Worth what? What did you do?"

"I've been saving that life a long time. My last one."

"Last life? What?"

"A leech takes blood. I used to take lives. For my wielder."

Kheth held up the weapon and admired its rubies in the sun. "So you give life as well as take?"

"I stole the lives of good men to empower monsters. No more. That was my last. You had better get riding."

Kheth recaptured his skittish horse and mounted. As they splashed back across the pool he redrew the sword and admired its balance and design.

"Now I understand the legends. How he who wielded you was invincible."

"Those invincible men all died. I could only heal them when I took others' lives."

"And now you claim to hunger no longer?" The limbs slapped at Kheth as they rode back into the trees.

"Well, I must admit that I still have odd moments . . ."

Kheth slashed the limbs with it.

"Stop!" shrieked the sword.

Thick limbs sheared apart and leaves began to flutter down about them. The trunks to either side groaned and popped.

"Oh, no," moaned the weapon. "I'm sorry. You surprised me. I'm so sorry."

Amazed, Kheth watched two stout trees wither from the sword's cut. The leaves browned, then dropped, followed by the branches, heaviest first, then the lighter until the trunks themselves splintered and collapsed.

"I couldn't help it," wailed the sword. "You didn't warn me. Oh, I've sinned again."

"Your voice seems the stronger for it."

"It was an evil habit. You set me to thinking of eating! My vows . . ."

"They were just trees. Can you heal me again now?"

"Just trees? That's how it starts! Then a toad or a bird. Then—No! I made a vow. Many times."

"But can you heal now?"

"Perhaps your scratches. I kept Gregor healthy that way, finishing off rabbits for his stew. Fixed his splinters and his chewed nails. He had perfect teeth, you know. But I could do nothing for the back he was born with. Or, in the end, his age. I hung there and watched him die and knew my healing a lie. Then I took my vow."

"But any life lets you heal?"

"Better my own life be taken after all! Would you defoliate the forest with me? Are you worth ten thousand trees? Your wounds took a man's life. And I won't take another's. Would you see men go the way of those poor trees? It's horrible. Trust me."

They found the road. "Sword?"

"Yes?"

"I do begin to believe you."

"Ah," it murmured. "Well, then. Perhaps it was good that I . . . but no." The skulls' eyes flashed once. "Sheathe me and ride, I have vows to renew."

They rode.

The miles passed with the hours. The diminishing stream crossed the road several times as they wound ever higher into the hills. Twice they hid from pursuing packs who made more noise than they.

Darkness finally shrouded them. The sword threw a dim red light ahead from its ruby eyes and they rode on, easily avoiding hunters' fires and torches. Kheth slept at dawn, holed up in a thicket with the sword standing watch.

This became their pattern. Using each night's cover they slipped steadily northward. They rode deep into the short, steep hills, and the thickening forest grew close overhead to hide the waning sliver of moon. Four long cold nights were broken by dawns, and on the fifth morning they stood outside the shrine and admired its mountain marble columns.

Kheth held the weapon lightly and started the horse forward. "I haven't been here since I was a boy. It seems smaller, now."

"I should be joyful to see it, too."

"I wonder if the priests get enough food these days?"

"Kheth—"

"Though perhaps with their spells they can conjure whatever they need."

"Kheth, I don't want to be destroyed."

Kheth nodded, still looking at the shrine. "I'll tell them what's happened to you. About your vow. They will know how best to use you. Sword, if together we could man the wall . . ."

"No killing, Kheth. Better that I be destroyed. How many fatal wounds do you have to survive before you stop wanting to live? How much pain before you hate me for sending you back for more?"

Kheth laughed. "Perhaps you should be a priest, sword. Though how you would wear the robes . . ."

Blood was smeared on the columns.

Kheth dismounted, crossed between the pillars, and stepped carefully into the doorway. Bodies lay strewn inside, priests slaughtered on their own defiled altar. Kheth cursed and drew back.

Crossbow bolts and war cries flew from the trees.

The horse was hit, reared, and sprang away. Marble chips and metal bolts bounced between the columns. The sword spun and sparked, blocking furiously, as Kheth fell back inside the stinking shrine.

But an iron bolt had pierced his stomach.

"They were waiting for us," he hissed. He limped across to the altar and peered outside at the armor glinting behind the woodpiles. "Surrounded. Can you block enough to get me across to the trees?"

"No. Too many. You've already been—"

"Will they close? Wait for dark?"

"They fear us. They'll keep back. But you are bleeding."

Kheth slumped onto a bench and cut his sopping tunic away from the red shaft in his flesh. "I could pull it," he said. "But the wound could start spurting."

"I can give you the tree-lives."

"Maybe there's some salve." Kheth grunted to his feet and searched through the wreckage. He found a small basketful of salves intended for the war. They were all unopened; the dead priests had been allowed no chance to use them.

Kheth eased to the floor among other bloody bodies. He smeared salve about the shaft, then grasped it in his right hand. In his left he held the sword.

He was pale and panting, semiconscious, when it was done. Between the sword and salve the wound was closed—but not before the iron barbs had made a pool of Kheth's life on the floor.

Something rattled and broke across the wooden roof.

"Can't hit me down here," mumbled Kheth, lifting the sword. "Come and get us."

"That wasn't a bolt, Kheth."

Other objects thunked overhead, and soon they could smell smoke.

"I don't want to burn."

"Over there, crawl to the door. There's more air."

The air was warming as the roar of the flames grew. Kheth slumped against the door frame with the sword across his lap. A wide red smear marked his passage across the marble.

"Stay awake, Kheth. Kheth! The roof is going to fall. Slide that table over you." Kheth raised his arm to grasp the table's edge. It would not move. "Can you get under it?"

Kheth began to cough and shook his head. "... all a trick? Knew all along ... " He pushed at the sword on his lap with lifeless arms. "Trapped me ... torturer."

"Kheth. No, Kheth. I was on your side before I met

you! Will you die without believing me?"

"... created out of lies ... "

"I need a life to heal you!"

The middle of the room crashed down in an explosion of heat and sparks. Kheth flinched away from the flames and fell partly out the doorway. The smoke blocked sight of even the columns.

"Tool of the Shadowed One," Kheth whispered. "Monster ... " He felt the hungry flames licking his feet.

Then he was whole again.

Kheth rolled out the door as the rest of the roof fell. The blast of heat was less shocking than the sudden absence of pain. He squirmed away through scalding pillars to find cool grass and enough air to crawl to the trees.

Thick smoke hid him as he sneaked past a knot of laughing crossbowmen. He relieved them of horses that had been tethered too near the road, mounting one and leading away the rest, each laden with weapons and provisions.

Kheth galloped northward and threw back his head to laugh. "You did it! We live!" He waved the sword in the air.

But the sword did not answer.

Kheth reined his horses to a stop and gently wiped the soot from the gem-encrusted pommel. Then he could see that the light had gone out of its rubies.

The sword never spoke again.

The boy's broth was cold. The old monk refilled the bowl while the boy watched Kheth pray.

Father Boras picked up his shutter once more. "You've heard the rest. How he gathered us in the hills into an army, how he led the rebellion, how he organized the baronies, how he carries Lifegiver wherever he goes. And now you see how he comes here each year."

The boy could see old scars on Kheth's neck, writhing in the firelight. "Why does he come?"

Father Boras bent over his work. "I used to think ... well, I used to tell him that the sword would be happy about all that he's done with its life. I thought it would make him feel better, you see?"

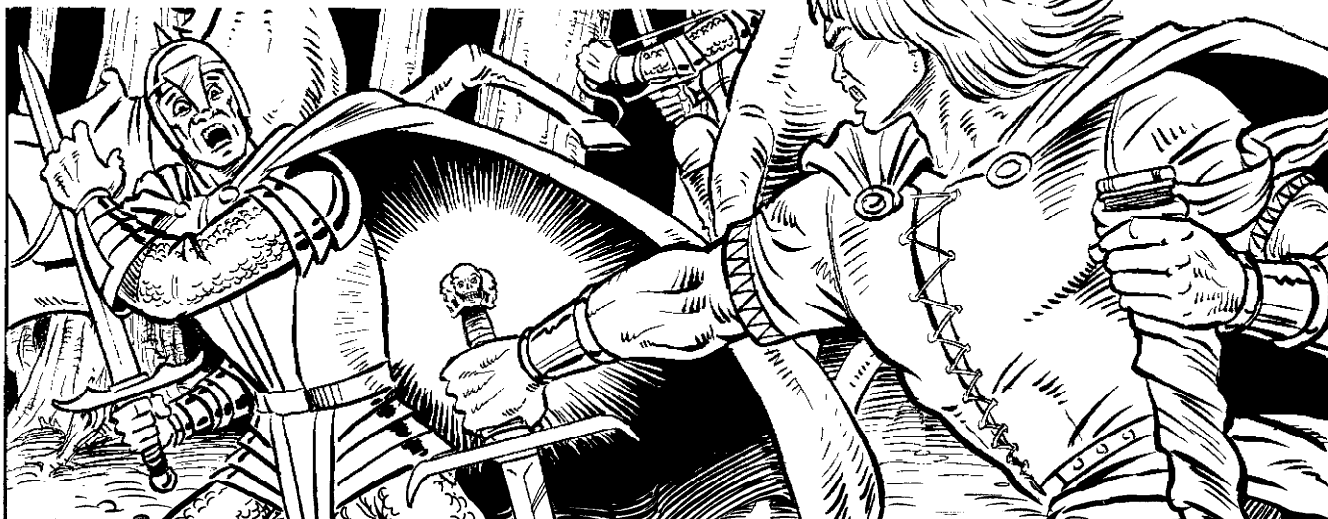
The boy nodded.

"But he told me to stop. He said he doesn't come here for feeling-salve."

The boy looked back to the warrior at the altar. "He comes to remember?"

"Aye. That, and to pray for the soul of his friend."

Ω



"The Sorceress has sent me to kindly ask you to leave her domain."

"What if I say NO!"



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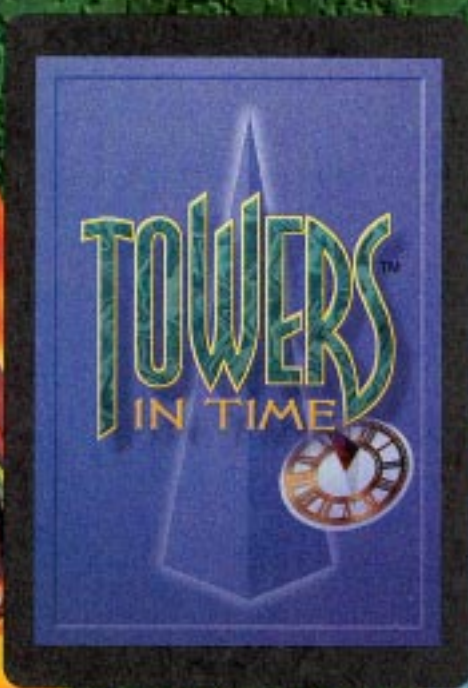
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A Night of Shadows

The Wizard's Three

by Ed Greenwood

Artwork by Dan Burr

"What be this stuff?"

Elminster's voice was testy. Inside the armor, I was sweating; the other two archmages weren't even here yet, and the Old Mage had burned his tongue on my chili. I dared not reply; it was past time for Mordenkainen to appear.

As I had that thought, the flames in the fireplace danced giddily and spat out a spreading tongue of amber fire. It expanded into an ever-widening ring as it rose—and when it was about man-sized, the Lord Mage of Greyhawk stepped calmly through it into the study, a small book in his hand.

Elminster looked up from the table where he'd been bathing his tongue in ice beer, and waved a hand in greeting. A glass of the driest white wine in my cellar glided up off the table; Mordenkainen plucked it deftly out of the air as he strode to his usual chair.

"Well met," he said with a smile, and I relaxed just a little. It wasn't going to be

one of Mordenkainen's grim nights. A platter of stuffed mushrooms slid across the table and offered itself to the mage of Oerth, and he leaned forward to select one with an even wider smile. "I've had a lot of fun with the magic we assembled last time," he said, "and I brought some odds and ends with me."

"Good," Elminster said. "It's time we indulged ourselves . . . saving worlds and speaking of utter doom are wearing work. Besides, I've found something called 'butter pecan ice cream' in the freezer here—" (I winced inside the armor; I'd been saving that) "—and I'd like a little fun to go with it."

"That sounds like my cue for a grand entrance," a shadow near the fireplace said smoothly, and stepped forward with cat-like grace. Dalamar, Master of the Conclave, raised his hand as he came, and a goblet obligingly drifted into it. He nodded thanks and greeting together, and sat down in his favorite chair.

A fruity, flatulent eructation followed.

Dalamar sprang up as if he'd been burned, glaring, as my best red wine leaped into the air all around him. "What-?" he snapped, and then his angry eyes turned from Elminster's look of angelic innocence to Mordenkainen's fixed grin.

The Lord Mage of Greyhawk's mouth twitched, and then he burst into helpless laughter. Dalamar hissed in rage, and raised a hand. Elminster's eyebrows rose, and the droplets of red wine that had been gathering like tiny pinwheels in the air around the dark elven mage swept together into a ball—and flew into Dalamar's upraised hand.

His glare turned to the sphere of wine, wobbling and heavy in his palm, and then at Elminster.

"Thy goblet," the Old Mage suggested. Dalamar's snarl as he thrust the ball of liquid into the vessel was almost a scream. I swallowed, waiting for my study to be torn apart.

Mordenkainen's forehead was down on the table now, and his shoulders shook. Dalamar watched them rise and fall for a long, cold time . . . and then I saw the corner of his elven mouth crook and rise, just a little.

"Might I suggest, henceforth," he said in silken-soft tones, "a 'no pranks' rule apply to our little gatherings? It might be safer."

Elminster nodded. "Agreed." He turned to Mordenkainen, but the Lord Mage was still lost in mirth. He looked back at Dalamar, and pointed at the goblet.

Dalamar's brow rose, and he pointed at the liquid with a nod. Elminster nodded, and the dark elf's smile was dazzling in its glee as he leaned forward to delicately upend the goblet over the back of Mordenkainen's neck.

The Lord Mage of Greyhawk sat up with a roar, and Dalamar sprang back with a

mocking little laugh. Inside the armor, I quaked again.

Mordenkainen slapped at the back of his neck, and wriggled his shoulder-blades. "Of all the fool tricks! What a waste of good wine, youngling!"

"It seemed just what your garb lacked, old man," Dalamar returned, hands raised to hurl a spell if need be.

Mordenkainen looked at him, snorted, and said, "Come and sit, then. 'No pranks' it is." As he reached for his own glass, he shook his head and chuckled again. "Ah, but 'twas worth it," he murmured.

The dark elf sat down a little gingerly, but there came no sound from his seat this time. Dalamar caught Elminster's interested gaze as he was carefully lowering himself onto the chair, and suddenly started to laugh. High, tinkling laughter, rather like Laeral's.

The Wizards Three chuckled together for a few moments, as squadrons of olives, pickles, sliced meats, nuts, cheeses, and the like swooped in from the kitchen. Bringing up the rear of the procession was a green bottle I recognized. Elminster identified it for the other two: "Almond sherry—tastes like Waterdhavian zzar."

Mordenkainen set aside one glass to sip at this new offering from another, raised his brows in appreciation, and said, "It does indeed."

Elminster raised his own brows. "When were ye in Waterdeep?"

Mordenkainen chuckled. "Oh, often. Years ago, when I'd newly mastered dimensional travel, I used to go with some friends to Waterdeep fairly regularly, for—ah, recreation."

Dalamar raised one of his eyebrows. "Shortage of ladies in Greyhawk, milord?"

Mordenkainen chuckled easily, refusing to rise to this jab. "As that city is now, 'twas also then: a lively place, where no one knew us and so we could act freely."

"So you went there for a Night of Shadows," the dark elven archmage said, scooping up a handful of almonds to go with his sherry.

Both of the men gave Dalamar curious looks. "How is it you know of that ritual?" Mordenkainen asked.

It was Dalamar's turn to assume an odd expression. "You mean Toril has some ceremony called a Night of Shadows?" He shook his head. "Among my folk, on Krynn, that term means a frolic, named when it was considered good fun to go up to the surface world by night, and raid human settlements."

"In Faerun," Elminster said, "those who worship Shar celebrate four Nights of Shadows a year—when they probably behave just as you did, on those surface raids."

"And on Oerth," Mordenkainen added, "that term refers to a night of doom that befell many Bakluni mages so long ago that what really happened has been twisted into several different legends."

Dalamar's face was thoughtful as he

voiced my own unspoken thought. "Perhaps these gatherings are our Nights of Shadows."

The two men nodded, and Elminster waved a hand and muttered something. Out of the apparently solid tabletop in front of the other two archmages, a parchment scroll arose and unfolded itself. "Our first spell, this evening," he announced.

Dalamar read the first few words, and nodded. "I believe I can match that." He reached into a sleeve of his robe, just as Mordenkainen snapped his fingers and a flurry of parchment erupted on wings from his book.

The elven mage's sleeve poured forth paper—and scrolls began to gather, flapping like a flock of hovering doves above the arriving dishes of butter pecan ice cream.

Then the three archmages started in talking, explaining and gesturing and boasting like three old horse-traders, while the golden ice cream melted into a thick liquid, and the nuts in it sank from view. My mouth watered in the darkness of the closed helm, but the wizards were deep in talk of magic, and paid no further attention to the viands as the long evening passed. Combat spells seemed to be the order of the evening; I often saw Dalamar's eyes burning brightly through the dimness, as he leaned forward eagerly, enjoying this Night of Shadows.

Dust was gathering on the surface of the ice cream when Mordenkainen finally rose, stretching and clutching at his stiff back, and snapped his fingers. Out of nowhere a fine dark red cloak settled around his shoulders, and he strode toward the fire.

Dalamar stroked his temples, where a headache was obviously coming on, and glared at the empty glasses in front of him. "We've got to stop meeting like this!"

Across the room, Mordenkainen turned, his cloak swirling around him grandly. "Someday, no doubt. But not yet."

For your campaign

After this get-together, I managed to get enough information out of Elminster to lay relevant AD&D® game details of a few of the spells exchanged by The Wizards Three, as set down hereafter. For those interested, Elminster contributed *falling wall*, *Jonstal's double wizardry*, and *Jonstal's improved double wizardry*; Mordenkainen presented *Argaster's cloak of shadows*, *Belsham's mace*, and *Othnal's spectral dagger*; and Dalamar set forth *battlecurse*, *sphere of eyes*, and *valiancy*.

Belsham's mace (Evocation)

Level: 2 Components: V,S
Range: 60' CT: 2
Duration: 2 rounds Save: None
Area of Effect: Special

This spell creates a blunt coalescence of force that bludgeons at a chosen foe from

above, with the casters' THAC0. If this force-weapon hits, it deals 1d8 +2 hp of damage, and forces the victim to save vs. spell. If the saving throw fails, the victim falls unconscious for one round, dropping all held items. Items struck by a *Belsham's mace* must save vs. crushing blow. The mace lasts for only two rounds, whether or not it hits, and then fades away. It operates even if its creator is dead, has fled, or is casting another spell—but if the caster's attention is elsewhere, the mace can follow, but cannot switch, targets.

Falling wall (Evocation)

Level: 2 Components: V,S,M
Range: 0 CT: 2
Duration: 2 rounds Save: None
Area of Effect: 20' x 20' x 4" thick

This spell enables the caster to create a temporary wall of armor plate, which "falls" into place from above. The wall is stationary, once it strikes an immobile surface (floor or ground), and remains unmoving, regardless of force directed against it, until the spell expires (whereupon it melts away). It can withstand anything short of a *dispel magic* or *disintegrate* spells, or contact with prismatic magic of any sort. *Fireballs* that strike it will rebound, *flaming spheres* and the like are halted, and so on. *Magic missiles* can dodge around a falling wall unless it is cast so as to fill an opening smaller than its maximum area of coverage as listed (such as a doorway), which is the most common use of the spell.

A *falling wall* is lightning-fast: it is very rare for one to come down on top of a creature or moving object—but if this occurs, the wall will strike for 2d4 + 12 hp damage. More often, the wall appears in the face of an onrushing missile or charging being; creatures that strike a *falling wall* will be stopped by it, and typically take 1d6 to 5d6 hp of damage, depending on how fast they are moving and how large they are (faster increases damage, larger body size decreases it). A running warrior in plate armor usually suffers 3d6 hp of damage.

Once a *falling wall* is created, the caster is free to cast another spell, flee, read a scroll, or perform any other activity, without affecting the wall in any way. A caster cannot will his own wall to vanish; it must be destroyed as noted above or expire. The material component of this spell is a piece of tempered metal, or any metal that is, or was once, part of armor worn into battle.

Battlecurse (Alteration, Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 3 Components: V,S,M
Range: 50' CT: 3
Duration: 1 round Save: Special
Area of Effect: 60'-radius sphere

This spell enables a caster to adversely affect any target creature that is not pro-



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tected by a *minor globe of invulnerability* or stronger magical barrier (some spells and items also may prevent its functioning). A *battlecurse* can be cast only on a being within range and visible to the caster when casting commences; the target is allowed a saving throw versus spell. If the save succeeds, the only effect of the spell is to prevent the foe from launching an attack on the following round (defensive spells, movement, readying of weapons, and parrying are permitted). If the save fails, an additional effect is visited on the victim: for the four rounds after the casting of the *battlecurse*, the victim's armor class is worsened by four points (from AC 4 to AC 8, for example).

The material components of this spell are a hair (broken or split) from any source, and a gem of not less than 200 gp value.

Argaster's cloak of shadows

(Alteration)

Level: 4 Components: V,S,M
Range: 0 CT: 4
Dur.: 1d4 +2 rds. Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This spell enables a caster or a touched recipient to be obscured by an ever-shifting, roiling webwork of intangible, dark shadows. *Argaster's cloak of shadows* veils the recipient's face, overall appearance, and precise location (although if the caster "wears" the spell, he can reveal his face or hide it, whenever desired).

The result is that the recipient gains a 2-point armor class bonus (e.g., AC 4 to AC 2), and missile weapons aimed at the being suffer a -1 penalty on attack rolls. *Web* and *Evard's black tentacles* spells won't stick to a being protected by *Argaster's cloak of shadows* — but these spells destroy, and are destroyed by, a *cloak of shadows* upon contact. Because the rippling waves of varying darkness are quite noticeable in all but the worst lighting, thieves "wearing" a *cloak of shadows* only gain a +5% bonus to their Hide in Shadows ability (lost whenever they move, of course).

The material components of this spell are a bit of cobweb and a pinch of dust.

Othnal's spectral dagger

(Evocation)
Level: 4 Components: V,S,M
Range: 70' CT: 4
Duration: 1 rd./level Save: None
Area of Effect: Special

This spell consumes an edged metal weapon of any size, sort, or condition—but regardless of what is used as the material component, it creates a translucent dagger-shaped blade of force that either can glow (equal in intensity to a *faerie fire* spell) or not (initially being nearly invisible; chance to notice is 3 in 10) as the caster wills.

The *spectral dagger* appears wherever the caster desires within spell range, and moves as the caster wills, at MV Fl 12 (A),

striking twice per round with the caster's THAC0, but with a +3 bonus. It is considered a +3 weapon for purposes of what it can hit, and deals 1d4 + 3 hp damage per strike.

Sphere of eyes

(Abjuration, Alteration, Evocation)
Level: 4 Components: V,S,M
Range: 70' CT: 4
Duration: 1 rd./level Save: None
Area of Effect: 60'-radius sphere

This spell enables a caster to create a sphere of radiance in which thousands of glistening, glowing eyeballs float, darting and swarming in random directions. Once cast, the *sphere of eyes* is immobile, and its radiance is at all times equivalent to a silvery-blue *faerie fire* spell. The eyes are intangible illusions, and do not react to their surroundings.

Any illusion or magical invisibility that comes into contact with a sphere of eyes is instantly and permanently negated. Beings who actually have changed their shapes by use of magic or a natural ability will be seen with a clear, bright silvery-blue "ghost" image of their other form superimposed upon their current one. This spell also negates operating *forget*, *misdirection*, *obscurement*, *non-detection* and *undetectable alignment* magics, and allows *feeble-minded* creatures an instant (extra) saving throw to escape the condition. The material component of this spell is an eyeball (from any source).

Jonstal's double wizardry

(Alteration)
Level: 5 Components: V
Range: 0 CT: 1
Duration: 1 rd./level Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This powerful spell enables a caster to unleash two specific spells at once, with the utterance of a single word. Both spells take effect in the same round, upon the caster or a touched recipient being (both on the same being, not one spell on each), and function normally (except that the duration of each becomes 1 round/level of the caster). The two spells must be memorized beforehand by the caster, and are not lost from memory until the *double wizardry* is employed; if either is used by itself, the *double wizardry* vanishes with it. Material components for the two spells are consumed when the *double wizardry* is uttered, and must be on the caster's person (but need not be revealed or handled by the caster). Only the caster can unleash the *double wizardry*, even if another being accidentally or maliciously speaks the trigger word.

The only two spells that can be paired by use of a *Jonstal's double wizardry* are *invisibility* and *levitate*; despite years of research, the archmage Jonstal has managed to master only one other pair of "combination" spells (see *Jonstal's improved double wizardry*). No known being

short of the Faerunian lesser divine power Azuth can freely cast any two spells in the same round.

Valiancy

(Alteration)
Level: 5 Components: V,S
Range: 90' CT: 2
Duration: 1 round Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This powerful spell enables the caster (or a recipient creature seen by the caster and within range) to gain an extra attack at the end of the round following the casting of the *valiancy* (that is, in addition to the normal attack(s) the being can make during that round). The spell's recipient can elect to undertake an additional activity (fleeing, readying a weapon, etc.) rather than attacking, but the spell does not aid the mind or speed up magic, so the extra activity cannot be the casting of an "extra" spell or the triggering of a magical item. This spell has no aging or other harmful effect on the recipient, and has only a minor effect on movement speed (a benefit of 2; i.e. from MV 12 to MV 14).

Jonstal's improved double wizardry

(Alteration)
Level: 6 Components: V
Range: 0 CT: 1
Duration: 1 rd./level Save: None
Area of Effect: One creature

This powerful magic enables a caster to unleash two specific spells at once by uttering one word. Both spells take effect in the same round on the caster or a touched recipient being (both on the same being, not one spell on each), and function normally (save that the duration of each becomes one round per level of the caster). The caster must memorize the two spells beforehand; they are not lost from memory until the *improved double wizardry* is employed. If either magic is cast by itself, the *improved double wizardry* vanishes with it. Material components for the two spells are consumed when this spell is uttered, and must be on the caster's person (but need not be revealed or handled by the caster) or the *improved double wizardry* will not take effect. Only the caster can unleash the spell, even if another being accidentally or maliciously speaks the trigger word. The only two spells that can be paired by use of a *Jonstal's improved double wizardry* are *fly* and *non-detection*. Despite years of research, the archmage Jonstal has managed to master only one other pair of "combination" spells (see *Jonstal's double wizardry*). No known being short of the Faerunian lesser divine power Azuth can freely cast any two spells in the same round.

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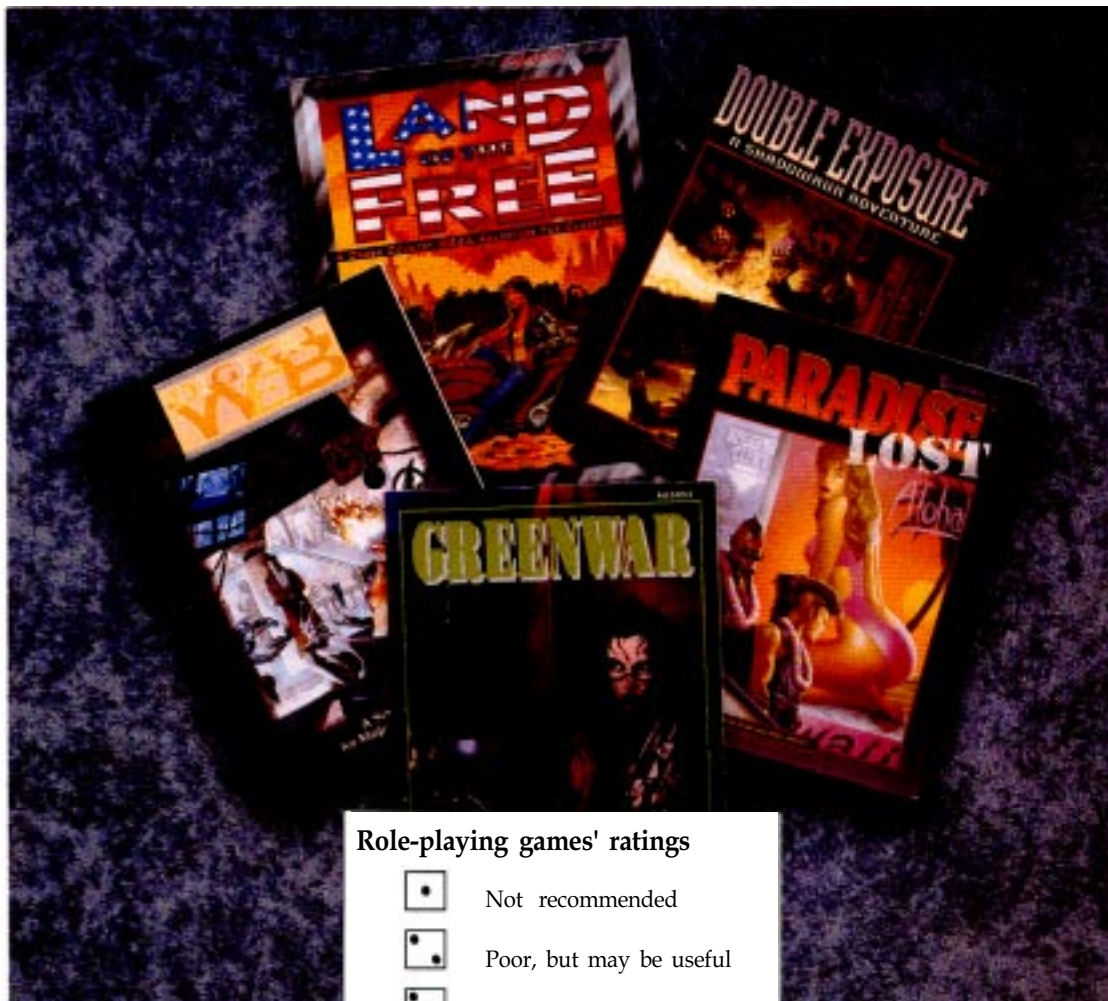
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ROLE-PLAYING reviews

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Cyberpunk for people who hate cyberpunk



Role-playing games' ratings



Not recommended



Poor, but may be useful



Fair



Good



Excellent



The best

Here's a short list of things I can't do: change the oil in a car, unclog a drain, repair a light switch, or replace the filter in a furnace. Mechanical objects, I believe, are alive and out to get me. To say that I am intimidated by technology is like saying that a chunk of red meat is intimidated by a shark.

Computers are particularly distressing. I half-expect them to blow up when I turn them on. Installing a program makes me break out in a cold sweat. I can no more set up a modem than I can take out my own appendix.

It should come as no surprise, then, that cyberpunk RPGs rank low on my list of favorites.

Don't get me wrong. I don't *hate* cyberpunk. But it's been a struggle. I bluffed my way through my first session without having the faintest idea of what "netrunning" meant. When the time came to coax data from a floppy disk, I found something to do in the other room. I never had trouble with magic wands and laser pistols. But cyberware?

Still, I've persevered. Over the years, I've come to appreciate cyberpunk games, despite the designers' determination to make things as difficult as possible for the technologically impaired. Good supplements help, and this month, we'll look at a few that might entice the leery into taking a second look.

Land of the Free

CYBERPUNK* game supplement

One 120-page book, one 36" x 24" double-sided map sheet, five player handout sheets, two cardstock vehicle sheets, five prop business cards, boxed

R. Talsorian Games, Inc. \$18

Design: William Moss

Development: Michael MacDonald and Lisa Pondsmith

Editing: Louise Stewart, Derek Quintanar S.E., and Michael MacDonald

Illustrations: Chris Hockabout, Patrick Gidaro, Christina Wald, Jean-Michel Ringuet, and Darrel Midgett

Cover: Doug Anderson



Greenwar

CYBERPUNK game supplement

One 96-page softcover book

Atlas Games \$12

Design: Thomas Kane

Editing: Robin Jenkins

Illustrations: Doug Shuler and C. Brent Ferguson

Cover: C. Brent Ferguson



Of the myriad cyberpunk RPGs, R. Talsorian's CYBERPUNK game does the best job of capturing the genre's world-weary ambiance and remains the purist's game of choice. The adventures, however, have been hit or miss. Despite a few solid efforts (like R. Talsorian's *Eurotour* and Atlas Games' *Night City Stories*), most feel like retreads, the contents less interesting

then the covers. They're playable but forgettable, doing little to convince skeptics that a sustained campaign is worth the effort.

But along come *Land of the Free* and *Greenwar*, and suddenly I'm a born-again netrunner.

Land of the Free, which I'm guessing was inspired by the *Mad Max* movies, may be the most ambitious cyberpunk adventure ever published. It's certainly the most lavish. The book-length scenario, packed with inventive encounters and NPCs, takes a month or two of steady gaming to complete. The huge black-and-white poster features a road map of apocalyptic America on one side and a tactical display on the other. Two sheets of cut-out vehicles may be used as props or visual aids. Five pages of player handouts include newsletters, magazine clippings, and airline reservations. The well-written text, augmented with a generous number of explanatory sidebars (how 21st century airships operate, the future history of the American southwest) and troubleshooting tips (attack routines for cyberdogs, what to do if a PC falls in the water and can't swim), makes the referee's job a breeze.

The story begins in New York, with the PCs hired to extract a mysterious woman named Adriana from a pharmaceutical laboratory and haul her across the country for a rendezvous in California. It's not that easy, of course, as everyone from Mother Nature to the Elvies of Grace-land(!) conspires to annihilate them.

What the plot lacks in logic—it's hard to believe that characters this resourceful have so much bad luck—it makes up in momentum. No sooner do the PCs board an airship than they have to fend off ninja assassins and missile attacks. A run-in with the New Orleans police precedes an assault from a hurricane. Grenade-tossing raiders nail them in Corpus Christi, and deranged cultists try to set them on fire in Colorado Springs. As if that weren't enough, the referee may introduce additional complications. She may, for instance, give the party a credit chip to help them make purchases, then stand back and watch them fight over who gets to carry it. She may encourage a romance between a PC and Adriana, then watch the sparks fly when the PC finds out who—make that what—she really is. The referee also may stage any of the approximately 35 optional encounters, ranging from a mugging by the Citizens of Decency to a shady deal with a netrunner on an oil platform. The explosive climax takes place in the shipyards of Night City; unless reinforcements show up, it'll take divine intervention to get all the PCs out in one piece.

If this doesn't sound like cyberpunk to you . . . well, it isn't, at least in the traditional sense. *Land of the Free* plays like an Indiana Jones adventure with computer terminals. There's enough high-tech high jinks to satisfy cyberjunkies, but not so much that laymen will be frightened away.

Sure, the referee has to lead the players by the nose; if they stray too far from the route outlined in the text, he may have to redesign a good chunk of the adventure. Sure, he has to feed them clues now and then; if he doesn't help them find Adriana, the adventure never gets off the ground. And sure, he has to keep a straight face while playing cornball characters like rock star Perry Garcia and spouting inane dialogue like, "Well, well, if it isn't an illegal congregation of scum." But with a referee capable of smoothing over the rough spots and cooperative players who aren't sticklers for realism, *Land of the Free* delivers the goods.

Just as *Land of the Free* was inspired by *Mad Max*, *Greenwar* takes its cue from the *Wall Street Journal*. The adventure casts the players as yuppie operatives of the Browning Investment Group, charged with engineering a takeover of Liverpool Shipping, Inc. Because Browning wants Liverpool intact, the PCs can't use force. Instead, they must acquire the company by buying up 50% of the stock at the cheapest possible price. The PCs have a more or less fixed amount of money to spend, and it's up to them to decide where and how to spend it.

To compliment the unusual premise, designer Thomas Kane (also responsible for the intriguing cyberpunk-meets-Vietnam adventure *Chrome Berets*) provides a suitably unusual format. Rather than following a sequenced series of encounters, *Greenwar* describes the settings, the cast of NPCs, and a simple but effective system for determining stock prices. The referee shapes the adventure according to the PCs' actions. If they force Liverpool into publicizing the takeover, the stock price may skyrocket. If they attempt an illegal action and fail to cover it up, they may be threatened with a lawsuit. Once they ferret out potential sellers, they must separate them from their stock through negotiation, intimidation, or trickery.

Greenwar may sound like a business-school assignment, but Kane's flair for the dramatic keeps it as tense as a castle siege. The NPC executives make formidable adversaries, thanks to their rich personalities and shrewd tactics. Office politics, personal vendettas, and overzealous bodyguards compound the party's efforts to squeeze stock from cagey shareholders. A private hit squad called Force X and a sabotage team known as the Three Horsemen (War, Plague, and Famine) set up action scenes worthy of Arnold Schwarzenegger. Clearly, there's a lot to keep track of, and the referee must be as familiar with stock tables as combat dice to run it effectively. Players more interested in muscles than minds should keep their distance; this is high IQ territory.

Evaluation: Neither *Land of the Free* nor *Greenwar* is suitable for novices. *Land of the Free's* gauntlet of death traps will

pulverize the unseasoned, while the corporate machinations of *Greenwar* will put hack-n-slashers to sleep. Though plot-wise, they have little in common, both extend the parameters of cyberpunk with off-beat premises. Both downplay high-tech mumbo jumbo in favor of imaginative casts and encounters. Most importantly, both demonstrate the resiliency of a genre that some (like yours truly) may have written off too soon.

Paradise Lost

SHADOWRUN* game supplement

One 80-page softcover book

FASA Corporation



\$10

Design: Tom Wong and Nigel Findley

Development: Tom Dowd

Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Paul Daley, Earl Geier, and Christina Wald

Cover: John Zeleznik

Double Exposure

SHADOWRUN game supplement

One 64-page softcover book

FASA Corporation



\$10

Design: Fraser Cane and Nigel Findley

Development: Tom Dowd

Editing: Donna Ippolito

Illustrations: Tom Baxa, Steve Bryant, Paul Daly, and Mike Jackson

Cover: Tom Baxa

By placing wizards and elves alongside hackers and netrunners, FASA's SHADOW-

RUN game struck me as a commendable effort to reach out to gamers uncomfortable with cyberpunk's relentless gloom. But after a few promising supplements, such as *Dream Chipper* and *DNA/DOA*, the line began to flounder, and the SHADOWRUN line threatened to become just another cyberpunk game. Fantasy took a back seat to science. The supplements became increasingly marginal, with complexity substituting for elegance, attitude for invention.

While *Paradise Lost* and *Double Exposure* don't completely put the SHADOWRUN game back on course—that's asking a lot of two modest adventures—both recapture much of the game's original appeal. The charming *Paradise Lost*, for instance, serves up a lean plot with plenty of whimsy. A corporate femme fatale, who introduces herself as "Mr. Johnson," hires the PCs to travel to Hawaii to investigate a raid on Molokai Microtronics. It's just an excuse, of course, to plop the party into a colorful locale and pepper them with obstacles. But the obstacles are so engaging that you barely notice the contrivance. An ocean voyage is interrupted by the abrupt appearance of a sea monster. A drive to a hotel is derailed by a Honda-riding orc. Memorable NPCs include and a dwarven chauffeur fond of Hawaiian shirts and a troll-ish night club bouncer named Egmond. An elven representative of the Haloes Don't Surf gang informs the party of the existence of the secret ALOHA

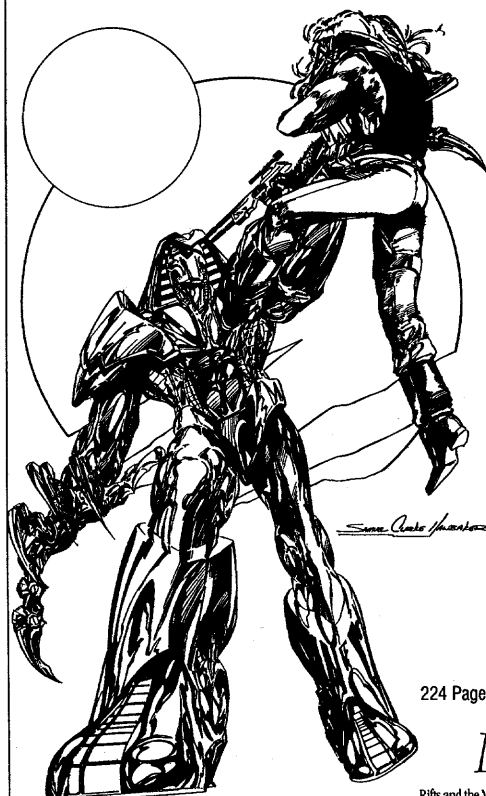
organization, aptly described as "a bunch of twisted morons." As for the ALOHA leader, whom the PCs meet in the climax, let's just say that he's unlikely to show up in any cyberpunk RPG other than the SHADOWRUN game.

Unfortunately, the designers seem so enamored with their ideas that they can't wait to get to the next one, resulting in underdeveloped encounters and flabby staging. The grand finale, confined to a single page, reads like an off-the-top-the-head outline, replete with useless referee notes ("If the runners decide to fight [the villain], let them have it."). NPCs tend to spill the beans at the slightest coercion, one of the oldest shortcuts in the designer's handbook. The source material offers a few tantalizing tidbits about cybernetic Hawaii (intelligent gray whales, for instance, lurk offshore), but spends too much time rehashing data available in a high school library ("... the Hawaiian Islands' first inhabitants arrived between the years 300 and 600 A.D. from Polynesian islands ..."). While none of this detracts from the fun, *Paradise Lost* could've been a classic with a little more creative rigor.

Those looking for a more sophisticated approach are directed to *Double Exposure*, a tight little chiller worthy of Chaosium's CALL OF CTHULHU* game. In the back alleys of Seattle, a thuggish FBI agent hires the PCs to investigate the relationship between Renraku Computer Systems and Project Hope, a homeless shelter devoted to rehabilitating the down-and-out. That there's more than meets the eye to Project Hope will come as no surprise to anyone who's ever seen a horror movie. But the cartoonish excesses (go ahead and check out the illustration on page 42—it won't spoil anything except your lunch) make this one of the most outrageous scenarios in SHADOWRUN history. Project Hope, one part Salvation Army and one part slaughterhouse, is described in stomach-churning detail, right down to the smells in the doorway. Evocative touches abound—magical sentries who patrol the camp via astral projection, a nosy reporter who asks one too many questions, a water-treatment pool that hisses at intruders. The climax features a confrontation in an underground tunnel system, guaranteed to send careless PCs to the cemetery.

As with *Paradise Lost*, the designers are better at dreaming up ideas than developing them. Too often, for example, the story is driven by coincidence. At one point, the designers suggest that the referee have the PCs arrive at a locale at exactly the same time as an important NPC. "If making this happen requires abnormal levels of coincidence," says the text, "so be it." Some passages try so hard to be hip that they end up sounding silly: "... if the runners decide to blow it just because they don't like other kids playing with their toys, they stand to get locked away in the Big

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House or geeked." And despite the potential for a slam-bang battle in the final encounter, the designers encourage the party to flee. I say, force 'em to stand and fight. Would I run in real life? Of course! But this ain't real life.

Evaluation: Flaws aside, *Paradise Lost* and *Double Exposure* remain accessible, fast-paced adventures, and a great way to spend a weekend. Neither is a ground breaker. But both succeed in reminding us about what was so compelling about the SHADOWRUN game in the first place.

Digital Web

MAGE: THE ASCENSION* game supplement

One 112-page softcover book

White Wolf Game Studio \$15

Design: Daniel Greenberg, Harry Heckel, and Darren McKeemen

Additional material: John Cooper, Jonathan Sill, Heather Curatola, Lee Chen, Bill Bridges, Brian Campbell, and Brad Freeman

Development: Phil Brucato

Editing: Ed McKeogh

Illustrations: James Crabtree, Darryl Elliot, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Quinton Hoover, and Dan Smith

Cover: John Zeleznik

White Wolf continues to wrench gamers in unexpected directions with the audacious *Digital Web*, which reshapes cyberpunk like so much modeling clay. A supplement for the MAGE: THE ASCENSION game, perhaps the best new fantasy RPG of the decade, *Digital Web* proclaims the world of the Net to be a manifestation of wizardly energy. In this "static reality," the differences between modems and magic wands are academic; mages roam the electronic realms with the ease of seasoned netrunners.

Actually, the abilities of a digital mage make those of a netrunner seem primitive. Cybernauts—the formal name for wizards in the Web—can take any form they wish by using magical "programs" to become three-dimensional icons. (Where technology-based icons are composed of simple yes and no integers, magical icons add a third element, the *maybe*.) Experienced mages may construct their own digital buildings, even their own worlds. Cybernauts also have a penchant for tinkering with reality. George Bush's presidential defeat, for instance, may have resulted from digital sabotage. Have you ever wondered why your head aches and your eyes get sore when you spend all day at the computer? It's because the Web is slurping away your Quintessence.

While all MAGE game spell-casters can theoretically access the Web, most Cybernauts are Virtual Adepts or members of the Technocracy. They use three primary methods to get in. Those with a set of virtual-reality goggles and tactile feedback equipment may use Sensory Visitation, where images are projected on the user's

retinas and electrodes spew sensory information into his brain. A second method, Astral Immersion, enables the mage to project his mind into the Web; bodyguards and burglar alarms may be necessary to protect the mage's physical body. Using the third method, Holistic Immersion, the mage transforms himself into raw data, then downloads directly into the system. Once inside the Web, a traveler may visit areas as diverse as the Junklands (a crazy quilt of images derived from failed attempts at formatting) and the Trash Sector (a graveyard of lost programs). Sightseeing, however, is not without risk. A burst of sensory feedback may shock an Astral traveler into paralysis. And with the right program, a villainous computer operator can trap a Holistic mage in an infinite loop.

The designers bend over backward to explain all this. A detailed history traces the development of the Net from Alexander Graham Bell's telephone prototypes through the experiments of computer whiz Alan Turing in World War II. Detailed rule modifications show how attributes function in a digital environment (Intelligence replaces Strength; the amount of data a Cybernaut can carry depends on its Virtual Weight). A section on digital magic describes how spells operate in alternate realities (*control randomness* may be used to manipulate programs; *diffuse energy/destroy matter* disintegrates electronic objects). There are even suggestions for linking *Digital Web* with the VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* and WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE* games.

But despite the designers' best efforts, *Digital Web* is hard to digest. The cursory definitions of Stacked Files and the Pool of Infinite Reflection raise more questions than they answer (such as where do you find the Pool?). The text is burdened with overstuffed sentences ("Fluid waves of potentiality suddenly locked permanently into place; the supple, dynamic world seized up and congealed into brittle shards . . ."). and saturated with gobbledegook ("The Net Runner enters the Web through the Umbral Computer Web that is connected to the Glass Walker CyberRealm in the Umbra."). I'm sure the designers know what they're talking about, but they have a heck of a time getting it across.

Evaluation: This is a tough call. In its attempt to redefine technology as magic, *Digital Web* scores on nerve alone. There's much to admire, particularly for those who believe that cyberpunk could stand to shed some clichés. But the text is so dense, so riddled with gamespeak and consumed by abstractions that a good portion of it borders on the incomprehensible. *Digital Web* is an impressive effort. But it needs a translator.

Short and sweet

The Eternal Boundary, by L. Richard Baker III. TSR, Inc., \$10.

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know where to begin. *Eternal Boundary*, the first adventure for the PLANESCAPE™ setting (reviewed in DRAGON® issue #207), comes to the aid of stymied plane-hoppers with an entertaining scenario that focuses on a few key areas of Sigil. Hired to locate a madman who holds the key to a portal, the PCs explore the slums of the Hive, meet the Bleak Cabal at the Gatehouse, and parley with undead in the vaults of the Mortuary. A fiery climax in another plane provides clues to a conspiracy. Despite the reliance on familiar settings (a tavern, a mausoleum, a trap-filled citadel), the bizarre cast of characters and almost casual way that travelers flip between planes gives *Eternal Boundary* a feel all its own; you're unlikely to confuse it with a conventional fantasy adventure.

GURPS Werewolf: the Apocalypse, by Robert M. Schroeck (based on the original game by Mark Rein-Hagen). Steve Jackson Games, \$20.

A GURPS* game supplement, this does for White Wolf's WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE what GURPS: *Vampire* did for VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE—it translates the Storyteller system into GURPSe, cleans up the text, and puts it all together in a handsome package. Illuminating sidebars clarify the mythos, while a section of conversion notes makes it easy to switch between the systems. Whether you prefer the White Wolf or GURPS rules is largely a matter of style; White Wolf offers more flexibility, GURPS more precision. Schroeck's economical writing, however, makes this book a better read, so I give the edge to GURPS.

Strangers in Prax, by Michael O'Brien, Jonathan Tweet, and Mike Dawson. The Avalon Hill Game Company, \$16.

The latest (and last?) supplement for the RUNEQUEST* game offers a trio of first-rate adventures set in the Pavis region, based in part on 1992's *River of Cradles* source book. Since all boast rich backgrounds and thoughtful encounters, it's difficult to single out a favorite. But I lean toward Michael O'Brien's "The Lunar Coders," featuring creepy agents from the Lunar Empire who communicate in complex ciphers and ride the skies in a glimmering Moon Boat. If this proves to be RUNEQUEST's swan song, at least it's going out with a bang.

BATTLETECH Tactical Handbook*, by Jim Long with Stuart Johnson. FASA Corporation, \$12.

Have your players been complaining that the BATTLETECH game isn't complicated enough? These 80 pages of optional rules ought to shut them up. Part One offers guidelines for staging double-blind contests, where each player moves his units on his own map and has no idea what the other guy is up to; a referee informs the players when they "see" something. The operational variant simulates a long campaign by divid-

ing the game into a series of linked scenarios (such as Planetary Landings and Meeting Engagements); the system encourages players to form long-range strategies instead of concentrating on tactical victories. Part Two presents advanced rules for ballistic weapons, four-legged 'Mechs, and line of sight. The book also introduces a convenient method for designating complexity, which presumably will be used in future BATTLETECH supplements. Level One games use the rules from the BATTLETECH boxed set, Level Two adds mechanics from the *BattleTech Compendium* and *CityTech*, while Level Three brings in the *Tactical Handbook*. All this is strictly for war gamers—make that *serious* war gamers. Role-players can put their wallets away.

Zentraedi Breakout, by Deborah Christian and Kevin Siembieda. Palladium Books, \$10.

Role-playing for robots? If you expect character development and gripping story lines from this ROBOTECH* game book, you're in for a letdown. The scenarios emphasize military excursions in the contested Zentraedi Control Zone of South America, with the focus squarely on the hardware. (A typical encounter centers around "one Scout Pod, 2D4 Tactical Battle Pods, and one male power armor with plasma cannon attachment out on a reconnaissance patrol.") They're action-packed, meticulously detailed, and utterly baffling to anyone not familiar with the ROBOTECH line (particularly *Book Four: Southern Cross*). The engrossing source material addresses South American Strategic Command deployment, troop movements of the 3751st Logistics Brigade, and other topics sure to warm the hearts of mecha aficionados.

Rick Swan has designed and edited more than 40 role-playing products. His recent projects include The Complete Ranger's Handbook and The Complete Paladin's Handbook, both published by TSR. You can write to him at 2620 30th St., Des Moines IA 50310. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope if you'd like a reply.

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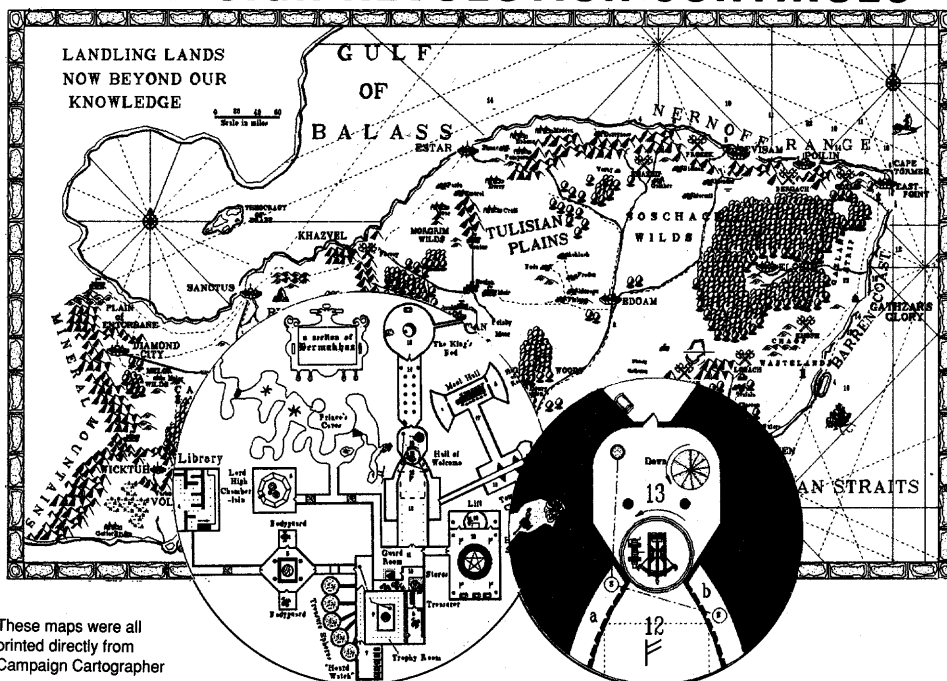
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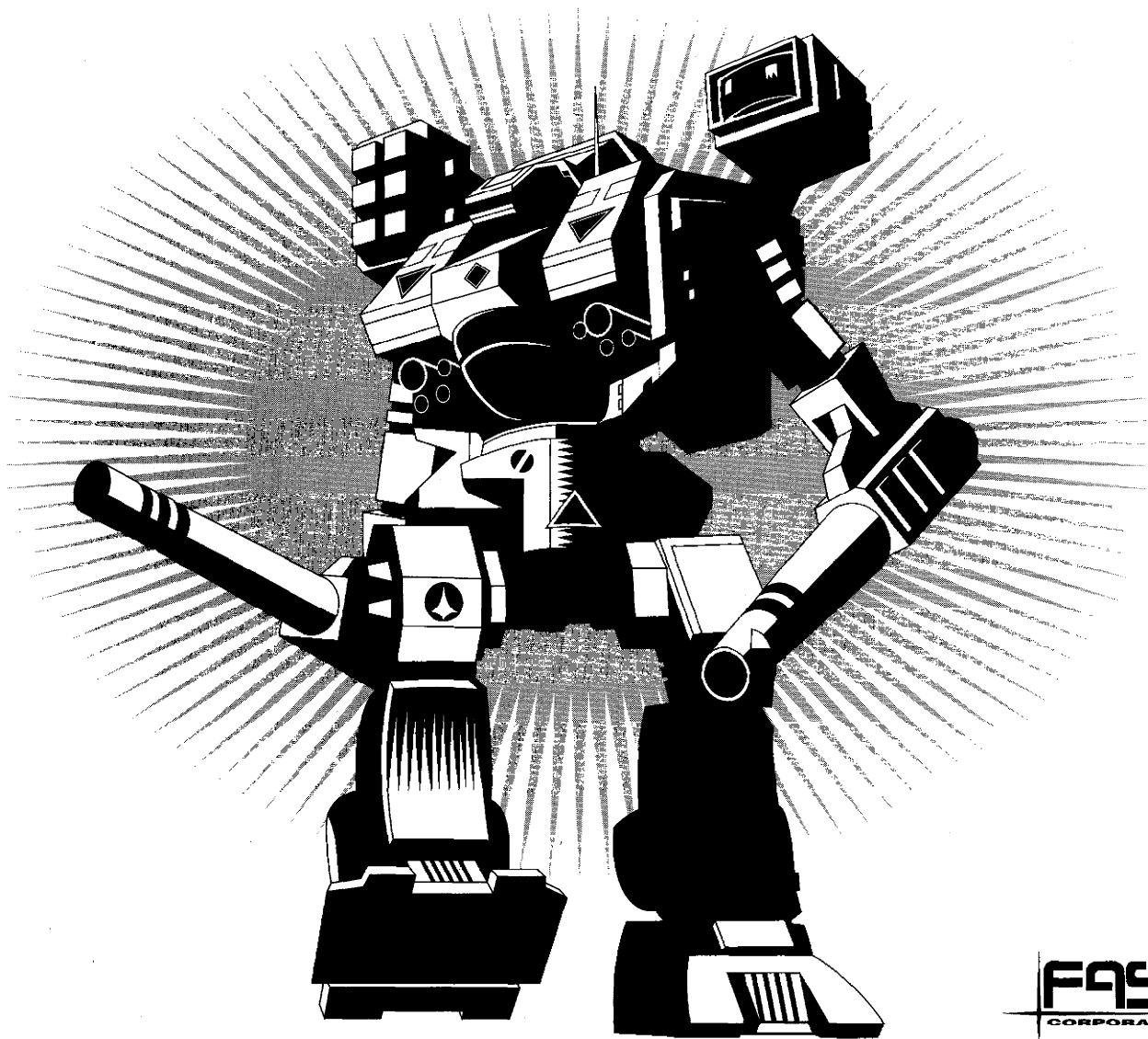
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Sage Advice

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, P.O. Box 111, Lake Geneva WI 53147, U.S.A. In Europe, write to: Sage Advice, DRAGON Magazine, TSR Ltd., 120 Church End, Cherry Hinton, Cambridge CB1 3LB, United Kingdom. We are no longer able to make personal replies; please send no SASEs with your questions (SASEs are being returned with writer's guidelines for the magazine).

This month, the sage visits battlefields and the COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ setting. The sage also continues his look at the SPELLFIRE™ game.

Where can I find rules for mass combat in the AD&D® game? I have seen the BATTLESYSTEM® supplement, but I don't have any figures.

The *Castle Guide* (TSR product #2114) contains two mass combat systems, one for resolving sieges and one for resolving open field battles. Both systems employ material from the BATTLESYSTEM game. The upcoming *PLAYER'S OPTION™ Combat & Tactics* book (due out next summer) will contain a system for handling skirmishes involving a few dozen to a few hundred creatures, but it also could be used for larger battles. The system is loosely based on the boarding action system from *The War Captain's Companion* for the SPELLJAMMER® setting (TSR product #1072). TSR also is planning a hardcover book on high-level campaigns (also due next summer), which will contain a system for conducting mass combat.

What happens to sha'irs (from the AL-QADIM® setting) when they venture into the PLANESCAPE™ setting? Can their gens still get them spells? Is the time required to fetch a spell increased or reduced?

Generally, a gen can go fetch spells for its master from any place in the multiverse. The gen's starting location has no measurable effect on how long it takes to fetch a spell, because most of the gen's time is spent locating and negotiating for the spell, not actually traveling from place to place. The DM can rule that local conditions prevent the gen from leaving the plane, but this should be very rare. If the plane the gen is on allows access to the Ethereal or Astral Planes, it always can fetch spells. Even when it cannot directly enter the Astral or Ethereal, the gen probably can find a conduit or gate that will

get it where it needs to go. Note that a gen's ability to go plane hopping does not apply to the sha'ir or to the sha'ir's companions.

Otherwise, a sha'ir's spells work the same way as any other wizard's. Any local conditions that affect the spell still apply even if the gen successfully delivers it. For example, a gen could deliver a *fireball* spell to its master, who is adventuring on the Elemental Plane of Water. The spell, however, still fails when the sha'ir tries to cast it because fire spells are ineffective on the Elemental Plane of Water.

Do dragon mages and clerics from the COUNCIL OF WYRMS setting acquire and cast their spells the way other dragons do (learning them randomly and casting them with only a verbal component)? Or do they acquire and cast spells the way other spell-casters do?

Dragon mages and clerics function just like any other player character spell-

caster. In learning "real" wizard or priest magic, they suppress their innate ability to learn spells randomly in favor of the regular method, which allows them to know and memorize many more spells. The dragon spell-caster must meet all the requirements for casting any particular spell, including casting time, and verbal, somatic, and material components. Note that the dragon's innate spell-like abilities are unaffected.

The core AD&D rules clearly state that a dragon can use its breath weapon only three times a day. However, the COUNCIL OF WYRMS rules imply otherwise (unless you're using the optional on page 40 of the rules book). How many times can a dragon use its breath weapon in a COUNCIL OF WYRMS campaign and should the rule for dragon breath weapons be the same in all worlds?

The current core rules say nothing of the sort (though the original AD&D game's *Monster Manual* did limit dragons to three breaths a day). In the AD&D 2nd Edition game, a dragon can use its breath weapon once every three rounds (see the MONSTROUS MANUAL™ book, page 64). As always, the DM has final say about how dragon breath weapons work, but breath weapons should work the same way throughout the campaign, regardless of which world the PCs are visiting.

It is possible to use a dragon character from the COUNCIL OF WYRMS setting in another setting if the dragon were in humanoid form?

Not really. A dragon requires a great deal of time and treasure to advance a level, and most campaign settings do not have enough of either.

What spheres of spells do dragon priests from the COUNCIL OF WYRMS setting cast? Which if the optional spheres from the *Tome of Magic* can they cast? Do the various dragon deities have specialty priests? If so, what spheres do they have access to?

All dragon clerics get the same spheres of spell, regardless of who their patron deities are. Worship in the Io's Blood Isles is not yet organized or developed enough

to allow for specialty priests. Also, it is unclear whether Io would ever allow specialty priests to develop.

COUNCIL OF WYRMS creator Bill Slavisek and I discussed the question of spheres for dragon clerics and here's what we came up with. Spheres marked with an asterisk are from the *Tome of Magic*:

Major: All, Astral, Charm, Combat, Divination, Elemental, Guardian, Healing, Necromantic, Protection, Summoning, Chaos*, Law*, Thought*, and Wards*;
Minor: None.

Note that dragon clerics get both Law and Chaos spells regardless of alignments.

What *Tome of Magic* spheres to specialty priests of Eilistraee and Lolth (from *Drow of the Underdark*) cast?

Here you go:

Lolth: *Major:* Chaos; *Minor:* Time.

Eilistraee: *Major:* Wards; *Minor:* Travelers.

SPELLFIRE™ game questions

In an earlier column, you said Iuz doesn't get to use his special power if he is defeated as the result of an event and is not discarded. What if he is defeated by the heartwood spear (card #318), which automatically kills monsters?

Iuz razes a realm whenever he is defeated and discarded. If the heartwood spear kills Iuz, he is defeated and discarded, and he razes a realm.

Who chooses the land Iuz razes when he is defeated?

The Iuz card holder picks the realm to be razed.

If Iuz razes the land he was attacking when he is defeated does the player holding him get to draw spoils of victory?

No.

Can a wizard or other champion who cannot fly but can cast wizard spells use a flight spell (card #211) to declare an attack on a protected realm in Step 4?

Yes.

Can a wizard immediately cast a death spell (card #392) on an opposing champion as soon as the champion is chosen?

Only if the wizard's rank is lower than the opposing champion's rank (you cannot play an additional card in a battle unless your point total is lower than the enemy's).

Ω

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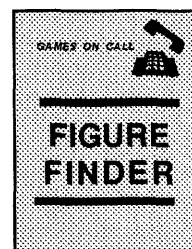
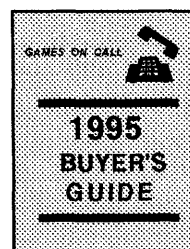
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Expect the unexpected (plot twist, that is)



DUN LADY'S JESS

Doranna Durgin

Baen 0-671-87617-1 \$4.99

If you pick up *Dun Lady's Jess* anticipating a light, freewheeling sorcerous adventure good mostly for taking your mind off the real world on a crowded bus, expect to be surprised. It's not that Doranna Durgin's debut novel doesn't have magic and peril in ample supply. No, the unexpected revelation is that Durgin also delivers a first-rate, thoughtful character study spun out from a concept that's remarkable for its originality.

The fantasy genre is well-known for giving animals the power of speech, or for trapping human characters in animal form. Durgin's ingenious twist is to reverse the effect. *Dun Lady's Jess*, whom her rider calls Lady, begins this story as a horse. But a magical accident not only carries horse and rider from their own world into the modern Midwest, separating them in the process—it also gives Lady a human being's body.

The premise alone, though, isn't what makes the novel a delight. Durgin not only has come up with a strikingly fresh idea, she's also thought out the consequences to a fare-thee-well. Lady's one stroke of sheer good luck is to be found by a sympathetic couple with a friend whose business is stabling horses. From there, every development springs logically from its predecessor, and the question of just what Lady's now Jess' new status means to her is central to the evolving plot. And Jess's new friends are each drawn with the same attention to creating utterly convincing characters.

Woven into this tale of self-discovery is the parallel story of Jess' quest for her missing rider and a way back to her own world, where the magic that bridged the two realities is the subject of bitter conflict. This, too, is ruled not by cliché but by relentless common sense, which means that Durgin doesn't pull punches when her villains take the stage. Readers who think they've seen enough similar plots to predict events may find themselves rudely awakened more than once before the novel threads its way to a conclusion.

Dun Lady's Jess is an eye-opening book, wise in the ways of horses and of humans, often cynically pragmatic and yet still touched with a certain misty-eyed optimism. Both the maturity of its vision and the skill of its crafting are startling in a first novel. Gamers with an interest in the process of "getting into a character's head" won't want to miss it, and it should be highly interesting to see what Doranna Durgin comes up with next.

A PRINCE AMONG MEN

Robert N. Charrette

Warner/Aspect 0-446-60037-7 \$4.99

I had high hopes for this first non-franchised novel from Robert N. Charrette, whose early SHADOWRUN* game stories showed considerable promise.

Regrettably, that promise isn't fulfilled in *A Prince Among Men*, billed variously as an Arthurian novel, the opening volume in a trilogy, and a "dark future" tale in a world that's a close cousin to the SHADOWRUN universe.

There are plenty of ideas, characters, and plots in the book; the trouble is that Charrette tosses them onstage and then leaves them to fend for themselves. The results are erratic at best and actively confusing at worst. It's one thing for a story's protagonist not to know what in heck is going on around him. It's quite another when there are some half-dozen sets of conspirators bouncing off each other's scams, lying to each other and disclaiming responsibility for the utter chaos in which the reader has been immersed.

There's Nym, for instance, who pops out of nowhere to summon King Arthur into Charrette's near-future milieu, then flees. There's Arthur, now called "Bear," who commandeers a street gang and takes on a squire in the form of nominal protagonist John Reddy. There's Pamela Martinez, a corporate climber who sees the rise of magic as a potential profit center. There's Dr. Elizabeth Spae, a thaumaturgical theorist for a secret government agency. There's Sorli, the dwarf on Martinez's payroll who is also an agent of otherworldly powers. And there's Bennett, likewise an agent of Faery but with very different origins and plans.

Of this ill-assorted web, only John Reddy is remotely sympathetic, but Charrette gives him a case of chronic self-doubt and indecisiveness that also makes him exceedingly annoying at times. The shy streak also makes it extremely hard to tell whether Reddy is the keystone around which the central plot (if any) will ultimately turn, or if he's simply an innocent, if oddly gifted bystander pulled into Arthur's orbit by blind luck.

A strong secondary problem is that for an Arthurian novel, the Arthurian lore is decidedly sparse and oddly used. We have "Nym," presumably an analogue for Merlin's lover Nimue, but no sign of Merlin himself. Caliburn, Arthur's sword, is described as a world-spanning relic of spectacular power, which Arthur must now find and recover. But the larger setting, with its elves and goblins and layered worlds, is more akin to a modern game-universe than to any genuine Arthurian legend. And it is all the more startling when Arthur, usually described as a good judge of character and a leader noted for uniting dissident factions behind him, proves to be something of a racist where elves are concerned.

That larger setting is itself another minor puzzle. It's not all that far ahead of the present in technological terms, but politically, government seems to have been largely displaced by mega-corporations in the traditional mold. Combine this with the intrusion of magic, and the parallels to

the SHADOWRUN universe are impossible not to notice. One can't help but wonder if the prospective trilogy was originally planned as an origin story for that universe, which has since had its serial numbers filed off for publication elsewhere.

As it stands, *A Prince Among Men* is remarkable only for the number and variety of ideas it borrows and then fails to exploit. Too much is going on, too little is explained, and too few of the characters are pleasant company to make the tale worth recommending.

AURIAN

Maggie Furey

Bantam 0-553-56525-7 \$5.99

Had I first seen *Aurian* as a finished paperback rather than a bound galley, I might well have been intimidated by its nearly 600 pages of small, dense type. (The galley was just as thick, but wider margins and crisp white paper went a long way toward making it more readable.) But don't be fooled by the small print and conservative design. Maggie Furey's first novel is a solid, sophisticated high fantasy set in a world as fully imagined as Raymond E. Feist's *Midkemia* or Judith Tarr's *Avaryan*.

Furey deftly establishes her pattern of expectation-twisting within the first few pages. Initially, *Aurian* looks like a variant Arthurian tale, with references to "the Lady of the Lake" and a knight called Geraint. But those hints are quickly overshadowed when the plot expands to include an ancient, otherworldly Forest Lord and an age-old prophecy concerning *Aurian* herself, a mere child as the story opens. But neither is the story the straightforward variation on Celtic legendry that it next resembles, for constant tension between Mage-blooded folk and mortals is the norm in *Aurian*'s world, and not without excellent reason on the mortals' part.

Despite being both Mage and expert warrior, *Aurian* finds herself taking up mortal causes more often than not—and again, not without good reason. Raised at first well apart from the insular Mage conclave, *Aurian* has no sense for the constant, subtle games of politics and power her blood-kin are driven to play. Only when she herself becomes the prize in one such contest of wills does she recognize the truth, embarking on a quest that may permanently shift the balance of power toward mortal hands.

Before the adventure is done—or at least, before it stops, for this is the first volume in a projected trilogy—it takes its heroes on a journey that spans continents, weaves through intrigue-ridden courts, and proves beings and artifacts out of sheerest legend to be dangerously real. Nearly every time the plot starts to look predictable, it's a signal that Furey is about to unveil some new twist or revelation, and she manages to stage most of them without making the story look contrived.

She's also a skilled hand with character,

especially when it comes to crafting villains. The antagonists here act not from some imagined ideal of utter evil, but from the conviction that they're entitled to power, privilege, and revenge purely because of who and what they are. The motivations are entirely convincing, and make Aurian's adversaries a great deal nastier than your average Darth Vader figure.

Make no mistake; *Aurian* is a dense novel that will take more than an afternoon to devour, even for quick readers. But it's well worth the time invested in the reading, and Furey is a welcome addition to the small group of high fantasists whose works set the standards of the genre rather than merely following its blueprints.

BATMAN: KNIGHTFALL

Dennis O'Neil

Bantam 0-553-09673-7 \$19.95

Veteran Bat-writer and editor Dennis O'Neil goes to considerable lengths, in his afterword to this novel, to explain that Batman's character has evolved and changed over time. But unless one of the phases of the Dark Knight's persona was intended to be "terminally stupid," this prose rendering of the *Knightfall* storyline must be regarded as a very strange aberration in Batman's history.

As the novel tells it, the fall of Batman begins when a drug-enhanced assassin called Bane comes to Gotham City and begins to stalk the Dark Knight. Bane is intelligent; he takes pains to observe Batman in action before approaching his target, and he wears down his adversary by setting other villains in Batman's path.

Batman, by contrast, displays a remarkable lack of judgment as the crisis develops. Though rapidly succumbing to fatigue from dealing with Bane's obstacles, he refuses to rest or summon super-assistance. (This being a prose novel, we apparently are required to assume that there are no other superheroes on the planet, and never mind the comic books.) After this leads to Bruce Wayne's back being broken, the world's finest detective then cleverly passes the Bat-cowl to one Jean Paul Valley: mistake number two, as Valley proves to be even more dangerously unstable than Bruce at his most obsessive.

Mistake number three is arguable. Dr. Shondra Kinsolving is clearly meant to be love interest as well as physician to the disabled Bruce Wayne, and his refusal to trust her with his secret identity (curiously inconsistent, since he's already spilled the beans to Valley) severely hampers her treatment. But the prose establishes no real chemistry between Shondra and Bruce, which clouds the issue. Mistake number four, however, is a no-brainer. When faithful Bat-butler Alfred finally loses his patience and threatens to resign if Bruce doesn't allow himself time to recover, Bruce calls the bluff and Alfred walks out. When the plot of a Batman story calls for Alfred to be smarter than

Batman himself, something is seriously rotten in Gotham City.

It's not that Batman doesn't have his weaknesses. But *Knightfall* isn't about the Dark Knight's weaknesses being used against him. It's a story in which his strengths—his investigative skills, his powers of observation, his keen ability to judge character—are arbitrarily ignored in the name of creating suspense. And it is ultimately a false suspense, for as is common in serial fiction, the tale's end mirrors its beginning, and Bruce Wayne is much as he was before.

Or at least so one gathers from the novel. I can't speak with authority about the comic-book version of the story arc, at which I haven't done more than glance when the issues hit the convenience-store racks. As far as Bat-novels are concerned, however, readers will get far better return for their money by seeking out Warner's line of paperback originals (notably Joe R. Lansdale's *Captured By the Engines*, reviewed some time ago in this space) or Geary Gravel's well-expanded treatments of episodes from the Fox Network animated series, available from Bantam.

THE RAVEN RING

Patricia C. Wrede

Tor 0-312-85040-9 \$21.95

I didn't realize how much I've missed Patricia Wrede's tales of Lyra until *The Raven Ring* arrived in the mail. While the supply of fantasy novels on bookstore shelves is never-ending, very few of them fit the comfortable niche that the Lyra stories occupy. The catch is that the niche in question is singularly difficult to label.

If one defines "high fantasy" purely in terms of stories set in wholly invented worlds as opposed to our own past or present, the Lyra books technically qualify. But practically speaking, the term is too general to be useful. A phrase sufficiently broad to include Tad Williams' Osten Ard novels, Terry Brooks' Shannara series, and *The Raven Ring* is not nearly descriptive enough to serve the purpose.

"Light fantasy" is closer but still insufficient. There's no shortage of wit in Wrede's present tale, which sends no-nonsense Cilhar traveler Eleret Salven from her family's remote mountain home to claim a legacy in the city of Ciaron, where protocol can be an art form. But the humor is incidental rather than integral, and "light" is more suggestive of comedy-driven material such as Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels or the works of Craig Shaw Gardner.

There's also a faint aura of disparagement about "light" that implies a lack of quality, and the aura brightens when the phrase "popcorn fantasy" comes up. "It's popcorn" is often read to mean "it has no redeeming social value, but I like it anyway," and that does books as well-constructed as Wrede's a serious injustice. Eleret's adventures in Ciaron are well-told and suspenseful; though the reader is apt

to deduce the title artifact's significance well before the characters do, there are plenty of surprises and fireworks along the way. What's more, Eleret and her newly acquired friends, incorrigible rogue Karvonen Aurelico and wizard-noble Daner Vallaniri, make an engaging trio as they attempt to unravel the raven ring's secret.

There's a balance here that's rarer than one might think. Instead of being driven purely by plot, or focused on characterization, or built around a particular theme, Wrede's novel takes a more generalized approach that blends these individual elements in the service of producing a narrative that holds the reader's interest.

As a catch-phrase, that's unwieldy. But it's an apt description of *The Raven Ring* and its predecessors, which feature first-rate storytelling and deliver entertainment value undiminished by additional baggage or affectation. The former quality is valuable in itself, but combined with the second it's entirely too rare. Readers only can hope that the next Lyra adventure isn't as long in coming.

THE GODMOTHER

Elizabeth Ann Scarborough

Ace 0-441-00096-7 \$19.95

The latest novel from Elizabeth Scarborough exhibits a fascinating schizophrenia. Its tone is part comic and part sharply incisive, with echoes both of her early humorous fantasy novels and her more recent, award-winning tales of the Far East. And while *The Godmother's* source material is taken straight from the familiar fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, Scarborough stitches it together with an unwieldy Gothic needle, as the plot resembles nothing so much as Dr. Frankenstein's monster animated by the split-brained souls of Jekyll and Hyde.

The narrative opens in modern metropolitan Seattle, which Scarborough portrays with authentically waterlogged enthusiasm, introducing us to one Rose Samson, an overworked social worker with the proverbial heart of gold. The title notwithstanding, Rose is the book's nominal centerpiece, and only when one of Rose's friends drags a wish out of her does Felicity Fortune, card-carrying godmother at large, appear on the scene.

We then bounce headlong into a loosely linked set of refurbished Grimm yarns: Snow White, featuring a wicked psychic super-model and seven Vietnam vets; Hansel and Gretel, in which two enterprising urchins fall into the hands of a child molester; Cinderella, in which a young horsewoman's step-family is doing its best to get its hands on her trust fund; and Puss in Boots, in which the talking cat's charge is to rescue a young black orphan and a Vietnamese street gang from mutual disaster. All four cases fall under Rose's and Felicity's attention, with assistance from genial police detective Fred Moran.

Individually, each of these is amiably and

neatly updated; it's in integrating the plots that Scarborough runs into trouble. By the time she's added villains and supporting players to an already extensive cast, and given most of them a viewpoint scene or two, there are enough characters so that nobody—including Rose and Felicity—really winds up with star billing, and some of the subplots end up fizzling badly as a result. Cindy Ellis, for instance, ends up being forcibly shoehorned into Snohomish "Sno" Quantrell's adventure, her wicked stepsisters relegated to offstage sweeping-aside. And Scarborough keeps yanking her talking cat out of its own story to help Felicity untangle other dangling plot-threads. The result is a Frankenstein-monster of a story, built from parts that are individually strong but unevenly matched and fitted together.

The mix of tones likewise ends up adding to the mismatched character of the novel. Scarborough has considerable fun updating the classic stories, and she makes Rose and Felicity (along with most of the secondary leads) relentlessly upbeat personalities. At the same time, some of her villains—notably the pedophile and Sno Quantrell's psychic stepmother—are genuinely nasty, dangerous characters. The difficulty is that, given the crowded nature of the book, Scarborough's protagonists end up winning the day mostly by spectacular good luck rather than active pursuit of justice. That severely undercuts the villains' credibility, and flattens the novel's socially conscious elements into a one-dimensional idealism that rings false against the colorfully accurate Seattle backdrop.

The Godmother, finally, is a novel in which illusion counts for more than substance. Like the wicked queen's poisoned apple, its brightly polished appearance hides an ill-made heart. Scarborough is capable of much better work, and this latest solo novel is a serious disappointment.

DRAGON'S EYE

Christopher Stasheff, ed.

Baen 0-671-87609-0 \$5.99

"A book of stories about dragons" is probably one of the safest concepts in fantasy publishing. Assemble a set of tales about one of the genre's most universally popular creatures, and readers are bound to trail eagerly after it like St. George in pursuit of his traditional foe. The only question is whether a particular hoard is full of copper or brimming with gold—and Christopher Stasheff's selections are an intriguing group that follows dragonkind on a fascinating tour of history and legend.

We begin with tales inspired by Norse and Celtic folklore. S. M. Stirling's contribution weaves a dark saga of confrontation between a Viking warrior and a Saxon dragon, while Teresa Patterson spins a lighter tale of Druidry, romance, and swordplay. Next comes Jody Lynn Nye's "The Stuff of Legends," the volume's one traditional fantasy, a clever entry that

gives its dragon a unique perspective on life and its human heroes a cheerful grasp of unconventional combat strategy.

Most of the remaining tales match legendary dragons with real-world history in one form or another. The two standouts in this group are "Birdie," in which Mike Resnick and Nicholas DiChario concoct a tale of Charles Darwin, a dragon, and human imagination, and Roland J. Green's "Call Him Meier," a clever recap of certain World War II episodes omitted from the history books. William Forstchen's tale of Napoleon's dealings with wyrm-kind is distinctive for its draconian statecraft, while Bill Fawcett's tale of a Templar knight and a dragon is well-told if rather predictable. Less memorable are contributions from S. N. Lewitt and Stasheff himself, both of which involve overplayed images of dragons as nation-souls.

The two oddest stories in the book come from Mickey Zucker Reichert and Diane Duane. Reichert's is an unusual Biblical tale which deals with Joshua's victory at Jericho in a distinctive context, and is intense enough that some readers will probably find it unsettling. "The Back Door," by contrast, is a modern caper yarn that provides good reason for thinking twice before trying to raid certain Swiss bank vaults, and is a welcome change of pace from the versatile Duane.

If there's a serious criticism to be leveled at *Dragon's Eye*, it's that it's oddly expensive—at \$5.99 for just eleven stories and a bit of blank verse, it's a dollar more than many recent theme anthologies featuring two or three times as many contributors. But as complaints go, that's a minor annoyance rather than a major flaw, and one that dragon aficionados shouldn't find difficult to overlook.

Recurring roles

While we're on the subject of anthologies, *Sword & Sorceress XI* (DAW, \$4.99) and *Bruce Coville's Book of Ghosts* (Scho-lastic, \$2.95) merit particular attention. Marion Zimmer Bradley's eleventh entry in her long-running series is as diverse and engrossing as ever, with perhaps a bit more emphasis on humorous tales this time out. Coville, meanwhile, continues to publish story-collections marketed for children but clearly compiled with readers of all ages in mind. These well-illustrated and produced volumes are the best anthology bargains in the business; wise readers will buy two copies, one to share and one to keep on the nightstand for reading under the covers with a flashlight.

Reaction elsewhere to *Field of Dishonor* (Baen, \$5.99), the fourth entry in David Weber's series about space-captain Honor Harrington, has been sharply mixed. In part, it's doubtless because Weber shifts his focus to the political arena this time out, with scarcely any deep-space action. But the suspense and strategy are as intricate as ever, and Harrington's choices just as compelling. Thwarted expectations

notwithstanding, this series continues to mature as each new volume appears.

The same can't be said for *At Sword's Point*, Scott MacMillan's second entry in the "Knights of the Blood" series for which he shares cover credit with Katherine Kurtz. The prose is marginally smoother, but the emphasis is drifting away from the very elements that made the first book marginally interesting. As with the first volume, the plotting relies on shadowy, unexplained conspiracies and exotic leaps of logic, and once again the climax leaves more questions than answers on the table.

Shadow of a Dark Queen (Morrow, \$22) begins a new cycle in Raymond E. Feist's tales of Midkemia. Most of the heroes are new, but there are familiar faces as well—notably the eccentric magician Nakor and the supremely dangerous Pantathian serpent-warriors, who are making new plans for ultimate conquest and destruction. A side trip through the Hall of Worlds adds a slightly science-fictional dimension to this installment, and Feist remains one of the most reliable of the genre's top-selling authors.

Change of pace is also the rule in the *Star Trek* universe, as ably demonstrated by *Warchild* (Pocket, \$5.50), the seventh novel in the *Deep Space Nine* sequence. Esther Friesner's chronicle of a deadly plague and the hunt for a child who figures in a key Bajoran prophecy is her hardest-edged novel to date, and a startlingly wise treatment of *DS9*'s Dr. Julian Bashir. Anyone who's thought of Friesner only as one of fantasy's foremost humorists will find this book a major and very welcome surprise.

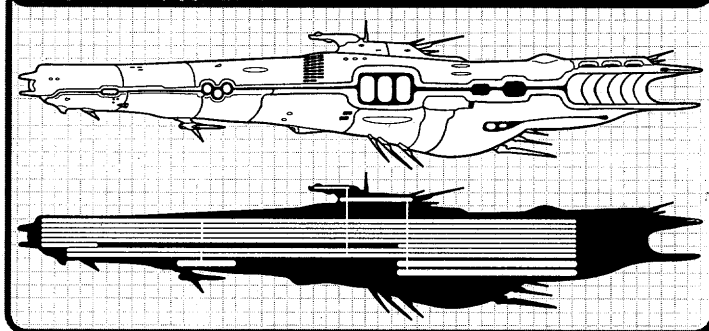
Equally surprising, if less successful, is *Crossroad* (Pocket, \$5.50), which marks Barbara Hambly's return to the *Star Trek* fold with a story that pits Kirk and his crew against a small band of renegades from a future Federation gone horribly wrong. The atmosphere is deliberately dark, partially owing to an alien race modeled strongly on Lovecraftian nightmare-creatures, and it takes our heroes rather too long to figure out what's going on. Psychological horror has never been one of *Star Trek*'s strong suits, and the rule holds true here even under Hambly's usually skilled hand.

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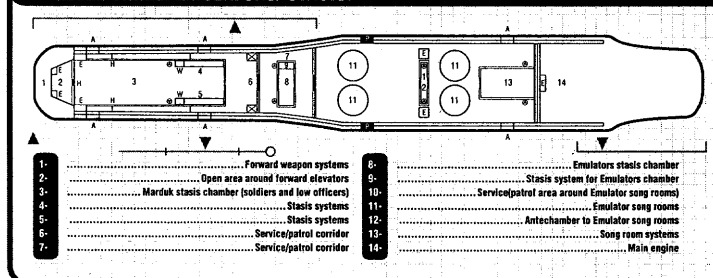
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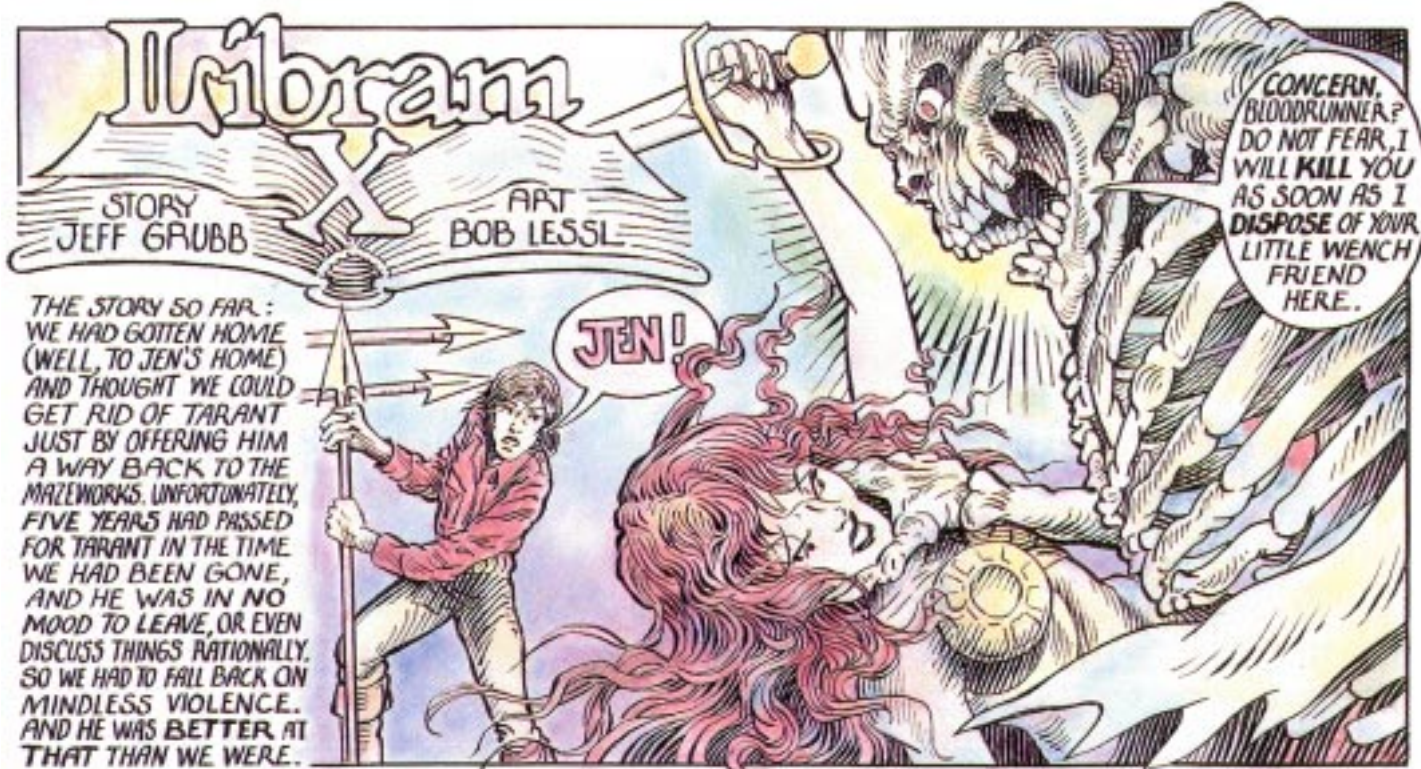
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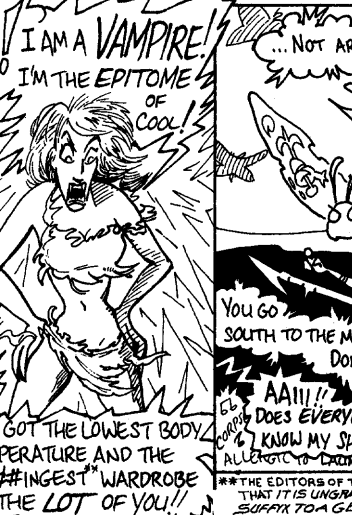
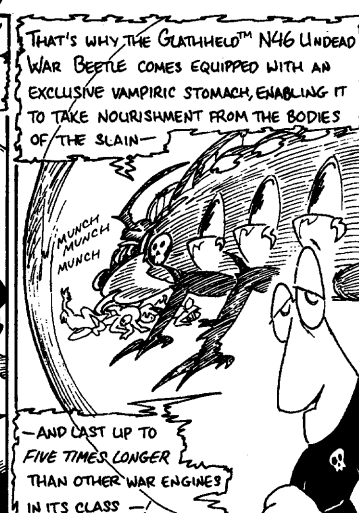
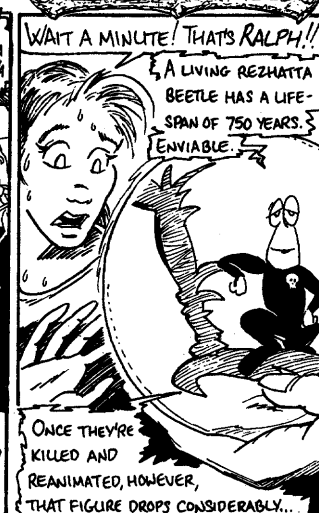
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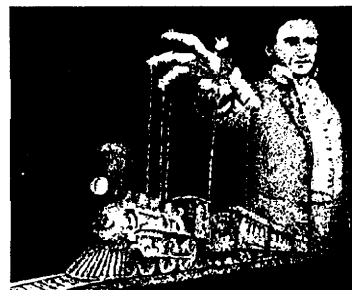
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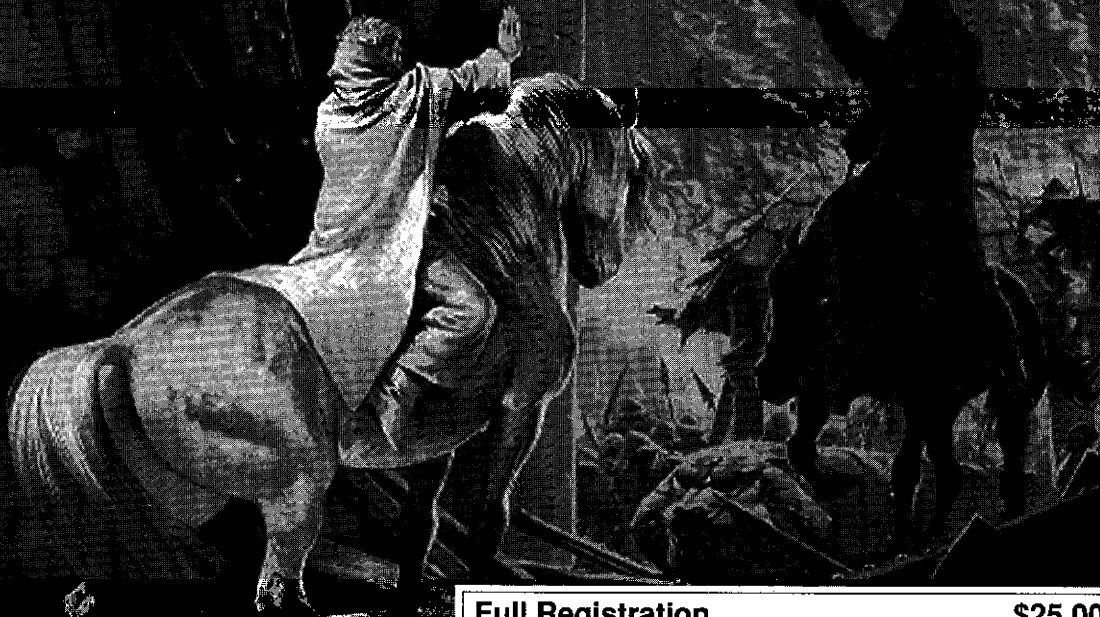
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War Dragon (Grenadier)

Browse for holiday gifts

This month marks the beginning of the Holiday shopping season. In this column I'm going to review some products that you may have missed this year. I've tried to pick out items that will serve several different settings or game genres.

I want to thank Chris Foster for his excellent job on the painting of the Grenadier figures. I further would like to extend thanks to all those companies without whose help this column would not have been possible all these years. Sometimes we forget there are others behind us, and the Holiday season is a time to enjoy and celebrate our friendships. To all my readers I offer the very best that all the holidays can bring and a peaceful and enjoyable season.

Reviews

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CH5 2QB United Kingdom

Miniatures' product ratings

*	Poor
**	Below average
***	Average
****	Above average
*****	Excellent

Gren #1826 War Dragon

**** 1/2

The War Dragon is a 15-mm multi-piece Luminate* kit, belonging to the *Warlords* series. The finished model is of a dragon and an armored warrior. The warrior is a one-piece casting dressed in a combination of plate and chain, with the separations in plate pieces and chain mail areas clearly visible. His helmet has a clear separation around the visor, and a deeply engraved vision slot. There is a hair tassel at the helmet peak that hints at individual hairs while still presenting itself as a full tail. He is armed with a spear and kite shield. The only flash was on the boot bottoms, and the mold lines needed only slight cleaning. You probably will want to prime the figure in black and then drybrush the armor and chain, since some of the separations are shallow and may not hold a wash or an inking.

The body of the dragon is over 98 mm long and is a combination of the head piece and the main body. These two pieces are joined at the shoulders in a well-concealed socket joint that required no cleaning and little filling and is camouflaged by the saddle. The body is sculpted in an overlapping scale pattern interrupted only by belly plates, extremities, and a line of sharp spinal ridges. The head features facial plates, horns, eye sockets, and an open mouth full of sharp teeth and a small tongue. Overall the body has little flash, but some cleanup is required along the mold lines and in the wing holder slots. The two wings have a combined span of over 100 mm and have excellent top and bottom detail. The leathery appearance, wing cartilage detail, pin claws, and the slightly puffed appearance of an air-filled space all overcome the disadvantage of the wings being slightly thick. There is very little flash between the wing claws and wing body. Some filling may be required at the wing base if a gap remains after mounting the wings.

The dragon is supported by a clear base, and with the left rear leg tucked against its body, it is clearly in flight. If you wish to show the dragon grounded, simply

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Street Bike (Grenadier)



Lizardmen Lair (Grenadier)

remove the flight base and the dragon will stand upright on the ground, although it will look a bit clumsy. I encourage Grenadier and other companies to produce more large creatures and other dragons in the 15-mm scale. This dragon is recommended to anyone who plays war games in this scale. The War Dragon retails for \$6.50 per blister-pack kit.

Gren #1526 Street Bike w/Uzi Rider

This 28-mm Luminite set is part of the *Future Warriors* line. The set contains a one-piece motorcycle and a two-piece rider. The base top is undetailed except for one pair of indented lines that run wheel-to-wheel and could be painted to resemble the center-line marker of a road. The motorcycle is of the trail bike variety, probably in the 500 cc range, with a clearly observable engine and cylinder head detail that is fair. The wheels have three-spoke aluminum centers, traction-tread

tires and a rear tread pattern that is slightly out of synch. A disk brake is visible in the front, and the rear wheel has a disk and sprocket. Wheel spokes are solid, front and rear, as are the seat and gas tanks. This molding will require the separation between parts to be created by careful painting. The exhaust system is rear-mounted and includes an air inductor and enclosed guard. The front has a faring complete with added weaponry and gauges. There was flash between the engine and frame, engine and seat, and on the rear spokes. However, all of the flash cleaned up easily. The mold line on the tank and seat was removed by simply running the edge of a knife over it. Last but not least, there is a buckle-down saddlebag on the right side of the cycle.

The rider is dressed in riding boots with extra front padding and side buckles, a pair of jeans with a narrow belt, and a tee-shirt. A standard leather jacket is stretched tight as he fires the Uzi clutched

in his left hand and aimed at a target to his left. His right arm is a separate piece that will require a little work to set correctly. Seat the figure on the bike and position the arm so that the hand is on the right handlebar. Tack the arm on with super glue. Allow the figure to dry and then fill the gap with super glue gap filler or epoxy. The face is bland, and the hair is slicked back in stereotypical biker fashion with individual strands visible.

This piece has lots of value. It can be used in any present-time RPG such as a TOP SECRET® game or ICE's HERO SYSTEM* or any near-future or dark future games. The retail price per blister pack is \$4.00, and I recommend getting this set if you play any of these types of games.

Gren #3008 Lizardmen Lair **** ½

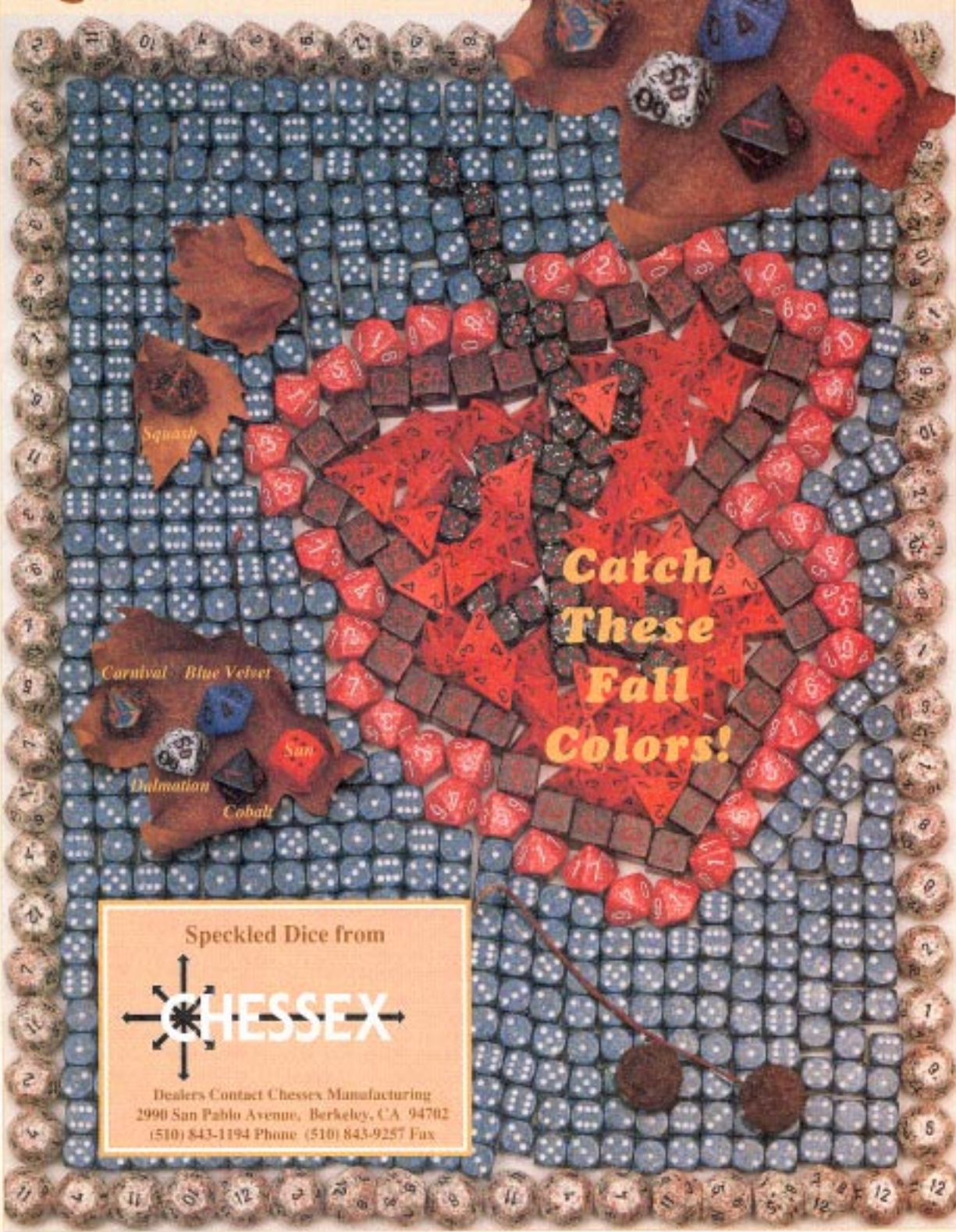
The eight Luminite lizardmen in this set are scaled to the larger 28-mm scale. These *Lost Lands* figures are set on rough oval bases with rock piles as prominent points. The bases are otherwise flat and presumed to be swampy terrain, and are just big enough to keep the figure upright. The lizardmen all have bony spinal ridges on the back of the head and from the lower section of the shoulders to the lower back. Otherwise, each figure has different characteristics, as follows.

Figure #1 has the smaller head usually equated with a snake. His clothes consist of a ragged hide loincloth and a ragged cape that is split in the back to accommodate his ridges. The cape halves are joined in front by a pearl and skull clasp. The body has very visible ribs and bone structure with muscles layered and tight-fitting. The skin has a pebbly surface and the feet are bare with sharp claws topping the toes. The tail is covered in chain mail and capped with a mace-type head. This lizard is smaller than the rest, measuring just under 25 mm squatting and would be under 38 mm standing. He is armed with a sling and a bag of rocks and is preparing to fire a projectile with his right hand. His armor consists of a round metal shield on his left arm and small shields on each knee. There was no flash on this figure, and the mold lines were hidden.

Figure #2 has a blunt face with a dull expression, but his bony jaws are open wide. This body is gaunt and his clothing consists of feathers under a hide shoulder protector and a leather breechcloth. His tail is bare. He is armed with a square club studded with a number of sharp, toothlike spikes. Protection is afforded by a tortoise-shell shield strapped to his left arm and knee plates. His breechcloth is held on by a bead-and-tooth belt that also supports a sheathed machete-type knife with a wooden handle. There are no other bags or accoutrements, and he is definitely in an advancing position.

Figure #3 has more feathers around the neck crest than figure #2, no shield protection, and a long toothed halberd that shows a lot of use. He is also in a charging

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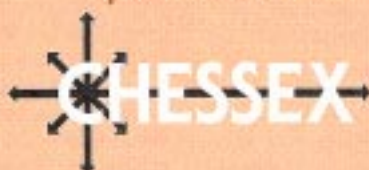
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Male Streetrunner (Simtac)



Veteran Merc (Simtac)

pose, seeming to be moving slightly faster than figure #2. Both figures are just over 40 mm tall.

Figure #4 is another smaller lizardman clothed only in a breechcloth. His neck is protected by a spiked collar, while his knees have small shields. He is armed with a short bow and has a rough-sewn skin quiver of arrows at his mid-back secured by belts. The arrows are crude in appearance. The tail is lightly armored in chain and has a small mace head.

Figure #5 has more feathers around his neck and sports a fur cape with gold button clasps. His breechcloth is secured by a bead belt, and a leather strap drops from the belt at the figure's front. He is charging with a halberd, and his mace-capped tail is swung back to deliver a second attack.

Figure #6 is in a defensive position with his shield-covered left arm extended to deflect a blow and his bracer-supported right hand clutching a broken halberd pointed toward the ground. The majority of his neck feathers are to the rear with only two facing forward. A belt with a skull buckle supports a breechcloth with spikes in the rear half and chain mail to protect the tail. The lizard's second weapon is a heavy mace-head at the end of a

slightly curled tail.

Figure #7 is the lizard champion. Metal bracers support straining wrists as both hands clutch a huge two-edged sword. His hide cape is decorated with a skull on the left shoulder and joined by a rope fastener. A skull-buckle belt supports his breechcloth, which also supports the chain mail protecting a usable tail mace. This figure has more spines on the back than the others and could be used as a leader; simply paint him a bit brighter.

Figure #8 has a mass of feathers under his skin cape and sports a large skull clasp on thongs just under his chest. A thin belt supports a sheathed knife, a skull buckle, a breechcloth, and chain mail for the tail. Both knees have shields, and both wrists have bracers. An oversized axe is clenched in both hands. If you want to use the other figure as a leader, this would make an outstanding champion.

These figures had very little flash and no problem with mold lines. The figures would normally be too big for use with AD&D® game figures, but they are only slightly larger than the Ral Partha lizardmen featured in issue #209. With this in mind, they could either be used as Tren (see the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessory) or giant lizardmen. By the same token, the Ral Partha lizardmen could be used as skirmishers for this unit. I recommend this boxed set, even at the \$18.99 price.

Simtac, Inc.

20 Attawan Road
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SZR-11 Male Streetrunner *****½

This lead-free 25-mm figure has a blend of past and present clothing. The basic clothing consists of a one-piece, full-length jumpsuit with an open tee-shirt type collar and pockets on both thighs. There are no closures noticeable, but there is a mold line that could easily be turned into a zipper line if you chose not to remove it. Over this is a long coat with a rear "V" cut that does not extend all the way through the coat. The sleeves are full-length, ending in a turned-back frilly cuff, and each sleeve has a shoulder pocket and a patch at the elbow. Wide lapels exhibit no closures, nor does the body of the coat give a clue to closures, except for a piece of metal that could either be a clasp or a necklace. His right gloved hand clenches a gun with sight and his left hand holds a courier bag or pouch that is also secured by straps across the chest. The face is middle-aged, with a look of concern that is accented by great bushy eyebrows. Facial detail is very good. His hair is swept back and falls to mid-neck. Close inspection reveals that there is a good-sized rat on his right shoulder that is looking at him!

This is a well-done, generic, dark future figure that could be used in a number of games besides West End's SHATTERZONE* system. The rat could be a familiar for a

street mage in FASA's SHADOWRUN* game or a "companion" in the GAMMA WORLD® game. There were only a few air-hole flash pieces and no problem mold lines. I highly recommend this figure at the \$2.15 price tag.

SZR-3 Veteran Mercenary ****

This 25-mm lead-free figure is walking across a ground-textured oval base in padded combat boots. A pair of thickly padded, wrinkled pants are protected by hinged protector plates. The upper torso is covered by a short-sleeved flak vest with extra shoulder plates over a tee-shirt. The t-shirt subtly shows off muscle detail, and a really nice touch is the pair of dogtags on a bead chain hanging down to mid-chest. A thin belt holds up his pants and a multitude of cartridge holders, other containers, and a knife that is hiding on the left side. A rifle is slung across the figure's back, but there is no sign of any holding straps. His arms are covered by modern bracers, which will be needed when he fires the heavy gun. A strap for the gun supports a line of grenades and a cartridge belt or energy packs snake across the left side to the gun. His head is protected by a Kevlar-type helmet secured by a chin strap. Eye protection is afforded by a pair of simple goggles. The face reminds me of a lightly bearded Santa, especially with the puffed-out cheeks and button nose, but I've rarely seen pictures of Santa with a cigar stub hanging from the corner of his mouth Sgt. Fury style! That is a nice touch.

This figure has a couple of problems, one of them serious. The pads on the left leg are split by a mold line and don't quite line up correctly. The same mold line runs up the arm and across the head and must be removed using a file. You also will have to figure out how to clear the space adjacent to the heavy gun, since this space is filled with spillover. Even with these problems, this is an interesting figure that can be used with a number of game systems. It retails for \$2.15.

Soldiers and Swords

40 Jarvis St.
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155002 Ladies *****½

This lead-free 28-mm set contains three women in late 1890s to early 1900s attire.

The first woman is encouraging someone into a "dead" sleep. She is dressed in bedclothes, a long nightdress covered by a laced corset-type bedjacket designed to enhance the bosom. The jacket's frilly half-sleeves balloon over the nightdress's regular long sleeves. Her upper chest is bare and framed by her long hair. Her left hand rests on her hip, while her right hand clenches a dagger. There is an expression of distaste on her face as if she is faced with a mundane chore. Only the flash between the arm and body mars the figure.

Lady number two is dressed in a formal

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Ladies (Soldiers & Swords)

evening gown that stretches from neck to floor. A laced top accents the bosom, while a single-jewel pendant helps draw attention to that locale. Her hair is combed off to each side and brushed back, falling to

mid-back. She has a stern expression on her face, and the wrinkles in her dress indicate that she is standing still. There was flash between her right arm and body, but it was easily removed.

Lady number three is dressed for traveling. A long coat ruffles in the evening breeze as a lightly tied hood protects her head. A gown and blouse are visible through the front opening of the coat, and her right hand is clutching a revolver. Her face is almost cherubic, with a big smile prominent as she plans her mayhem. There was no flash or visible mold line on this figure—even the bow securing her hood was flash-free.


This would be a good set of ladies for GDW's *SPACE 1889**, Chaosium's *Cthulhu by Gaslight*, R. Talsorian's *CASTLE FALKENSTEIN**, or any other RPG set during this general time period. This set provides an excellent value at \$4.95 per pack of three.

For questions and comments, call me at (708) 336-0790 MWThFr 2-10 P.M. or SaSu 10 A.M.-5 P.M. or write me c/o Friends Hobby Shop, 2411 Washington, Waukegan IL 60085.

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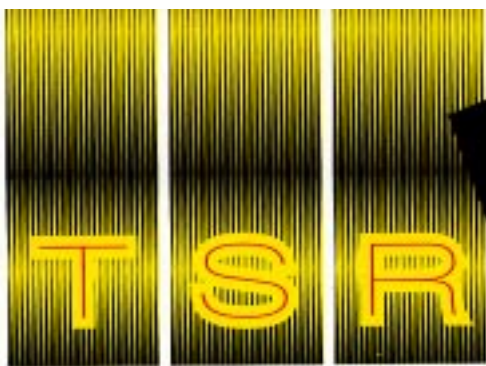
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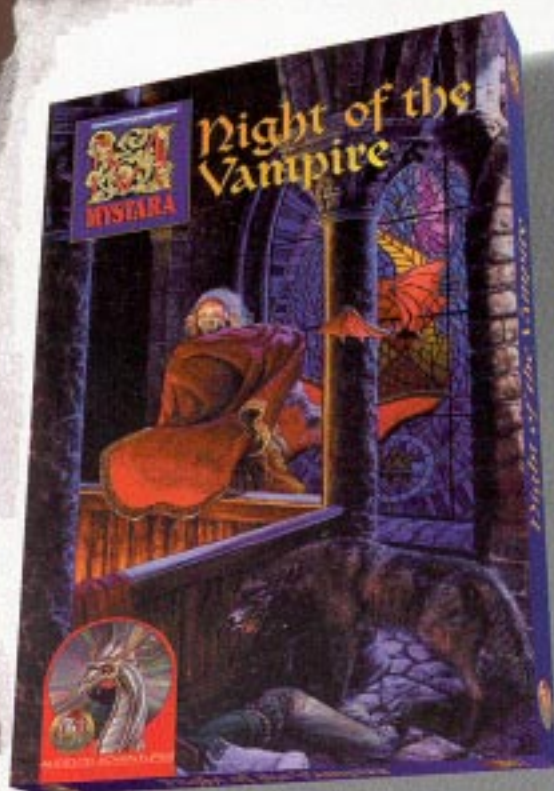
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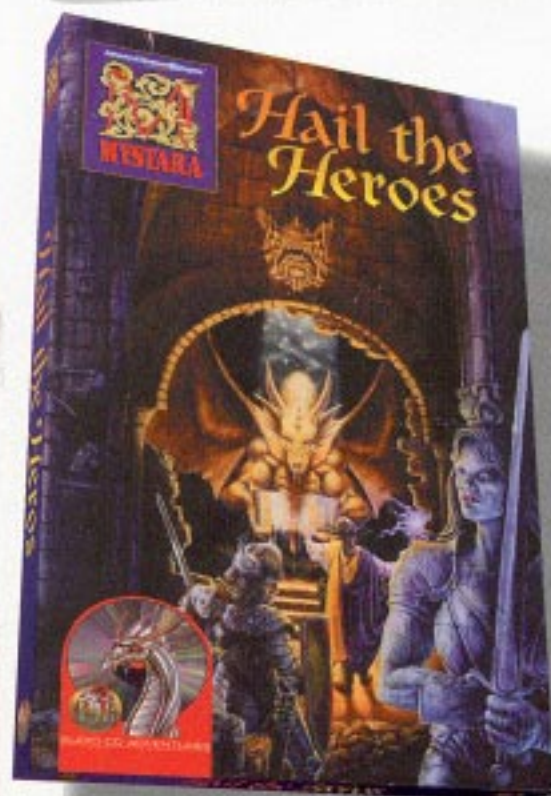
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