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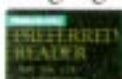
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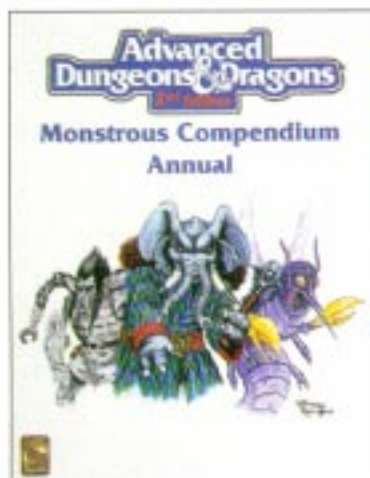
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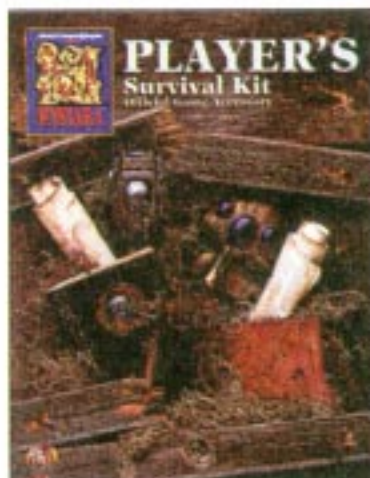
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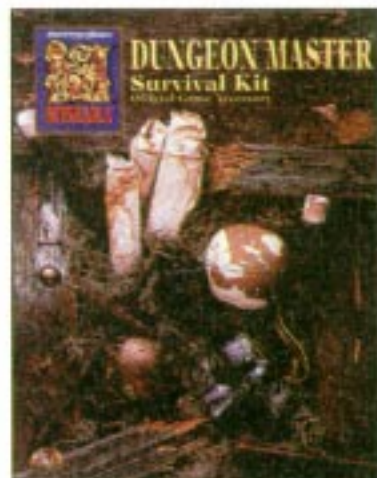
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COVER

If you're observant, you're likely to notice Robb Ruppel's cover art for this issue also adorning the cover of the PLANESCAPE™ setting's Planes of Law boxed set, out next month. Robb's piece depicts a modron cathedral; saying any more than that would be giving away planar trade secrets.

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More Masque material?

Dear Dragon,

Yes! Thank you, TSR, Inc., for publishing the RAVENLOFT® *Masque of the Red Death* campaign set. I've been waiting for a gothic horror campaign setting that we are somewhat familiar with, and now we have it in Gothic Earth. Now the big question is: Does TSR plan to make this an ongoing product line or is this boxed set all we'll see? I would love to see *Masque* become a full-fledged line. C'mon, TSR, don't let a really cool idea go to waste!

Jimmie Earls
Chesapeake OH

I passed Jimmie's letter on to William W. Connors, the primary designer of the Masque set (and the author of the "Psychic Proficiencies" article in DRAGON issue #212 for use in Masque campaigns). His reply follows: —Dale

Thanks for the kind words, Jimmie. Both Anne Brown and myself worked very hard to make Masque an exciting and interesting alternative to the traditional RAVENLOFT campaign. (For those who aren't familiar with it, Masque essentially is a stand-alone campaign using the AD&D® game and RAVENLOFT setting rules, but set on an Earth of the 1890s.)

Masque wasn't intended to be anything more than a one-shot product. But, because of the positive responses we've gotten from gamers like yourself, we've added a second product to the schedule of 1995 releases: The Gothic Earth Gazetteer. This product is due out in December of this year and will provide players and DMs with an incredible amount of information about the people and events that made news in the 1890s.

As for other products, that's up to you. We don't have any on the schedule right now, but if we get a few more letters like yours (hint! hint!), we'll be sure to respond. In other words, if you and your players want more Masque products, you're going to have to earn them. Also, keep your eyes on the pages of both this magazine

and of DUNGEON® Adventures for possible Masque articles and adventures.

William W. Connors

Gaming on Krynn

Dear Dragon,

I have been reading the DRAGONLANCE® novels for nearly a year now. I've thought that playing in the world of the Companions of the Lance would be fun. I was wondering what books would be good to have in order to play.

Ben Thompson
Salt Lake City UT

The one absolutely essential game product for any DRAGONLANCE campaign is the Tales of the Lance boxed set (TSR product #1074). This \$20 set contains all you'll need to get a Krynn game campaign off the ground, Ben. You also may want to check out the Player's Guide to the DRAGONLANCE Campaign (TSR product #2143, \$15) that compiles all the information that DRAGONLANCE setting players need without giving any DM secrets. Have fun! —Dale

Beginners only?

Dear Dragon,

I've been playing both the D&D® and AD&D games for eight years now. Over the last two or three years, I've noticed a change in TSR, Inc.'s products. When I started playing, there were many high-level modules available. Now TSR seems to be catering to beginning gamers only. While I appreciate the need to bring new blood into the hobby, is it really necessary to neglect the needs of those players who have already bought and enjoyed many TSR products?

Mark J. Beeley
No address given

While bringing new people into the role-playing hobby certainly has been one of TSR's goals in recent years (and a goal that I heady applaud, by the way), I disagree with your charge of neglect. TSR's Games Department does produce fewer "modules" than eight years ago, but much of the responsibility of presenting high-quality adventures for characters of all levels belongs to DUNGEON® Adventures. Wolf Baur does his best to publish adventures for a variety of PC levels in each issue of that magazine.

TSR has produced some terrific high-level adventures in the recent past. Look for the adventure, Temple, Tower, Tomb (TSR product #9448, \$6.95), published in 1994. It contains a trio of deadly scenarios for PCs of 7th-12th

level, all very much in the spirit of the "killer dungeons" TSR became famous for in the early 1980s. The DRAGON MOUNTAIN® adventure boxed set from 1993 (TSR product #1089, \$30), is a huge, incredibly nasty adventure for PCs of levels 10-15. (For more details, the DRAGON MOUNTAIN adventure was reviewed in DRAGON issue #200.)

Many of TSR's campaign settings have outstanding potential for high-level adventures. I've always wanted to take a high-level, magic-rich party of lawful and good PCs—with at least one holy sword-bearing paladin—into the domains of the RAVENLOFT® setting and conduct a guerilla war against the various Darklords. I think such a campaign would be a blast, full of action, tension, and machinations. The SPELLJAMMER®, DARK SUN®, and PLANESCAPE™ campaigns all handle high-level PCs very well.

TSR is publishing a veritable torrent of material in 1995 suited for high-level action. Available in July of this year will be the BIRTHRIGHT™ campaign setting. This setting allows PCs (regardless of level) to be the ruler of a domain. No more must your PCs be in the service to an NPC ruler—the PCs are the rulers. ("It's good to be the king.") The Labyrinth of Madness 64-page AD&D game adventure, available in August, is another tribute to the classic dungeon-crawl modules we all love to hate. The High-Level Handbook is a 192-page hardcover book, available in September, that is devoted entirely to maintaining a high-level AD&D game campaign.

Other options also exist for those AD&D game veterans who are feeling a bit jaded. Try a variant campaign such as the Masque of the Red Death (mentioned above) or the COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ settings. Or, pick one of the AD&D game's Historical Reference source books and develop a campaign from the material therein. Role-play a Viking, a Celt, a Spartan, a Crusader a Roman, a Muskeeter; or a paladin of Charlemagne.

Don't neglect your own imagination, either. Gamers—almost by definition—are creative people. Flex those creative muscles. Create the kind of adventures you're looking for. The AD&D game is flexible enough to challenge characters and players of any skill level. Take advantage of that. —Dale

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New From TSR!

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Editorial

Counter Intelligence



One of the benefits of working for TSR, Inc., is that I get a choice in the type of calendar I want for my office. This year I chose the desk blotter style. Every year I choose the desk blotter style.

It's not that I need all of those parallel lines for scheduling my appointments—no, my requirements are much more practical. I need that large white rectangle as a target for my desk clutter. From halfway across the room I can fling a pink "While-you-were-out" note and get it within those commanding black vinyl corners three out of four tries.

When I first moved into my new office with its custom counters and its impressive skylight (with which I issue Skylight Weather Reports for the dwellers of the Cubular Village), I thought about going with the datebook-style calendar. The desk looked so sleek in its uncluttered glory, so contemporary, so '90s. But, alas, it also was so *unfocused*. A week from now, it will take some effort to sift through all the clutter to see if next Thursday is the twelfth or the thirteenth (it's the twelfth—watch out for Friday the 13th). But, for today, that large white rectangle beckons, "January 1995" boldly emblazoned across the top.

Whoa, hold on! Can it really be January, 1995, already? George Orwell's *1984* was set in a future time that is now more than ten years in the past!

George wasn't off by much. Hardly a day goes by any more without some Orwellian concept making the news. Computers threaten our privacy, audit our tax returns, and offer us endless variety in ways to pass our hours in entertainment. We're plugged into the Net, talking on cellular phones in our cars, and faxing messages from home while naking our dinner. But even George Orwell couldn't predict that DRAGON® Magazine would survive to enter its 20th year. And, like any 19-year-old, we intend to stay up with the trends and be a player in the future.

Since 1976, DRAGON Magazine has been part of the growth of a new form of entertainment. Kim Mohan talks about the early days, when the magazine was "a giant errata sheet." At that time, TSR was creating new products so fast that a lot of rules were published with holes in them large enough to drive a truck through. DRAGON Magazine filled those holes. Time passed, the game products became more complete and comprehensive, and this magazine turned its focus to other areas. Book and game reviews, short fiction, humor, coverage of miniature figures, and computer game reviews were all added into the mix. We supported our readers with convention listings and gave them a voice through "Forum." All this, and rules expansions too!

Throughout almost two decades of publishing, DRAGON Magazine has been the largest, most celebrated magazine of its type. Now, having survived the agonies of our adolescence, this year seems like a good time to take a hard look at ourselves and chart our course over the ever-changing landscape of the hobby. This is where you come in.

The future of role-playing entertainment appears as seamless and uncluttered as my office counters once were. New styles, new technology, and new thinking are

taking these games into areas that we could barely imagine just a few short years ago. It will be within the pages of this magazine that you will be presented with the latest information and challenged by the best games available. And much as that blotter-style calendar focuses my activities, we're creating a new target to focus this magazine on. That target is, as its always been, you, the reader. But these days you're a rapidly moving target.

Send us your thoughts, your opinions, or your concerns about the future of gaming and this magazine. We'll review those comments, organize them as well as we can, and integrate them into future issues. It is our goal to present you with a new and exciting DRAGON Magazine at around the time of our 19th anniversary this summer. If you take the time, make the effort, and participate in our focus group, you'll be rewarded with the knowledge that you have been instrumental in changing the look of gaming.

Thanks!

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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.

What memories. . .

by Lester Smith

I don't really remember the first time I played a role-playing game. There's just the vaguest recollections of a stream bank, and somebody's character getting bitten by a giant tick because the DM decided the guy was being greedy. My wife tells me that she was playing a halfling, but I don't recall my own character at all. In fact, I only vaguely remember my wife being there. (Sorry, Honey.)

In retrospect, it seems odd not to remember that session. After all, I'm fascinated by gaming—so much so that I've made it my profession. I enjoy writing in convention bios that I've made an "occupation of a preoccupation." And considering that I had a wife, children, and a steady job for years before starting a gaming career, it ought to be obvious that this devotion is not merely a temporary whim. (By the way, lest anyone be worried, I still have the wife and children.) So it seems strange that my first role-playing experience should be so forgettable. It begs the question why I ever played again, let alone became an addict.

Maybe there is a clue in what I do remember of that first time. I recall the DM. And, of course, the giant tick. And the stream.

The stream is significant, I think, in that it is a visual memory. For me, a major part of the enjoyment of fiction—written or role-played—is in the mental images it creates. I think there is no greater compliment for a game master than to be told "The adventure seemed so real, I could picture just what was happening." That fragmentary image of the stream bank in my memory carries with it a good feeling, a glimpse of an imaginary world that I want to spend more time in. And therein lies one reason for my addiction.

The giant tick plays its part in that it was so unexpected, and yet so appropriate. Now that I think about it, I recall that we had slain a hill giant (interestingly enough, I don't remember the combat at all), and the greedy fellow had searched the giant's cave for treasure. Unsatisfied with what he found, he searched again, then outside, and finally began rummaging through the skins the giant wore. That's when the DM decided to punish him, with a giant tick. I hadn't thought about the possibility of

giants being infested with overlarge bugs, but in retrospect it seemed so right. Yet it was evident that the DM had just invented that detail. His setting had grown a bit in response to a character action, giving us all a peek at how much larger than any one of us a role-playing game world could become.

But it was only a peek, because the dominant thing I remember about that first session is the DM. As I recollect, there was a sense of his having invited us by for a glimpse into his imagination. In those early years, it was a pretty common attitude that the DM was a performer, calling the players together to be entertained by his world. The trouble was, that made the PCs secondary to the DM's vision, serving more as our interface with his world than as personalities in their own right. Of course, it wasn't long before we began taking over by portraying characters vivid enough to demand attention, thereby seizing joint authority for the stories that evolved.

My earliest vivid memory of role-playing—when it really all began coming together—was some months later. At the time, it was just me and the DM. I played Raedel Pinehaven, an elven fighter-mage leading half a dozen hirelings on periodic forays into a recently discovered dungeon. I vividly remember one room in particular: a cobwebbed dining hall with doors all around the walls and a gong standing on a dais at one end. From my map, one of the doors seemed to match up with a passageway back to the surface, so Raedel sent the NPCs through it, remaining behind long enough to throw a dagger at the gong. When it hit, a door across the room flew open and a horde of skeleton warriors clattered through, swinging rusty swords. By the time they got across the room, Raedel had fled to meet his friends topside. At the next session, I asked the DM if the group could purchase lantern oil by the barrel at a discount, and some rope to make a harness for carrying it between four people. With a puzzled look, he assented, and Raedel led the party right back to that dining hall, where he poured the oil all over the floor in front of the skeletons' door, then hit the gong. Again, the door flew open, and out ran the skeletons, only to slip and fall in a tangled heap. Quickly, Raedel

dropped a torch into the oil, burning them to ashes. The DM was pleasantly surprised by the tactic. But he did insist that I make a Saving Throw to keep Raedel from losing his eyebrows in the initial flash. I failed. I should have said Raedel "tosses" the torch instead of "drops" it.

Most memorable about the campaign, however, were the NPCs accompanying Raedel. He had a thing for one of them—Mistress Goldleaf, an elven sorceress—but the DM played her as a bit standoffish. Their slow-growing relationship added considerable life to the adventures. Another NPC was a surly fighter named Barat, who tagged along just for the treasure to be had. He had an annoying habit of holding Raedel personally responsible whenever anything went wrong. One time when deep in the dungeon, we had been cut off from our entry route and were looping back toward the entrance—at least according to the map—battered and bleeding from a host of encounters, and just hoping to make it back out alive. Unexpectedly, we stumbled upon a cache of weapons and armor, including one full set of plate. Raedel warned Barat that it might be dangerous, but of course the guy put it on, and of course it turned out to be cursed, though we didn't find out until later. We got out of the dungeon without another encounter, and a week passed before Raedel heard that Barak was looking for him. It seems he hadn't been able to remove the armor since first putting it on. Thinking (erroneously) that I had heard something about cursed armor falling apart when struck in anger, I came up with a plan. Raedel asked Barak to meet him in a local tavern, with Mistress Goldleaf secreted at a booth there. While Raedel and Barat talked at the bar, she used a *push* spell to nudge Barat's arm, spilling his drink all over a bruiser standing next to him. A brawl ensued, but to Raedel's horror the armor didn't fall off; Barak was just getting beat up—a lot. Raedel cast a *sleep* spell on the place to stop the fight, dragged Barak out, left him some money, took Mistress Goldleaf, and headed for distant lands. It was a fitting end to the campaign, and somewhere in the back of my head, those two elves are still exploring that world, hand in hand. 🐉

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Secrets of the PLANESCAPE™ setting's factions

by Rich Baker

Artwork by Tony DiTerlizzi



Listen, berk. You might think you've got the dark of what the factions are about, but there's more to 'em than meets the eye. They've got secrets within secrets, and the poor sod who crosses a factol'll find himself lost, and lost fast. Now, you seem like a decent basher, and it would be a shame if you got put in the dead-book without even knowing why you got there. So, pay attention, and you may learn something that could keep your soul and body together when you walk the streets of the Cage.

Factions

There're thousands of leagues, circles, conspiracies, and alliances on the Great Road, but there aren't more than a few dozen factions, and there's only fifteen that are known in all the planes. Each faction stands for something—a body'd have to be completely Clueless not to know that—but there aren't many cutters who have the dark of what the factions do about their beliefs and what belonging to a faction actually means.

If a cutter's a factol's man, he lives the belief of his faction. The Ciphers empty their heads of thought. The Bleakers embrace howling insanity. The Mercykillers hound lawbreakers into their graves. But that don't mean that every Cipher spends his day contemplating his navel, or that

every basher wearing the badge of the Red Death does nothing except pursue criminals. See, there're different levels of association with each of the factions, and the truth of things is this: most cutters wear the colors and live the belief while going about their own lives.

Most bashers you meet on Sigil's streets are namers. They're sometimes called the file, or factioneers. Namers are cutters who wear the colors but keep a distance from the factol's plottings. They'll gladly get in a brawl over their badge, but they'll rarely shed blood for their colors. When namers can, they help each other out. Maybe they let the faction's bloods crash in their kip, or maybe they keep their ears and eyes open and pass news along. The point is, they keep their involvement at a minimum unless it serves their purposes to get in good with the factol.

If a namer doesn't want to do something for his faction, he can tell his fellows to pike it. Usually, he can get away with it. He'd better not come around asking for help later on, though. A lot of the factols only ask a cutter once, and if he doesn't march to their tune, he'll never become a high-up.

When a basher enlists in a faction full-time, he's called a factotum, or faction-man. A lot of sods think that factotums are just guides and messengers, but those're only the most visible kind of factotums. Many more factotums are soldiers and scholars, diplomats and enforcers, and knights of the post who all work for the factol. In fact, any basher who considers being a faction member his primary employment and use of time is a factotum.

Generally, all factions are short on factotums; it's easy to find namers to wear the colors, but it's hard to find someone who'll drop what he's doing to carry a message to Ribcage, or maybe undertake a little cross-trading for the factol's benefit. Factotums have to take orders from the higher-ups in their faction, but the factions watch out for their factotums and make sure they've got the jink and savvy to get a job done. Each faction has a different way of making factotums out of namers.

The rarest kind of faction-man is the factor, or factol's man. The factors are the high-ups of the factions. They command strongholds and oversee operations, and councils of factors usually govern most of the factions' relations and activities. In some factions, the factors stay invisible; they disguise themselves as factotums of some type or another. Other factions, like the Guvners, like to put a name and title to each of the factors. When it's time for a new factol, it's usually one of the factors who ends up taking the job.

Faction secrets

So, you think you have the dark of it now? Well, don't think you know all you need to know to deal with the factions. See, the factions pass on more than a set of colors and an attitude to their namers and factotums. Factions are about knowledge and philosophy, after all, and there's few pieces of knowledge more handy than spells no one else has seen, or darks no one else can learn. The low-ranking bashers—the namers—won't know much more than you would, but the high-up factotums and factors have been initiated into the deepest, most dangerous darks the factols know. In the Cage, knowledge is power.

Most of this chant is common sense. Any sod on the street knows that Ciphers know things about how to move and how to act faster than a snake's strike. Everyone's seen Dustmen deal with undead, or a Doomguard in a fight. But these aren't the only tricks the factions have up their sleeves. There aren't many namers who learn these darks; the factols like to get their hooks in a cutter and be sure of his loyalty before they call him a factotum and trust him with a new secret. And in most cases, the blood'll have to demonstrate his loyalty many times to earn the more powerful darks the faction trusts him with.

Athar

The Lost have a lot of enemies in the Cage. There ain't many cutters who'll admit to thinking like they do. After all, who knows when a sod might need a little divine aid? An Athar sure won't see any..

Wearing the Athar colors is bad enough, but the factotums of the Lost have to learn a trick or two to help themselves when other folks might turn to a power for help.

In the Athar, factotums are called athaons. A namer can become an athaon by participating in a hidden ceremony in the walls of the Shattered Temple. It's said that an athaon has to bring three objects, books, or symbols imbued with the magic of the so-called powers to this ceremony and destroy them there. (Magical items usable by priests, relics, or holy writings will do.) Once the namer's done that, he's sworn into the ranks as an athaon.

Athaons can get room and board from any namers of the Athar. In addition, the factors'll keep him busy with assignments designed to increase the power of the faction and work against those sods who meddle in the name of imaginary powers. Most low-level athaons are used as guards and messengers, or technical experts. Mid-level athaons (4th-7th level) are used as special envoys, independent operatives, or supervisors.

Athaons receive a special saving throw bonus of +2 against priest spells cast by clerics, proxies, or servants of any of the powers. They know that it's all a sham and place their trust in themselves. This bonus also extends to the spell-like abilities of creatures such as devas and baatezu who serve a power.

By 9th level, most athaons are nearing selection as a factor and elevation to the inner circle of the Defiers. Factors of the Athar gain a special *obscurement* that protects them from the observation of powers and their servants. Priests, divine servants, and even the powers themselves using spells or spell-like powers to locate or inquire after an Athar factor must make a saving throw versus spells or have their efforts fail automatically. Spells or abilities this Athar *obscurement* counters include *detect evil*, *detect invisibility*, *ESP*, *know alignment*, *locate object*, *clairvoyance*, *clairaudience*, *magic mirror*, *contact other plane*, *sending*, *ensnarement*, *legend lore*, *demand*, *foresight*, *augury*, *detect lie*, *divination*, *reflecting pool*, *magic font*, *find the path*, *exaction*, and other such spells. It's thought that since the Athar don't believe in powers, the powers and their servants have a hard time affecting them.

Believers of the Source

Godsmen believe that every sod out there can be a power someday. It's easy to laugh at 'em, but there's the unsettling fact that sometimes Godsmen do things that can't be explained. None of the other factions believe the Godsmen are actually becoming deities, and say that they're using magical items to achieve these effects. The Godsmen pay no attention to these nonbelievers—they know they're right.

Godsmen namers who want to become factotums undertake an apprenticeship beneath a more experienced character

who shows them the ropes. The apprenticeship varies widely from individual to individual; some mentors almost ignore their charges, leaving it to the apprentice to keep up with them, while others take their duties very seriously and insist on daily lessons or tasks. When the mentor feels that the factotum candidate is ready, he takes his protege before a Godsmen factor who evaluates the candidate with tests, puzzles, or challenging tasks. The tests are said to be tailored to the candidate's fears and weaknesses.

Factors of the Godsmen are selected from the most experienced and powerful factotums (10th level or higher) after a secret ceremony or test of some kind in the Deep Ethereal.

The Godsmen spend a lot of time in the Ethereal Plane, studying the formation of demiplanes, and they learn their way around the Gray Sea. Godsmen factotums are trained in recognizing color curtains and automatically know what plane a curtain of vaporous color leads to. They make excellent guides in the ether; Godsmen factotums reduce travel times by one-third, and Godsmen factors reduce travel times by one-half. Because they are attuned to the misty world of the Ethereal Plane, they learn to detect the approach of enemies—Godsmen factotums gain a +1 bonus to surprise checks on the Ethereal.

Godsmen factotums sometimes can be found with magical stones called *source tokens*. These stones look like cloudy gray pebbles with swirls of darker matter inside. The holder of a *source token* can enter the Ethereal Plane at will from any other point in the multiverse, but each token only works once before disappearing. It's said that *source tokens* are manufactured in a secret forge in Sigil's Great Foundry, and they're only given to factotums who have a specific mission for the faction.

Bleak Cabal

Bleakers don't see themselves as insane, despite everything everyone else says about them. It's all the other sods who're deluded. The Cabal picks its factotums carefully; the difficulty of their beliefs is more than most sods can take. Prospective factotums must serve six months in the Gatehouse, looking after the barmies, before they are accepted and assigned to other duties.

One of the unusual darks about the Cabal is the fact that there're many wizards and scholars among their ranks. Characters of high intelligence find a strange logic in the Bleakers' teachings. Most of the factotums and factors of the Cabal are wizards, and the Cabal has access to a number of rare and dangerous spells developed by its members. (Two of these special spells are described here, as examples.) The Cabal jealously guards the knowledge of its spells, passing them on only when a factotum has proved his value and loyalty in many important missions.

Despair (Enchantment/Charm)

Wizard spell

Level: 4

Components: V,S

Range: 30 yards

CT: 4

Duration: 1 rd./level

Save: Neg.

Area of Effect: 2d4 creatures in a 20' X 20' square

Mages of the Bleak Cabal developed this spell to share their point of view with their enemies. When this spell is cast, 2d4 sentient creatures (Intelligence 3 or better) in the area of effect must make a saving throw versus spells or lapse into a despondent depression as they realize the hopelessness and folly of their beliefs. Victims of *despair* are unable to attack, cast spells, move, or even engage in basic activities such as eating or drinking. Everything just seems pointless. The effects last for one round per level of the caster.

Creatures suffering from *despair* don't bother to defend themselves, so opponents can automatically strike, disarm, or bind them without resistance. However, when a creature is damaged or bound, it may attempt another saving throw versus spells to shake free of the spell effects. Primes and Independents resist the effects of *despair*, since they're not committed to a philosophy. They gain a +2 on saves versus this spell.

Howl of Pandemonium

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Wizard spell

Level: 6

Components: V,S,M

Range: 0

CT: 6

Duration: Special

Save: Special

Area of Effect: 30' radius or a cone 60' X 20' at its end

This spell enables a mage to channel the screaming winds of Pandemonium through his own body, allowing him to emit a numbing howl that incapacitates anyone nearby. The spell lasts as long as one round per level of the caster, but ceases if the howl is not maintained for that length of time. (The howl must be maintained for at least one full round to be effective at all.) The effects linger after the spell ends, lasting as long as the howl was maintained. The wizard can take no other action than standing still and howling to maintain the spell. When the wizard casts *howl of Pandemonium*, he has the option of channeling the spell into a cone-shaped area, or simply affecting all creatures within 30 feet.

All sound-based attacks are negated by this spell. Even a banshee's wail or an androsphinx's roar would be drowned out by the howl. All creatures in the area of effect are deafened and disoriented by the spell. Communication of any kind is impossible, and the victims suffer a -2 penalty to attack rolls and saving throws. Any creature trying to approach the caster must save versus spells to be able to get closer, and any nonmagical missile fire is deflected by the force of the howl.

In addition to the above effects, creatures whose Hit Dice or levels are less than the caster's must save versus spells or become confused. Roll a d10 for those who fail their save and refer to the list below:

1: Wander away for duration of effect.
2-6: Stand confused for one round, then roll again.

7-9: Attack nearest creature for one round, then roll again.

10: Act normally for one round, then roll again.

Creatures of 2 Hit Dice or less who fail their saving throw are not confused, but instead driven into a catatonic state that lasts for 2d6 hours. Petitioners and monsters native to Pandemonium are unaffected by this spell.

The material component is a pebble from Pandemonium, which must be consumed by the caster.

Doomguard

The Doomguard believe that it's necessary to prevent people from interfering with the natural order of things—the gradual entropic death of the entire multiverse. The constant conflict of entropy against order has taken on the characteristics of an unending war for many Doomguard. Unlike many other factions, the Doomguard make no distinctions between namers or different ranks of factotums. Doomguard forces form spontaneously in response to a direct threat to entropy, and any blood who happens to be there may end up as the high-up for that fight.

Although the Doomguard don't officially create supervisors or officers, the truth is that there're Doomguard who spend all of their time fighting the entropy war, and there're Doomguard who don't. The full-time bloods might be considered the equivalent of factotums from another faction, since they tend to be in on the dark of things and often wind up as the cutter in charge when the faction needs to get things done.

While the Doomguard skips on organizers and middle ranks, they do spawn factors to marshal the forces of entropy against the forces of order and progress. These bloods are known as Doomlords, and most sods don't ever want to meet one who's about the faction's business. Doomlords are picked from the most powerful and ruthless Doomguard, and then subjected to some kind of unspeakable transformation in the Negative Energy Plane. When they return, they wear black and red masks blazoned with the faction symbol where their faces ought to be. It's said that the sight of what's under the mask'd drive a body mad.

From time to time, the Doomlords create champions of entropy to respond to specific threats. These cutters would be high-up factotums in another faction, but in the Doomguard they're made from whoever's the strongest sword arm near the trouble. To help these cutters perform their duties, the faction arms them with magical weap-

ons known as *entropy blades*.

Entropy blades are forged in the Doomguard citadels and imbued with the destructive powers of the negative quasi-energy planes. An *entropy blade* is created to oppose a specific threat to the disorder of the universe, and once the threat has passed, the *entropy blade* dissipates into dust. For example, a powerful priest of a lawful power may be trying to unite a warring kingdom. The Doomguard chooses to oppose his action, since if the kingdom were left alone it would fall into entropy. A Doomguard hero is entrusted with an *entropy blade* with the purpose of destroying the priest and his works.

Entropy blades are normally swords of +2 magical value, but when they directly oppose the threat that prompted their creation, they act as +4 weapons. *Entropy blades* ignore the normal adjustments to magical weapons caused by travel through the planes—after all, entropy is everywhere.

Entropy blades also have special powers, depending on the specific type of blade created—but note that these special powers only operate when the blade is being used in direct pursuit of the purpose for which it was made.

—An *ash blade* protects the bearer as if he were wearing a *ring of fire resistance*, and can cause a *chill touch* three times per day.

—A *vacuum blade* provides the bearer with immunity to gas attacks such as a green dragon's breath or a *stinking cloud* spell. It can *enfeeble* (as per *ray of enfeeblement*) by touch three times per day.

—A *salt blade* provides the bearer with water resistance (as per a *ring of fire resistance*, but against water-based attacks or spells) and allows the bearer to *lower water* or *destroy water* as a 12th-level cleric, up to three times per day.

—A *dust blade* protects the bearer against earth- or stone-based attacks, including earth elementals, giant-thrown boulders, or *fist of stone*, and can *disintegrate* stone or earth by touch once per day.

A Doomguard factotum with a very long mission may retain his *entropy blade* for his entire natural life, passing it on to another Doomguard when he can no longer serve as a champion of entropy. However, most *entropy blades* exist for only a few months before their missions are either accomplished or defeated.

Dustmen

Dustman factotums are rare; the members of the faction refer to them as Initiates. The lowest-ranking factotums are Initiates of the Fifth Circle, and middle-ranking factotums are Initiates of the Fourth Circle. The factors and factol of the faction belong to the First Circle. No sod's ever discovered what the Second and Third Circles were and lived to tell the tale, but it's said that powerful, free-willed undead make up these ranks of the faction. To become an Initiate, a Dustman must be at least 4th level.

Initiates of the Fourth Circle are inaugurated into a sinister and dangerous dark: their pact of neutrality with the undead becomes a pact of service. Dustmen factotums gain the power to *command undead*, just as if they were neutral priests. Each Dustman must be individually initiated into the circle of command; many Dustmen never become part of this alliance. Once initiated, the character gains the power of a 1st-level priest for purposes of commanding undead, and improves whenever he rises in level. Priests who gain access to this inner circle get a bonus of +4 on all their normal attempts to command undead.

If this wasn't frightening enough, it's also said that the Dustmen hide a terrible dark in their hidden Negative Energy Plane citadel: Every Dustman who has ever died is waiting to be recalled to service. Except for those who were *disintegrated* or otherwise physically destroyed, the Dustmen take all their dead back to their black citadel and prepare them for continuing service as undead. Some day, they'll all be summoned back to unlife when the faction has need of 'em. A body'd better not rattle his bone box about this one—if the Dustmen even suspect that someone's tumbled to this, they'd be waiting in the darkness.

The end result of all this is that Dustman Initiates often can muster undead allies to help them. An Initiate of the Fourth Circle can "requisition" a group of undead whose total Hit Dice are no more than twice his own level. To make this requisition, the Initiate must convince his superiors that he really needs the help, must succeed in a *command undead* attempt, and also must reward the undead for their service. (The DM can decide exactly what kind of undead forces are available for the character's command, and what the character must pay them. Under no circumstances can a PC attempt to muster undead allies more than once per adventure.)

The Dustmen are careful not to abuse this pact of service or to let it become common knowledge. There are too many bloods in the Cage who'd take offense at the sight of undead marching through the streets or looting the homes of the rich for the faction's benefit. A Dustman sod who fouls this up could very well find himself as one of the creatures he was trying to control.

Fated

The Takers have a unique system of advancement from namer to factotum, and from factotum to factor: challenge and defeat. When a Taker decides he wants to become a factotum, he has to find a sod who's got the job he wants and remove him from it. The sod can be "convinced" to retire, encouraged to go after someone else's kip, or (rarely) simply disappear. Whatever it takes, it's understood that the fellow advancing in rank is merely asserting his right to confiscate the desired position from someone too weak to defend it.

Factotums of the Takers soon discover that it's not in the Takers' nature to help each other out. They don't pass around special magical items, or teach each other unique spells. They believe that each cutter's got to make his own way in the world, and if one of the Fated really needs help from someone else, maybe they shouldn't have become Takers in the first place.

However, this doesn't mean that the Fated don't have tricks that other people don't. Any sod'll tell you that the Fated are some of the most knowledgeable and reliable guides on the Great Road. You see, one of the Takers never lets someone else do his work for him. If he's planning a trip to Carceri, he finds out everything there is to know about the Red Prison first. When he gets there, he relies on nothing but his own observations and common sense. The Takers've got a knack for survival that's a mile wide. Of course, Takers don't pass along this information for free. You've got to earn it somehow, and if you want a member of the Fated to guide you across Avernus, you'd better be prepared to pay dearly for his time and trouble.

In game terms, factotums of the Fated can use nonweapon proficiency slots to gain a special proficiency called Plane Knowledge, described below. Once a Taker spends a slot on Plane Knowledge, he can spend additional slots on Layer Specialization. For example, a Fated who has Plane Knowledge (Baator) can spend another slot to get Layer Specialization (Avernus).

Plane knowledge

General, 1 slot, Int -2

This proficiency allows a character to become familiar with the hazards, denizens, and refuges of one specific plane. A character with this proficiency knows what the gates to the neighboring planes and different layers look like. He can recognize common denizens of that plane and estimate how dangerous they might be. He has a good idea of what's where, and the general characteristics of any power's realm in that plane. With a successful proficiency check, the character can determine which way to go to find any destination or portal he's heard of, recognize uncommon or rare residents of the planes, determine the intent or purpose of any natives he meets, or survive on inhospitable planes without food, water, or special equipment.

By spending another proficiency slot, the character can specialize in a layer of the plane he has knowledge of. Layer specialization creates several contacts or acquaintances for the character on the layer in question. With a successful proficiency check, he can apply a +3 reaction adjustment to any dealings with natives of that layer—the character learns which names to drop in which situations. A character with layer specialization effectively has the direction sense, weather sense, and

survival proficiencies while on that layer.

Unfortunately, the only real way to learn this proficiency is to spend time on the plane (or layer) in question. About a month's worth of travel and study will suffice for general plane knowledge, but becoming an expert on a layer could take four to eight months of extensive travel and introductions.

Fraternity of Order

It shouldn't surprise anyone that the Guvners are the most organized and disciplined of the factions. Every factioneer or factotum's got his place and his responsibilities. A clear chain of command connects even the lowest cross-trading innkeeper right to the factol himself. Factotums are advanced at regular intervals to positions of greater responsibility, provided they live by the rules and show creativity in getting around them.

As Guvner factotums grow more powerful, they learn the dark of things. They find the loopholes in the universe and learn how to take advantage of them. A high-up Guvner can do things that no one should be able to do. When a Guvner factotum reaches 5th level, she gains a limited ability to manipulate probability. Once per day, the character can tinker with the laws of chance to gain an advantage for herself. (In game terms, she can give herself a +1 to an attack roll, damage roll, saving throw, or bestow a -1 penalty to any one of her opponents' rolls. This bonus or penalty improves by 1 per three levels, so at 8th level it's a +2 bonus or a -2 penalty, at 11th level a +3 or -3, and so on. This ability is one commonly taught by the Fraternity of Order to all of its factotums.

A more personal special ability lies in the Guvners' command of spell-like abilities. These are acquired on an individual basis, usually at the cost of months of adventuring or research. A fighter might learn how to "borrow" some elemental fire to temporarily turn his sword into a *flame blade*, or a thief might learn how all shadows meet on the plane of Shadow and how he can *teleport* himself by stepping into one shadow and out of another. Every time the character uses one of these abilities, there is a 10% cumulative chance that the loophole in the laws of the universe closes, and the ability is lost forever. If the character rolls 01-05 on this check, the loophole closes in a catastrophic fashion for him. (The DM is encouraged to be creatively malevolent.)

As a rule of thumb, a factotum cannot learn how to create a spell-like effect that is of higher level than he could cast if he were of the appropriate class. It would take a 9th-level thief to learn the teleport trick described above, since it takes a 9th-level wizard to cast teleport normally. In addition, the research and study involved is approximately equal to the time and money required to research the same

spell. (Refer to page 44 of the *DMG*.) It is possible for a wizard to research a spell that he knows how to cast normally; these are spell-like abilities derived from a knowledge of the multiverse, not extra spells. After a character invests the necessary time and money, he has a percentage chance equal to his Intelligence plus his experience level to find a way to make it work.

A Guvner can't gain more than one spell-like ability per five levels. The DM is perfectly within his rights to require a player character to make an extraordinary effort (i.e., have a successful adventure) to even get started on developing one of these abilities.

Free League

The Indepts don't have any formal organization or card-carrying factotums. There aren't any terrifying secrets that they're passing around, no distinctive powers that mark them for what they are. They settle for maintaining their neutrality and keeping out of the kriegstanz of the other factions. Since they don't create special powers for themselves, the Indepts find other ways to look out for each other. One of these is a spell, *know faction*, which was developed by an Indep wizard who wanted to be sure of who he was dealing with at any given time.

Know faction

(Divination)

Priest or wizard spell

Priest sphere: Divination

Level: 1 Components: V,S

Range: 20 yards CT:1

Duration: 1 rd./level Save: Neg.

Area of Effect: Special

This spell enables a wizard to determine the faction of a character or creature simply by looking at him. Most faction members don't bother to hide their affiliation, but on occasion factotums will order covert missions or infiltrations of other groups. The spell lasts one round per level of the caster, and the caster can determine the faction of one creature within range every round. If a target is trying to conceal his faction, he may attempt a saving throw versus spells to foil the wizard's efforts.

On occasion, creatures with deep-rooted philosophical beliefs will be revealed by this spell. For example, a high-level priest who worships a power of death may be mistaken for a Dustman.

Harmonium

Strangely enough, the Harmonium's views often create situations of conflict with those who don't agree with them. The Harmonium has adopted a rigid military structure similar to that of a typical army, and most factotums serve as soldiers and officers beneath factotums of higher rank. The Harmonium is careful in select-

ing factotums, requiring candidates to be tough, smart, and dedicated. Usually, candidates of lower than 3rd level can't handle the regimen of exercise, training, and education.

Hardhead factotums are trained extensively in combat and are almost as good at ending fights as the Doomguard is at starting them. At 4th level, a Hardhead factotum may select a weapon of choice appropriate to his class. When attacking with the weapon of choice, the factotum gains a +1 bonus on his attack roll. Note that a weapon of choice is not weapon specialization, and provides no extra attacks or damage bonuses. If a fighter already has a weapon specialization, she can use the weapon of choice to gain the +1 attack bonus with another weapon.

At 7th level, Harmonium factotums gain a special +3 bonus to saves versus fear and emotion effects. Their dedication to duty and their rigid beliefs make it difficult to distract a Hardhead from his duty. This bonus applies against spells or spell-like abilities such as *friends*, *spook*, *taunt*, *forget*, *scare*, *emotion*, *fear*, *despair*, *eyebite*, *cause fear*, or even dragon fear.

Finally, Harmonium priests are taught a special second-level spell called *dictate*. Harmonium factors (characters of 10th level or higher) may learn *dictate* as a special spell-like ability, which they may employ once per day.

Dictate (Enchantment/Charm)

Priest spell

Sphere: Law, Charm

Level: 2 Components: V

Range: 30 yards CT: 5

Duration: 1 rd./level Save: Neg.

Area of Effect: Up to 6 creatures in a 20' cube

This spell is an improved version of the *command* spell. It can affect up to six creatures at once, and its effects can last more than one round. *Dictate* allows the caster to speak a short, precise phrase or order of no more than a dozen words that must be obeyed by all targets who fail their saving throw. Examples include, "Throw down your weapons!", "Stay here until I return!", or "Seize that elf!" The command must be stated in a language understood by the targets, or the spell fails. The subjects will continue to obey nonimmediate orders (such as "Wait here,") for up to one round per level of the caster.

Dictate must be phrased to create an immediate course of physical action for the target. Commands to "Die!" or "Sleep!" usually don't work, but commands to "Lie down and put your hands behind your head" are effective. If the *dictate* spell is poorly phrased, the DM can assign a saving throw modifier of +1 to +4 for the targets. If the caster directs the intended victim to take an obviously self-destructive action ("Throw yourself off that cliff!" or "Kill yourself!"), the victim stands still for

one round if he fails his save, fighting the compulsion to obey.

Mercykillers

Mercykiller factotums are called themselves justices. They must undertake a lengthy period of training and study, learning the law to an exacting degree. Once the justices graduate, they are free to serve the faction independently and pursue punishment as they see fit. Most Mercykiller justices commit themselves to an unending crusade against lawbreakers.

From time to time, the Mercykillers are confronted with a criminal who escapes the normal processes of justice and whose crimes cry out for retribution. When this happens, the factol orders the creation of a justiciar from the ranks of the justices to pursue the villain and ensure that the crime does not go unpunished.

Justiciars are justices of 5th level or higher who are assigned to find criminals of unusual power or villainy who would otherwise escape punishment. Only the most responsible and resolute of Mercykillers are selected for this duty; it is expected that the justiciar will place the performance of his task above his own life and never give up the chase until he is dead or justice has been done. Some justiciars have followed their quarry

for lifetimes, and many others have died in their quests.

Justiciars are created in three steps. They first swear a blood oath to pursue their assignment; second, they are linked to their target in a magical binding ceremony; and last, they are equipped with a warrant with which to serve their prey. When the justiciar's creation is completed, he is excused from all other duties and assignments and set to the trail. Justiciars can command any resources or assistance necessary from other Mercykillers they meet during the pursuit of justice.

The magical binding ceremony that is part of a justiciar's creation serves two purposes. First, it provides the justiciar with an innate sense of direction that gives him a feeling for how far his quarry is and in which direction. Even the planes themselves do not bar the justiciar's special sense. Second, when the ceremony is completed, the quarry becomes instantly aware of the fact that it is now being hunted for its crimes. The material component of this binding ceremony is a piece of evidence from the crime, or something belonging to the criminal. The justiciar must keep this on his person for his special sense to operate.

The warrant is a scroll with a very spe-



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Unlike other graphics

cialized spell written on it. When read in the presence of the justiciar's quarry, the warrant functions as an individualized *hold person* spell with a -4 penalty to the target's saving throw. The justiciar can read the warrant regardless of his character class, and the warrant works only against the individual creature named in the scroll. Even creatures normally immune to hold effects are threatened by the power of the warrant; they must make a saving throw versus spells or be affected. The warrant's effects last for 5d4 rounds.

Player characters occasionally may be assigned as justiciars if they have served their faction well and have shown that they have what it takes to be made into a justiciar. There are no limitations on companions, so a PC justiciar could bring his fellow PCs along in the search for justice.

Revolutionary League

The Anarchists have found that espionage skills and revolutionary organization are useful tools in their war against the establishment. Revolutionary League members are organized into cells, which are groups of three to eight cutters who don't know anyone else in the organization. Only one blood, the factotum of the cell, knows anyone else. He is a member of a second cell, composed of the factotums of other cells. The Anarchists take their internal security very seriously, and a prospective factotum is watched for

months before he's invited to meet other factotums.

When dealing with the Anarchists, it's best to assume that they know most of your darks and can get at the rest if they want. It's a good thing these cutters can't figure out an agenda, because if they ever did agree on which faction to topple first, the Cage would never be the same.

Anarchist factotums are career revolutionaries. They train their cells extensively in skills such as Forgery and Disguise. The factotums gain the special benefit of learning proficiencies from the rogue group at normal cost, regardless of their actual class. Rogue characters gain a special +2 bonus to their score in any proficiency of their group that they know.

Sign of One

The Signers believe that all existence is imagined by the mind that perceives it, and that reality is real for only one blood at a time. It sounds far-fetched, but there's a circular logic to their arguments that a sod just can't get free of. Of course, most of it's just drivel, but every now and then a Signer shows you just how powerful the power of belief can be.

Signers of 4th level or higher can choose to be initiated into the inner circles of the faction as a factotum. Signer factotums are trained in the special art of *imagining*. The Signers find *imagining* to be extremely arduous work—after all, they're tampering

with reality by forcing their perceptions on everyone around them. A character must make a successful saving throw versus spells to *imagine*, and for each additional time he attempts *imagining* in the course of one week, he suffers a -4 cumulative penalty to the save.

When a factotum *imagines* successfully, he can mimic the effects of the wizard spells *minor creation* or *shadow monsters*, as if he were a wizard of the same level. If the factotum makes his saving throw by four or more, he can mimic the effects of the spells *demi-shadow monsters* or *major creation*. The factotum actually is creating a temporary, subjective version of reality through the force of his beliefs.

Unfortunately, reality doesn't like to be bent like this. When a Signer fails his *imagine* saving throw, he "burns out" the power until he advances in level. The Signer realizes that he didn't know as much as he thought he did and has to re-examine his beliefs. If the Signer fails his saving throw by rolling a 1, he suddenly realizes that he is imaginary, and becomes a *shadow monster* version of himself. He is reduced to 20% of his normal hit points, inflicts 20% of his normal damage, and cannot cast spells or use special racial or character class abilities. It's hard to get much done when a body's almost *imagined* himself out of existence. The unlucky sod can attempt a saving throw versus spells (no penalties apply) once per day to *imagine* himself back into reality.

Society of Sensation

Some bashers think the Sensates are nothing but an organized society of staggering bubbers. It's no dark that the Sensates enjoy themselves, and do so in any way possible, but it's also true that Sensates make a point of collecting life experience as well as pleasure. Sensates live every moment of their lives, ignoring nothing that seems new or unusual. It's not a never-ending debauch; it's a studied effort to experience everything there is to be experienced, and Sensates can tell stories that'll open a body's eyes in wonder. Sensate factotums are recruited by senior factotums who search for characters with experiences of particular value and intensity.

All this life experience and the appreciation of entertainment and the arts can't help but rub off on cutters who become factotums of the Society. Sensate factotums begin to pick up a few skills a body'd normally associate with bards. Beginning at 5th level, Sensate factotums can use the bard's Local History and identification abilities as if they were 1st-level bards. Sensates have an extensive store of experiences that often provide them with unusual insights. "Been there, done that," is practically the faction's motto.

To be initiated as a factor, the Sensate has to make some lasting and significant contribution to the experience of the entire faction. The factors of the Society of





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Transcendent Order

Action without thought is perfect, or so the Ciphers say. Any cutter who's ever seen a Cipher spend a day contemplating his navel in front of a wall'd be inclined to think they were half-right. But the truth is, Ciphers can achieve a remarkable state of coordination between mind and body that can leave other sods wondering how things happened so fast.

The Ciphers don't recognize factotums or factors. They simply reward those bloods who've proven their mastery of the Cipher meditations with the title of master. There are three ranks of masters: master of the heart, master of the mind, and master of the spirit. Masters of the spirit are roughly the equivalent of the factors of the other factions. Members of the Transcendental Order must be at least 3rd level to be recognized as a master of the heart, and at least 7th level to be recognized as a master of the mind. No body knows the dark of what it takes to become a master of the spirit—'cept the masters themselves.

With time, the Cipher meditations can improve a character's reflexes to superhuman proportions. A master of the mind

increases his initiative bonus to +2, and a master of the spirit increases the initiative bonus again to +3. It takes a Cipher about three to four months of intensive exercise and deep meditation to absorb the teachings of his new rank.

Another benefit of the Transcendental Order's teachings is the fortification of the mind against mental attack. It's hard to take control of a cutter's mind when the fellow isn't even thinking. Once a Cipher has invoked his action trance, he gains a saving throw bonus versus mind-affecting spells and spell-like effects (charm person, dragon fear, harpies' songs, and the like) equal to his initiative bonus. If the spell or effect normally allows no save, the Cipher may attempt a save without his special bonus. Note that Ciphers only enter their trance of action when they get into a fight or are engaged in their exercises and meditations—a Cipher PC can't walk around in a blank zone all day on the off chance that someone might try to throw a command at him.

Xaositects

Who knows what the Chaosmen might have the dark of? It's likely they're not sure themselves. The Xaositects have no structure or organization at all; a blood just finds something he's interested in and keeps doing it. There are some Chaosmen with more pull than others, ranging from

leaders of cliques or bands of bashers on up to major figures who seem to act as marshals of Chaos. There's no limit to how far or fast a Chaosman can rise.

Like the Doomguard, the Xaositects have no formal structure for creating factotums or factors. It's simply a matter of whether a cutter remains a Chaosman in name only, or chooses to make the goals of the faction (such as they are) his primary pursuit. Chaosmen who strongly embrace their faction's causes tend to become mobile centers of mayhem and disorder that infect everyone around them with confusion.

As the Xaositect becomes more powerful, the forces of Chaos become stronger in her. Chaosmen of 5th level or higher are protected by *nondetection* against spells cast by lawful wizards or priests. Chaosmen of 9th level or higher gain the ability to radiate confusion in a 20' radius, once per day. The effects of the *confusion* last for 2d6 rounds, and any lawful characters within the area of effect save with a -2 penalty.

It's rumored that very powerful Chaosmen have the ability to mutate their physical forms or create a circle of chaos similar to a paladin's aura of protection from evil. Unfortunately, no one's been able to get to the truth of the matter—the Chaosmen both confirm and deny any stories to this effect.



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The Dark Demiplane of Shan-Yi

**Explore this dark
realm and its
darker residents,
shades**

by Edward Bonny
Artwork by Tom Dow

[Editor's Note: This article was written to be usable in any AD&D® game campaign. It is not specifically intended to be used in the PLANESCAPE™ setting, although such certainly is possible with some minor adaptation. (I think shades would fit right in with the cutters and bashers of Sigil.) Also, Wolf Baur pointed out that DUNGEON® Adventures issue #35 contained the adventure, "Twilight's Last Gleaming" by James Jacobs, which takes the PCs to the demiplane of Shadow.

—Dale]

Overview

Swirling within the Ethereal Plane, large blobs of proto-matter collide and clump together. When significant amounts of a specific proto-matter have amassed, it acquires physical and magical properties of its own and becomes a demiplane. As a demiplane continues to acquire more of its base proto-matter over time, it eventually may become a plane in its own right. The demiplane of Shadow (known also as the Shadowlands) is one of the largest demiplanes and is believed to be nearly infinite in size. Sages speculate that it might become the newest inner plane in the centuries to come.

Shadowstuff, the essence of the demiplane of Shadow, is derived from intermingling forces constantly pouring forth from two great vortices connected to the Energy Planes. It is a "semi-element" created by the combination of equal parts of energy from the Positive and Negative Energy Planes. Fixed in the sky high above the demiplane of Shadow, these two vortices appear as huge spheres of identical size. One sphere, blazing forth with blinding white light, is the vortex to the Positive Energy Plane. The other sphere, oozing out thick, inky darkness, is the vortex to the Negative Energy Plane. The spheres are nearly impossible to see from within the demiplane, due to the rolling thick shadow-clouds that always blanket the sky. Most visitors to the demiplane are unaware of the existence of these vortices.

The demiplane of Shadow is not an inherently evil land. Although its gloomy appearance does contribute to the myths that only dark and foul creatures would

want to live in such a place, there are a fair number of nonevil creatures living on the demiplane—both natives to the Shadowlands and outsiders who have sought out the demiplane to dwell in or visit. Some creatures found here are good (15%), but the majority are either neutral (45%) or evil (40%). The demiplane is a dark and murky land of perpetual gloom and twilight. Most of the demiplane has terrain and weather similar to those phenomena on the Prime Material Plane worlds. Other areas of the demiplane are alien, strange, and often highly dangerous to travelers.

Reaching the demiplane

The primary means of reaching the demiplane of Shadow is through the use of planar travel spells and devices. The spell created specifically for such a journey is the seventh-level wizard spell *shadow walk*. Travelers in the Ethereal Plane may enter the demiplane's silver curtain from its Border Ethereal. Permanent ducts leading to the demiplane of Shadow may be found on all the inner planes and the Prime Material Plane. These are usually hidden or well guarded by powerful shadow-beings. There may exist a portal to the demiplane in Sigil, the City of Doors, from the PLANESCAPE setting.

Movement

Movement on the demiplane is the same as on the Prime Material Plane (dependent on existing weather and terrain conditions). Terrain varies on the demiplane; dim forested regions, gray hills, dusky deserts, dark mountains, pitted plains, insubstantial oceans, and alien landscapes are all to be found. All light sources are severely dampened by the light-dimming quality of the demiplane of Shadow. Torches burn only as brightly as a candle, while a lit candle will barely glimmer. In game terms, all light produced by natural sources (torch, lantern, bonfire, etc.) is reduced by 75%. Vision in this shadowy realm is limited to that available under "Twilight" as per the *Players Handbook*, page 117. Infravision works normally on the demiplane of Shadow.

Characters who walk along the demi-

plane's Border Ethereal will find that they can cover more distance than if they were in the demiplane itself or on the Prime Material Plane (three quarters of a mile can be traveled in one round of normal movement). The shadow *walk* spell takes advantage of this unnaturally occurring phenomenon.

Physical conditions

The environment of the demiplane of Shadow is not immediately hostile to non-natives. The demiplane's temperature stays nearly constant at 60° F. The air is breathable and not known to produce any ill effects. Travelers must bring their own food and water, though. Any food or water found on the demiplane has no true substance with which to nourish a visitor and will not satisfy hunger or thirst. The demiplane has a gravity similar to that of most Prime Material worlds (a definite sense of up and down, items released fall to the ground, etc.). Time passes here the same as it passes on the Prime Material Plane with regard to combat, memorizing spells, and natural healing.

Creatures of shadow

Beings encountered on the demiplane of Shadow either are natives of the Shadowlands or outsiders that are visiting or have decided to reside permanently on the demiplane.

Among the natives are the ancestors of many creatures that have migrated to other planes but are believed to have originated on the demiplane of Shadow. Additionally, the demiplane is home to a group of natives commonly referred to as "umbrimals." These are shadowy counterparts to Prime Material Planar creatures (similar to the animentials of the Elemental Planes). [*Animentials are further detailed in the Manual of the Planes supplement for the original AD&D® game.*]

Many of the common animals and some of the unusual monsters found within the MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® volumes have shadow-duplicates living on the demiplane. These umbrimals have similar hit dice and Intelligence to their Prime Material counterparts, and 10% of these doubles can cast some form of magic equivalent in ability to a spell-caster of the same level as their hit dice. This ability is innate and requires no components.

All natives of the demiplane of Shadow are immune to the effects of any spell that specifically draws upon shadowstuff (a *shadow magic* fireball would not burn natives of the demiplane, a *demi-shadow monster* griffon is unable to harm an umbrimal, and so forth). Umbrimals encountered may appear solid, semi-corporeal, or insubstantial. Coloration of these creatures is always drab (gray, olive, brown, and other muted hues). All natives of the demiplane of Shadow are immune to attacks that drain life levels.

As a general rule of thumb, creatures from the demiplane of Shadow are strong-

er and more resilient when in shadowy areas (+1 to hit, +1 bonus to AC, 1 additional hp/hit die). Conversely, in areas of bright illumination, shadow-beings become somewhat enervated (-1 to hit, -1 penalty to AC, lose 1 hp/hit die).

Combat

At the DM's option, melee and missile combat abilities may be affected by the shadowy lighting conditions (as per the *DMG*, page 118).

Effects on magic

Spell-casting characters on the demiplane will discover that certain spells and items that produce spell-like effects do not function the same way they do on the Prime Material Plane. For one thing, spells that produce bright light, vivid colors, or darkness (*light*, *continual darkness*, etc.) are severely limited when cast on the demiplane of Shadow (area of effect reduced by 75% and duration halved). Spells belonging to the various wizard schools are additionally affected as follows:

Abjuration: Spells of this school perform normally, except those that defend against specific animals or plants from the caster's homeworld may not protect against similar types of creatures on the demiplane. Abjurations will, however, function well against non-natives. Abjuration spells that produce colors (i.e., *prismatic sphere*) will still function, but all colors of the sphere will be greatly dimmed (and area of effect and duration are affected as mentioned above).

Alteration: Many of these spells function normally, except as noted above where light effects will be lessened. Spells that rely on colors for their effect (*rainbow pattern*, *color spray*, etc.) allow a +2 bonus to the saving throw for targets because the demiplane dampens the spell's effect. There are no "natural" plants, animals, or weather conditions on the demiplane of Shadow, so spells such as *plant growth*, *speak with animals*, and *control weather* will not function.

Conjuration/Summoning: Any item or creature conjured up in the demiplane will be composed of shadowstuff—which is real for all intents and purposes while the item or creature remains on the demiplane. Once removed from the demiplane, it immediately dissolves into insubstantial shadow. The caster may summon creatures only from the Inner Planes, due to the demiplane's remote location in the Deep Ethereal. *Summon shadow* will summon shadows from the Negative Energy Plane, but the caster has no control over them.

Divination: Most divination spells function normally here. No divination spells are able to contact the Outer Planes, due to the demiplane's remoteness from those locations.

Enchantment/Charm: Natives of the demiplane may be immune to *charm* spells cast by non-natives. Otherwise these spells

work normally.

Evocation/Invocation: Most of these spells work normally except for spells that produce bright colors or light. These spells will be muted but still have the same effects (for example, *meteor* storm will cause burning damage but will glow no brighter than a torch). *Astral spell* does not work on the demiplane.

Necromantic: These spells have enhanced effects when cast on the demiplane of Shadow, due to the demiplane's unusual relationship with the Positive and Negative Energy Planes. Necromantic spells that heal or cause harm with a touch have 1 hp added per die. Additionally, spells that target individuals, large groups, or areas from a distance (*death spell*, *finger of death*) carry a -1 penalty to the saving throw for the victim(s).

Illusion/Phantasm: The often colorful effects that accompany illusions and phantasms will be muted, but they otherwise function normally except as follows: Since most illusions draw their magic from the Ethereal Plane and because of the demiplane's proximity to that plane, illusions and phantasms take on a truer aspect of reality, making them harder to disbelieve (-1 penalty to saving throws). Spells that directly draw on the demiplane are special cases. Their effects are altered as follows:

Shadow magic and demi-shadow magic: The effects from these spells are 100% real and function exactly as the spell that it is meant to imitate. For instance, a *magic missile* created by *shadow magic* functions as the real *magic missile* spell with regard to damage inflicted, number of missiles, etc.

Shadow monsters, demi-shadow monsters, and shades: The monsters created by these spells are actual monsters with the full abilities of the monsters they duplicate (Intelligence, innate spell-like abilities, THAC0, movement, etc.). In most cases, the monsters disappear at the spell's expiration. However, the nature of the demiplane may allow created monster(s) to become free-willed. There is a 30% chance of this happening with *shadow monsters*, 20% with *demi-shadow monsters*, and 10% with *shades*. Free-willed monsters may behave in any way the DM decides (attack the caster, flee, fight for the caster).

Minor creation and major creation: Items created are permanent and real as long as they remain on the demiplane, dissolving immediately once removed from the demiplane.

Shadow walk: This spell opens a temporary conduit to the Prime Material Plane through which the caster may enter that plane, along with anyone else chosen by the caster.

Shadow door: This spell creates an actual room in extradimensional space for the spell's duration. The room may be secured by those inside or outside.

Lorloveim's creeping shadow (from the *Tome of Magic*): Any native of the demiplane of Shadow immediately becomes aware of the presence of a *creeping shadow*. Demi-

planar natives may attack the shadow as if it were a physical creature.

Lorloveim's shadowy transformation

(*ToM*): There is a base 100% chance, minus 1% per level of the caster, that the recipient will become an insubstantial shadow forever.

Shadowcat (*ToM*): The *shadowcat* created by this spell has no limit on the distance it may wander from the caster. There is a base 50% chance, minus 1% per level of the caster, that the *shadowcat* will be free-willed. A free-willed *shadowcat* may not be hostile, but is under no obligation to obey the caster's will.

Effects on PCs

Priests who have deities residing anywhere but the Ethereal Plane or the Inner Planes will be unable to receive spells over second level.

Psionics can use their abilities normally, since psionics are not affected by the demiplane of Shadow.

Thieves gain a +10% modifier when attempting to hide in shadows. However, natives of the demiplane can see through any shadows and will always be aware of a thief trying to hide.

Bards' abilities are unaffected on the demiplane.

The combat abilities of fighters, paladins, and rangers are not affected on the Demiplane of Shadow. A paladin's *holy sword* loses its ability to cast light on the demiplane. Unless a ranger learned how to use his abilities on the demiplane of Shadow, he cannot track wildlife or identify any plants native to the demiplane. Both rangers and paladins fall under the same restrictions as priests when attempting to regain spells.

Wizards are affected to the extent that certain spells will have different effects (see "Effects on magic" above).

Encounters

Below is a brief list of creatures—natives of the demiplane, ancestors of creatures that have migrated to the demiplane, and outsiders that often visit the demiplane—that a group of player characters could meet while they are adventuring on the demiplane of Shadow. The list includes the primary source for each creature's full description, and in some cases a brief explanatory remark. A DM who does not have access to some of the primary sources given here should feel free to expand this list—especially the "Outsiders" section—with creatures as he sees fit.

Sources

MC# = MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® accessory followed by specified volume number

MM2 = *Monster Manual II* from the original AD&D® game rules

Dun = DUNGEON® Adventures followed by issue number

Drag = DRAGON® Magazine followed by issue number

Natives of the demiplane of Shadow

Monster	Source	Remarks
Elemental, Semi-(Shadow)	MC1	Not a true elemental, a shadow elemental has similar stats and commensurate abilities to natives of the Inner Elemental Planes with regard to hit dice, control, etc.
Dragon, Shadow	MC5	
Gloomwing	MC3	
Worm, Tenebrous	MC1	
Greelox	Dun 35	
Shadeling	Dun 35	
Mastiff, Shadow	MM2	
Psi-Shadow	MM2	
Shade	Drag 213	
Shadow Asp	Drag 174	

Ancestors of migrant Prime Material Plane creatures

Monster	Source	Remarks
Cloaker	MC3	
Cloaker Lord	Menzo	
Dark Creeper	MC14	Most commonly encountered humanoid on demiplane
Dark Stalker	MC14	
Raven (all types)	MC5	
Steel Shadow	RoU	

Outsiders

Monster	Source	Remarks
Baatezu, Greater	MC8	Refugee from the Baator
Bodak, Benign	MC8	Escapee from the Abyss
Darkenbeast	MC3	Prime Material creation brought to the demiplane
Deva, Monadic	MC8	On mission from greater power of Outer Planes
Gingwatzim	WHR1	Accidental wanderer from Ethereal Plane
Human/Humanoid	various	Party of NPC adventurers*
Nightmare	MC8	Summoned by powerful beings, often seen in herds
Shadow **	MC1	Visitor from Negative Energy Plane
Shadow, Slow **	MC5	Visitor from Negative Energy Plane
Shadow Fiend	MC10	Refugee from the RAVENLOFT® setting domains or the Abyss
Tanar'ri, True	MC8	Escapee from the Blood Wars and the Abyss
Undead, various **	various	Undead who have partial existence on the Negative Energy Plane sometimes visit the demiplane
Xag-ya, Xeg-yi	MM2	Visitors from the Energy Planes
Xill	MC14	Hunter from Ethereal Plane tracking Prime Material Plane travelers into the demiplane of Shadow

*—NPC party composition is up to DM (adventuring high-level NPCs, a mage questing for information and magic, resident hermit locked away in a keep, spelljamming vessel somehow lost in the demiplane, etc.)

**—Undead do not remain long on the demiplane of Shadow. The natural resistance of the natives to most life-draining attacks coupled with the proximity of the demiplane to the Positive Energy Plane causes undead to seek out more appealing places.

Poly = POLYHEDRON® Newszine followed by issue number

WGR1 = WORLD OF GREYHAWK® source module

RoU = FORGOTTEN REALMS® original *Ruins of the Undermountain* boxed set
Menzo = FORGOTTEN REALMS *Menzoberranzan* boxed set

Shade

CLIMATE/TERRAIN: Any (demiplane of Shadow or shadowy areas)
FREQUENCY: Very rare
ORGANIZATION: Solitary
ACTIVITY CYCLE: Special
DIET! See below
INTELLIGENCE: Varies
TREASURE: Varies
ALIGNMENT! Any
NO. APPEARING: 1
ARMOR CLASS: As original creature
MOVEMENT! As original creature
HIT DICE: As original creature
THAC0: As original creature
NO. OF ATTACKS: As original creature
DAMAGE/ATTACK: Varies
SPECIAL ABILITIES: See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE: 3% per level of original creature
SIZE: As original creature
MORALE: Varies
XP VALUE: Variable

It is agreed by most sages that a shade is a once-powerful human or demihuman who sought out immortality by infusing his mortal body with shadowstuff—the “semi-element” that comprises the demi-plane of Shadow. The magical union with this dark essence has brought about the character’s transformation into a shade.

Only a single-classed human or demihuman of at least 10th level may become a shade. A dual-classed or multiclassed character can never become a shade. A shade may continue to advance in its class (racial limits still apply) but cannot change to another class under any circumstances. Knowledge of the rare and highly reclusive shades is kept secret by the few residents of the Prime Material Plane worlds who know of their existence.

The infusion of gloomy shadowstuff often changes the alignment of a shade (generally toward neutral and/or evil). Because of this, only 10% of all shades encountered will be of good alignment, 50% will be neutral, and the remaining 40% encountered will be evil. Only a *wish* spell may prevent this change. Once it has successfully completed the transformation, a shade is considered to be a true native of the demiplane.

Special abilities: The transformation empowers all shades with special abilities. Some abilities are always available, while others may be employed only in areas of heavy shadows. The infusion of shadowstuff extends a shade’s life indefinitely, for unless a shade is slain outright, it will never die. Shades no longer need to eat, but subsist solely on shadows. Additionally, shades gain magic resistance equal to 3% for each level possessed. Shades are immune to disease and life-level loss. All shades are able to regenerate lost limbs (except for the head) in 2d8 weeks. In areas of sufficient shadows, a shade will regenerate lost hit points. Moreover, a

shade is empowered with special spell-like abilities. These spell-like abilities are common to all shades in addition to other abilities available to each particular class:

Shadow walk as per the seventh-level wizard spell (see *Player’s Handbook*, page 186); two uses per day.

Lorloveim’s shadowy transformation as per the sixth-level wizard spell (see *Tome of Magic*, page 38) 3 uses per day.

The shadow may open a *gate* (ninth-level wizard spell, *PHB*, page 195) to the demi-plane of Shadow once per day (100% chance of success). The *gate* summons a specific creature that the shade personally knows (ally, pet, etc.). The creature may refuse to pass through the *gate* and is under no obligation to obey or fight for the shade.

Effects of light and darkness: A shade’s power can wane or wax dramatically depending upon the lighting of its current surroundings. A shade is most powerful when surrounded in shadow. In areas of bright light or extreme darkness where shadows are scarce, a shade is weakened significantly and loses much of its special abilities.

General outlook

Most shades care little for the day-to-day affairs of mortals whose days are few and whose lives are consumed in petty quests and mundane struggles (an existence shades are glad to be freed from). The virtual immortality that all shades possess allows them to pursue those interests that they followed when mortal (magical research, increasing personal power or wealth, overseeing an ages-long project, etc.). Whatever endeavors they undertake, shades rarely interact with each other. The incorporation of shadowstuff into their beings invariably brings about a gloomy, sullen change in personality toward solitary behavior. Even good-aligned shades are affected in this way.

The priest-shade

This class of shade is among the rarest of all shades. Since most deities do not approve of their clerics becoming shades, priests almost never become shades on their own. Those who do often worship deities whose sphere of influence lies with shadows and darkness. Priest-shades lose all access to the Sun sphere of spells. Any priest who successfully becomes a shade

Light conditions*	Regenerate	Magic resistance	Damage from condition	Special abilities **
Bright	No	Standard, saves at -4 penalty	lose 1 hp/round	None
Average	No	Standard, saves at -2 penalty	lose 1 hp/turn	None
Twilight	1 hp/turn	3% per lvl	None	1, 2
Shadowy	1 hp/turn	3% per lvl	none	1, 2, 3
Night	1 hp/turn	3% per lvl	none	1, 2
Complete darkness	No	Standard, saves at -2 penalty	lose 1 hp/turn	None

*—Light conditions:

Type	Examples
Bright	Bright sunlight on clear day Center of <i>continual light</i> spell Light without shadows (from several sources around shade)
Average	Normal daylight with shade or clouds Center of <i>light</i> spell Outline of <i>faerie fire</i> or similar spell
Twilight	Dawn or dusk Average indoor light Edges of <i>light/continual light</i> spell
Shadowy	Normal illumination on demiplane of Shadow Underground torchlight
Night	Dimly lit room or forested area Room with windows at night Moonless or cloudy night sky
Complete darkness	Pitch black, overcast night sky Unlit interior room or cavern In area of <i>darkness</i> spell

**—Special abilities:

1= *shadow walk*
2= *Lorloveim's shadowy transformation*
3=*gate*

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has its Wisdom ability score permanently raised by one (with a maximum of 19).

Combat: Priest-shades are limited to the weapons and armor normally usable by their class. In shadowy areas, priest-shades may, once per day, use the special ability either of *shadowharm* or *shadowheal*. When employing *shadowharm*, the priest-shade uses the magic of a *harm* spell on another creature's shadow, damaging the target as if affected by the 6th-level priest spell, *harm* (saving throw allowed). Conversely, *shadowheal* will affect the target creature as if cured by a *heal* spell. The priest-shade must physically touch the target's shadow to use this special ability.

Habitat/Society: Because so few priests become shades, the priest-shade is the rarest of all shades. Given the fact that only the most devoted and powerful clerics rise high enough in level to become shades, it is improbable that such high-level priests would forsake their deities to become shades unless given permission to do so. Priest-shades residing on the demiplane of Shadow must worship higher powers dwelling either in the Inner Planes or in the demiplane of Shadow (if any such exist in your campaign) to receive spells above second level. Priest-shades primarily seek to exist in their shadowy temples and live out their immortal existence obeying their deity. When priest-shades travel to the Prime Material Plane, it is mainly to keep in contact with the mortal members of their sect.

The psionicist-shade

After priest-shades, psionicist-shades are the rarest type of shade. This is primarily due to the secretive nature of psionicists and their small numbers. The transformation for a psionicist gives the psionicist a boost to her mental powers. A psionicist-shade permanently gains 20 to 80 (1d4 X 20) additional PSPs. Additionally, a psionicist-shade gains the sciences of *animate shadow* and *shadowform* (even if the psionicist-shade does not have access to the disciplines that include these sciences). The use of these sciences does not have an initial cost or maintenance cost, and a psionicist-shade never rolls a 20 on its power score. A psionicist-shade may use each of these abilities twice per day.

Combat: With poor hand-to-hand combat skills, psionicist-shades rarely enter into physical combat. Since psionic effects are not hampered on the demiplane of Shadow, a psionicist-shade can use all its powers to overcome an opponent. If seriously threatened, a psionicist-shade will flee using its innate *shadow walk* ability.

Habitat/Society: Psionicist-shades are the most reclusive of shades. They spend most of their immortal existence alone strengthening their mental abilities through dedicated practice, creating a

psionic artifact or two, and occasionally dealing with troublesome intruders. Psionicist-shades' dwellings are spartan and devoid of earthly riches or other "useless" treasures. Items found within a psionicist-shade's abode primarily serve a utilitarian purpose. Psionicist-shades rarely leave the demiplane unless on a mission of personal importance.

The rogue-shade

Only thieves—not bards—are eligible to become rogue-shades. Upon becoming a shade, a rogue-shade's Dexterity score is immediately raised three points (with a maximum of 19). This change in Dexterity improves the shade's thieving skill base scores appropriately. On the demiplane of Shadow or in areas of similar illumination, a rogue-shade can move silently and hide in shadows with a 100% base chance of success. When employing these skills, a rogue-shade is completely undetectable by normal means (but magical detection will still function).

Combat: Rogue-shades fight as they did in their mortal lives, except that they more craftily wield the power of shadows to aid them in their endeavors. Seemingly being able to dissolve into the shadows at will and then surprisingly reappear soon after in another area is the rogue-shade's main combat tactic (+4 on attack rolls, +4 bonus to armor class when in shadowy areas). Rogue-shades are cunning opponents, always looking for an opportunity to utilize the surrounding shadows to the best advantage.

Habitat/Society: Rogue-shades enjoy accumulating wealth, especially if they can acquire riches through their thieving ways. Rogue-shades travel more than any other shade class between the demiplane of Shadow and the Prime Material Plane. Rogue-shades have been known to run thieving guilds on several Prime Material worlds from their home base on the demiplane of Shadow. Rogue-shades work solely for themselves and have never been known to serve a master. They primarily seek to fill their dark and dusky mansions with treasures and magical items. These mansions are always well guarded against unwanted visitors.

The warrior-shade

Warrior-shades were once formidable fighters, paladins, and rangers who now fight in a new shadow-enhanced body. The fear of old age and its infirmities that eventually turn all stalwart warriors into feeble things is what drives most warrior-shades to become shades and thus be forever able and strong. Any subclass of the warrior class may become a warrior-shade. All warrior-shades add one point to their Strength ability (with a maximum of 19; any score from 18 to 18/00 is raised one category).

Paladins and rangers who become shades suffer a great loss of abilities. Pala-

dins who move toward this darker side lose all benefits associated with their subclass (spell-casting, *cure disease*, *protection from evil*, etc.). A paladin's war horse will always desert a master who becomes a shade. Rangers who become shades are no longer considered a part of nature and so lose most of their special ranger abilities. A ranger retains only those of his tracking abilities that work both on the ranger's home plane and on the demiplane of Shadow and the ability to hide in shadows. A paladin or ranger who undergoes the process to become a warrior-shade is now a warrior of the same level (experience points adjusted downward appropriately).

Combat: A warrior-shade is formidable in combat. In shadowy areas, a warrior-shade gains a +2 bonus to armor class, +2 to attack and damage rolls (cumulative with any other benefits). A warrior-shade also may animate a *shadow double* of itself once per day when sufficient shadows are present. A *shadow double* is an exact physical duplicate of the warrior-shade with regard to armor class, THAC0, and hit points (*shadow doubles* have no weapons but may pick up an available one). The *shadow double* will fight or move as directed by the warrior-shade and will remain until dismissed by the warrior-shade or slain. A *shadow double* must be within the warrior-shade's field of vision to be controlled. A loss of control will dispel the *shadow double* for that day.

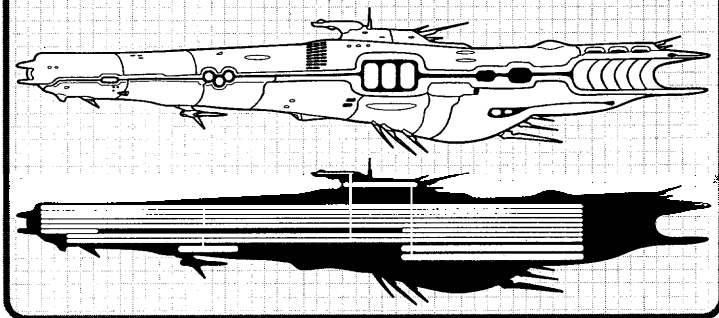
Habitat/Society: Warrior-shades are among the most numerous of shades. They gave up their mortal lives to become eternal warriors. At times, they are seen emerging suddenly from the shadows on a great battlefield to aid some cause or nation. Oddly enough, while warrior-shades enjoy battle, their brooding and solitary ways keep them from sharing their adventures with others. Once a battle has been finished, a warrior-shade usually slips back into the shadows—avoiding curious adventurers and other questioning folk. In their keeps and castles, warrior-shades live as most royalty does—having a full staff of servants, well-tended and stocked stables, a secured armory, and lots of treasure. A few are believed to rule lands and people in dark, shady castles on the Prime Material Plane.

The wizard-shade

This is the most common type of shade encountered. Any subclass of wizard may become a wizard-shade. Of all the character classes, wizards are perhaps the ones most likely to use life-extension methods. For wizards, the shade-transformation is viewed as a much more pleasant option than undeath. Wizard-shades add one point to their Intelligence scores (with a maximum of 19).

Combat: Wizard-shades suffer none of the spell limitations that normal wizards do when casting spells on the demiplane of

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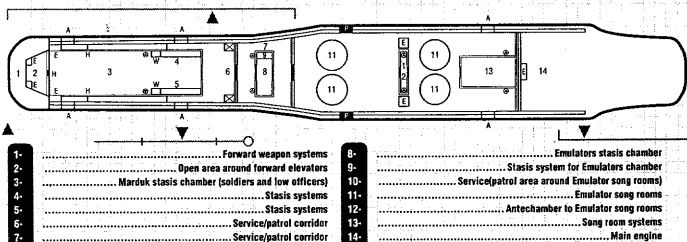
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Shadow. Spells that deal with shadows when cast by a wizard-shade will have double strength and a double duration. Illusion/phantasm spells cast by a wizard-shade are more difficult to disbelieve (-2 penalty to save) since the caster has a deeper comprehension of the shadowy magic being wielded.

Habitat/Society: The lure of long life, the love of magic, and the desire to pursue a deeper understanding of their magic are the primary reasons that wizards become shades. Their immortality allows for nearly limitless research and creation of spells, magical items, and an artifact or two. Wizard-shades prefer to stay locked up in their towers to continue their arcane research. A few wizard-shades have been known to live in towers of solid shadow-stuff situated on the border of a Quasi-Elemental Planes and an Energy Plane. How these structures withstand such harsh environments remains a mystery. Wizard-shades are very private and have rarely been known to accept strangers into their dwellings. Some wizard-shades keep in touch with old comrades on the Prime Material Plane and have been reported to aid friends in times of need.

Character subclasses of unique worlds: DMs may opt to allow character subclasses unique to certain worlds the option of becoming shades. These special subclasses would fall under the appropriate class heading (an Athasian gladiator would become a warrior-shade, a templar would become a priest-shade, etc.)

The transformation

A shade may be created in one of two ways. One is by the use of the new ninth-level wizard spell create shade, which is described below. The other way is alluded to in the Player's Handbook under the ninth-level wizard spell *energy drain*, page 194—a wizard who has his Constitution score reduced to 0 by multiple castings of *energy drain* dies and is “reborn” as a wizard-shade. A shade created in this manner immediately undergoes an alignment change to neutral evil (due to an imbalance caused by tapping the Negative Energy Plane when casting *energy drain*).

Create Shade (Alteration)

Level: 9	Components: V,S,M
Range: Special	CT: 1 day
Duration: Perm.	Save: None
Area of Effect: 1 creature	

This powerful spell infuses one being with shadowstuff from the demiplane of Shadow and transforms him into a shade. The subject of this spell must be a single-classed human or demihuman (psionicist, priest, thief, warrior, or wizard only) of at least 10th level.

The casting of this spell is a long, delicate, and highly complex procedure. The caster and the recipient must not be dis-

turbed at all, or else the spell will fail. The caster must additionally cast shadow walk, *Lorloveim's shadowy transformation*, *gate*, and *permanency* upon the subject for the transformation to succeed.

Upon completion of all the castings, the subject must successfully roll a system shock roll.

A 25% bonus may be added to this roll if this spell is cast on the demiplane of Shadow. A percentile roll less than or equal to the survival chance indicates that the subject has been transformed successfully into a shade. Failure means that the subject dissolves away into shadow—lost forever. Any attempt (even by a *wish*) to return the subject to normal will automatically fail.

It is possible for a character to have his alignment changed by this spell. Roll d10 for any changes: 1, Alignment stays the same; 2-4, Alignment moves one step toward true neutral; 5-7, moves one step toward evil; 8-9, becomes true neutral; 10, becomes neutral evil. A *wish* spell may be used to prevent any change in alignment. After the spell is cast, the caster loses 1d6 Constitution points and loses consciousness for 1d8 days (also aging five years if a *wish* was used to prevent an alignment change).

If not for the fact that this spell is dangerous to both the caster and the recipient, shades might be more numerous. Only a free-willed wizard can cast this spell successfully. The material components for this spell are 10,000 gp worth of powdered onyx, 10,000 gp worth of powdered diamond, and an *amulet of the planes*. The powdered onyx and diamond are consumed during the casting of the spell, while the *amulet* is used to draw forth the necessary amounts of shadowstuff and planar energy from the demiplane of Shadow and the Positive and Negative Energy Planes respectively.

Ω



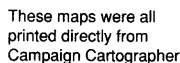
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DRAGON 31

PLANAR PERSONALITIES

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PERSONALITIES

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PERSONALITIES

A few of Sigil's more colorful residents

by Bill Slavicsek & Michele Carter

Artwork by Tony DiTerlizzi



Welcome to Sigil, the Cage, the city of Doors. Whatever you call it, Sigil is eternal. It's the crossroads of everywhere, the waystation of the multiverse. But you already know that, 'cause you're here. It's not like you're one of the Clueless or some addle-coved barmy, right? You know the chant. I could tell the moment you stepped through the portal just by looking at you. Still, there's dark and there's dark, and every cutter needs a light now and then. For just a little jink (a little more than that, berk!) I'll be your light. It'll be money well spent.

Now, most touts'll show you where to eat, what to see, where to sleep, and where to spend jink. But the Cage's more than shopping and impossible architecture. It's bodies, especially the bodies who're found in Sigil more often than not. Without them, there'd be no services, no bloods to pass on the chant, no cutters to tell you the dark of it. A few of these bodies are so well known that they've become fixtures in the Cage—not quite on the same level of recognition as the dabus and the Lady herself, but close enough. I know these bodies, and I'll point them out as we go.



The first body you'll want to remember is A'kin. He knows where all the skeletons are buried in the Lower Ward, if you catch my meaning. He's over this way, right off Bloodgem Road. . . .

A'kin, the friendly fiend

A picture of a smiling yugoloth over the door identifies the shop as The Friendly Fiend. It's one of the best shops in the Lower Ward, with a reputation for fairness and quality that impresses even the hard-to-please denizens of the Market Ward. If a cutter needs the best supplies available in this part of town and wants to pay the best prices, then this is the place to do business—even if the shopkeeper is a greater yugoloth.

A'kin, the shopkeeper, has a fearsome appearance. He looks like a robed human with the head of a war dog. He has a pleasant personality, however, and a friendly manner. In fact, he's probably the nicest yugoloth a cutter'll ever run into. He never has a foul word to say or a bad mood to pass on to a customer. To the contrary,

A'kin makes friendly conversation and parcels out kind words to everyone who visits the shop.

Step inside The Friendly Fiend and browse. Unusual items from across the multiverse fill the shop. From the mundane to the magical, if it's available in Sigil it's probably in a bin, atop a shelf, or on a table in A'kin's shop. A moment after a berk steps through the door, the yugoloth rushes over with an amiable greeting and a cup of hot tea or a mug of sweet wine to wash away the dust of travel. Enchanted items and goods from far-off planes can be purchased here, but quantities are extremely limited. But don't be in a hurry, 'cause A'kin takes his time.

A body won't get the hard sell here. In fact, A'kin takes forever to get around to selling anything. Instead, he talks about the weather, provides local news, and shares amusing anecdotes with his customers. He asks about where they're from (if they look like they don't mind talking), or drops hints about places that might offer advice or assistance to their types (bashers, peelers, faction members, and so on).

A'kin's shop has been around for a number of years. He arrived mysteriously (as most arrivees do) and quickly made a name for himself among the other Cagers. While the friendly yugoloth talks a great deal, he doesn't say very much—at least not about himself. In the absence of facts, Cagers tend to invent fantasy. How close some of this fantasy comes to the truth, who can say? Regardless, if a body asks three different berks on the street about A'kin, a body'll get three different versions of who A'kin is, why he's so different from other yugoloths, where he comes from, and why he's living in Sigil.

One says that A'kin is a spy, sent to Sigil to gather information for the Blood War. Which side does he work for? Well, that depends on who's spouting the chant. Some of the berks who hold with this story say he's the eyes and ears of the Dark Eight, sending intelligence reports back to Baator on the Lady of Pain. Others claim he's in the employ of one of the balor, watching for a weakness the tanar'ri can exploit. A few even suggest that he's an

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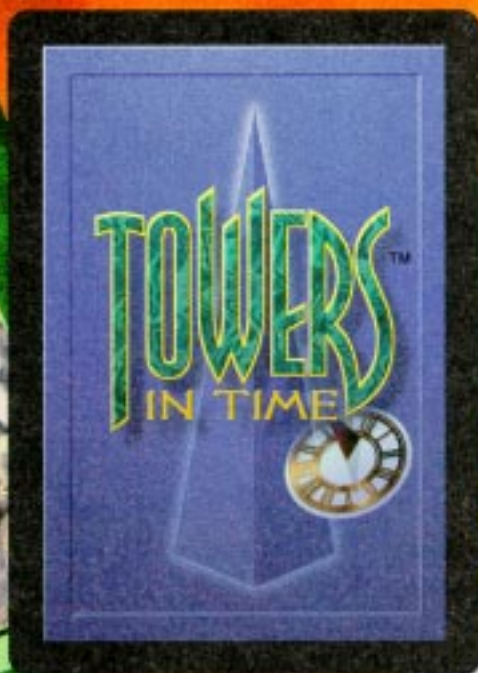
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They knew less than they thought!



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independent, selling what he learns to the highest bidder. In all of these cases, the friendly persona is just an act. Deep down, these bubs believe, A'kin is as vile and evil as all his brethren. He just hides it well for the profit he can gain.

Another rumor describes A'kin as an exile. The arcanaloth, according to the dark of it, did something so terrible that the General of Gehenna banished him forever. To survive outside Gehenna's cruel embrace, A'kin had to take on a persona contrary to fiendish nature. He hopes someday to return to Gehenna, once the climate improves. That, of course, could take centuries, for the speculation over A'kin's actions ranges from the horrific to the most revolting imaginable. Most who hold to this chant believe that A'kin's calm exterior hides a terrified castaway. He constantly watches for signs that the General has come to terminate his exile—permanently. They believe that one day a fiendish assassin will arrive to put A'kin in the dead book—unless the arcanaloth remains alert and ready to strike before the assassin's blade slashes in the night.

Finally, there are those who think that A'kin is barmy. He doesn't behave like a normal yugoloth, so he must be one stone shy of a portal, they say. A friendly fiend? That's just plain addled! It's a sure indication of insanity, as A'kin's behavior goes against the natural order. These bubs believe that insanity and violence go hand-in-hand. "We know how a normal yugoloth acts," the bubs say, "but a barmy yugoloth might do anything, and that makes him twice as dangerous!" Someday they think that A'kin will totally snap—and not even the Lady herself will be able to prevent the deaths that will surely follow.

The truth, as is so often the case, probably includes elements of all these chants. Until A'kin feels inclined to share his history or something happens to confirm one or another, one fact remains clear. If a body enters The Friendly Fiend looking for a deal, some information, or just to get out of the rain and smog, then they've got a friend in A'kin the arcanaloth.

A'kin the greater yugoloth

(Planar/male arcanaloth/HD 12+24/N); Int 20; AC -8; MV 12, Fl 18 (B); hp 88; THAC0 9; #AT 3; Dmg 1d4/1d4/1d6 (claw/claw/bite); SA Poison (cumulative -1 attack roll penalty per successful claw hit); SD +3 weapon or better to hit, immune to acid, fire (dragon and magical), iron weapons, poison, half damage from gas, double damage from cold; Spell-like powers: *Alter self, animate dead, cause disease, charm person, continual darkness, control temperature* (10' radius), fly (unlimited duration), *heat metal, improved phantasmal force, invisibility, magic missile, produce flame, shape change* (to any humanoid form), *telekinesis, teleport without error, warp wood* (all used at will), *advanced illusion* (once per day), *fear* (once per day); MR 60%; SZ M (6' tall); ML 16.

'Course, not everyone in Sigil's native to the Outer Planes. Plenty of berks come here from their insulated prime worlds, most of 'em in search of power and treasure and as clueless as you can imagine. Lots of 'em get killed in ugly ways, too. But there're some canny enough to seek out the dark of the planes, and those who adapt quick enough prove themselves cutters the equal of any planar. Well, almost any.

Anyway, the point's that not all primes are completely clueless. Take Lissandra, there. If you want to know where to find a portal to elsewhere, or you need to know about a certain gate key and don't have time to deal with the Guvners' endless fussing and forms, you might simply ask her where it is and how it's done. 'Course, it'll cost you a bit of jink . . . but what in Sigil doesn't?

Lissandra the gate-seeker

As a scholar on some backwater prime, Lissandra always was fascinated with the idea of the infinite planes. Specifically, she was intrigued with the mechanics of traveling measureless distances, and the seeming paradox that an infinite distance *could* be traveled in a finite period of time. She scrupulously gathered and compiled reports from plane-traveling souls that spoke of "portals" and "paths"—shortcuts between the infinite distances capable of

transporting a body from one hypothetical end of the multiverse to the other.

Lissandra arranged to have herself transported to the planes. She arrived in the Cage just as clueless as any prime, but with a mission. It didn't take long for her to learn the dark of surviving in Sigil; for the most part, it's a matter of providing a service to some other berk for enough jink to live on.

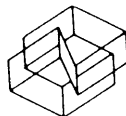
After getting used to the local conditions, Lissandra went about doing what she does best. She started to investigate Sigil and its connection to the rest of the multiverse. It wasn't long before she discovered that the Guvners already had a great body of knowledge on the subject. Using her natural beauty and charm, Lissandra hooked up with a few Guvners and gained access to the faction's library. Soon she was sifting through all of their records pertaining to portals, conduits, gates, keys, and related topics—at least all of the records not sealed by order of the Guvner's factol. She spent months poring over scrolls, paging through books, and studying complicated diagrams. In return, she used her considerable research skills to help organize the library and catalog the vast amount of information that arrives on a daily basis.

With the Guvner's records as her starting point, Lissandra soon ventured out to conduct personal research. A body can

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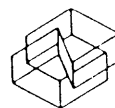
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spot Lissandra more often than not in Sigil's streets. She watches the known portals, waiting for someone to come through so she can ask her questions: "Where did you just come from? What's the portal on the other side look like? How did you get it to work?" She's learned to be patient and not so enthusiastic in her questioning, as most visitors to the Cage are suspicious and short-tempered by nature. Plus, most cutters don't give away anything for free. Lissandra has become adept at determining what fee will usually be called for.

The Gate-Seeker, as most of the Cagers have come to call Lissandra, does more than watch portals, however. She tracks shifting gates, trying to determine logical patterns so she can predict future appearances. She maps stationary portals, compiling a list almost as long as the one kept by the Guvners. And she's always experimenting with gate keys, trying to determine not only which item works with which portal, but why. Lissandra is very systematic. She starts her investigations on one end of a ward and works her way from block to block in orderly fashion. Sometimes her investigations take her to another part of the city, but eventually she'll return to complete the circuit she started.

Lissandra is attractive, perceptive, and more than a bit obsessive about her studies. Still, she finds time to take a break from the research so that she can make

some honest jink. 'Course, it all ties back into what she knows, 'cause knowledge is her power and source of livelihood in the Cage. Need the location of a portal? Go ask Lissandra. Need to know what key opens a planar gate? Go ask Lissandra. As almost any berk'll say, the Gate-Seeker is a lot easier to deal with than the Guvners. A body's still got to acquire the key for himself; Lissandra's a source of information, not a key-seller. Like everything else, though, it'll cost. (Exact prices vary with campaigns and DM styles.) In addition to a reasonable (for Sigil) fee, she expects to be told about a body's experiences traveling the distances of the planes.

In pursuit of knowledge, Lissandra's completely fearless. She'll ruthlessly interrogate a marraenoloth, contend with the circular reasoning of a modron, or play riddle-games with a ratatosk until it gives her the answers she wants. Gossips in Sigil

recount the memorable day she queried a cornugon baatezu for hours about the twisting paths of Baator; apparently amused by her investigation, the fiend answered truthfully (as truthfully as a baatezu ever does, anyway) until she starting asking about ways onto the ninth layer of Nessus, where the Dark Eight meet—whereupon the cornugon got as pale as a baatezu ever gets (which isn't very), and abruptly fled.

Lissandra might ask or be persuaded to temporarily join a party, particularly if it's traveling on one of the Great Paths (Yggdrasil, River Styx, Mount Olympus, or River Oceanus) or plans to visit a unique pathway site (such as the Labyrinthine Portal of Mechanus or the Infinite Staircase in Selune's realm in Ysgard). If she does, she'll be as useful to the group as she can; she doesn't expect to be protected or coddled. Lissandra may have her own agenda, but she recognizes the fact that there's no such thing as a free ride—or a completely safe one.

Lissandra the mage

(Prime/female human/W9/NG): AC 0 (*bracers AC2, ring of protection +2*); MV 12; hp 22; THAC0 18; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 +3 (*staff of striking*); SZ M (5' tall); ML 16; Spells (usually memorized): *charm person, comprehend languages, detect magic, magic missile, ESP, warp sense x2, fly,*



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lightning bolt, suggestion, dimension door, wizard eye, teleport; Str 11; Dex 15; Con 12; Int 17; Wis 15; Cha 16.

This is the Clerk's Ward. It's clean, peaceful, and totally boring, but there're a few bloods you should be aware of. Estavan, for instance. He's got an office near the Hall of Records. If you need something—and I mean anything—then Estavan is the blood you'll want to talk to. 'Course, if you're one of those sods who has trouble making nice to an ogre, you could have some problems. . . .

Estavan of the planar trade consortium

Not far from the Hall of Records, on a street of crowded, two- and three-story houses, a curious sign directs interested patrons to the second floor of a building that looks like it's been squeezed flat between its neighbors. The narrow stairs climb toward a plain wooden door, and anyone taller than a large human has to duck beneath the swaying sign. On the sign, a series of glowing portals stretch across the surface in an artful rendering. The silhouette of a long caravan trudges through the portals. This is the icon of the Planar Trade Consortium.

The door at the top of the steep, narrow stairs opens into a richly appointed office that's furnished with an oversized desk, a huge chair, a couch of gigantic proportions, and a pair of human-sized chairs. The room appears huge, due in part to the 15' high ceiling. A door on the far wall reaches almost to the ceiling. Arcane icons decorate its frame, and the door itself is made of solid bronze. The same icon as the one on the exterior sign is engraved on the face of the door. Four times out of every five, an ogre mage will be seated behind the desk or stretched out on the couch. This is Estavan, one of the merchant lords of the Consortium.

Estavan wears expensively tailored clothes with a definite oriental flare. His light blue skin always is clean and powdered, his ivory horns polished so they gleam. An ornate polearm called a *naginata* hangs on the wall behind the desk whenever Estavan is in his office. When he's not, the rack is empty. The ogre mage serves as one of the Consortium's agents in Sigil. There are at least two other Consortium offices elsewhere in the Cage, one in The Lady's Ward and one in the Market Ward. Each seems to have a slightly different function, though any business a body has with the Consortium can be handled by any of the merchant lords in the city.

The Planar Trade Consortium handles commerce across the multiverse. The Consortium's agents go far and wide to find exotic goods, make deals, and engage in many kinds of business transactions. Much of their activity comes through Sigil at some point, where the resident merchant lords direct it to the best markets (both in the Cage and beyond). This is one

of Estavan's major functions, though he juggles many tasks in a given day.

Estavan can be gracious and polite, but he is ruthless in business dealings. He's always calculating, always watching for opportunities. If a body deals fairly with him, he'll return the favor. If a body tries to pull a fast one, the merchant lord reacts harshly, with no remorse, as though he was engaged in war instead of business. Estavan isn't squeamish about spilling blood to keep the jink flowing. He also likes to provide favors in return for future considerations. The chant's that so many berks in the Clerk's and Guildhall Wards owe Estavan favors that the Planar Trade Consortium's allowed privileges that no other group could ever hope to achieve.

The ogre mage is never seen outside his office. In fact, it's doubtful he could fit through the door or down the narrow stairs. Most of his clients believe that the door inside his office is actually a portal to the secret headquarters of the Consortium. When Estavan isn't in the office, the clients think, he's off on some other plane performing missions of some sort for the Consortium. If asked, Estavan simply laughs hid chilling laugh.

If a body needs to get out of the Cage, Estavan's one blood to talk to. The Consortium has pathways to most of the major planes and to many of the backwaters. For a price, Estavan can put a body in one of the planar caravans. It costs more if a body wants to leave Sigil quietly, but Estavan can arrange that, too. A body has to work during the trip, of course, helping to get the goods to their destination. On some trips, the work's easy. On others, it's hard and dangerous. If a body wants to leave badly enough, a Consortium caravan's probably the best way to go.

Estavan the merchant lord

(Planar/male ogre mage/HD 5+2 Fraternity of Order/LE): Int 16; AC 4; MV 9, Fl 15 (B); hp 27; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1d8 +2 (*naginata* +2); SA +3 to attack rolls, +6 to damage rolls; Spells: Used at will: *fly* (for 12 turns), *invisibility*, *darkness* 10' radius, *polymorph self* (humanoid form, 4-12' tall), *regenerate* (1 hp per round); Used once per day: *charm person*, *sleep*, *gaseous form*, *cone of cold* (60' long, 8d8 damage); SZ L (10½' tall); ML 14.

Me? Oh, I'm nobody special. Just another tout showing a bunch of cutters the back alleys and secret spots of the Cage. Maybe I know a bit more about the bloods living here than some of the other tous—it's all part of the service. But you know that, 'cause you're paying the jink to make it worth my while.

Kylie, a tout

Kylie was born and raised in the Cage, and she's happy to stay there. She never wanted to work in a shop or go adventuring, but she loved to roam the city and meet the diverse beings who come and go. It was inevitable that Kylie became a tout. A tout's reputation and pay ain't the best, but it does let Kylie get to know everyone—and everyone knows her. She figures that the best way to fame and fortune isn't through adventuring around the planes (a nasty business—and dangerous!), but by simply being at the center of events and knowing everyone and everything going on. She's got acquaintances all over Sigil, from the Court of the Lady's Ward to the slime pits of the Hive. She doesn't consider them friends—she's too wary to call anyone friend—but she goes out of her way to make sure everyone remembers her favorably.

Kylie figures that information is the core of her business, and she's right. She follows her own Rule of Threes: watch, listen, and learn. Somebody always wants to know something, and Kylie wants to be the first blood they think of when they're ready to hand out the jink. Though she's more inclined to collect information about Sigil as it's usually immediately profitable, she'll keep track of anything and everything that crosses her path. No bit of news, nor rumor, nor solid fact is wasted. Growing up in Sigil taught Kylie a valuable lesson—everything's worth something to someone. Everybody needs to find something sometime, and when they do they're usually willing to spend jink for the privilege. That's where Kylie comes in.

Kylie is very friendly and extremely helpful to everyone she meets. She's especially gracious to adventuring types, as they're usually most immediately in need of her services. Like all tous, Kylie watches the portals for new arrivals. When she sees a good prospect, she hooks up with her (or it) and offers her unique services. Besides acting as a guide to the city, Kylie likes to provide her customers with an additional service. She points them toward the really important things in Sigil, namely the bloods who make the city work. Most cutters really don't need help finding a good inn or a lively tavern. It's much harder to find a berk who knows the dark of a particular topic or the clerk who can grease the wheels of bureaucracy. That's the unique service Kylie sells.

Jink's well and good, and Kylie won't turn down substantial amounts of it, but whenever possible she prefers a different kind of payment. Kylie likes to be paid in magical items. She has an appetite for all things arcane, from clothing to weapons to items with magical properties. It isn't that she has a desire to become a wizard or anything like that. She's just fascinated by magical items. As such, she's always loaded down with at least a handful of useful (and sometimes not so useful) enchanted things. Another form of payment she'll accept is useful information, but it has to

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This game was developed by Andrew Spencer. Animation by Alain Maudron.

be something she thinks will earn her a lot of jink for her to take it in lieu of money or magic.

Kylie's ambition is to set herself up as an information source with an extensive spy network at her command. To that end, she's already begun "recruiting" some of the younger, less-experienced touts to advise her of news and happenings throughout Sigil. She won't establish a shop, as a permanent headquarters makes an easy target for the enemies she's sure to cultivate. Instead, her network will be a roving one, made up of dozens of seemingly independent touts making the daily rounds of the portals and marketplaces. She's seen careless berks who deal in information end up on the leafless tree because they dealt the *wrong* information; others are so paranoid their shops and homes are turned into veritable fortresses, afraid of factions or proxies or powerful bloods who find out the sods are dealing secrets they'd rather keep dark. 'Course, her dream is still far from becoming reality. She still has to build a sizeable base of trusted associates and work out the logistics of gathering and passing along information. In addition, Kylie has two other weaknesses to overcome. First, she needs to recruit bashers to provide her network with protection. Even a roving group can be attacked, if only one member at a time.

Second, she has a lack of magical sources of information. To rectify this deficiency, Kylie is especially friendly to all wizards she meets. One day she hopes to find one willing to join her developing network.

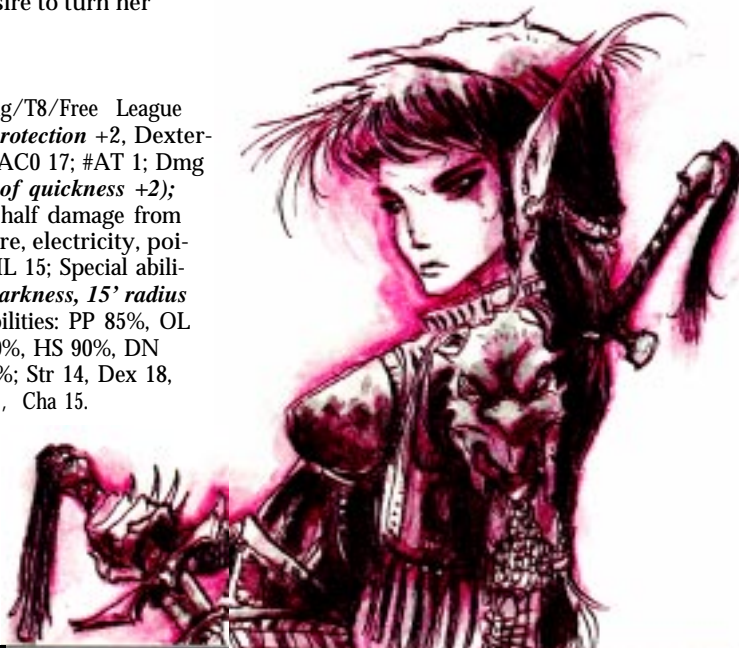
Kylie is whip thin and slight of build. She's frighteningly quick, with movements that appear too smooth to be natural. Her manner is friendly and easy-going, at least on the surface. Deep down, she's possessed of a terrific desire to turn her dream into a reality.

Kylie the tout

(Planar/female tiefling/T8/Free League N): AC 2 (*earring of protection* +2, *Dexterity*); MV 12; hp 27; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6 + 2 (*short sword of quickness* +2); SA: Backstab x 3; SD: half damage from cold, +2 to saves vs. fire, electricity, poison; SZ M (5½' tall); ML 15; Special abilities: *infravision 60'*, *darkness, 15' radius* once per day; Thief abilities: PP 85%, OL 55%, F/RT 55%, MS 90%, HS 90%, DN 50%, CW 85%, RL 45%; Str 14, Dex 18, Con 12, Int 16, Wis 11, Cha 15.

Notes

A'kin and the Consortium appear briefly in the upcoming PLANESCAPE™ adventure *Harbinger House*. For more on the pathways of the planes—particularly the lawful ones (including the treacherous way into Nessus)—see the *Planes of Law* boxed set.



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[Editor's Note: As with "The Demiplane of Shadow" article elsewhere in this issue, this collection of encounters is usable in AD&D® game campaigns that includes planar adventures. High-level campaigns are best suited for the material herein. These lists also are adaptable for use in the PLANESCAPE™ setting—with a little work.

—Dale]

YOU NEVER
KNOW WHO
(or what)
YOU'LL MEET

Plenty of planar-encounter possibilities

by Larry Granato

Artwork by Terry Dykstra

Are ordinary monsters getting a bit boring? Are the local dungeon and wilderness becoming too familiar? If you're a DM running a party of high-level characters who like to *teleport*, *plane shift*, travel ethereally or astrally, and generally visit other worlds and planes, then here are some interesting ideas to spice up your campaign.

Traveling throughout the multiverse in search of adventure can lead to confrontations with unusual beings not found on the Prime Material Plane. But there's more out there than monsters. There may be times when the DM wants to provide special encounters with strange and awesome entities or places.

The spells and devices that allow interdimensional travel are fraught with hazards, too. If you subscribe to the theory that although magic is usually well understood and controlled, from time to time there is a small chance that something will go wrong—really wrong—then you're getting the picture. When one is attempting to travel between worlds, the results can be interesting.

The following three lists (along with their accompanying explanations) can be used in cases where the DM decides that some sort of mishap has befallen a party of travelers. Or, the encounters and occurrences described here can be used simply as random events, for a change of pace.

List #1, "Interdimensional mishaps," mentions the most common problems encountered by groups *teleporting* or moving about the planes. These represent various natural hazards. Every time the party uses some form of magical transport, there is a small (01-05%) chance that something will go wrong. If the spell has been hurried or disrupted slightly, but not enough to spoil it, the chance of error rises to 25%. When an error occurs, the DM can roll a d10 and consult List #1, or choose an appropriate result.

There are times when the DM decides that the party has traveled to an unusual

place (either deliberately or by accident) or has encountered powerful forces of the Multiverse. These "Forces and places of the multiverse" are given in List #2.

List #3, "Strange encounters," gives some possible encounters with the bizarre that can flummox even the mightiest group of PCs. Use this list sparingly.

Fantasy literature, TV, movies, and other articles in DRAGON® Magazine provided inspiration for many of these ideas. You can expand these lists using similar means.

Since these encounters are special, don't let the players get off easy by having their characters cast a few spells or use a few magical items to solve their problems. For instance, you can tell the PCs that magic doesn't work well in the universe they're in, and they're out of touch with their deities. This will restrict the use of high-level priest spells and cut back on their using potent magic to blast their way to success. You don't want to destroy the characters; just make the players come up with creative solutions instead of relying on the usual magical ways of problem-solving. Keep the PCs guessing about their adversary's true strength.

Good DMs try to be consistent and follow the rules. But remember the advice, "moderation in everything," including moderation itself. Once in a while you can pull a fast one, as long as you are not unfair to your players. Playing strictly by the rules all the time can get tedious, especially if you've got a group of "dungeon lawyers." They know all the monsters in the books, so now's the time to throw in a few things they've never heard of before (unless they read this article). However, I would not recommend using the following encounters on every adventure!

Some of these encounters result in the party being *quested*. For the DM, it's always a good idea to keep a few *quests* hanging over the party's head in case they run out of things to do, or need help. The entity who *quested* them might be willing

to pull them out of a tight spot so he doesn't lose their services for some other task at a later date. This will cost the adventurers additional *quests*, of course.

These encounters are suggested only for groups with a sense of humor and imagination—and DMs who can come up with ideas on the fly, and like to roll dice a lot.

List #1 : Interdimensional mishaps

1. Random destination. When using *plane shift*, *teleport*, *dimension door*, or traveling astrally or ethereally by some means, the party ends up in an unexpected location on their homeworld, thousands of miles from their intended

destination. Needless to say, they are hopelessly lost.

2. Vortex. An energy vortex appears for 2d10 rounds. Its origin is on another plane. It may siphon PCs (or their magic) off to another world or spew out debris (50% chance of either). Characters pulled into the vortex suffer 10d6 points of damage and end up on another plane. Debris comes out at the rate of 1d4 - 1 pieces per round. Each piece has a 5% chance of hitting someone within 400 yards, doing 3d6 points of damage. There is a 10% chance that one of the pieces of debris is a valuable item, possibly magical.

3. Psychic winds/Ether cyclone. If the party is traveling astrally or ethereally, a gigantic storm blows them far off course, and they are lost for 3d10 days. If they weren't astral or ethereal, something (a miscast spell, a dimensional hole, etc.) propels them into the Astral or Ethereal plane.

4. Discontinuity. A quirk of the universe has changed what was. Upon returning home, the PCs may find that their house is on the other side of the street, one of their followers never existed, past history is different, a certain spell or magical item doesn't work the way it used to, an opponent they killed is back, etc. This gives the DM a chance to change something that has been causing problems in her campaign.

5. Displacement. A temporal, planar, or energy displacement affects the party. If the displacement is temporal, the party appears forward or backward in time from when they left (or expected to be). A planar displacement puts them in another universe. Energy displacement involves the draining (or gaining) of charges from magical items and any technological items, if the party has them. Items totally drained of charges crumble to dust; items that are overcharged (charged beyond their capacity) explode, doing 6d6 points of damage to all within 10'.

6. Teleport or planar fatigue. Too much dimensional travel wears out the party. They may not use any *teleporting* or *dimension-shifting* spells for 1d4 days.

7. Rift. A hole to another dimension opens up. The rift is unstable, and disappears in 10d10 rounds. Meanwhile, there's a 85% chance some really nasty monsters (DM's choice) will come through. The party also can go through, but can't come back after the rift is closed. There's a 25% chance the rift is so strong that creatures within 100' must make a saving throw to avoid getting pulled in.

8. The mystery nexus triangle. The party enters a strange area (a "crack" between the planes) where things from all over time and space disappear. Sometimes they pop back years later. It's a sargasso (or a garbage dump) of the cosmos. All those lost items like lost socks and keys end up here (maybe even things the PCs have lost). Strange creatures and items also can be met, but the real trick is to



find the way out. (Is that Elvis over there?)

9. Miscast spell. The party's magic goes haywire. Roll percentile dice:

01-05 Random spell affects the party
06-10 Random spell affects a random target

11-15 Spell affects wrong target
16-20 Spell's power increases/decreases*
21-25 Spell effects reversed
26-30 Spell delayed 1d20 rounds
31-35 Spell affects possessions only
36-50 Backfire. 6d6 damage to all within 10' of caster

51-00 Fizzle. The spell has no effect
* The DM must determine how this affects range, duration, area of effect, damage, saving throws, etc.

10. Character/Item encounter. The party encounters a group of plane-shifting nonplayer characters. These NPCs are high level and are not happy they've been interrupted in their journey. Or, the PCs inadvertently pull an object out of another plane to their location. This could be an astral artifact, a technological device, a piece of trash, someone who's been turned to ethereal stone, a supply cache, etc.

List #2: Forces and places of the multiverse

1. Gate/Portal. An opening to another world or plane appears. It is permanent until some ultrahigh-level creature closes it. These openings often appear as mirrors, stone megaliths, caves, etc. Some are one-way only. This encounter also covers special areas that connect many dimensions like the "Wood between the Worlds" in C. S. Lewis' *Narnia* stories or the City of Doors, Sigil, of the PLANESCAPE setting.

2. Unique character/creature. Now is your chance to inflict on the party one of those special monsters you've been saving. Is it Megabreath, giant dinosaur king of the B-monster movies? The sweet-looking little girl who is the most powerful (and chaotic) psionicist in the multiverse? How about that Bolo Mark XXVI Continental Siege Unit?

3. The balance of the planes. This entity, appearing as a giant set of scales, maintains the balance between good and evil, order and chaos. The PCs have done something to upset the balance, and they have to correct it by performing a difficult quest. If they fail, the balance will be changed for a long time. For example, the party may find themselves defending their homes in a losing battle against ever-increasing hordes of evil, otherplanar monsters.

4. The auditing department. Oh-oh. The agency responsible for balancing the levels of magic in the multiverse has found an account overdrawn. They will correct the situation by permanently draining magic (or levels) from magic-using characters or the party's magical items. As an alternative, the party might be able to "pay the bill" by going on a difficult quest; perhaps recovering a few cursed artifacts for the agency.

5. The cosmic wheel of fortune. Spin the wheel and take a chance! Representing the force of random fate and fortune, it rolls into view looking like a giant vertical roulette wheel (sorry, no Vanna White). There is a base 25% chance (plus 10% per each roll after first) that the Wheel will disappear after each spin. The following table is an example of the various effects on a character who spins the Wheel, but DMs can substitute any appropriate effect they desire.

Roll	Effect
01	Disintegrated
02-03	Killed
04-05	Turned into a monster
06-10	Loses a level (it can't be restored)
11-15	Loses a good magical item
16-25	Loses half his money and valuables
26-35	Gets a disease
36-65	Nothing
66-75	Gets a cigar
76-80	Gets 5,000 gp
81-85	Gets a magical item
86-90	Gets a special ability
91-95	Gets a really good magical item
96-97	Has one ability score raised 1-3 points
98-99	Raised one level
00	Gets a wish

6. The eternal city. This is a tranquil place that exists between time and space. Visitors are greeted with hospitality. The inhabitants are unarmed and peace-loving. They don't want to be involved in the struggles of other worlds. If the party is pursued by enemies, they could bring unwanted conflict to this peaceful locale. In that case, they are responsible for helping to protect the Eternal City.

7. The Dimension-traveling structure/place. This could be a "floating" extradimensional island or a building like the Vanishing Tower of Voilodon Ghagnaisdiak in Michael Moorcock's *Elric* stories. These objects usually only appear for a short while and jump from plane to plane randomly. The party could be trapped in such a place until it stopped somewhere familiar. Sometimes one appears only on a certain plane once a year, on a particular day, or at a particular time.

8. The conjunction of the million spheres. The barriers between the universes are at their weakest ever. It's possible to visit another dimension just by taking a walk. Needless to say, creatures from other dimensions will be visiting your PCs' neck of the woods to pick up a few "goodies" (e.g., the PCs and their treasure). The conjunction lasts (1d10 +61 days).

9. The plane-shifting vessel. A magical vessel that can be steered to different

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universes. One example is "The Ship That Sails the Seas of Fate," also from the *Elric* stories, but a zeppelin, spacecraft, or chariot are other possible vehicles. The crew will be interested in the PCs, either as potential targets of attack or suckers for a quest.

10. The night of nights. Only once in a thousand years does a night like this occur. Anything can happen on a Night of Nights and usually does. A princess might fall in love with a homely dwarf. Muscle-bound barbarian warriors take up knitting. A greedy PC gives his most treasured possession to a homeless orphan. In short, the DM will have plenty of chaos to spread around.

11. The stars are right. Extremely rare astronomical conditions make the time perfect for an appearance of an malevolent extraterrestrial slime-sucking horror. Such creatures start at 20 HD, are immune to most magic, attack both psionically and with numerous tentacles or squirts of face-dissolving goo, and like to eat brains. Enjoy.

12. Bar between the worlds. This hospitable tavern can be reached from many planes by those who know how. It's always full of interesting people from all of space and time. The special anti-magical properties of the place prevent magic and any but the most primitive (nontechnological) weapons from being used. This restriction does not affect the owner and his staff.

13. The fountain of youth. The fabled source of restoration. After drinking a sip, a character's physical age will be in the 16-20 year range. Anyone who takes a big gulp turns into an infant. Anyone who drinks twice will disappear.

14. The labyrinth. A dungeon to beat them all. There's no mapping here; the party is perpetually lost. The labyrinth exists in a "pocket" dimension of its own, so there is no chance of escape before getting to the end of the maze. The traps and monsters of the labyrinth usually are controlled by a malicious archmage (who observes the party's progress through magic), making them doubly dangerous. The DM is encouraged to be particularly fiendish (e.g., part of the labyrinth is a giant pinball machine; the PCs are the balls).

15. Pure law/chaos. The party comes into momentary contact with a force of

Pure Law or Pure Chaos (50% chance for either). The effect on characters varies with each character's alignment. Pure Law gives lawful PCs a temporary raise in three ability scores (character's choice) to 18 for 3d10 days (30% chance) or gives a +2 bonus on attack, damage, and saving throw rolls for 1d3 months (70% chance), but gives a -4 penalty to a chaotic PC's attack, damage, and saving throw rolls, and ability checks, and causes a 20% reduction in spell range, duration and effects for 2d4 weeks (60% chance) or slows the PC for 1d20 + 10 days (40% chance). Neutral-aligned PCs will be blasted for 5-20 (5d4) points of damage. The effects described above are reversed for a Pure Chaos force acting against lawful and chaotic characters—a lawful PC either is slowed or suffers the penalties, and a chaotic PC either gets the higher ability scores or the bonuses.

16. The well of wisdom. The magical font of sagacity. One drink allows characters with Wisdom of less than 7 to add 1d8 points. For a Wisdom of between 7 and 12, add 1d6 points. For a score of 13 through 15, add 1d3. For a score of 16 or 17, add 1. Drinking from the fountain is dangerous for mortal beings with a Wisdom of 18 or higher—there's a 50% chance of having the character's Wisdom permanently reduced to 3; otherwise add 1 point. Characters who drink from the fountain a second time will die (no resurrection possible).

17. The crack of doom. Now they've done it. It's like a rift, only a lot worse. A giant abyss opens in the surface of the ground near the party, and out pours a horde of creatures from the underworld. Overhead, storms and lightning rage. The PCs must survive as best they can. Remember, even if they get away, whoever has to clean up the mess will try to find out who caused it and will take revenge. Unless you plan on ending your campaign, the Crack of Doom is only a temporary phenomenon and will disappear in 1d4 days.

18. Pure evil/good. The party comes into momentary contact with a force of Pure Evil or Pure Good (50% chance for either). The effect on them varies with each character's alignment. Pure Good will raise good-aligned PCs one level (30% chance) or add 1d8 hit points (70% chance), but will drain 1d4 levels from evil PCs (40% chance) or cause 8d6 points damage (60% chance). Neutral PCs will be blasted for 3d8 points of damage. Effects are reversed for a Pure Evil force on good and evil characters. Level drains cannot be restored.

19. Land of dreams and nightmares. The place where what you dream comes true. While characters are here, their physical bodies are in a unbreakable sleep. What the PCs dream appears to happen, but the effects are not permanent. However, the creatures who inhabit this land are much better at creating dreams than visitors, and their attacks

cause real damage. If a PC is "killed" in the Land of Dreams, his physical body dies. The land is ruled by Morpheus, the deity of dreams, whose will is the only reality here. He can make any dream come true.

20. The city at the end of time. Quite different from the Eternal City, this is an ancient, moldering ruin inhabited by packs of horrific mind-destroying monsters. The creatures can track you through any dimension, so there's no escape. Alternatively, the city is inhabited by a few degenerate humans with huge heads and weak, shriveled bodies. The humans may be conscienceless technologists who want to manipulate the party for their own enjoyment, or pitiful, helpless remnants of humanity who are besieged by evil forces.

List #3: Strange encounters

1. The black coach. This is a dark, sinister carriage that flies through the air, guided by a headless driver and pulled by six black horses. It has come to take a PC to another plane to pay for some crime or offense. It is unaffected by any magic or physical attacks, and can follow its prey anywhere. The only hope of avoiding it is through the use of a wish (unless the party comes up with a sufficiently impressive alternative).

2. The anti-universe. After using a *teleport* or plane *shift*, the characters arrive at their destination to find that everything, although familiar, is the opposite of what they're used to. For example, everyone who was good-aligned before is now evil. (The PCs may have counterparts with opposite characteristics in this land.)

3. Death. Yes, it's big Mr. D, and he's coming for one or more of the party. Death is immune to all forms of bribery or flattery, and beyond the ability of the most powerful PCs to injure or influence in any way. He occasionally can be distracted, however, and there is also the possibility of making a some kind of deal, although wealth or magic will not interest him.

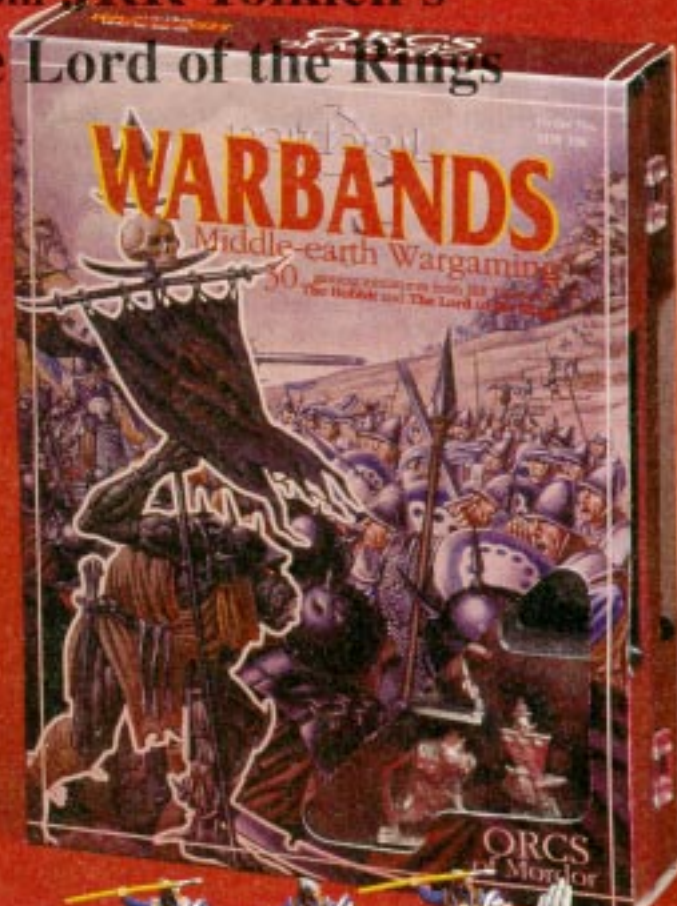
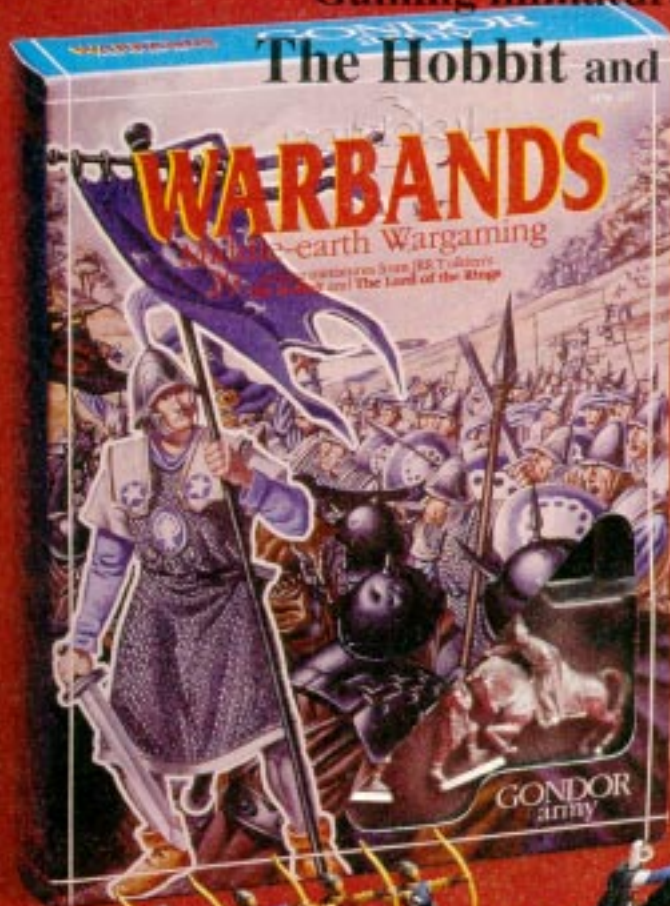
4. The megacurse. A curse of extreme potency, it can't be removed except by a major deity or the like. Examples are a *curse of extravagance*, which causes the PC to give away all of his possessions to the poorest people around (not other PCs), or the *jinx*, in which the PC's bad luck affects everyone but himself, causing them to miss saving throws and attack rolls, do minimum damage, miscast spells, lose stuff, trip and fall in combat, etc. An alternative to the megacurse is the cursed super-item, something that the party can't get rid of. This intelligent, annoying object causes the PCs unending problems with its pouting and whining, but has a few very useful, very powerful abilities it employs when it feels like it.

5. The guru. Also known as the celestial sage, this incredibly wise, ancient hermit is full of useful information and good advice on every subject. He doesn't adventure and dislikes being bothered.



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6. Mental transfer. A PC exchanges minds with a monster. The condition may be permanent, or may revert after a period of time. (One character in my land got to be "king of the slimes.") Another possibility is the possession of a character by a creature that can't quite displace the PC's mind, so they're continually fighting for control over his body.

7. UFO. A flying saucer descends on the party. The aliens are hostile and very high-tech. They usually have some scheme of conquest. One campaign I played in was famous for its "Martian Nazis." Can the PCs save their world? Remember: "Resistance is useless. Take us to your leader!"

8. The zone of diminished illumination. For your approval . . . a group of medieval adventurers are thrown into a strange, incomprehensible situation. Is it the Kung Fu disco party? A moronic game show hosted by demons? The battle of the Somme? The sinking of the *Titanic*? The eruption of Krakatoa? Will they survive? (doo-doo-Doo-doo, doo-doo-Doo-doo . . .)

9. Fate. One PC is selected to confront a critical moment in her lifetime. Her future should depend on how she handles the predicament. The DM should devise a situation that is appropriate for the PC's background and goals.

10. Trial. Arrogant superbeings from somewhere else force the party to stand trial for the crimes of humanity (or elfdom,

dwarfdom, etc.). The fate of the world as the PCs know it may hang in the balance. The superbeings plan to punish the party with the same penalty the PCs have dished out to countless monsters (i.e., death). The trial will not be fair, but PCs who claim ignorance and stupidity as their defense will find the superbeings agreeable, since they consider all mortals inherently feeble and weak-minded. Insufferably righteous characters will be squashed like bugs.

11. Mutation. A strange oddity of genetics affects the party. You can use something from the GAMMA WORLD® game or make up a mutation yourself—the more gruesome, the better.

12. The accommodating circumstance. A creature that can transmute itself into anything takes the form of an object the PCs need at the moment or have always wanted. Of course, after a little while (no more than one adventure), the being will get bored with that form and become something else—maybe something dangerous or antithetical to the party.

13. The imp of improbability. This annoying creature can't be destroyed either because you can't locate exactly where he is, or if you do, by the time you attack, he's somewhere else. The most unusual things happen when he's around. Water flows uphill, dragons become vegetarians, PCs break their +4 swords, flying sheep fill the sky (led by Harold the clever

sheep, of course), magic backfires, etc. The Imp hangs around until he gets bored with the party's efforts to get rid of him.

14. Transformation. One or more characters undergo a startling transformation. Examples are changes in race, characteristics, appearance, sex, age, metabolism, height and weight, skills, levels, or class. Why ask why?

15. The powers that be. These are the cosmic personifications of such qualities as Liberty (lady with a book and torch), Justice (blindfolded woman with scales), Plague (diseased guy on a pale horse), Greed (Ebenezer Scrooge), Cleanliness (knight with magic lance that makes "white clothes whiter"), Stupidity (Disney's Goofy), etc. They are all-powerful in their sphere of influence and either can help or hurt the party.

16. Bazaar of the bizarre. A magic shoppe with a difference. It looks ordinary, but it actually exists on a different plane, with the front door being a *gate*. No PC's magic will function inside. It appears full of the most powerful magical items imaginable. The shopkeeper will not sell any item, but will only trade for the PCs' items, at ridiculous bargain values. (PC: "You'll give me a *vorpal* sword for a *healing* potion?" Shopkeeper: "Sure!") However, 95% of the items in the shop turn into worthless junk when taken outside.

17. Casino of death. You like to gamble? This is the place. One problem: You can't leave unless you win, and the only acceptable bet is your life. Mr. Bones, the croupier, is waiting for your roll.

18. Carnival of doom. It looks like an ordinary 20th-century amusement park, but the staff are monsters in disguise. To be allowed to exit, the party must go on each ride once. There are some problems with the rides, however. The roller coaster tends to leave the track, boat rides sink, merry-go-round animals bite, bumper cars explode on contact, etc.

19. The secret place. This ordinary-looking village (or old house, castle, or hotel) harbors a sinister secret. The DM must formulate the mystery, but it should be well hidden. Think of a "terror town" where everyone seems bland and happy, or a "house of horrors" with a mad scientist.

20. The siege perilous. This is the mystical chair at the head of King Arthur's Round Table. Only the pure of heart, or those willing to undertake an arduous quest, are allowed to survive after sitting on it. The rest disappear in a burst of flames. The chair may appear to PCs in distress and offer to rescue them in return for several difficult quests.

Ω

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THE SWORD OF MAIDEN'S TEARS

Rosemary Edghill

DAW O-88677-622-8 \$4.99

I'm not quite sure yet whether I liked *The Sword of Maiden's Tears*—but I certainly came away from the novel feeling impressed. Author Rosemary Edghill has taken a standard fantasy premise and given it enough dimension to make it distinctly uncomfortable.

As in many contemporary yarns, Edghill begins by introducing a magical entity into the modern world. In this case, the arrival is Rohannan Melior, an elf of noble lineage in his own realm a number of dimensions over from Manhattan. Almost before he can blink, he's mugged and robbed of his sword, a major magical artifact that wreaks a terrible transformation on any human who holds it.

Also true to form, Melior is found by an earnest young graduate student who takes him home, introduces him to her friends, and offers to help him locate the lost blade. But here the pattern becomes darker and more intricate, because Ruth and company are not your everyday misunderstood folk with hearts of gold. The five members of the group are at once jarring and realistic, each high-strung in one way or another and none entirely stable psychologically. Despite the physical evidence of Melior's own existence, not everyone wants to believe that he's real, or that he's right in his assertion that, left unchecked, the lost sword will eventually drive its possessor to turn all New York into a blood-drenched wasteland.

Edghill thus makes the novel a sort of anti-quest, in which her protagonists are all doing their level best to avoid confronting their own self-doubts, to say nothing of saving humanity from a threat in whose very existence they don't want to believe. But the evidence gradually comes together in ways that the little group's members can't ignore, resurrecting various personal demons that individually and collectively force the issue.

In some ways, this makes for tremendously frustrating reading; one is frequently tempted to give one or another of the characters a good shaking in the interests of heading off impending disaster. But Edghill takes the frustration and turns it into suspense. Much of the novel's tension is derived from the characters' stubborn insistence that their problems will go away if they ignore them with sufficient fervor. For all that they're borderline mental cases, Edghill's cast is utterly believable in this regard, and if they're not exactly likeable, they're at least ethical enough to be sympathetic. One can imagine, all too easily, that this is precisely how matters might unfold in the real New York. And that's a downright frightening thought as events build toward a climax.

Thus the observation that *The Sword of Maiden's Tears* is a decidedly uncomfortable novel, not one to be casually read and filed away and forgotten. It's a sobering

reminder that not all role-playing takes place in the context of a fantasy game—and that in real life, the stakes for which one plays can be very high indeed.

THE LIST OF 7

Mark Frost

Avon O-380-72019-1 \$5.99

The List of 7 is a difficult book to categorize. There are elements of high adventure and philosophical speculation, of historical fiction and occult suspense, of literary homage and pure invention. And ultimately, that's the problem: Mark Frost's novel tries so hard to be so many things that it fails to succeed convincingly at any one of them.

The first and perhaps most striking oddity comes from reading what amounts to a Sherlock Holmes novel in which Holmes' creator, Arthur Conan Doyle, is playing the role of Watson. Though Frost gives Doyle some of his fictional detective's innate deductive abilities, the good doctor spends most of the book trailing willy-nilly in the wake of the astonishing and mysterious John Sparks, who alone has a full grasp of the extraordinary plot being hatched against the English crown. Watson is an unexpected role for a man generally thought of as a capable, persuasive investigator in his own right, and even though this is a comparatively young and inexperienced Doyle, the portrayal simply doesn't feel authentic.

Then again, *The List of 7* is at best a highly non-traditional Holmes yarn. Frost makes use of the historical Doyle's interest in spiritualism to devise a plot of exotic occult dimensions, involving a mysterious list, a variety of strange manifestations, men drugged into zombie-like slavery, and an attempt to seize supernatural control of an heir to the British throne. The overall effect strongly resembles one of the *Indiana Jones* movies, or the film *Young Sherlock Holmes* of some years ago. But while Frost invokes numerous trappings of the occult, the novel is persistently ambiguous as to whether the paranormal phenomena are real, or merely believed to be so by various of the characters.

That's a problem, especially because Frost also plays the story as a crisis of faith for Doyle. If Doyle (and Frost) acknowledge the occult as genuine from the first, Doyle's character has no chance to grow and change over the course of the book. If the supernatural elements are shown to be entirely artificial, Doyle's credulous attitude makes him appear foolish and inept. Yet if the matter is left without definite resolution, we're left to wonder whether the villains are merely a deranged band of lunatics or a truly diabolical threat. In trying to play both sides of the fence, Frost robs his premise of any real dramatic impact.

Subtracting the occult issues and the Holmesian resonances still leaves the book with its breathless, movie-chase adventure quality. But that's easier to suggest after

the fact than it is to do in the reading. For all the flaws in its conception, *The List of 7* is intricately woven, each strand of theme and event and character twining tightly around all the others. But while the weaving may be intricate, the pattern Frost creates is like a purple and orange paisley shirt—too loud and too chaotic to be pleasant to look at.

THE WINTER PRINCE

Elizabeth E. Wein

Baen O-671-87621-X \$4.99

THE CHILD QUEEN

Nancy McKenzie

Del Rey O-345-38244-7 \$4.99

If the criteria for a successful Arthurian novel is to bring some new twist to the vast body of lore on the Matter of Britain, then on first glance neither Elizabeth Wein's nor Nancy McKenzie's works would seem to qualify. Both Mordred (in Mary Stewart's *The Wicked Day* and elsewhere) and Guinevere (notably in an excellent trilogy by Sharan Newman) have had the story told from their perspective before. But closer examination yields the startling and pleasant discovery that both new efforts are ambitious, distinctive, and worthy additions to the Arthurian canon.

Of the two, Wein's *The Winter Prince* easily is the more unusual. The atmosphere is at once archaic and intimate, as Wein adopts Welsh spellings and a rugged, rural quality for a tale which chronicles Medraut's return to his father's court and his interaction with Artos' two legitimate children, Lleu and Goewin. But while Medraut is a more or less welcome guest in Artos' hall, he is also his mother's son, and Morgause is the most cunning and powerful sorceress in the British Isles.

In form, the novel consists of a manuscript addressed by Medraut to his mother, and the first-person narrative expertly captures the tangled knot of emotions that binds Medraut to his mother by blood, his father by honor, and his half-siblings by a mixture of rivalry and respect. As much or more of Medraut's character is revealed by allusion and oblique hint as by direct admission, and this Medraut is a most complicated young man. No one's willing pawn, he nonetheless finds himself manipulated by those around him and struggles to face the world on his own terms.

The remaining players are well-realized as well, if in rather less detail—no small achievement for Wein, who must filter their portrayals through Medraut's eyes and pen. She sketches each in with fine, quick strokes and just the proper touches of light and shadow. Morgause in particular becomes a fascinating, chilling presence, as Medraut relates her actions as minimally as possible, yet can't escape her pivotal influence on events.

These events are not, for the most part, the well-known knightly deeds of the best-known Arthurian legends. Rather, Wein

focuses tightly on Artos and his family, and on the rise of Lleu and Goewin to young manhood and womanhood respectively. But if an Artos with legitimate heirs is a novel concept, it is one that is impossible to question while under the spell of Wein's prose, and Medraut's authoritative narration gives the scenario a quiet credibility that sets aside objections before they can be raised.

Where *The Winter Prince* is subtle, complicated, and emotionally dense—strikingly so, in a novel originally published for younger readers—Nancy McKenzie's tale of Guinevere is far more direct and straightforward. So, too, does McKenzie present a tale of more traditional Arthurian scope. *The Child Queen* begins with Guinevere's birth and moves rapidly but not breathlessly through her childhood, courtship, and marriage, touching on a great many familiar incidents from the legends along the way. Indeed, McKenzie appears to be offering no less than a full-scale mainstream retelling of the entire Arthurian legend, rather than a story as tightly focused on Arthur's queen as the title might suggest.

Yet for all that McKenzie's tale is "generalist" King Arthur, told in disarmingly accessible prose from Guinevere's first person viewpoint, it's also both fascinating and well-presented. McKenzie has clearly done her homework, and smoothly combines the classic portrait of Camelot and Arthur as wellsprings of chivalry and romance with a credible grasp of the historical realities of the day. But the style, good as it is, isn't what makes McKenzie's saga unusual. That honor goes to a pair of ingenious twists she works on conventional Arthurian lore, which combine to turn a fresh eye on the familiar saga of tragic romance and ill-fated love.

First of these is her use of Guinevere's foster-sister Elaine, often said to have been romantically involved with Lancelot. In McKenzie's story, Elaine becomes much more: she is both Guinevere's closest childhood friend and her greatest rival, whose desperate desire for Arthur himself leads to treachery and betrayal of startling proportions. This Elaine is a daring yet highly plausible invention, changeable yet consistent and distinctively characterized.

McKenzie's second, even more ambitious twist is to utterly redefine the relationship between Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, the principals in one of legend's great romantic triangles. As she would have it, Guinevere truly loves both men, both are genuinely in love with her, and Arthur and Lancelot share a brotherly bond. In itself, this isn't revolutionary; what's startling is the apparent assertion that the supposed collapse of the triangle never happened. Rather, McKenzie seems to suggest that the supposed betrayal and liaison between Guinevere and Lancelot was manufactured out of rumor and innuendo, until the mere appearance of illicit romance, rather than the reality, was enough to

destabilize Arthur's reign. (One can't be entirely sure of this, since *The Child Queen* is the first half of a planned duology. But at least in this first volume, McKenzie strongly implies that the balance is more unshakable than previous accounts would have it seem.)

The two novels are a study in contrast, one fragile yet powerful, the other durably matter-of-fact. Where Wein positions a small, formal tale on the outskirts of tradition, McKenzie stitches a brightly colored tapestry that spans the breadth of the Arthurian legend. Both, however, are wise and well-told tales that make solid contributions to the lore of King Arthur. (This is especially true of *The Child Queen*; if McKenzie's sequel holds to the quality and vision of this first novel, the two together might just prove to be the definitive Arthurian retelling of their generation.)

BRIAN FROUD'S FAERIELANDS: SOMETHING RICH AND STRANGE

Patricia McKillip
Bantam O-553-09674-5 \$19.95

The prose is elegant. The imagery is vivid. The tone, like the accompanying art, is misty-edged and airy. But triumph of style that it is, *Something Rich and Strange* is ultimately a disappointing book whose ample visual attractions far outweigh the merits of Patricia McKillip's story.

McKillip's is the second of four novels commissioned to be drawn from the artwork of highly regarded illustrator and scenic designer Brian Froud. But though her literary credentials are numerous and well-respected, the tale she draws from Froud's art lacks the depth and dimension of the pictures themselves.

The novels title is drawn from Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, which refers to a "sea-change." And so the seashore is where McKillip sets her story of an artist, a shopkeeper, and their brush with magic. But while the motif of ordinary folk crossing the borders between the everyday world and the realms of faerie is a venerable one, McKillip doesn't manage to bring it off.

The trouble is that Jonah and Megan don't themselves seem to live in reality. Save for a few vague passages in the opening pages, nothing in the novel ties their small coastal town to the world around it. We see little of the town at all, in fact—a few other businesses are mentioned, but there are no residential neighborhoods, no side streets, and surprisingly few people, local or otherwise. The buildings have no shape or color or size, nor does the town have any name or recognizable feature tying it to a spot on a map somewhere. And even within this nameless town, Megan and Jonah share little with such neighbors as there are. Shop, owner, and artist could vanish into a fog and not be missed or mourned by anyone.

Thus it's hard to work up much surprise or sympathy when Jonah does exactly that, disappearing into the lands of the seafolk after hearing the song of their

elemental queen. If anything, the change is a welcome one, for McKillip gives the searrealm more color and depth and sense of place than ever she provides the town beyond the beach. Megan, of course, must follow after and try to rescue him, but it is difficult to understand what the shop and town offer them to return to afterward. McKillip gives what amounts to an ornately disguised environmental message, but this too lacks impact considering the shapeless gray void of a world to which Megan and Jonah are encouraged to devote themselves. It is not a world worth the saving, and their decision to return to it is thus unconvincing.

The descriptions are another matter. *Something Rich and Strange* is full of lyrical seascapes and exotic underwater wonders. But that's not enough to sustain even as short a novel as this is, especially given that the relationship between Megan and Jonah is taken more or less for granted. There are no crises of character here, no sense of true growth and change, only exotic scenery loosely connected by strands of seaweed disguised as plot. Brian Froud's dense, detailed artwork may be barely enough excuse to justify buying the book; McKillip's story isn't.

SPEAR OF HEAVEN

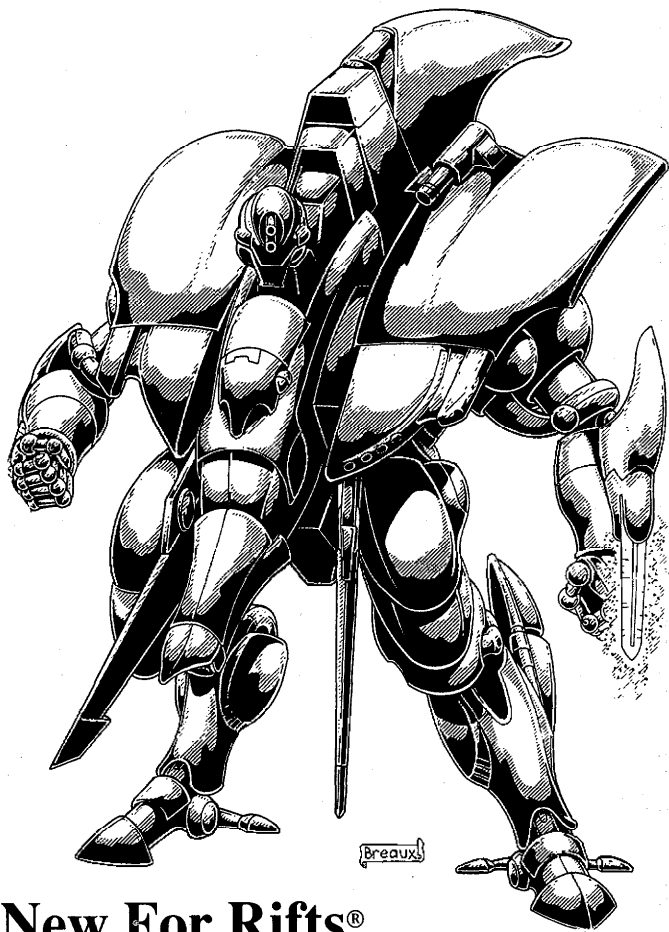
Judith Tarr
Tor O-312-85543-5 \$22.95

I've always liked Judith Tarr's historical fantasies for their convincing sense of period, the ability to combine authoritative scholarly details of time and place with the sense of immediacy that's needed to keep readers interested in an unfolding story.

Spear of Heaven, however, finds Tarr in a somewhat different mode, and proves that her skills aren't limited to chronicling magical variations on real-world history.

This new novel is the fifth to take place on Tarr's invented world of Avaryan, where the dominant ruling dynasty is imbued with god-touched power. It also is, however, a free-standing tale, and one need not be familiar with the previous books to enjoy this one. The opening pages quickly establish context and cast, from the distinguished emperor Estarion to Estarion's rebellious granddaughter Daruya and Daruya's three-year-old daughter Kimeri. Of the four, only Vanyi is supposed to be traveling to the far side of the world to investigate a malfunctioning magical Gate, but Daruya refuses to be left behind and Kimeri surprises everyone when she turns up as well, seemingly sensitive to the energies of the ruined Gate.

To further complicate matters, the dead Gate is outside Estarion's lands, and the denizens of the high, isolated valley in which it is located are deeply suspicious of mage-gifted folk. Though initially courteous to the travelers, they are unable or unwilling to help unravel the riddle of the Gate's fall. And some factions of the valley-dwellers seem bent on making sure that



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This book has been rescheduled for a March or April 1995 release.

Authors Kevin Siembieda and C.J. Carella promise a world unlike any you've seen before. Whale singers, underwater magic, new bionics, aquatic aliens, the Lord of the Deep, bio-engineered rejects flushed into the ocean, mutants, monsters, strange civilizations, mad men, ancient secrets, ley lines and adventure ideas galore. Art by Vince Martin, Kevin Long and Wayne Breaux Jr. Cover by John Zeleznik.

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Vanyi and her companions neither succeed nor survive in their quest.

Tarr unfolds the layered mysteries and the exotic culture of Vanyi's hosts with a typical blend of elegance, sardonic humor, high drama, and thoughtful sympathy. Tightly constructed prose always has been one of her strengths, but this time out it's tempered with a somewhat lighter tone and a sense of clear delight in anything that resembles a challenge to established authority. And even though Avaryan is Tarr's own creation, her dedication alludes aptly to the legends of Shangri-La, from which *Spear of Heaven* clearly draws inspiration.

Don't be misled; the novel is briskly paced and suspenseful, moving smoothly from travelogue to court intrigue to open revolt to lively romance before all the puzzles are solved. But it's also a startlingly playful book, one whose author is clearly having great fun in the writing. As a historical fantasist, Judith Tarr is already first-rate, but set her loose in her own worlds and the results are positively vibrant.

Recurring roles

There simply isn't a good explanation for it. *The Eagle and the Nightingales* (Baen, \$22.00), Mercedes Lackey's third "Bardic Voices" novel, finds the author badly off

her form. This time the problems lie in uneven stage-management of her dual protagonists and in a hazy, repetitive plot that's utterly unlike Lackey's usual work. Unresolved loose ends, missed opportunities, and a too-convenient royal redemption combine to form a whole that just doesn't stand up to careful reading. Readers will be well-advised to focus on Lackey's other series for the moment.

One prospect is *Elvendude* (Baen, \$5.99), Mark Shepherds first solo novel, which connects to Lackey's assorted novels about modern-day elven affairs. Shepherd's prose has rough spots, but the story is fast-paced and plausibly orchestrated. Set in and around Dallas, Texas, it follows young elven Prince Adam's race to foil an Unseleighe drug plot while avoiding its architects, old enemies who would cheerfully destroy him given the smallest chance.

Another *Sporting Chance* (Baen, \$5.99) comes from Elizabeth Moon. This is the second adventure of spaceship captain Heris Serrano, her employer, the wealthy Lady Cecelia, and the small army of young nobles and star-crew personnel attached to their entourage. There's more space-faring than in the prior book, and though one twist involving a remodeling company's trade secret strikes a wrong note, the pace and tension are well up to Moon's

solid standard.

Susan Dexter's newest fantasy, *The Wind Witch* (Del Rey, \$5.99) is likewise enjoyable, though a much quieter, almost domestic tale. Part of her series featuring the magical warhorse Valadan, this entry concerns one Druyan, the young widow of a minor noble. Left without manpower on a remote holding, she must somehow harvest her crops and manage her estate unmolested for a year and a day, until she can legally hold it in her own right rather than submitting to a new and unwanted marriage at the king's whim. It seems an odd challenge for a fantasy heroine, but with the help of Valadan and of a mysterious captured prisoner, the tale proves readable and wise.

Two young adult titles round out the series list this time out. First is *Hunter's Moon* (Berkley, \$3.99), continuing the adventures of teenage werewolf Val Sherwood as told by Debra Doyle and James D. Macdonald. Val's father's new girlfriend is the least of her problems; she's coping with vampires in the neighborhood at the moment. And vampires tend to be very hard to kill.

Bruce Coville presents the other entry, beginning an unusual series with *Into the Land of the Unicorns* (Scholastic, \$12.95). It's a lively beginning, starting with twelve-year-old Cara's leap off the roof of a church and into adventure, as she accepts a mission to deliver a message to the Oldest One. The quest is soon sidetracked, however, when Cara loses a magical amulet and learns a series of startling secrets concerning the unicorns' origins, her own heritage, and the magical realm of Luster. Coville gives Cara a complex set of opponents and allies, and offers some intriguing twists on typical unicorn lore. Future volumes in the cycle will be worth watching for.

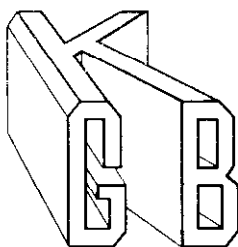
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THE ORIGINAL BATTLE MACHINES!

■ Adventures in customer service

EYE OF THE MONITOR

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Dee: Hello, and welcome to our second review column for DRAGON® Magazine. This time out, we're going to be a little more traditional and review four specific games in depth, all of which are designed for the IBM PC platform.

Jay: Some are old, some are new, but all these titles are of possible interest to DRAGON readers. We promise to review games for Sega and Mac and so forth in future columns. Our first title is *Ultimate Domain*, published by Software Toolworks—which, by the way, seems to have been bought out recently by Mindscape.

Dee: I was quite surprised by that when I called for customer support. I also was a little disheartened by the “average 11-minute wait” they spoke of in their recorded message.

Jay: Is that a good sign, meaning that they actually spend time on the phone with their customers solving problems, or a bad sign, indicating there are lots of problems to solve? At least they warned you how long you might be in hold-limbo; that was kind. Company manners aside, I've got to confess I didn't like *Ultimate Domain*.

Dee: I think it was a little bit of a stinker, actually. One problem that isn't Mindscape's fault is that we played the game on a 386, so turn processing took forever—even with the enhanced sound turned off.



Master of Magic (MicroProse)

Jay: The biggest time-waster was being forced to watch the AI take its turns. That's a designer's decision; nothing to do with sound or graphics or slow processors. There are plenty of faster strategy games. Maybe we were supposed to be using the computer-players' strategies as little tutorial lessons: you know, look at what your opponent does first: Hint, hint.

Dee: Yeah, but I'd rather have an actual tutorial. That way, the second time I play the game (when I know what I'm doing), I don't have to sit around and wait for the same hints to pop up over and over.

Jay: Tutorials are good. Unfortunately, *Ultimate Domain* doesn't have one—or

much in the way of strategy guidelines in the manual. To figure out how to play it well, you've got to just play.

Dee: So we did. We found that *Ultimate Domain* is a little bit of strategy mixed with a little bit of fantasy and a little bit of what-have-you. I would think that the point of mixing the 1600's colonial feel with things like balloons and “The Seven Jewels of Genesisia” would be to get the absolute best gameplay possible, and reality be damned.

Jay: Exactly. Except, as is so often the case with “mixed reality” games, all the designers managed to do was confuse me. Am I going for science, or exploration, or

Jay & Dee's ratings at a glance

Game	Jay	Dee
<i>Ultimate Domain</i>	2	2
<i>Genghis Khan II</i>	2/3	2½/3
<i>Master of Magic</i>	4½	4
<i>Space Hulk</i>	1½	2

economic growth here? Is there any benefit to skipping, say, economic stability and just rushing out to find the jewels?

Dee: *Ultimate Domain* starts you out in the new world with four settlers and a few raw materials; everything else is up to you. It sounds exciting, except I would think I could still contact my mother country at least occasionally. Or is that who I sell my goods to?

Jay: It doesn't say, actually. But be fair; *Civilization* only gave you one settler, and the map was black until you discovered it. *Ultimate Domain* at least shows you what terrain and raw materials you have, and what the land around you looks like.

Dee: True. Okay, so when you start the game, you give your settlers jobs such as woodcutter, architect, and specialist. Woodcutters turn trees into logs, architects use wood, stone, and metal to make various kinds of buildings, and specialists make the goods I mentioned selling.

Jay: But you can't sell them until you build a shop, and you have more important things to build at first. For your farmers to increase your food stores, they need fields to work. For water, you need to dig wells. And to get more than a few raw materials per turn, you need to build drills. Why does it keep saying "We need stone" when we have plenty of stone?

Dee: I think that means that we randomly got fewer than two stone this turn, but it doesn't say in the manual. The beginning game, as you can see, is supposed to be a decision-making extravaganza: Do I build fields and wells right off, to feed everyone, or do I go for a drill and a warehouse to stockpile raw materials? Or should I build a workshop and start right in on scientific discoveries?

Jay: Right. The way it comes out, though, is that you must absolutely build a drill first or you don't have enough raw materials to do anything else. Then you need a warehouse so you can store the materials the drill produces. After that, you must have fields and wells or the food runs out. Then you start making decisions about the rest of the game goals.

Dee: One of the most interesting and annoying things (both at the same time, a neat trick!) are the seasons. In spring, rain and lightning cover the isomorphic 3-D view, and trees on your domain occasionally burst into flame. In summer, everything is lush and green, and birds are singing. In fall, the trees turn brown and winds blow. In winter, wolves howl and snow covers everything.

Jay: It's pretty, but ultimately of little value. The isomorphic view sometimes makes it hard to see things behind other things. (Where did that soldier go? Oh, he's hidden behind a tree.) A top-down view wouldn't have looked as good, but it sure would have been easier to use.

Dee: Yup. The other really annoying thing about the seasons is the restrictions imposed in each one, and the restrictions on changing settlers' jobs. Each season is a



Master of Magic (MicroProse)

turn. During the turn, you can give each settler a job. Only thing is, she doesn't start work until the following season.

Jay: There are a few jobs, like specialist (the guy or girl who makes luxuries) that start right away. Dee is right about the rest. The other annoying thing is that in some seasons, people don't do their jobs well—or at all. Farmers aren't working at optimum during summer, the manual says, the way they are during spring and fall. Nearly everybody stays indoors in the winter.

Dee: Again, I suspect this was done to make it feel like there were more decisions to make: Should I take my farmers off work in spring so they can be doing something more productive in summer? Should I move everyone to indoor specialist jobs in winter?

Jay: What ends up happening, though, is that you leave everyone doing exactly what they were doing, because the restrictions are so severe that you end up losing more than you gain by trying to maximize the minimum return (the theory known as min-maxing).

Dee: Which means that it's really no decision at all. You leave a settler at a job until she's done enough of it so that you don't need her to do it anymore, then you move her to some other job.

Jay: Or him. See, another detail in the game is that each settler has a sex and age. As they age, settlers can lose morale, take sick, and die. On the other hand, if you build bigger houses for them, a man and a woman can move in together and have a baby, which will become a new settler in a few turns (the manual kindly points out that you don't have to wait 64 turns for the baby to grow up to working age!).

Dee: Yes, houses are a very important part of the game. If you don't build them, you don't get any new settlers—and not just because there's no place for the settlers to sleep together. If you build empty

houses, nomads appear and give you new settlers to work with. No kidding!

Jay: Those new settlers are vital. If your population doesn't grow, you're just spinning your wheels.

Dee: So after we finally figured out how to finish building a house—

Jay: The manual says that architects continue working through the winter, but mentions in another place that the only thing they don't build in the winter is houses, which we missed the first time we played.

Dee: —we got a new settler. By that time we had a workshop and a settler acting as a scientist, studying new technologies. So we made our new settler into a soldier.

Jay: For which we needed to build a barracks first. The soldier then went off to explore nearby lands and conquer them to expand our territory.

Dee: Only trouble was, we did exactly what it said in the rules manual to conquer the new territory and start a new colony there—and it didn't work. The soldier was supposed to become a settler and start working the land, giving us a new place to build a warehouse (our old one was getting full). But he didn't do it. That was when we tried to call customer service.

Jay: Hey, maybe we needed to go to the settler/job screen and move his icon around to tell him not to be a soldier any more.

Dee: Could be, but it didn't say anything in the manual about that.

Jay: You know, that's the third time we've said that.

Dee: Well, I'm sorry, but the manual is not very helpful. We had a really hard time finding information in it, including how to quit the game!

Jay: That's true. I know there are a lot of people out there who dive right into games without looking at the manual, but I like to read the rules first. Maybe it's the



Master of Magic (MicroProse)

editor in me.

My summary is that Ultimate Domain looks good, but works very, very slowly. There's too much micro-management on the part of the player, and it's too hard to get going. There are no milestones popping up that keep you playing, and the decisions you make are dull.

Jay's rating: * *

Dee: I agree, mostly. On a faster machine it might not have been so tedious to wait for the next turn. And as we got more experienced, we might have found ourselves growing faster and gaining new territory and getting to all the good stuff—technology and balloons and temples and finding the Seven Jewels of Genesis!

Jay: Yeah, but having to research the

cure to each of six different diseases? What's the point?

Dee: You're right.

Dee's rating: * *

Jay: Our next game is *Genghis Khan II* from Koei, the people who brought us *Bandit Kings of Ancient China*. You'll remember that was one of our picks from our column in issue #211.

Dee: Yeah, so we were predisposed to like *Genghis Khan II*. The interface and game engine are very similar to *Bandit Kings*, even though this is a newer game. There are some new features, but it uses the same basic mechanics to run your territory and give orders.

Jay: I anticipated that this game would be a new generation of *Bandit Kings*, but actually, *Genghis* is more like a colorized version—the graphics are pretty old-fashioned compared to the 3-D maps of *Ultimate Domain*, or the bug-hunting detail of *Space Hulk* (which we'll get to a little later). Still, there are great portraits, and an even wider range of cultures: depending on the scenario, you can conquer Japanese samurai, Indian mughuls, even European crusaders! Why stop at Constantinople? You can sweep through to conquer England!

Dee: Hey, take it easy—this is a review we're writing, not ad copy. The way I look at it, when you're doing a follow-up game,

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you want to keep the mechanics that work, but you want to add something new as well—about 20% of a sequel game should be brand new innovations. That's where I think *Genghis Khan II* falls short. They've added more detail, but nothing really exciting. In *Bandit Kings*, your leader got tired if you asked him to do too much. In this game, he has a finite number of "body" points to spend each turn—so you know exactly when he'll get tired. Pretty much the same thing.

Jay: What about the neat isomorphic 3-D combat graphics? That's new!

Dee: True, true . . . and that's definitely the most interesting part of the game, in the same way that the battles in *Bandit Kings* were the most interesting part.

Jay: I don't think the battles are the most interesting part at all. I liked going hunting for tigers, and wandering into the market to listen for rumors of who might join my cause.

Dee: Yes, but the entire point of the political and economic parts of both these games is to arrange alliances and raise armies so you can conquer your neighbors. There's no way to win *Genghis Khan II* (or *Bandit Kings*, for that matter) without fighting—which is what you'd expect from a game about the world's greatest conqueror.

Jay: If that's true, then why do they bother putting in stuff like hunting tigers and visiting your children and your wife, dealing with merchants, and so on?

Dee: To puff the games up, I guess. So that they won't feel like just plain war games.

Jay: I think you're wrong. I think those things add to the overall feel of the game. The difference between *Genghis* and *Bandit Kings* was that *Genghis* hid its texture beneath too many layers of menus. They can't trick me. It felt like just a war game.

Dee: I agree. It's funny—there are actually *more* decisions to make in the non-war aspects of *Genghis*. When you begin, you control just a few provinces in whatever area you've chosen. Like *Bandit Kings*, the game can be played by multiple people taking turns sitting at the computer, and there are several different scenarios. You can start as a warlord in Mongolia, and attempt to conquer the Steppes, or you can begin on a larger-scale map and go after all of Europe.

Jay: That looked pretty neat—all the different cultures and types of troops available. However, we played the Mongolian conquest scenario for our review. In that, you start with one or two provinces, earning income and wealth from each province. You also have some troops and a supply of generals and advisors in place.

Dee: Some of the decisions you can make include switching the default orders for a province (the ones you're not running act according to specific guidelines that you set up), switching or promoting generals and advisors, talking to your

family, examining provinces, raising and training and arming troops, moving commodities around, and improving the economics of your province.

Jay: Some of the decisions are pretty unique—such as talking to your family. If you visit your wife, she can give you hints about your various generals and advisors. An interesting touch, and it gives a female character something important to do. I'm all for it. An even more important outcome of your visit is that later on, she has a baby who can grow up to be one of your generals. If you get killed, he might even succeed to your empire!

Dee: This seems to be a common theme, these games where you have kids. Maybe the designers are all reaching the age where their biological clocks are ticking.

Jay: Anyway, each decision you make costs body points, so you can make only so many in a turn. You can maximize your production by micro-managing, but to save body points it's wiser to let your advisors handle a lot of things. The better you get at delegation, the better you'll do in the game.

Dee: Which means that your expanding empire never really expands the tasks you the player have to perform, or affects your ability to perform them. The game is having all the fun.

Jay: *Bandit Kings* had a similar mechanic.

Dee: Yeah, I know. I think part of the difference is the very addition of the extra decisions. *Bandit Kings* was simple and straightforward: You recruited heroes to lead your armies and used your armies to defeat the evil Gao Quiu. Here, the designers have attempted to duplicate the feel of being Emperor of an expanding nation, by giving you lots of national decisions to make, and a nebulous "conquer the world" goal. As a situation, it's much more open-ended and war game-like—and a little more dull.

Jay: I like open-endedness as a concept, and some of the extra decisions, but you're right. Some new stuff is just trappings and doesn't really add to the game.

Dee: The worst stumbling block was the merchant system. In *Bandit Kings*, you always could spend some body points and go to market. You could sell food and fur, buy arms, and recruit new heroes.

Jay: But in *Genghis Khan II*, you have to wait for merchants to come to your territory before you can trade. You can be trained up and ready to buy arms and go to war—with the one and only thing stopping you the random placement of a silly wandering merchant.

Dee: I believe this is meant to encourage you to expand your territory: the more provinces you control, the greater the odds of a merchant being in one of them.

Jay: But that's *dumb*. The whole object of the game is to conquer territory; I don't need artificial incentives. And as I conquer more territory, I get more direct tax income and so have less and less need for the merchants.

Dee: I didn't say it made sense, I just said I thought I knew why they did it. So once you've got enough money, you can buy various types of troops. There are a lot more details to the combats than in *Bandit Kings*, and this is where *Genghis Khan II* starts to shine.

Jay: Yup. Cataphracts (mounted bowmen), pikemen, archers, Mongol hordes, and even cannon! And in the European game there are samurai!

Dee: I think the readers have noticed you like the samurai. Once you've bought troops, you have to buy arms and train them, just like in *Bandit Kings*. Then you're ready to go to war.

Jay: The battles have a two-step level detail. An invasion starts on a battle board where you direct your legions to attack various targets, or go into ambush mode in woods and towns. One nice thing is that you can attack to conquer the territory killing your opponent's #1 Legion, or you can make raids where you simply occupy towns and then retreat.

Dee: Each turn you spend occupying an enemy town gains you gold and food, and lowers the popularity of the ruler of that province. I agree, a nice touch.

Jay: Once you've maneuvered your legions to meet your opponents' on the battle board, the battle sequence switches to a close-up tactical screen. Your little horse units gallop, your little artillery roll. . . .

Dee: Yes, and they look good, too. They are isomorphic 3-D images, meaning a sort of cross between a top-down view and sideways, as in *Sim City 2000*—or *Ultimate Domain* (reviewed above). Each legion is made of four units, which can be mixed when you create them. It's nice to have the option of having cavalry, artillery, and infantry work together with something like coherence.

Jay: Close-up battles are pretty simple—the interface is a little clumsy, but we moved pretty fast once we got the hang of it. A unit flashes to show it's ready. You choose from a menu of options. If you choose "move," the board shades in the areas to which that unit can move.

Dee: If you select any square in that area, the unit moves there. Units are several squares wide, so until they take casualties, they're big and can't fit two abreast to attack castles through their gates. And since units on walls can fire down at the field, storming castles is pretty difficult, which is as it should be.

Jay: Yes, and it shows you why; it's not just abstract "fewer casualties."

Dee: When you want to attack, the board shades to show how far you can attack. If you choose "near," it's a melee; if you choose "far," it's bows.

Jay: You also can charge, which does damage to your troops as well as to your opponent—but it shakes the enemy and makes it likely they'll break and run.

Dee: One annoying thing is that if a unit has no enemies in range, the designers don't gray out the Attack option. You can

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choose it, select "near" and find you can't attack anyone. Then you select "far" and find you *still* can't attack anyone!

Jay: A minor problem. Other nice touches include the tiny arrows flying around, the numbers appearing above a unit's head to indicate how many men are left, and the neat sound effects and visuals when units get stunned by missile fire or broken by cavalry charges.

Dee: So that's the game in a nutshell. I think the battles are fun, and the surrounding parts aren't too obtrusive. There are some annoying rules and restrictions, and it's less focused than *Bandit Kings*, but still interesting.

Dee's rating: * * ½, maybe * * *

Jay: I think it depends on what you like. If you just like fighting, it's got lots of interesting details, and it deserves a higher rating. But if you like atmosphere, character, and economic and political decision-making that makes a difference, it falls short.

Jay's rating: * * or * * *

Dee: Now on to a game that we both liked fairly well, *Master of Magic* from MicroProse. It was designed by the SimTex group, the people who did *Master of Orion*, but it bears obvious allegiance to *Civilization*. We both loved *Civ*, so again we were predisposed to like *Master of Magic*.

Jay: And we weren't disappointed by the game. But before we review the game itself, let me just warn you all: we got the first-shipped version of the game, and it was buggy. Things didn't work the way they were supposed to. It crashed when certain spells were cast, with "Sound Error" messages. The AI seemed a little wimpy. So we called customer support, and they sent us a "patch disk."

Dee: A patch disk contains fixes for bugs that have been found in an already released product. We copied the patch disk into our *Master of Magic* directory, and unzipped it. Now the game plays much, much better.

Jay: The moral of the story: Always try customer support if you're having problems—if the company you're dealing with has a decent staff, you might actually get through. Some of them are on-line now, which should make access even easier. And be a little wary of buying a game when it first comes out.

Dee: That said, we can talk about the merits of the game, which are many. This is one where your decision-making starts from the get-go, there's lots of cool stuff to see and do, and the game progresses in a logical and orderly fashion to a satisfying conclusion. In the game, you play a wizard who starts out as leader of one little hamlet. You can order your hamlet to build a variety of things, and as you add to it, more troops become available. At the same time, you are accumulating "mana" (magic) points, which you can use immediately to research new spells or increase your

casting skill, or save in a pool to actually cast spells with later.

Jay: As we said, it's a lot like *Civilization*, but there are plenty of differences. For one thing, you can customize your wizard at the start of the game. You choose which type or types of magic you like—sorcery or nature magic, life or death or chaos—and how deeply into your field of study you want to be. If you'd rather dabble in everything, you can.

You also determine what special abilities you have, if any. Dee goes for the Warlord ability, because Warlords recruit better armies. I'm fond of the Channeling ability, which lets my wizard cast spells over long distances without a penalty.

Dee: It's not that I love the armies or anything—I just think that the game's mechanics reward combat and make life difficult for spell-casters; I'm only keeping up with the AI wizards.

Jay: My Myrran Wizard is romping through her spell research, though. I think you're just more bloodthirsty than I am.

Dee: And what's your wizard researching, but spells to attack monsters?

Jay: Yeah, but they *are* monsters.

There's no reasoning with them . . . and they have treasures that I want. In fact, one of the best things about *Master of Magic* is the variety: the variety of treasures, the variety of heroes, the variety of races, the variety of wizards. You can have up to four opponents. These AI wizards are randomly chosen from a pool of 12, so the game plays differently each time, depending on the strengths and interests of your rivals.

Dee: Your wizard starts as one of those 12 templates too, although you can customize her, as Jay said. Sometimes I pick the one I'm least interested in facing as an opponent.

Jay: Like in *Civilization*, there are two possible outcomes for *MoM*. You either can conquer the world militarily, or you can win through research, by being the wizard to successfully cast the *Spell of Mastery*. Even if you're leaning toward armed conquest, there are still plenty of opportunities for spell-casting.

Dee: One of the neatest tricks is conquering the city that houses a rival's enchanted fortress. If you manage this, the wizard is not killed, but banished from the world.

Jay: The animation is wonderfully satisfying. The rival wizard stares in horror as you advance and cast a blue bolt that melts him into a two-dimensional shadow, and then nothingness. It's possible, according to the manual, for a banished wizard to return to the game, if she can generate the necessary mana to cast the *Spell of Returning*.

Dee: Of course, once you've vanquished a wizard, you take the opportunity to mop up all his cities while the boss isn't there to cast spells at you. So we've never seen one come back yet, but the pressure of knowing your rival might return gives the game

an added spice.

Jay: Your opponents are not just the rival wizards. *MoM*'s two planes, or worlds, abound with ruins, monster lairs, neutral cities, and magical nodes that generate power you can harness.

Dee: So there's a little bit of everything in *MoM*. You've got your dungeon crawls, your role-playing, your economic development, your combat. . . .

Jay: And with an interface that's much less cumbersome than *Genghis Khan* or *Ultimate Domain*. And let's not forget a really neat feature called Itemmake. You type that before starting the game, and you can customize all the magical items you can find as treasure when you play. Just remember the more powerful you make the goodies, the bigger the monsters guarding them will be.

Dee: That's very cool. If I was disappointed by anything in *MoM*, it was the aforementioned imbalance toward fighting, and a feeling that the AI isn't really up to snuff. Otherwise, it's addictive and highly repeatable, and I've been playing it a lot just because I want to.

Dee's rating: * * * *

Jay: I only wish it was more like *Civ* in its diplomacy. You can't bribe cities or units in *MoM*, you must conquer them, which may be one reason Dee feels that combat is too important. It would be nice to be able to compare your overall score from one game to the next, as well. But neither of these quibbles diminishes my desire to play this game into the wee hours.

Jay's rating: * * * * ½

Dee: Now on to our final game for this column, *Space Hulk* from Electronic Arts. This is a science-fiction game based on the popular Games Workshop board game. Again, I was hoping to like *Space Hulk* because I had played the board game and found it intriguing.

Jay: In fact, we played *Space Hulk* longer than any other reviewed game. You seemed determined to like it.

Dee: Yes. And I'm sad to say, it disappointed me in the end. The gimmick of the board game is timed turns combined with the ability to interrupt your opponent's turn. Basically, the computer game tries to recreate this—and fails.

Jay: *Space Hulk* reminds me a lot of the movie *Aliens*. The "good guys" are Imperial soldiers, dressed in huge suits of power armor, carrying weapons like Flame Throwers and Storm Bolters. The bad guys are called Genestealers, but they look suspiciously like H. R. Giger's aliens.

Dee: The basic idea of any scenario is that a giant, empty spaceship—a *Space Hulk*—has been found floating in the void. On board are wonderful scientific gadgets the Imperium desperately wants. Also on board are hordes of deadly Genestealers.

Jay: In the board game, the Imperial player has a certain amount of time, say one

minute, to complete his turn. At the beginning of his turn, he draws a chit that tells him how many Command Points he's got.

Dee: Then, during the Genestealer player's turn, the Imperial player can interrupt and spend Command Points to take opportunity shots or quick-moves. There's a lot of uncertainty, bluff, and planning necessary on both sides.

Jay: *Space Hulk*, the computer game, is for one player. You command an Imperial squad of five troopers (some scenarios let you control two squads). You have one fairly large window that shows you what trooper #1 sees. Four smaller windows show you what the others are seeing; you can click in any window to make that one the primary view.

Dee: It looks a lot like the scene in *Aliens* where the lieutenant is watching all the monitors to see what his squad is doing. In the same way, you can give orders to each trooper in his window, to move or fire. This all happens in real time. Controlling five guys in real time while the computer is controlling the Genestealers (who have an infinite supply of troops and charge to rend you limb from limb) is, of course, impossible.

Jay: One difference from *Aliens* is that you have to hand-hold your troopers through each step of their moves; they're really dumb.

Dee: Exactly. Sounds like not much fun, right? But, here's the kicker: you also have a limited supply of Freeze Time, which allows you to halt the action, give orders to each trooper individually, then make them execute all orders simultaneously.

Jay: It really gives you the feel of coordinating complex maneuvers. When it works, it's satisfying to watch.

Dee: Of course, when you screw up and they traffic-jam, you have to go in there and order them around individually to clear things up.

Jay: And meanwhile, the Genestealers are scuttling up to attack you.

Dee: Yup. Once you turn Freeze Time off, everything starts happening at once. You always can stop time again and give more orders, but as I said, you only have a limited amount of Freeze Time. Once it runs out, the game starts up in real time whether you want it to or not.

Jay: Except that you earn more Freeze Time for every second the game is running in real time. Besides that very first training mission, I never noticed you actually running out of Freeze Time.

Dee: Yeah, that seems to be one of the problems. If you choose, and you will choose, you can pretty much stay in Freeze Time for the entire game. Which means it goes from being a real-time nail-biter into a board game on the computer.

Jay: Isn't that what you wanted?

Dee: No. I wanted a computer game that was faithful to the elements of the board game. I think they tried to do that, but failed.

Jay: I agree. Every time we went into

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was impossible to stay alive. The first time I played *DOOM* was like that too: full bore down the corridor—Splat! You're dead! Except you get resurrected instantaneously in *DOOM*, and in *Space Hulk* you go to the "mission failure" screen, and have to start over again. We constantly had to stop the action and give orders on the overhead view just to stay alive.

Dee: Exactly, and it would have been a lot more fun to have a more equal mix of order-giving and real time. One way to do that would have been to have the real-time action move a little slower. Then we would have had the moral equivalent of Command Points—we could go in there with some hope of success to give a specific order to someone.

Jay: As it was, whenever we watched one monitor to give a guy a specific order in real time, two other troopers were busy getting killed.

Dee: And that was with two of us watching the monitors! Another flaw that Jay alluded to is the overhead view. In order to give anything like decent orders, you really have to have an overhead full-map view of what's going on. Unfortunately, the overhead view is so detailed and so full that there's no reason to ever use the monitor views.

Jay: No reason at all—well, one annoying reason. We played one entire mission

artifact we needed to pick up only shows in monitor view.

Dee: So we did it over again—practice does help you find your way around, just like *DOOM*—and this time we used the monitor view to find and acquire the artifact.

Jay: But then we got a report of mission failure, even though we think we did everything we were supposed to. I still say you dropped the artifact.

Dee: Maybe. My trooper certainly wasn't bright enough to mention it.

Jay: *Space Hulk* also has a campaign game, where you can take the same squad through several missions, and surviving troopers can gain experience and earn the right to have better weapons. We had so much trouble with the scenarios that we never got to a campaign.

Dee: There wouldn't have been much point, for us. One last note: We had trouble with the music crashing the game, and had to call customer service (sense a theme in this column?). EA's support was pretty fast, and clearly they'd had this problem a lot, because the representative read off a cheat-sheet instructing us to simply delete the sound directories and play the game in silence!

Jay: Unfortunate, but at least we got through to them. So, *Space Hulk* was very frustrating for me, even after we started

the same scenario over and over, until I know exactly where the monsters are going to be, just so I can gun 'em down. Not my cup of tea. The graphics in the monitors were cool-looking, but to successfully play you had to ignore them; and the stop-and-go nature of the game system was really jarring.

Jay's rating: * ½

Dee: I kept feeling as though I should be able to do better next time, which is one hallmark of a good game. I was never actually able to do better, though, which is not a hallmark of a good game. Maybe it's just us, but *Space Hulk* seemed too difficult, and the emphasis in the design was on the wrong things. Also, I missed being able to relax and play the Genestealers occasionally.

Dee's rating: • •

Jay: So that's it for this month. Look for us again in two months, when we hope to review, among others, Sierra's new Bug Wars. Sayonara!

Dee: Ciao. Write to us (in care of the magazine) if you have something you'd like to say about any of the games we've reviewed, or if you've got suggestions for games we should look at in the future. See you in two!



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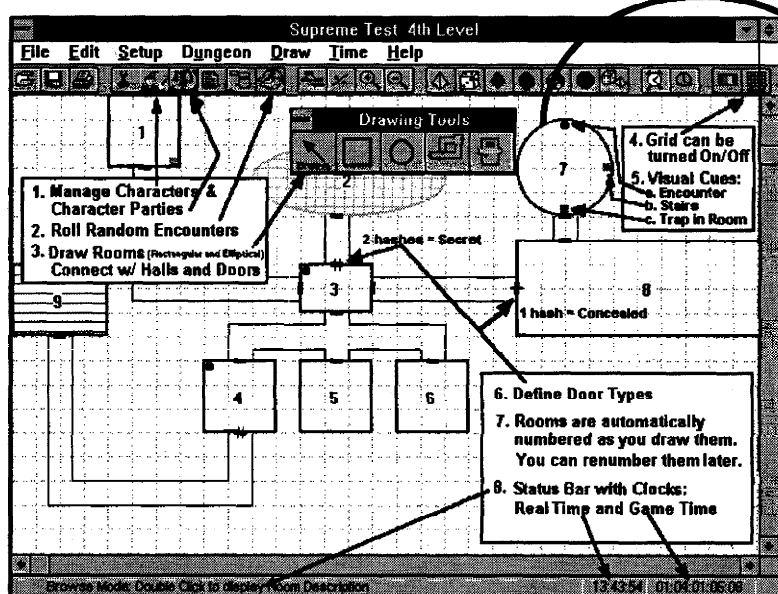
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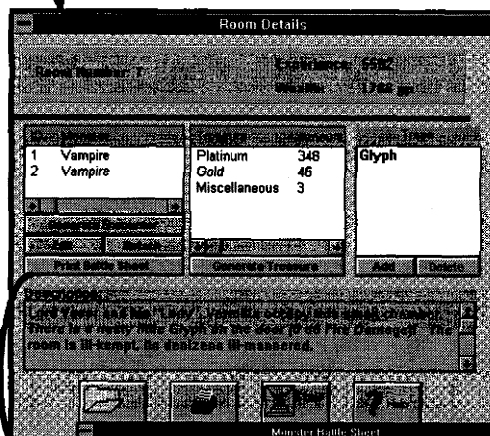
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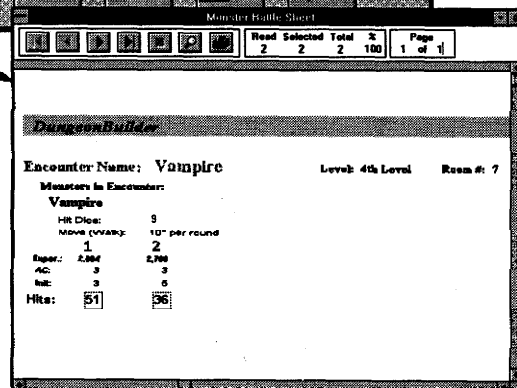
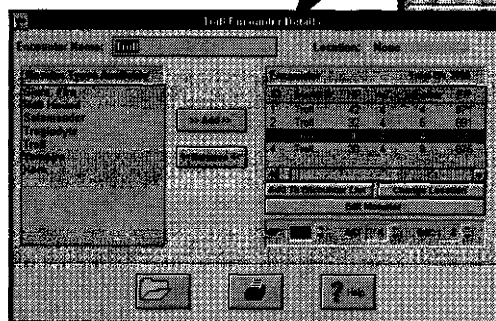
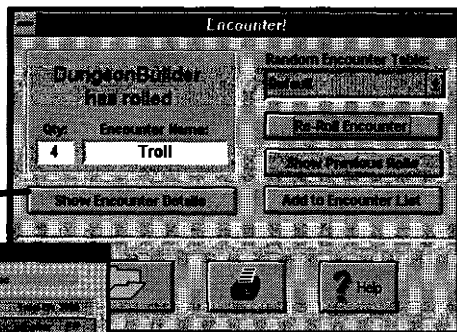
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Being a long-time AD&D® game player and DM I know almost every aspect of the game, especially FORGOTTEN REALMS® and DRAGONLANCE® settings. In the past eight years, six of them as a DM, I have created many spells, magical items, new races, classes, and rules.

One rule in particular involves the conflict of player-character knowledge. There are things a veteran player obviously knows; but who's to tell that her character knows that information? For example, if a group of PCs are in temple ruins and encounter an undead creature, my "physical description" may be all too familiar to the player, but how would a 1st- or 2nd-level character know exactly what this is and what it can do?

On many occasions I've seen players "cheat" using their knowledge that their characters wouldn't know. Here's a simple solution to that problem. First of all, change the monster's abilities—make it stronger or weaker, perhaps give it a different immunity, or even have a different monster be present, cloaking itself to appear as what the player characters see.

Second, I would like to comment on the Alignment Tracking chart in the *DRAGONLANCE Adventures* hardcover book. This is an excellent tool for new DMs and players with alignment-restrictive characters—such as paladins, rangers, or clerics of a strict religious order. I recommend innovating this into other campaign settings to facilitate a character's alignment status.

Also, to enhance this not-so-new idea,

the DM can create a list, as determined by individual characters, that decides which actions move the alignment status up or down the chart.

Joseph Mills
Fredericksburg VA
(currently in USAF, Okinawa, Japan)

In issue #202, Travis Gillespie requested a list of parallels between the lands of the FORGOTTEN REALMS setting and our own world. Like Mr. Gillespie, I think such equivalents add a lot of fun and realism to a campaign, so I've put together a list of the parallels that I use in my own campaigns. I've left out demihuman nations, and there are some places in the Realms that I admit I just don't know much about. I indicate these with a question mark. Main sources for information on each area are also listed.

Aglarond: ? (I put in my own ideas against a rural European background.) FORGOTTEN REALMS Campaign Set (old and new editions), by Ed Greenwood & Jeff Grubb; FR6 *Dreams of the Red Wizards*, by Steve Perrin.

Amn: Renaissance Italy (including the fun accents!). Another possibility would be Spain and Portugal at the time of the discovery of the New World (which would be Maztica in this case). FR3 *Empires of the Sands*, by Scott Haring.

Bawa: ? (I use an "Oriental land set on a lush, tropical island" flavor, complete with the occasional gargantua, as seen in many cheesy Japanese films.) I assume details are in the *Kara-Tur, the Eastern Realms* boxed set by Batista, Christian, Nephew, Swan, and Pondsmith.

The Border Kingdoms: ? (I use a magic-rich, high-fantasy setting with a touch of Persian culture.) Mentioned briefly in FR3.

Calimshan: Magic-rich Persia/Turkey. FR3.

Chessenta: Greece (Climbar is similar to Athens; Akanax, Soorenar, and Sirspur are all similar to Sparta). FR10 *Old Empires*, by Scott Bennie.

Chondath: ? (I treat it as a mercantile, magic-rich area where I put in my own ideas). Passing mentions in FR boxed set, both editions.

Chult: "Land lost to time" Africa (including dinosaurs!). Featured in FRM1 *The Jungles of Chult*, by Jim Lowder & Jean Rabe.

Cormyr: England at the time of the Crusades, and thereafter. There is a lot of

detail on Cormyr in both the old and new FR set.

The Dales: "Robin Hood" England. The Dales are heavily detailed in the FR set and in FR51 *The Dalelands*, by L. Richard Baker III.

Damara: I go by the information given in FR9 *The Bloodstone Lands*, by R. A. Salvatore, and the *Bloodstone Quartet* (H1-H4) by Douglas Niles, Michael Dobson, and Ed Greenwood. Damara is a good place to stage gritty political adventures.

Dupar: Ancient lands at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, such as Turkey at the time of the Crusades, or, possibly, the Ottoman Empire (although the latter is more modern). FR16 *The Shining South*, by Tom Prusa.

Estagund: A mercantile version of medieval lands around the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. It also could be used as one of the territories chafing under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (although again, this is somewhat modern). FR16.

Gulthmere: ? (As far as I know, this place hasn't been described anywhere. Whether it is a nation or the name of that forest, I don't know.)

Gundarlun, Ruathym, Tuern, and the Purple Rocks: Norse "vikings" settings. FR5 *The Savage Frontier*, by Paul Jaquays.

Halruaa: Halruaa doesn't really have an earth-based parallel. I use it as a magic-rich, high-fantasy area. FR16.

The Hordelands: Mongolia and nearby Russia and China. *The Horde* boxed set, by David Cook.

Impiltur: Traditional Europe. I pretty much follow the information in FR9.

Khazari: Indo-Asia (complete with lamas, fakirs, and snake charmers!). See *The Horde* boxed set.

Koryo and Kozakura: Japan. See the *Kara-Tur* boxed set.

Lantan: This island really doesn't have an earth-based equivalent. I use it to combine magic and technology to good effect. It receives a brief mention in the FR set.

Lapaliiya: ? As far as I know, this area has yet to be described.

Malatra: ? (I use an "Oriental land amidst lush tropical jungles" theme, a little like the lands of ancient Malaysia and the Philippines.) I assume details are found in the *Kara-Tur* boxed set.

Maztica: Mayan/Aztec Central America. See the *Maztica* boxed set, by Douglas Niles and Tim Beach.

The Moonshae Isles: The parts of the Isles inhabited by the Northmen make good Norse "vikings" settings. FR2 *Moonshae*, by Douglas Niles.

Mulhorand: Egypt (including pharaohs and mummies!). FR10.

Murghom: Egypto-Persian cross. See *The Horde* set.

Narfell: Narfell has its own distinct flavor, as described in FR9. The Nars also could be treated as a combination of the Mongolian-like Tuigan culture (see *The Horde*) and that of the North American Indians.

Nimbral: ? (I use it as a magic-rich, high-fantasy setting). It receives passing mention in the FR set and also is featured in Volume 2 of the Cloakmaster Cycle, *Into the Void*, by Nigel Findley.

The North: Frontier setting. The Uthgardt also give the region much of its flavor. FR5. (I give the Uthgardt even more of a North American Indian feel than they already have in FR5).

Pelvuria: The Ulutians have an Inuit-based culture (complete with igloos and sled-dogs). FR14 *The Great Glacier*, by Rick Swan.

Petan: ? (I use an "Oriental land in a lush, steamy jungle" setting.) I assume details are in the *Kara-Tur* boxed set.

The Pirate Isles: Both those of the Inner Sea and the Nelander make a great settings for the standard pirate story, such as *Treasure Island*, by Robert Louis Stevenson. The Nelander are detailed in FR3, and the Pirate Isles of the Inner Sea in the FR set and FOR3 *Pirates of the Fallen Stars*, by Curtis Scott.

Ra-Khati: Indo-Asia. See *The Horde* set.

Rashemen: Rashemen has its own flavor, as described in the FR box, briefly in *The Horde* boxed set, and I assume, FR6.

Sembia: Mercantile Europe during the Crusades and thereafter. The large cities could be used as England at the start of the Industrial Revolution, although this is somewhat modern. FR set.

Semphar: Persia. See *The Horde* set.

Sespech: ? Brief mention in the new edition of FR box.

The Shaar: Africa/Aboriginal Australia. FR set.

Shou Lung: China. See the *Kara-Tur* set.

Sossal: ? Sossal is briefly described in the old and the new FRO and *The Horde* set.

Tabot: ? (I use an Indo-Asian flavor set against the backdrop of the Himalayas. Tabot sounds a little like Tibet, eh?). I assume details can be found in the *Kara-Tur* set.

Tethyr: France at the time of the French Revolution and shortly thereafter (complete with big white wigs!). FR3.

Thay: Thay doesn't really have an earth-based equivalent. FR6.

Thesk: ? (I use a traditional European background). It is briefly described in the new FR set and in Volume 3 of the Empires Trilogy, *Crusade*, by James Lowder.

Threskel: Troy, under the control of the Greeks (Chessentans). FR10.

T'u Lung: China/Manchuria. See the *Kara-Tur* set.

Turmish: ? (I use a mercantile Turkish flavor). It was mentioned in passing in Volume 1 of the Finder's Stone Trilogy, *Azure Bonds*, by Jeff Grubb and Kate Novak.

Ulgarth: Medieval Spain, or for a more modern feel, Spain at the time of the discovery of the New World. In this case, the "New World" could be Maztica or Zakhara. FR16.

Unther: Babylon. FR10.

Vaasa: Vaasa has a flavor all of its own, as described in FR9.

Var the Golden: A mercantile version of the medieval lands at the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea, such as Turkey. A more modern possibility would be a territory under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (Durpar). FR16.

Wa: ? (I use an Oriental version of the magic-rich, high-fantasy setting seen elsewhere in the Realms). Details can be found in the *Kara-Tur* set.

Zakhara: Persia/Arabia. See *Arabian Adventures* by Jeff Grubb and Andria Hayday, and the *Land of Fate* boxed set by Jeff Grubb.

Rob Gidlow

I am concerned with the ever-rising prices in the gaming industry. I understand that prices rise due to inflation and such, but some of the prices I've seen recently have driven me to write this letter. A little over a year ago, a pack of lead miniatures with four figures cost \$4.00. Now, a pack of two or three miniatures made from lead-free metal costs anywhere from \$6.95-\$8.95 or higher. There also is a need for more common monsters and such to be produced in a wider variety of poses. Games also have been affected. The average price of an RPG now is close to \$30.00! And supplements for them average from \$15.00 to \$30.00 also. I know that the companies making these products are in business to make money, but how can you get people involved in a hobby that keeps getting more and more expensive every day?

Jason Whitbeck
Wayne MI

After running a game with the fiends in MC8, the *Outer Planes Appendix*, I have just one question: why haven't these creatures taken over the world a long time ago? Under the new rules, both their *gating* abilities and their interest in the Prime Material Plane have been substantially increased. One uncontrolled creature can summon many of its fellows, who can in turn send a summons, and so on until armies of the creatures are formed to sweep all before them. Given the propensities of adventurers who meddle with sorcerous prisons and of wizard apprentices whose ambition exceeds their skill, this scenario is only a matter of time.

And then what? A comparable force

from the Upper Planes may serve to restore the balance, but only at the cost of massive devastation every 100 years or so, as someone slips up and the mistake is not found or corrected in time. Hardly a solution. On a less abstract level, any fiend who gets lucky with its summons is quite likely to be the death knell for any party, due to the "pyramiding" process noted above. Given the large number of such creatures roaming the WORLD OF GREYHAWK® setting in the wake of the recent wars (and especially in the lands of Iuz), this creates some serious problems. In order to restore historical and gaming balance, therefore, I have come up with a solution: the two-step rule.

Briefly put, this rule stipulates that no fiend can open a *gate* more than two callings removed from the original summons. This means that a fiend may either elect to *gate* in allies and allow them to make one successful summons each in their turn, or to use its own powers twice. If it wishes to use its powers again after this limit is reached, it must either dismiss the remnants of a *gated* group in favor of fresh allies or have every single member of a group slain or dismissed. Fiends with ambitions on this plane, therefore, will tend to operate under cover and with many native allies if at all possible.

This restriction is primarily aimed at the tanar'ri and gehreleth, whose powers are the most unbalanced. Baatezu cannot *gate* at all on the Prime Material, as the MC8 Introduction notes that such summons are explicitly restricted to mortals. (Though it is reported that some powerful mortals can structure their summons to allow this within certain well-defined limits, and travelers on other planes are advised to be most cautious.) *Gated* yuggoloths, meanwhile, pose too grave a risk to the summoner to make such a "pyramiding" strategy possible. I also have taken certain other logical steps, such as taking note of these creatures' great pride and arrogance when role-playing their tactics and removing the ability of the babau to *gate* in true tanar'ri allies, since they are not recruiting for the Blood War while on the Prime Material Plane.

These rules have gone a long way toward restoring game balance, and have proven quite effective without making these creatures easy prey or preventing them from stocking their lairs with infernal servants. Note, however, that free-standing *gates* are a separate phenomenon, though they do count as a first summons, and that all of these restrictions are removed on the creatures' native planes. This makes facing them there much more fearsome!

Joe Katzman
Toronto, Ontario

Has anyone else out there encountered abuse of the "Minus 10" rule? I am the DM for a group in two campaigns (*Oriental Adventures* and the AL-QADIM® setting) that has been miraculously keeping track

of the life expectancy of fallen comrades, coming to their aid at the last possible moment (after having attended to more pressing matters such as the first pick of the treasure pile).

In one instance, a PC refused to help another PC until he reached -9 hit points simply out of spite, knowing of course that the injured party member wouldn't die for another minute! In the face of abuse like this, I was tempted to remove the rule from play altogether, but there are, I feel, good reasons to keep it. First, in real melee combat, not a lot of wounds from swords, axes, etc., prove instantly fatal. Usually, you could expect to simply bleed to death—which realistically could take up to 10 minutes. Second, the campaigns I run tend to fall to the low-fantasy side of the genre and so we have a higher PC mortality rate than most AD&D games out there, and the "minus 10" rule tends to help out while the parties are still at low-level and without access to too much magical healing. I realized that the abuses were springing from the fact that the other PCs knew precisely how long they could wait before coming to the aid of the fallen, so this is how I changed the rule: As soon as a PC reaches 0 hit points or below, I make a secret d10 roll to determine how many more rounds they have. This means that someone on -9 could still live another 10 rounds, but it equally means that someone at 0 hp could die in the next round. The point is, there's uncertainty.

I introduced the new rule in a game a few weeks ago (in "A Mighty Fortress" game) and you should have seen the difference in the PCs' behavior! Suddenly when someone looked as though they had been badly hurt, they found it of utmost urgency to try to reach their injured companion and stabilize his condition, forcing another PC to withdraw from the fight to administer the first aid. I'm happy to say that the fallen party member (who had been shot with a musket) pulled through, but I'm happier to say that it wasn't only that player who had his heart in his throat!

As a final note, in order to simulate the effects of having been on death's door, characters in my game don't recover consciousness for some 3d4 hours, during which time they are in a "stable but critical condition" and cannot be moved. When they do come around, they suffer penalties to Strength and Constitution equal to the number of hit points below zero they reached. (-2 hit points means -2 to Strength and Constitution). A successful system shock check means that the character will regain these scores at the rate of one point per day. If the check is failed, well, they're stuck with the new numbers. This impresses upon them the desire to not get killed!

Ruediger Landmann
St. Lucia, Australia

As a long-time player (11 years) who has read DRAGON Magazine off and on for the same period of time, I would like to discuss the lunacy of demihuman level limitations. I have no idea if this has been discussed in any great detail in the magazine, as I have only recently become a subscriber.

It has long been the policy of the old masters of the game to limit the level attainment of demihumans. My older brother and his friends who introduced me to the game many years ago held to this rule. As my fellow gamers and I gained experience and age in the AD&D game, we began to question the wisdom of such restrictions, and asked ourselves the question, why does this policy exist?

The old guardians of the game had ready answers, and it is these answers that I wish to dispute. There are two arguments against allowing unlimited level progression. One is just plain silly, and the other will consume most of this letter.

The first argument is this: Demihumans should not be allowed unlimited level advancement because of their special abilities. I know of no one who seriously thinks infravision and an occasional ability bonus means anything to a character beyond 1st level, and even then the advantages are slight.

The second argument is as follows: Demihumans should not be allowed unlimited level progression because of their much longer life spans, which will allow them to attain super-high levels and disrupt the game.

This argument seems sound, but let us examine it more closely. What are the assumptions connected with it? First, that for some reason the nonhuman character will never face overwhelming odds and the nonhuman character will never retire, never be asked to run a kingdom/guild/church/etc. . . . His deity will never bring up this powerful ally to the Outer Planes to aid the celestial battle between good and evil (or however you wish to divide sides). We also assume that the DM is willing to continue leisurely adventures easily passable by the player, and does not take the character as an NPC once he reaches a certain level. Remember, we are talking about unreasonable levels.

One argument I have used when debating my brother over this issue is, "What about Elminster?" as well as the many other ancient human wizards who are around the various gaming worlds. Why aren't there cries against their power and age? I can find no reasonable answer to the question, accept perhaps it is from the tradition of fairy tales to have an ancient human wizard, or that they are NPCs, and controlled by the DM.

Another example I found useful in argument was that of a 15th-level elfen fighter. This argument makes for a few assumptions (reasonable ones I think), so bear with me. With his human companions retiring, let us presume this elf still has

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over a hundred years to adventure, so off he goes. The elf needs 250,000 experience points to move up to 16th level. So where will he get this? He may try to combat humanoids, slaughter them by the thousands. This of course has its flaws, as I think anyone will agree. Numbers do make a difference, and Jason Dunn's letter to Forum in issue #152 and "Tucker's Kobolds" from issue #127 showed how deadly humanoids can be.

So how does our humble elf get his XP? Some would say "dragon" in an instant, but a dragon is no easy kill in the AD&D 2nd Edition rules. Even killing a Great Wyrms red dragon is worth only 20,000 XP, and while this number would soar if its lair is discovered, there is no guarantee of doing so. My own experience with a dragon of such magnitude would advance our elf by only half, and only if he had slain the creature by himself or if his companions had been slain. No one can seriously think that this particular elf could kill such a beast on his own (and if he did, several dragons might pay him a visit . . .), so, the dragon and its treasure and experience is divided among the party he is with (assuming success, of course), leaving our poor elf far distant from his goal.

What about giants? An easier kill, perhaps. But the most powerful storm giant yields only 16,000 XP, and certainly anyone with the name "giant killer" does not

tend to live long (either pressing his luck or having some assassin go in for the giant's money . . .). Even the mighty lich is only 7,000 XP, and our poor elf would be hard pressed to kill even one of these powerful undead. Life is not so easy at the top, and so our elf must leave the more "mundane" creatures of the gaming world if he plans to reach these lofty XP heights. Quests are what he will seek. Perhaps our brave elf and his new party will manage to kill the mighty Tarrasque, but to his misfortune even as the lone survivor, he receives only 107,000 XP for his trouble, less than half his needed experience.

But let us imagine that this brave elf proceeds to gather some artifact (the only object that can really advance a character rapidly), not be destroyed by it (or controlled, maimed, disrupted, or disposed of in some other horrible way) and moves up a level or two. He now becomes some evil deity's most powerful and prominent enemy. I think it would be foolish to say that our elf would survive long with the powers of deities at his throat.

Of course, our elf could retire to be the defender of his community, but this offers very little in the way of experience.

Similarly, our elf over the years could, with luck and the greatest Monty Haul DM ever, reach say, 40th level. After all, he would only need 6,520,000 XP (the equivalent of 59 Tarrasques). But this is obviously

ridiculous, since such an occurrence would never happen.

I don't pretend to have all the answers, and there may be some argument or logic I haven't thought of. I can say that my gaming group has never had any problems not having level restrictions, and it is my opinion that no one, human or otherwise, could attain a ridiculous level without DM aid or being an NPC to begin with.

If this reaches print, I would appreciate the opinions and experience of my fellow gamers. I also would appreciate the printing of my address, in case anyone should care to write to me directly.

Peter David Levi
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Ω



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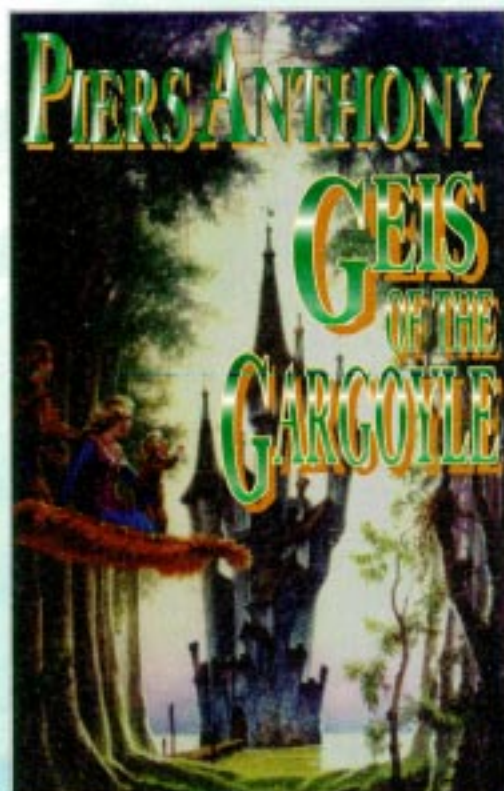
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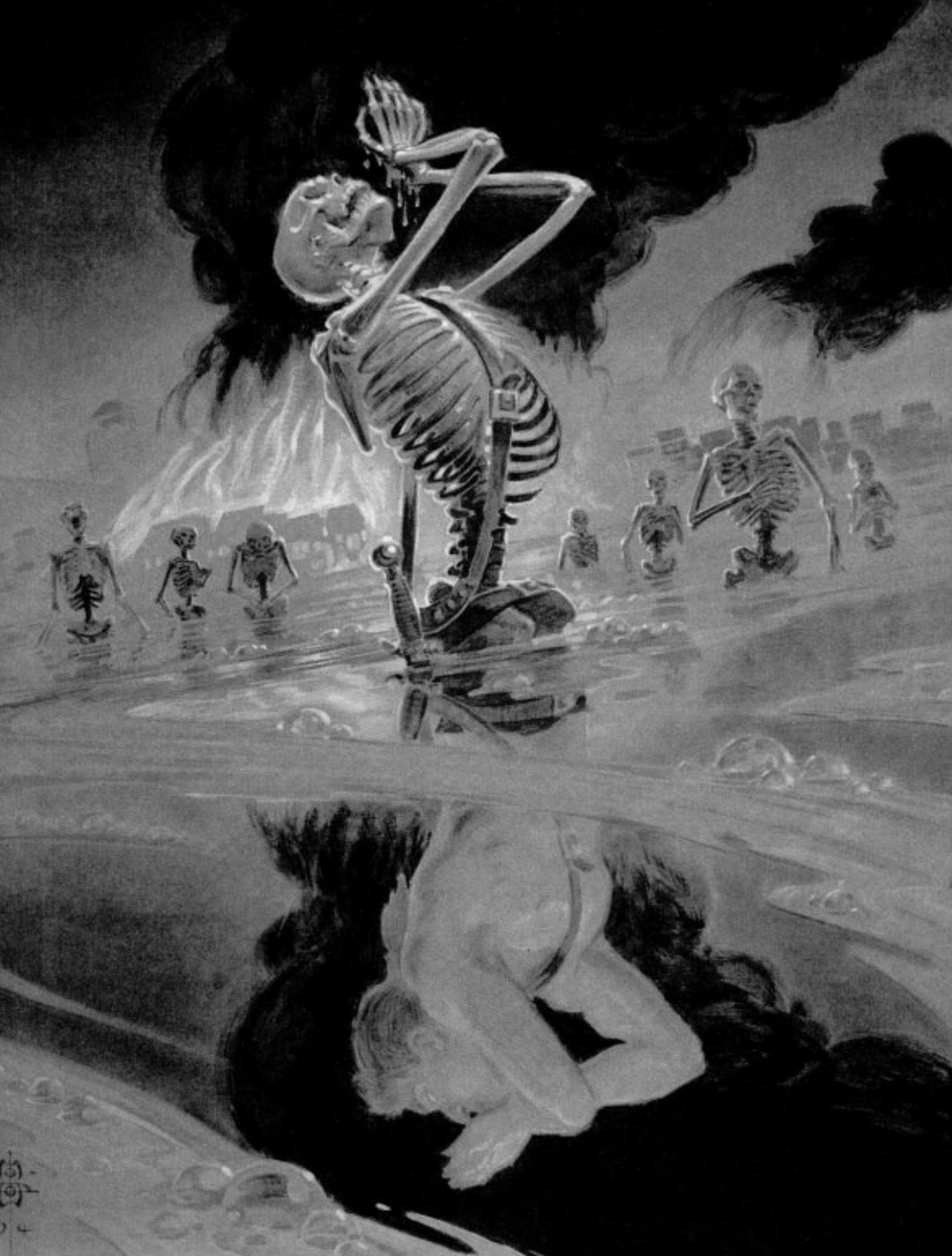
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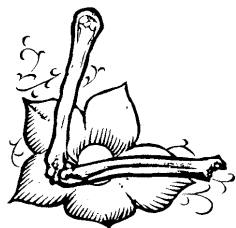
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oomer Tomp poured water into his mouth and down his snapping jaws. The tin cup he carried for just this purpose banged against his teeth and knocked some of them loose. He didn't notice. The ecstasy of filling up with tilted neck, knee deep in cool

liquid, made him forget. The sand colored the large pool a murky brown, and his bones gasped as the water soaked them, the marrow absorbing its moisture and the promise of renewed life. Thousands around him filled the oasis and poured water down their empty throats, lost themselves in the vision of flesh sprouting from bleached bone.

Loomer didn't know how long it lasted. He never did. He knew it was over when a ball of hot wind and sand smacked into his head and chipped off a piece of hard bone from his skull. He held on to his vision a moment longer. The whip hit him again and he returned to the water and the crowd surrounding him. He heard the whips from the priests on the shore lashing through the air and he ducked. The blow missed him but smacked into the shoulder of another in front of him. He saw the joint shatter. The arm fell off into the water. Those around him scattered and fled for the shore. Loomer kept low, his open jaw dipped in the water, tasting it even as he scrambled with the others toward the beach. When he was out of the pool and standing on the rise that surrounded the oasis, he took a moment to count his fingers and toes.

That's how you go first, he thought to himself. First you lose your digits, and then you're left for the sand to cover. Someone else takes your place in the column. He had most of eight fingers including both thumbs, and all his toes. He turned his head upward to the sun and gave thanks. The light entered his eye sockets and filled his soul with a new warmth. "I'm going to be one of them," he said firmly to himself. "The flesh *will* come back. There *will* be a harvest." It was what he always said after he drank from the waters and counted his digits.

In the long valley behind him, the fallen from the battle were being awakened by the priests. The dark figures passed quickly whispering their prayers, touching the flesh of the bodies lying in the sand. Men and women, reborn in the priests' wake, took their first faltering steps and joined the back of the column. The remains of those who had lost their places or couldn't be reborn were left to be covered by the sand and eaten by the scavengers. Fragments of their crushed and splintered bones littered the valley like new-fallen snow.

Loomer pulled at his shoulder belt. He adjusted his shield and scabbard, checked the hilt of his sword, and joined the forming ranks on the shallow dunes below him. He pulled himself into step next to two that he recognized. They both wore mail shirts with ragged holes that showed their exposed ribs. Spiked helmets covered their heads. Thick oak spears were clenched in their hands. Loomer counted their fingers quickly and saw that they had passed through undamaged.

"Roth, Shannon," he called to them. His jaw moved slightly with each word, and they heard him even though all three had long since lost the flesh from their faces.

They turned their heads toward him and nodded together.

Harvesting the Boneflowers

by Joe Lunievicz

Illustrations by Tom Dow

"We were wondering if you had made it through," Shannon said, slapping the bones of her hand against his back in greeting.

"Yes," Roth agreed, tapping his shoulder at the same time. "We lost you at the first clash in the valley. They separated us into two groups and we were swept to the right. You must have been with the left part of the column. They lost so many. We thought you were one of them."

"I was," Loomer said, laughing. "I was. But I've told you a hundred times, I'll be with you at the final battle. I've been charmed. I always have been and I always will be."

"Wagner thought we was charmed, too," Shannon said. "But now he's face down in the sand. He always swore his flesh would grow and his bones would flower."

"Wagner was reckless," Loomer shouted as the wind picked up around them and the sun began to set. "He thought he was immortal. That's the first mistake the new ones make. He was reborn with us and should have known better. I know I'm not immortal. I know the path is short. I'm just charmed. There's a difference."

"And what's that?" Roth asked, leaning forward into the gusts of sand that sprinkled past them.

"I'm still walking with you, and he's not," Loomer shouted.

They all laughed, their jaws creaking in imitation of the living. Their column spread before them, one hundred thick and endless to the horizon, like darkened soldier ants marching toward a new hive, following the outline of a storm. Around the edges of the column moved the priests, their whips snapping at the heads of the weakest, turning them into bone dust. Crawling bodies followed the column with hands outstretched, shrill *take me alongs* mixing with the sound of the wind whistling through their frames.

Loomer glanced behind him at the column's debris. "What do you think happens to them?" he asked.

"They lose their place," Shannon said, keeping her eyes fixed on the earth in front of her.

"The sands cover them," Roth added quickly, completing the ritual.

Loomer nodded his head slowly and repeated the words to himself. He found himself glancing back again even as the night closed around them.

The column moved across the desert, the storm blanketing the passages of the sun and the moon. The days passed as seconds or years, Loomer Tomp couldn't tell the difference and didn't want to. The storm disappeared. The southern sky glowed with the lights of a far-off city. Loomer Tomp wondered at the luminous horizon and the stars that blended into the sky above it.

"Do you think this could be the final battle?" he asked.

"No, it's not," Shannon said.

"How do you know?" Loomer asked.

"Because we'll know when it's the final battle. The priests will tell us."

"They gave us birth," Loomer said.

"And the air that we breathe," Shannon completed the saying.

Loomer Tomp had long ago forgotten what breathing was and what it was like to smell, but he nodded his head in agreement with the words anyway. It was part of the ritual.

That night one of the newly born joined them. He stepped up beside them, some flesh still covering him, sheltering his skeletal frame.

"What will happen?" he asked.

"We'll join battle," Roth said, not looking at the man.

"We'll cross the sands," Shannon added.

"Why?" the man asked.

"Because we always have," Roth said. "We move forward, following the storms."

"But the storms are gone," the man said.

"We'll find them on the other side of the city. It's the sign the priests look for," Roth said. "It's the passage of eternal life. When we reach the final battle, our bones will flower and the harvest . . ."

. . . and the harvest," Loomer broke his silence, "will be the quenching of our thirst. Our limbs will swell and our lungs will fill with air again. Until then, we'll find water inside the city and we'll have our dreams."

"What dreams?" he asked.

"Of the boneflowers," Loomer said sharply, losing patience.

"How long have you been waiting?" the man asked.

"I don't remember," Loomer said.

"A long time," Roth added quickly.

"We were reborn together," Shannon said.

"No," Loomer said. "Not just the three of us. There were twenty."

"What happened to the others?" the man asked.

"I don't know," Loomer said, and gazed at the glowing horizon.

"They lost their place," Shannon said.

"And the sands covered them," Roth added.

They marched through the darkness until they stood on the dunes surrounding the city walls. They watched torches flicker and bob along the parapets as messengers darted between shivering archers and crossbowmen. From the dunes, the torches seemed like a line of shimmering fireflies. The city behind the walls whispered with closing, bolting doors and wooden shutters. A baby's wailing cries carried over the walls and across the sands to Loomer Tomp.

"Watch above for the rocks when you get to the wall," Shannon said.

"Keep your shield on your back and your body close to the wall," Roth added.

"Right," Loomer said, and flipped his curved sword to his right hand. Its silver edge glistened in the moonlight where rust hadn't turned it brown.

A priest stepped in front of them, its body seeming to appear from the sand itself. It was wreathed in gray and black cloth, tightly wrapped from its head to its feet. Loomer watched as a gloved hand adjusted a wrap of shoulder cloth. Sand spilled out like crystallized blood until tightening made it stop. The priest raised its hands above its head and they all stepped forward. Loomer unhooked his shield from his back and strapped it to his right forearm. The priest turned toward them and gazed with eyes that sparkled like emeralds. They stepped forward again, smacking their spear hafts and swords against their shields. The crackling of arms rang in the darkness like the shattering of thunder as they stepped forward again

and started down the hill. More torches lit on the city walls. The priest stepped with them, and the clamor of weapons quickened as they increased their pace. At five hundred yards they began to run. Loomer screamed and the others behind raised their voices with his. The soldiers on the walls in silvered mail and hardened leather heard nothing but the striking of steel and a low humming as if flies were pricking at their ears.

At two hundred yards the first flight of bolts rained down on them, the arrows bouncing off their shields and nicking their bones. The air filled with their whistling hafts and the stars were dimmed by their black feathered clouds. Roth's helmet took two blows and a third passed through his mail coat, chipping a rib. A fourth arrow passed through his eye socket and cracked the back of his skull. His step faltered and Loomer ran past him, not looking back.

"Come on, Roth," he yelled.

Shannon stepped next to him, leaping over a fallen pile of bones, its skull shattered from a crossbow bolt.

Tightly stretched bows added their arrows to the clouds of stinging rain. Loomer reached the wall, slung his shield over his back and hooked his sword into his harness. Reaching up, he stuck his fingers and toes into the crumbling masonry. He started climbing upward, his bones finding holds that flesh could never find. Earthen bricks and flaming oil spilled down upon them. Loomer clung close to the surface of the wall and climbed as fast as he could. Arrows ricocheted off his shield again and again, the harness holding it close against his back.

A few feet from the top, Loomer glanced up and swung his body to the side as a spear plunged down into the space he had been in before. The second time the spear jabbed, he grabbed it and pulled hard, tearing the owner forward over the wall and into the darkness below. He scrambled over the top and ducked as swords sliced the air above him and to his side. Others joined him at the top of the wall. He pulled out his sword and grasped his shield, hacking in a circle around him. Within minutes the wall was overrun and the parapets were slippery with blood. Men, screaming, dropped their weapons and ran into the streets of the city.

Loomer saw Shannon and waved his sword in the air, following others into the streets in pursuit of the fleeing men. Bolted doors were splintered with sword and ax cuts as more souls were gathered for the following priests to rebirth. Word passed from gaping jaw to gaping jaw that water was near. Loomer could almost smell it. His thirst grew and his step quickened, the long passage across the sands already forgotten. He passed street after street, catching shadows of armored skeletons, hearing the rattling of dried bones and the screaming of the living. Loomer followed a pack in front of him and ran down two more streets until he heard a baby cry. He stopped running and crouched. Muffled voices came from a doorway to his left, the adobe walls cracked near the shuttered windows. He pressed his head against the door and heard the cry again. Stepping back, he slammed his body against the door and pushed it inward, snapping the lock. He rushed in, his body low, shield to one side, sword held high.

There were four people huddled against the back wall, their eye whites glowing like small moons suspended in the darkness. The baby cried again, and one of the figures glanced downward at a bundle in its arms. Loomer stepped forward and they shrank back against the wall, gasping. The baby cried again.

"Please," a woman's voice called out to him. A pale white hand reached up from the shadow of her robes. "Please," her voice quivered, "leave us alone. There is a child."

Loomer stood slowly and lowered his sword and shield. His shoulders seemed heavy. He worked his jaws to speak but no sound came out.

"Please," the woman said again.

He didn't feel the spear pass through his rib cage from behind. He saw it come out in front of him as it snapped off the tip of a rib and jerked his body forward. The spear withdrew quickly and Loomer spun around, raising his shield in time to block the second blow. He could hear the warrior's heavy breathing. In a second he spotted the outline of the figure thrusting the spear. Loomer rushed the figure crouched in the darkness behind the door, cutting with his sword from left to right. He felt the blade meet flesh just before his shield did. He held the figure against the wall, then released it when it stopped struggling. The body fell, the spear dropping to the floor alongside it. Loomer stepped back and looked down at the figure on the floor. Blood was already pooling at his feet. The figure was small, about the size of a young boy. Loomer didn't look any closer. When he turned around, the room was empty, the women and baby gone. The door to the back courtyard swung loosely on its hinges.

Shannon appeared at the doorway and yelled to him, "There's water in the center. Come quick and we'll be there with the first."

Loomer stepped over the boy and followed, his feet leaving red prints like the sharp-lined tracks of a prehistoric bird.

In the city's central park, Loomer and Shannon soaked their jaws and spines and ribs with well water and dreamed of the return of their flesh. Loomer didn't bother to count his digits this time.

That night they left the city behind, flames burning the sky red with orange and yellow lingers. The newly reborn stumbled behind the column. The priests followed them, their whips releasing the flesh of the living and baring the bones of the undead.

"There were twenty of us originally," Loomer said.

"I don't want to talk about it," Shannon replied. The wind had picked up again, and the top layer of sand whipped in tall bilious sheets across the desert floor. The storm had returned.

"There were twenty, and now that Roth is gone there are only two left."

"I said I don't want to talk about that," she yelled against the wind.

"I watched you take a spear through your chest when the column came for us," Loomer yelled back.

"I don't remember," Shannon said.

"I saw you die. I remember, because we held you before we were slain. You were in our arms and Roth was

crying. He sounded like a child. He loved you. When he died, I was the last one left. I held you both."

"They gave us birth," she interrupted.

"I remember the rebirth. I remember waking up and seeing you both with me. The others were alive again, and we walked into the desert together."

"... and the air that we breathe," she continued.

"I don't remember any of them since that moment."

"... and the bones will flower with the spirit of the flesh."

"Roth is gone. I didn't look back when I saw him fall. I didn't stop."

"... and the bones will flower with the spirit of the flesh," she repeated.

"Soon you'll be gone, and I won't remember you. I won't stop for you either."

"... and the bones will flower..."

"I don't want to be the only one left again, quoting ritual to the newly reborn and pointing toward the glowing horizon as if it were the pathway to eternal life."

"Shut up, Loomer Tomp!" she screamed. But Loomer wasn't standing next to her anymore. He had dropped to his knees and fallen face down in the sand. Shannon glanced to her side once, then faced forward into the wind and moved on with the rest.

The column passed over him, leaving him behind as part of the debris. When he was sure they were gone, he pulled himself out of the sand and sat up. He could see their shadows in the light of the fading moon. The storm drew a veil around them and made them disappear. Loomer drew his knees up to his ribs and let the sand cover him.



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Convention Calendar

Convention Calendar Policies

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

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

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

1. Convention title and dates held;
2. Site and location;
3. Guests of honor (if applicable);
4. Special events offered;
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements; and,
6. Address(es) 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.

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

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been 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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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: \$15 on site. Write to: Trella Wilhite, Round Table Gaming Soc., USC PO. Box 80018, Columbia SC 29225.

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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.

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LEXICON XI, Feb. 3-5 KY

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This convention will be held at Memorial Student Center on the Texas A&M campus in College Station, Tex. Events include role-playing, board, war, and miniatures games. Registration: \$13 on site. Write to: MSC Nova, Box J-1, Memorial Student Center, College Station, TX 77844-9081.

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This convention will be held at the Chancellor Hotel in Champaign, Ill. Events include role playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include open gaming, dealers, auctions, and a miniatures-painting contest. Registration: \$6 preregistered; \$8 on site, plus \$2 event fee. Judges are welcome. Send an SASE to: Donald McKinney, 986 Pomona Dr., Champaign IL 61821.

CLUB CON 4, Feb. 4-5 OH

This convention will be held at the Independence Holiday Inn in Cleveland, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events. Registration: \$13 preregistered; \$15 on site. Send an SASE to: CLUB CON 4, PO. Box 16161, Rocky River OH 44116-0161.

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This convention will be held at Wyndham Hamilton Hotel in Itasca, Ill. Guests include Nancy Kress, Lucy Synk, and Sue Blom. Events include anime, panels, demos, workshops, film, a cabaret, a masquerade dance, art shows, and a blood drive. Registration: \$40 on site. Write to: CAPRICON XV P.O. Box 60085, Chicago IL 60660.

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This convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Southeast in Denver, Colo. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include computer gaming, a figure-painting contest, auctions, and dealers. Registration: \$15 preregistered. Write to: Denver Gamers Assoc., PO. Box 440058, Aurora CO 80044.

KATSUCON ONE, Feb. 17-19 VA
This anime/manga convention will be held at the Holiday Inn Executive Center in Virginia Beach, Va. Activities include panels, workshops, an amateur film fest, an art show, dance, and anime. Registration: \$30. Write to: Katsu Prod., PO. Box 11582, Blacksburg VA 24062-1582; or e-mail: katsucun@vtserf.cc.vt.edu.

ORCCON 18, Feb. 18-20 CA
This convention will be held at Airport Hyatt Hotel in Los Angeles, Calif. Events include all types of family, strategy, and adventure board, role-playing, miniatures, and computer gaming. Other activities include flea markets, an auction, dealers, seminars, and demos. Registration: \$25 preregistered; \$30 on site. Write to: STRATEGICON, PO. Box 3849, Torrance CA 90510-3849.

TOTAL CONFUSION, IX, Feb. 23-26 MA
This convention will be held at the Best Western Royal Plaza Hotel & Convention Center in Marlboro, Mass. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a dinner-theater production. Registration: \$30/weekend or \$10/day preregistered; \$12/day on site. Write to: TOTAL CONFUSION, PO. Box 1463, Worcester MA 01607.

JAXCON '95, Feb. 24-26 FL
This convention will be held at the Ramada Inn Conference Center in Jacksonville, Fla. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include door prizes, dealers, and a flea market. Registration: \$22 on site. Single-day rates are available. Write to: JAXCON, PO. Box 14218, Dep't. M, Jacksonville FL 32238-4218.

RADCON 1C, Feb. 24-26 WA
This convention will be held at the Best Western Tower Inn in Richland, Wa. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include workshops, dealers, an art show, movies, demos, and gaming. Registration: \$18. Write to: RADCON 1C, 2527 W. Kennewick Ave., #162, Kennewick WA 99336.

POINTCON II, Feb. 25-26 WI
This convention will be held at the University Center on the UW-Stevens Point campus in Stevens Point, Wis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, door prizes, and dealers. Registration: \$2/event; \$3/4 per tournament. Send an SASE to: GASP Box 41, Univ. Activities Office, Univ. Center UWSP, Stevens Point WI 54481.

CONCENTRIC '95, March 3-5 IL
This convention will be held at Ramada Hotel O'Hare in Chicago, Ill. Guests include Lynn Abbey and Larry Elmore. Events include role-playing, board, computer, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show, seminars, films, anime, the blood drive, and a masquerade ball. Registration: \$13 before Feb. 15; \$17 on site. Write to: Concentric Circle Inc., 114 Euclid, Box 287, Park Ridge IL 60068.

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This convention will be held at Southern Illinois University's Student Center in Carbondale, Ill. Guests include David Gross. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include a game auction, plus miniatures-painting and art contests. Registration: \$10 preregistered; \$12 on site. Single-day and visitor passes are available. Write to: EGYPTIAN CAMPAIGN, c/o SIUC Strategic Games Society, Office of Student Development, 3rd Floor Student Center, Carbondale IL 62901-4425.

TENN CON '95, March 4-5 TN
This convention will be held at the Knoxville Convention Center in Knoxville, Tenn. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card-game events. Registration: \$25 (plus tax) on site. Write to: TENN CON '95, c/o Gameboard, 3018 B Mall Rd. N., Suite #161, Knoxville, TN 37924.

WARP'DCON V, Mar. 4 NJ
This convention was scheduled to take place Dec. 3, 1994. It 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: \$5. Write to: Richard Ditullio, PO. Box 802, C.M. Box 1405, Madison NJ 07940.

CON OF THE NORTH '95, March 10-12 MN
This convention will be held at the Landmark Center in St. Paul, Minn. Events include role-playing, board, computer, and miniatures games. Registration fees vary. Write to: CON OF THE NORTH, PO. Box 18096, Minneapolis, MN 55418.

COSCON '95, March 10-12 PA
This convention will be held at the Days Inn Conference Center in Butler, Pa. Guests include Jean Rabe. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, dealers, and demos. Registration: \$15 before Feb. 25; \$20 thereafter. Send an SASE to: Circle of Swords, PO. Box 2126, Butler PA 16003.

SIMCON XVII, March 23-26 NY
This convention will be held at Wilson Commons on the University of Rochester campus in Rochester, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include tournaments, dealers, and open gaming. Registration: \$8 before March 15; \$10 thereafter. Tournaments fees are \$3; most other event fees are \$2. Write to: SIMCON XVII, c/o URSGA, CPU 277146-River Station, Rochester NY 14627-7146.

CONNCON '95, March 24-26 CT
This convention will be held at the Danbury Hilton & Towers in Danbury, Conn. Guests include Jean Rabe and Sam Lewis. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include RPGA® Network events, miniature-painting, costume, and art contests, and an awards banquet. Write to: CONNCON, PO. Box 444, Sherman CT 06784-0444.

MIDSOUTHCON 14, March 24-26 TN
This SF convention will be held at the Best Western Airport Hotel in Memphis, Tenn. Guests include Timothy Zahn and Alan Gutierrez. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: MIDSOUTHCON, PO. Box 22749, Memphis TN 38122.

SCOTCON '95, March 24-26 OH
This convention will be held at Lowry Center on the College of Wooster campus in Wooster, Ohio. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include card games. Registration fees vary. Write to: Avery Leckrone, Box C-1706 COW, Wooster OH 44691.

COASTCON XVIII, March 31-April 2 MS
This convention will be held at the Miss. Gulf Coast Coliseum/Convention Center in Biloxi, Miss. Guests include Mike Stackpole, Steve Perry, Jennifer Roberson, and George Alec Effinger. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include an art show and auction, a charity auction, dealers, videos, and writing and costume contests. Registration: \$25 before March 1; \$30 thereafter. Write to: COASTCON XVII, PO. Box 1423, Biloxi MS 39533-1423.

I-CON 14, March 31-April 2 NY
This not-for-profit convention will be held at the SUNY campus in Stony Brook, N.Y. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include SF&F, comics, and anime. Write to: I-CON, PO. Box 550, Stony Brook NY 11790-0550.

TECHNICON 12, March 31-April 1 VA
This convention will be held at the Donaldson Brown Center for Continuing Education in Blacksburg, Va. Events include role-playing, board, and miniatures games. Other activities include panels, an art show and auction, filking, videos and anime, computer games, and dealers. Write to: TECHNICON 12, c/o VTSFFC, PO. Box 256, Blacksburg VA 24063-0356; or e-mail via the Internet: Technicon@VTCC1.cc.vt.edu.



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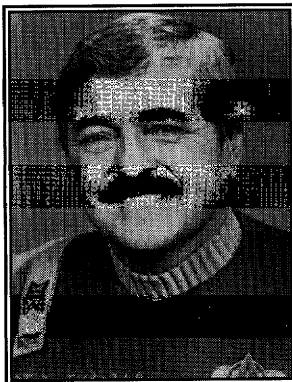
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Sage Advice

by Skip Williams

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

This month, the sage looks at more magical enigmas in the AD&D® game and continues his examination of the SPELLFIRE game.

Just how complete is the protection provided by an amulet *of proof against detection and location*? Does it protect the wearer and his clothing and gear from *detect magic* spells? Is the wearer and his gear protected from spells such as *detect invisibility* and *true seeing*? Suppose the wearer stole an item from a spell-caster, would the item be shielded from *locate object* spells? Does the amulet protect the wearer from psionic detection? Is the amulet itself resistant to spells such as *detect magic* and *identify*?

The letter of the rules will support you if you decide that an amulet *of proof against detection and location* defeats all divination spells (that is, spells of the Divination school) and psionic powers that mimic those spells. However, I suggest a few exceptions in keeping with the spirit of the rules: First, the item description says that some information about the amulet's wearer is revealed if a powerful being is consulted. In game terms, I'd suggest that the priest spell *commune* provides access to suitably powerful beings; so does the wizard spell *contact other plane*, but only if the being contacted resides on an outer plane and has an intelligence of at least 22 (see spell description, *PHB*, page 167). I also suggest that you allow *true seeing* to reveal the wearer if he is invisible and to reveal the wearer's true form if it is altered or disguised in any way. Note that the amulet suppresses the wearer's aura, and a priest's *true seeing* spell cannot reveal the wearer's alignment.

In any case, an amulet *of proof against*

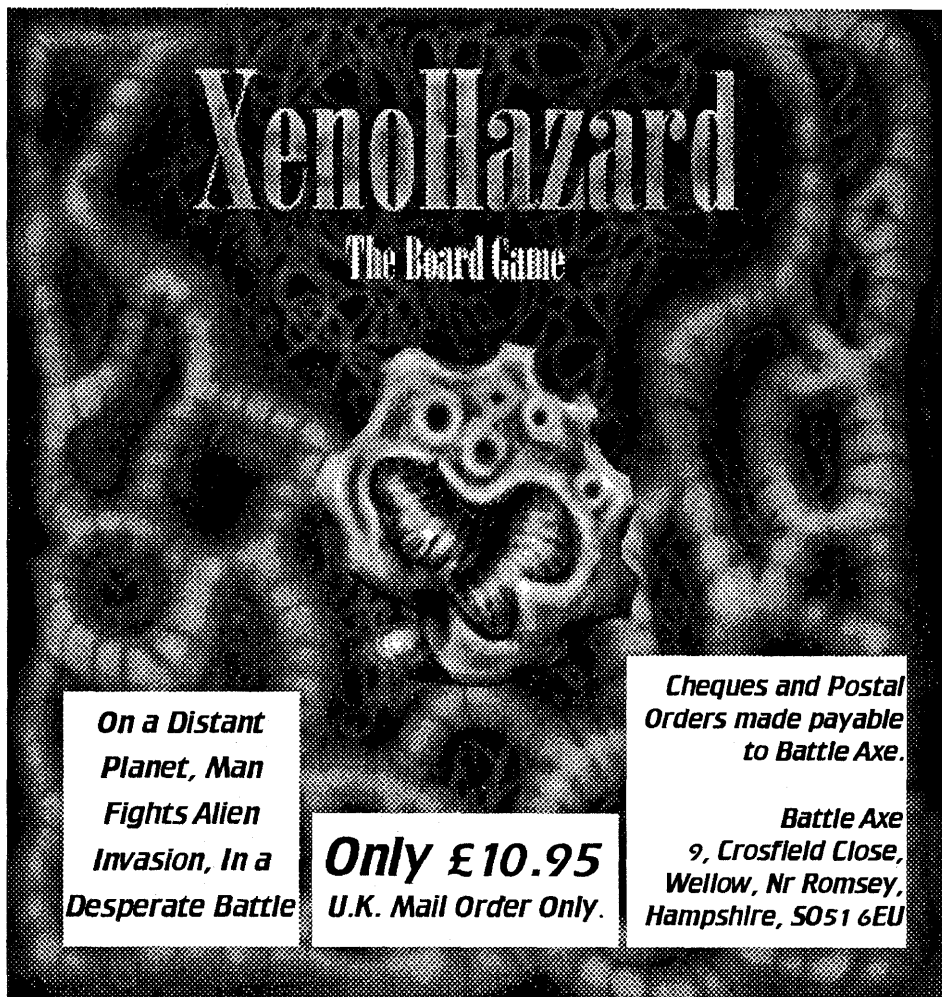
detection and location also protects the wearer's clothing and equipment, and it defeats spells such as *locate object* if targeted on items the wearer has on his person. The amulet only functions when worn by a creature, however, and it can be magically detected or identified if it is unattended or if it is carried, but not worn.

Can a *detect* magic spell detect a magical aura on an invisible creature? If so, would this reveal exactly where the invisible creature was?

Yes, *detect magic* can detect an invisible creature's magical aura. No, this does not pinpoint the invisible creature's exact location. See page 120 of the *DMG* for details.

Creatures can use weapons one size larger than themselves if the use two hands (*PHB*, page 73). If a gnome were using a bastard sword in two hands, what would its damage and speed factor be?

That depends on how the gnome decides to use the sword and what the DM will allow the gnome to get away with. A bastard sword is a size M weapon no matter how it is used, so a gnome always has to use two hands. There's nothing in the rules that says a gnome, with his two-handed grip, can't use a bastard sword in "one-handed mode" (speed 6, damage 1d8/1d12) or in "two-handed mode" (speed 8, damage 2d4/2d8) just by shifting his grip. Most DMs I know would treat a bastard sword in two-handed mode as a large



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weapon, however, owing to the fact that the wielder is putting more of the weapon's overall length to use. This would prevent gnomes and other small creatures from using the sword in two-handed mode.

Can *shadow magic* affect objects? For example, how much effect would a shadow *fireball* have on a ship's sails?

Shadow magic has a real component, and it can harm objects. If the object in question has hit points, a *shadow magic* spell inflicts 20% of its normal damage (see spell description, *PHB*, page 171). If the target item has no hit points, make a normal roll for the item on the item saving throw table, using whatever attack form the *shadow magic* was mimicking—the spell's real component, however weak, is potent enough to cause regular saving throws.

When a magical weapon loses its enchantment due to planar travel (a *sword* +2 from the Prime Material plane is taken to Limbo, for example) does it lose its ability to harm creatures struck only by magical weapons?

Yes, as an item's power fades, so does its ability to overcome special defenses.

Would a character wearing a *cloak of displacement* lose the cloak's benefits if she became invisible?

Yes, displacement fools viewers by making the displaced creature appear to be somewhere it is not. The effect is lost when the displaced creature becomes invisible.

The various descriptions of golems say that golems are immune to all spells except the ones specifically listed in the creature's description. Does this mean that a golem can ignore spells such as *prismatic sphere*? What about spells with mostly physical effects such as the *Bigby's hand* spells and *Mordenkainen's sword*?

Golems are impervious to most spells, but they are not anti-magical. Spells that do not change or damage the recipient generally work in a golem's presence just fine. Taking the items from your example: a golem can walk through most layers of a *prismatic sphere* and suffer no damage or special effects, but the violet (force field) layer stops the golem. The *Bigby's hand* spells cannot damage golems, but they can slow them or move them around if the golem falls within the spells weight limits. *Mordenkainen's sword* is ineffective against golems. Note that other spells

might have strange effects when golems are involved. For example, a *transmute rock to mud* spell cast under a golem's feet probably will cause the golem to sink into the mud. The golem, however, will not drown. Instead it sinks to the bottom and keeps right on moving, eventually climbing out. If the spell is dispelled or reversed, the golem eventually will smash its way out of the resulting rock.

Can a wizard memorize an extra spell of lower level in lieu of a higher-level one?

No. At least not without aid from a spell such as *Rary's mnemonic enhancer* or *Mordenkainen's lucubration*.

What, exactly, is required for a wizard to copy a spell from one spell book to another?

All that is required is a suitable spell book with space to receive the spell to be copied (see *DMG*, page 42), adequate light, suitable ink and quills (the DM is free to determine what is suitable, but the requirements for writing in spell books are *much* less rigorous than for writing scrolls, see *DMG*, page 85), and a reasonable amount of uninterrupted study time, say one hour per spell level.

SPELLFIRE™ game questions

The dragon Gib Htimsen (#13 of 25) is immune to spells, events, items, and artifacts. Is Htimsen immune to events such as Solid Fog (#382) that prevent attacks until the player's next turn? If so, does the immunity also apply in multi-player games?

Yes to both.

We have a local player who likes to use the Assassins (#252) ally when he has no hope of winning, so he can destroy a champion of his choice. Is this allowed?

Sure it is. It's a cheap shot, but that's what the card is for.

If two Surprise Raid cards (#101) are played together are they cumulative?

Yes. (This is a great time to play Assassins.)

Does Mogadisho's Horde (#251) force the opponent to discard all holdings from her hand as well as those attached to realms?

No, it doesn't. When the SPELLFIRE game designers got together they tried very hard not to set up conditions that would cause the players to play things out of their hands. It's too easy for a player to cheat and say they she doesn't have a thing in her hand when she actually does. While SPELLFIRE players are unusually honest, the designers didn't want to tempt them in any way.

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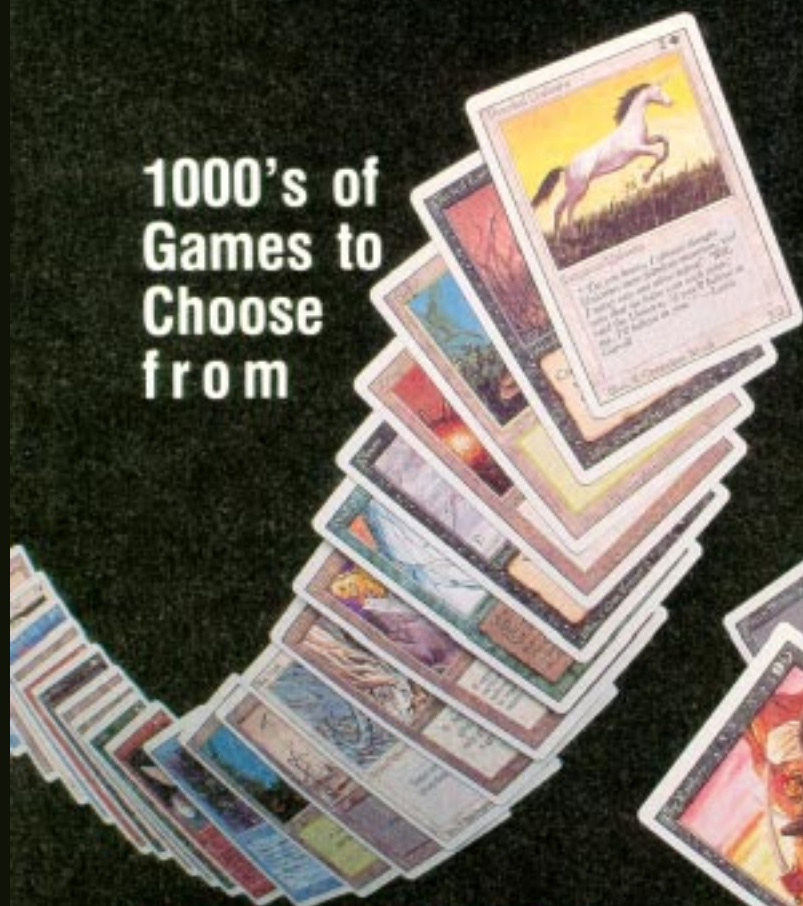
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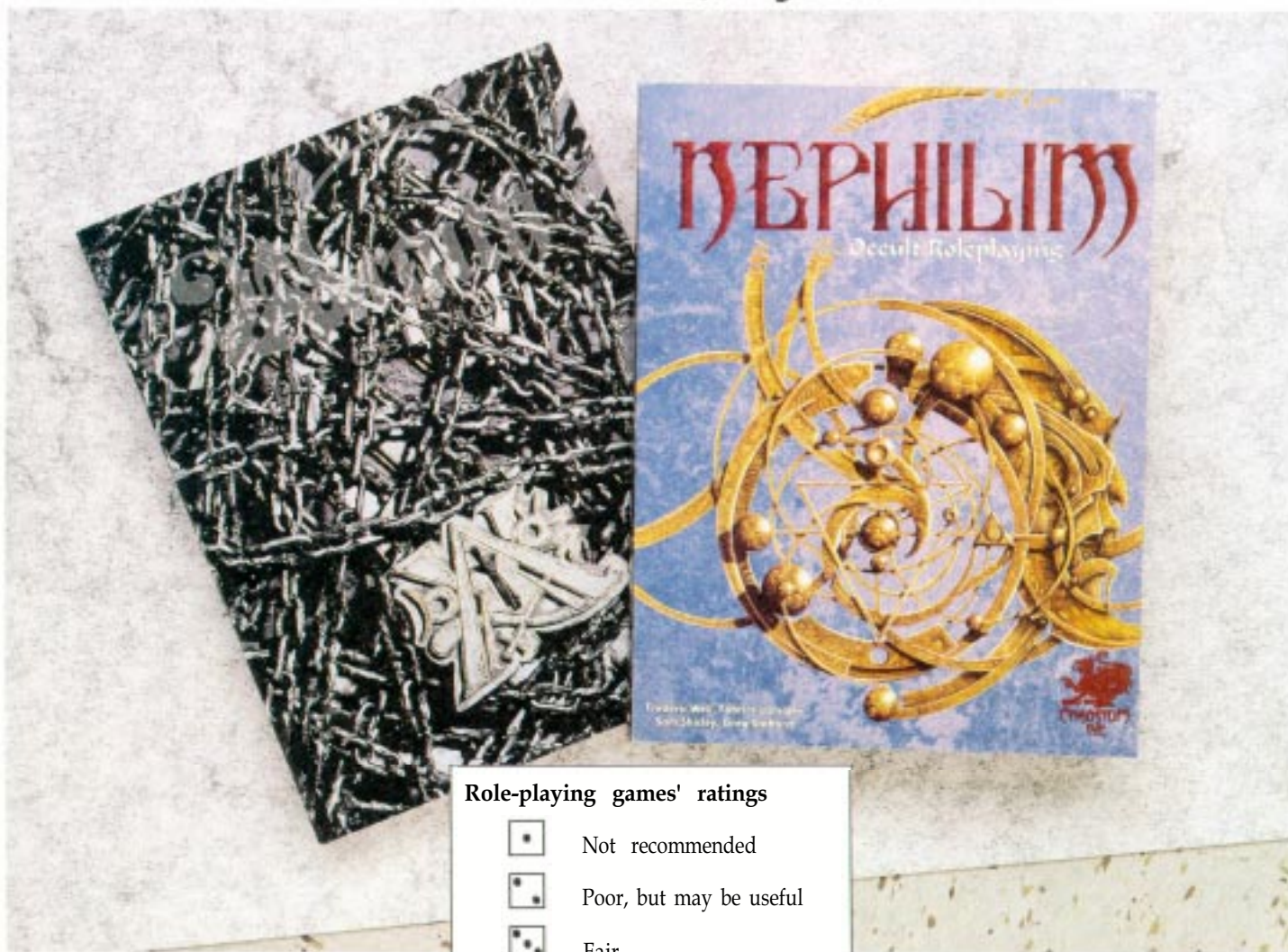
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ROLE-PLAYING *reviews*

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Reincarnation, anyone?



Role-playing games' ratings



Not recommended



Poor, but may be useful



Fair



Good



Excellent



The best

I'm not sure I like the idea of reincarnation. I mean, it'd be okay if you could pick who—or what—you'd return as, but the way I understand it, the choice is out of your hands. With my luck, I'd come back as something awful, like an earthworm or a country-western singer.

The alternatives outlined in this month's games aren't much better. The player characters—player things?—in Chaosium's NEPHILIM* game spend eternity struggling for spiritual fulfillment. The tormented entities of White Wolfs WRAITH: THE OBLIVION* game have an uphill battle against alienation and fear, not to mention their own oppressive alter-egos. That's why I originally intended to relegate these products to a column about dark fantasy, where good and evil blur together, and only chumps remain optimistic.

Then I got a letter from Sam Shirley, one of the NEPHILIM game's designers. He pointed out that reincarnation, in the context of an RPG, can be thought of as a metaphor for growth, "a window into light, a starting point . . . If anything, it is path of light, a way out of the dark."

You know what? He's right. To appreciate a reincarnation RPG, you've got to identify with your character's essence—the qualities that make him an individual—and not the character himself. The essence has a "life" of its own, irrespective of its human host. The goals of the essence can be as challenging and as meaningful as any experienced by a human being.

I know, I know. It sounds like gobbledygook. But if it doesn't make sense to you, believe me, it will over the course of a NEPHILIM or WRAITH campaign.

NEPHILIM* game

240-page softcover book

Chaosium Inc.

Design: Fabrice Lamidey, Sam Shirley,

Greg Stafford, and Frederic Weil

Editing: Charlie Krank and Sam Shirley

Illustrations: Frank Achard, Jean Bey, John Bridges, and Darrell Midgette

Cover: Frank Achard, Jean Bey, and Charlie Krank



\$22

Chaosium was once the Tiffany's of the gaming industry, a company whose name was synonymous with quality. But in the last few years, Chaosium has lost some of its luster. It's been nearly a decade since the PENDRAGON* game, Chaosium's last home run. The RUNEQUEST* game, the first serious challenger to the AD&D® game, now languishes in publishing limbo; neither Chaosium nor The Avalon Hill Game Company, the game's last caretaker, has shown interest in tackling the hopelessly overdue revision.

Even the CALL OF CTHULHU* game, Chaosium's crown jewel and my all-time favorite RPG, is showing its age. Recent adventures, like *The Thing at the Threshold* and *Adventures in Arkham Country*, were enjoyable but not memorable. The expansions never caught fire; there have only

been two supplements for *Cthulhu by Gaslight* since 1986. And White Wolfs lurid Storyteller series, which includes the VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE* game, makes the CoC game's mannered style look quaint (though considering some of White Wolfs excesses, quaint ain't necessarily bad).

But Chaosium has bounced back with the NEPHILIM game, a dazzler of a game that combines real-world history, fine-tuned mechanics, and the most inventive character-creation system this side of, well, er, the VAMPIRE game. It may not be a home run—expecting another CoC game from Chaosium is like expecting another *E.T.* from Steven Spielberg—but it's a solid triple.

Perhaps it's coincidental, but the NEPHILIM game in some ways resembles a White Wolf product, what with its liberal use of jargon ("Stasis objects were first invented . . . as receptacles to hold the Nephilim's Ka-elements between incarnations and prevent their disassociation back into the elemental fields"), epigrams ("To be or not to be, that is the question"), and evocative descriptions ("The Nephilim exhales a sweet odor, flowery, close to that of honey"). But where White Wolf continues to struggle with the fundamentals—they've yet to learn the value of understatement—Chaosium has game design down to a science. Taut writing and merciless editing make this game a joy to read. These guys take their syntax as seriously as their game systems.

Characters: The bizarre NEPHILIM player characters make vampires and werewolves seem like the next-door neighbors; this may be the only rule book in gaming history that refers to a PC as "it." A Nephilim, the "it" in question, is one part ghost, one part energy, and one part ideology, taking possession of a series of human hosts (called Simulacrum) in an effort to achieve self-actualization (called Agarthas). Character creation, which fills close to a third of the book, begins with the selection of Ka, a magical force that functions as a character template; in a broad sense, Ka is to the NEPHILIM game as class is to the AD&D system. Each of the five Ka—Fire, Air, Earth, Water, and Moon—is coupled with an attribute and personality trait. Fire Ka, for instance, affects the Strength attribute and is associated with violence. Air Ka influences Intelligence and is linked with insight. The player's choice of Ka becomes the dominant Ka-element; the two types of Ka adjacent to the dominant Ka on the pentacle of opposition (a star-shaped diagram with a different Ka on each of the points), are neutral elements, the remaining two are opposed elements. The elements grant Attribute bonuses depending on their location on the diagram; a dominant Fire Ka might grant a +4 bonus to Strength, an opposed Water Ka might grant a +3 bonus in Intelligence.

Having nailed down his Ka, the player then decides his PC's Metamorphosis, a set of physical changes the PC will attempt to

achieve as the campaign progresses. Nine options are available, among them Djinn, Phoenix, Elf, Satyr, and Snake. Each has five aspects: Face, Hands, Skin, Smell, and Voice. The player receives a number of Metamorphosis Points equal to the value of the PC's dominant Ka (shown on a table). He distributes these points among the five aspects any way he likes. If he has 14 points, he might allocate five to Face, five to Skin, and four to Smell (another first for the NEPHILIM game—it's the only RPG with an Odor rating). The player earns additional Metamorphosis points as a result of successful adventures; to achieve Agarthas, all aspect scores must be raised to 20. The Nephilim's Simulacrum physically transforms as the aspect scores increase. A high score in the Head Aspect of the Djinn Metamorphosis, for instance, causes the human host's hair to stand straight up. A high score in the Skin Aspect of the Snake Metamorphosis turns the host's flesh to scales.

Since it may take a few centuries to achieve Agarthas, a typical Nephilim will have already lived a life or two before the campaign gets underway. The player decides how many past lives his Nephilim has experienced, with each life costing two of his initial 22 Ka Points. Achieving Agarthas becomes more difficult as the Ka Point pool decreases; that said, a Nephilim can afford to invest in two or three past lives without undue hardship. A past life takes place in an historical era of the player's choice, ranging from Predynastic Egypt to 18th Century London. Dice rolls determine the incarnation's occupation, circumstances of death, and Stasis Object, a physical item that holds the Nephilim's magical energy (if a Stasis Object is destroyed, the Simulacrum dies and the Nephilim may disappear). Additionally, each incarnation comes equipped with a set of skills that the Nephilim carries into subsequent lives. A typical incarnation, then, might be a 14th Century chariot driver from Thebes, skilled in First Aid and Hunting, possessing a Staff of Rule as a Stasis Object, and was murdered at age 75 by the Pharonic Priests. Another might be a Babylonian princess with an aptitude for Reading Hieroglyphics who was killed by rioting mobs; a winged bull statue serves as her Stasis Object.

The player selects his Nephilim's current Simulacrum from a list of 27 possibilities, including Anthropology Professor, Marine Corps Private, and Unemployed Single Mother. The Simulacrum's Attributes derive from a set of standard scores, adjusted by the Nephilim's Ka-Element modifiers. The player also notes the Simulacrum's appearance, equipment, and income, then selects a suitable name. The game begins when the Nephilim takes possession of the Simulacrum, effectively transforming him (or her) into an it.

Among the other numbers players have to juggle are those for life experience (which determines the chance of the Simu-

lacrum remembering facts from the 20th century), Khaiba (the likelihood of a Nephilim temporarily transforming into a monster), and ch'awe (points expended when casting magic). But complicated doesn't always mean crummy; thanks to the flow charts and step-by-step examples, the process is surprisingly smooth. And it's fun; I could've rolled up past lives all night.

Mechanics: The NEPHILIM game uses the standard Chaosium skill system, second nature to CoC and RUNEQUEST game players, with a few tweaks to accommodate the otherworldly PCs. The player assigns a variable number of points to a menu of skills ranging from Astrological Lore to Submachine Gun. To use a skill, the player rolls percentile dice; if the roll is less than or equal to the PC's skill score, the action succeeds. In situations involving two or more opposing forces, such as a PC attempting to push open a door blocked by another character, the referee rolls against the skill score on the Resistance Table (lifted from the CoC rule book). Unlike other Chaosium products, the NEPHILIM game allows PCs to have two scores per skill, one for the Simulacrum, one for the Nephilim. The player may use whichever score he likes, though only the Nephilim's score earns experience points. Additionally, NEPHILIM PCs may have skill scores in excess of 100%, the result of experience acquired over multiple incarnations. These super skills help absorb the effects of negative modifiers and improve the odds on the Resistance Table.

It's a logical, durable system, marred only by the overly generous experience rules. With a little luck, a PC can improve any skill that's successfully used in an adventure; if a percentile roll equals or exceeds a skill's current score, the score is increased by 1d6 points. (Interestingly, CoC PCs raise their scores by 1d10, even though as mere mortals, their capabilities pale before those of NEPHILIM's magical entities.) The potential for abuse is obvious. Devious players will use as many skills as they can, just to get the chance to improve them at the end of a game. To keep these sneaks in line, we've imposed a house rule that allows no more than five skills to be improved in the same cycle.

Combat employs the same system. The attacking character makes an appropriate skill roll, such as Melee or Missile. The defending character attempts a Parry or Dodge roll to fend off the attack. Successful attack rolls result in a variable number of damage points, absorbed by the defender's armor or subtracted from his hit point total. If the Simulacrum dies, the Nephilim is forced out of the body, taking the Simulacrum's skills with it. The controlling player then rolls percentile dice. If the result is less than the Nephilim's current number of Ka points, the Nephilim may search for a new Simulacrum and attempt reincarnation (which is not without risk; each attempt, successful or not,

costs two Ka points). If the roll fails, the Nephilim is whisked back to his Stasis Object, where it's trapped until a benevolent referee engineers the conditions for its release. If the Stasis Object has been lost or destroyed, the Nephilim dissipates, and the player starts from scratch. Otherwise, the Nephilim continues to improve its skills, acquire experience, and beef up its Metamorphosis aspects until it reaches Agartha, "a shining goal at the end of many lifetimes of effort." An Agarthan PC becomes pure Ka, achieves perfect mastery of magic, and gains access to extraplanar realms—in other words, the player wins, big time.

In contrast to the elegant skill system, the magic system is a mess. Nephilim have access to three categories of magic: Sorcery (traditional spells), Summoning (creatures conjured to execute specific tasks), and Alchemy (formulas linked to elemental powers). Each category is divided into three circles of knowledge, analogous to the AD&D game's spell levels. Spell-casting involves manipulating magic fields, determining thresholds, expending ch'awe points, and mastering game mechanics too complex to summarize. Here's a sample of what you're up against, excerpted from the section on Astrological Modifiers: "The Ka-element associated with the field receives a bonus . . . The other Ka-elements are influenced according to the position they occupy on the pentacle; the two neutral Ka-elements have no modifier, while the two opposed Ka-elements have a negative Astrological Modifier of equal magnitude to the positive modifier for the dominant element."

It might be worth the trouble if the spells were out of the ordinary, but most are mundane. *Caduceus press* restores lost hit points. *Chameleon skin* allows the target to change his shape. Skimpy descriptions sabotage the inventive entries. *Seething aqua*, for example, causes a fixed volume of liquid to boil. But suppose the liquid's in a container? (And can it make a living creature's blood boil?) *Caress of Lilith* "causes any human being to feel supremely intense physical and mental pleasure." Rut what does that mean? How does it work in the context of a game? The Summoning spells show promise. *The silvery scales of the ocean meadows* calls up a sentient suit of armor. *Those who creep and nibble* conjures cat-sized imps that eat everything in sight. But without more details about the creatures, they're just another bundle of undercooked effects. The designers could've done us a favor by ditching the Sorcery and Alchemy spells, streamlining the rules, and using the extra space to develop the Summoning material.

Campaigning: The NEPHILIM game takes place in the contemporary world, meaning that players don't need a lot of background information to find their way around. A chapter on the occult surveys

the myths (the Lost Civilization of Mu, the Golden Fleece) and secret societies (the Templars, the Teutonic Knights) relevant to Nephilim history. A handful of plot hooks are intended as campaign springboards, but at a mere paragraph apiece, they're all but useless. I improvised a scenario involving a Templar infiltration of a sacred Nephilim library in Japan, but it left a lot to be desired. The players weren't sure if their Nephilim were supposed to cooperate or compete, and didn't know how to interact with nonplayer characters. I blame the book as much as my own shortcomings as a referee; guidelines for Nephilim behavior are scarce, and if the designers know what goes into a good adventure, they didn't think it was worth sharing.

Evaluation: First-timers may find it tough to connect with characters this ethereal—in some ways, it's like trying to role-play a moonbeam—but hang in there; the NEPHILIM game rewards the stubborn. The clever Metamorphosis rules force players to balance their Ka requirements with the difficulties of functioning in the real world (try making friends with the neighbors when your skin's covered with scales). The character-creation section shows how PCs evolve from blobs of energy into richly textured personalities. And Stasis Objects may be the most intriguing treasure items ever to grace the pages of an RPG. The NEPHILIM game boasts a great premise, great rules, and great characters. And as soon as Chaosium shows us what to do with it all, I suspect we'll be looking at one of the best games of the decade.

WRAITH: THE OBLIVION *

272-page softcover book

White Wolf Game Studio

\$25

Design: Mark Rein-Hagen with Sam Chupp and Jennifer Hartshorn

Writers: Steven C. Brown, Phil Brucato, Sam Chupp, Brian Campbell, Jackie Cassauo, Graeme Davis, Dan Greenberg, Mark Rein-Hagen, Jennifer Hartshorn, Robert Hatch, Harry Heckel, Ian Lemke, Ken Rolston, Kathleen Ryan, and Teeuwyn Woodruff

Development: Jennifer Hartshorn with Sam Chupp

Editing: Robert Hatch and Brian Campbell

Illustrations: Tom Berg, John Cobb, Anthony Hightower, Larry MacDougall, Anson Maddox, Robert McNeill, Ken Meyer Jr., E. Allen Smith, Richard Thomas, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, and Drew Tucker

Cover: Henry Higgenbotham and Larry Snelly

Somebody ought to send the Gloom Kings at White Wolf a box of cookies. If the introduction to the WRAITH game is any indication . . .

"The stench of Death taints everything

we say and do. Life is so often pointless and devoid of meaning, little more than a journey into Oblivion. The pain just won't go away."

... These guys are in desperate need of cheering up.

But give them credit for remaining true to their vision. The Storyteller line (which includes the VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE*, WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE*, and MAGE: THE ASCENSION* games, reviewed in DRAGON® issues #175, #192, and #202 respectively) reeks of attitude and remains the system of choice for nihilists of all persuasions. The WRAITH game continues that tradition with its creepy characters, vivid setting, and an atmosphere so grim, it makes the CoC game seem like a picnic at Grandma's.

That's the good stuff. As for the not-so-good stuff, the WRAITH game suffers from eccentric organization (adventure design is discussed before the rules are explained) and baffling definitions. ("Oblivion, we may say, is nothing less than the triumph of unbelief. When the people trust in nothing, annihilation prospers.") And as in previous Storyteller games, the overwrought prose ("Loss and torment of all kinds seep through the membrane and soak into the very essence of the place where they transpired") often borders on the ludicrous.

Characters: Players assume the roles of ghosts, the spirits of recently deceased humans. Character creation forgoes dice rolls in favor of a purchase system that gives players the freedom to shape their PCs any way they like. The process begins with the selection of the PC's career (criminal, cop, politician), the manner in which the PC died (old age, murder, car wreck), and an unresolved conflict that denied the PC a peaceful afterlife (unrequited love, an unpunished enemy, miscommunication with a sibling). The player selects an Archetype (a concept imported from the VAMPIRE RPG) that defines the PC's personality and rewards Willpower points for performing particular actions. The Bravo Archetype, who delights in bullying the weak, gains Willpower when he forces another character to do his bidding, while the Curmudgeon, a know-it-all cynic, acquires Willpower when a companion does something stupid.

The player then ranks the three Attributes—Physical, Mental, and Social—into Primary, Secondary, and Tertiary categories. Each Attribute consists of Talents (such as Alertness, Empathy, and Intimidation), Skills (Etiquette, Firearms, Leadership), and Knowledges (Bureaucracy, Computer, Medicine), collectively known as Abilities. The player spends 13 dots on the Primary Abilities, nine on the Secondary, and five on the Tertiary; the more dots, the stronger the Ability. He also allocates dots to Background Traits (Allies, Contacts, Status) and his initial Willpower, which regulates his self-control. A wraith's

Arcanos indicates his aptitude in the spiritual arts; depending on his guild allegiance, he may be able to *oubliette* (banish a rival wraith to another realm), *materialize* (assume a near-human state), or *gremlinize* (possess a machine and make it do his bidding).

Ratings for Pathos, Fetter, and Shadow also must be determined for each PC. The Pathos rating, equal to five plus the number of dots assigned to the Memoriam Background, rises and falls according to how successfully the PC evokes a particular emotion. A PC attuned to Love, for example, earns Pathos if he protects his daughter or expresses unrequited love. Fetters are physical objects that tie the PC to the real world and enhance his ability to perform supernatural acts. Each Fetter receives a rating from one to five, depending on its significance; an engagement ring might rate a four, a pair of baby shoes might rate only a two. The Shadow represents the dark side of a wraith, taking the form of a separate entity with its own statistics. Controlled by the referee or another player, the Shadow uses spell-like powers to torment its PC; it might use Freudian *slip* to cause the PC to take an unintended action, or *aura of corruption* to give him an offensive body odor. Unfortunately, these concepts work better in theory than in practice. Awarding Pathos points is so subjective, it's next to impossible for the referee to be consistent. (What exactly constitutes a suitable expression of unrequited love?) There are no clear guidelines for rating Fetters. And the wraiths in my group were so busy harassing each other with Shadows that the adventure came to a dead stop. Sophisticated players may be able to untangle the knots, but novices better stock up on aspirin.

Mechanics: Most actions, combat included, are resolved with the skill-check system refined in previous Storyteller games. The referee decides which statistics apply to a particular situation, usually an Attribute and Ability. If the PC wants to scout the area for an enemy, for instance, he uses his Perception Attribute and his Alertness Ability. The player rolls a number of 10-sided dice equal to the Attribute and Ability ratings. The referee determines a Difficulty Rating; spotting an enemy might have a Difficulty Rating of six (if it's raining, the rating might be boosted to eight). Each die that has a result equal to or higher than the Difficulty Rating counts as a success. The more successes, the better the outcome. With one success, the PC might catch a glimpse of the enemy. With six, he might notice the blood on the enemy's hands. It's an efficient system that produces satisfying results, assuming the referee has a knack for assigning Difficulty Levels.

Campaigning: Set in the same urban squalor as the VAMPIRE and WEREWOLF

RPGs, the WRAITH game explores themes of alienation, loss, and self-discovery—at least, that's the intent. The game master chapter suggests methods for maintaining a horrific tone and employing dream sequences. The cosmology chapter discusses the Shroud, a barrier of fear separating the living from the dead, and Maelstroms, rolling storms of black mist that herald disaster. The Underworld, the haunted land that wraiths call home, has its own politics, social order, and economy (souls are smelted and shaped into goods). As with the NEPHILIM game, however, there are too many generalizations and not enough specifics. The section on bohemian Atlanta, a sample setting for a WRAITH campaign, offers a good overview but few close-ups; it's like flying over a city in an airplane. The plot hooks read like synopses from *TV Guide*, too slight for satisfying adventures.

Evaluation: The WRAITH game is the weakest of Mark Rein-Hagen's Storyteller RPGs, lacking the intensity of the VAMPIRE game and the scope of the WEREWOLF RPG. (Stewart Wieck's MAGE game, with its revelatory take on wizards and spell-casting, remains the one to beat.) Still, if you liked the VAMPIRE or WEREWOLF games, you'll like the WRAITH game, as it's more or less the same. That's meant as a compliment. I've never run across a designer so willing to bare his soul—the afterword, detailing Mark Rein-Hagen's personal and professional struggles, reads like an excerpt from his diary—and as a consequence, the WRAITH game resonates with emotion. Having completed his third excursion into the netherworld, it'll be interesting to see where Rein-Hagen takes us next. I'll bring the cookies.

Short and sweet

Underground Player's Handbook, by Loren Coleman, Nigel Findley, Aaron Loeb, Bryan Nystul, Chris Pramas, Ray Wininger, and Scot Yonan. Mayfair Games, Inc., \$18. *Techno: Gear and Accessories for Underground*, by Paul Murphy. Mayfair Games, Inc., \$18.

Mayfair returns with two supplements for the UNDERGROUND* game, the moody super-hero extravaganza whose surly protagonists make the Punisher look like Tinkerbell. Despite the padding—many pages have as much margin as text—the *Player's Handbook* contains a wealth of useful information. Skill packages help generate instant PCs, such as Snipers and Combat Medics. The section on flashbacks clarifies one of the game's trickiest elements, while the Archetype chapter expands the options in the original rule book, adding Clergymen, Spies, and Entertainers. *Techno* provides descriptions and statistics for a warehouse of equipment. The gadgets themselves aren't anything special, comprising the usual array of computers, sensors, and communications

gear. But *Techno's* sense of humor—a Prowler robot powered by a chimpanzee brain; guidelines for constructing mobile broadcasting units titled “So Ye Wants to Be A Pirate”—distinguishes it from the zillions of similar guides.

The COUNCIL OF WYRMS™ setting by Bill Slavicsek. TSR, Inc. \$25.

If you're an AD&D game player who's had your fill of wizards, who's fed up with fighters, who doesn't care if he ever lays eyes on another thief, brother, have I got a supplement for you. The COUNCIL OF WYRMS boxed set provides all the rules and background material necessary for staging adventures with dragon PCs. The dragon's color substitutes for race and class; the addition of proficiencies (Chanting, Looting, Religion) and a character kit (Dragon-Mage, Dragon-Priest, Dragon-Psionist) make it a full-blown personality. Players also may experiment with half-dragon PCs, spawned from the union of polymorphed dragons and their demi-human vassals. This product doesn't lend itself to long campaigns, since dragon PCs are too disruptive to function in traditional AD&D settings (their adventures occur in Io's Blood Isles, a string of islands in a self-contained world). But as a change of pace, the COUNCIL OF WYRMS set is a roaring success.

Star Wars Source book, by Bill Slavicsek, Curtis Smith, Peter Schweighofer, and Bill Smith. West End Games, \$22. *Rebel Alliance Source book*, by Paul Murphy and Peter Schweighofer. West End Games, \$22.

While George Lucas continued to dawdle over the next *Star Wars* film(s), West End spent the past year producing a steady stream of quality source books for the STAR WARS® game. These represent the best of the batch, two hardcover volumes describing the state of the universe at the end of the first movie, arguably the most popular era for STAR WARS scenarios. Rather than rehash the familiar story line, the *Star Wars Source book* focuses on hardware and creatures, including informative looks at TIE starfighters, astromech droids, and space slugs. *The Rebel Alliance Source book* examines the loose organization of men, women, and aliens who stand in opposition to Darth Vader & Co. Intelligence operations are discussed in detail, as are ground-combat strategies and starfighter tactics. Unless they're desperate to bring their statistics up to date, owners of the First Edition versions can skip these books. But for Second Edition players, especially those who've yet to get a campaign off the ground, both are essential.

The Will and the Way, by L. Richard Baker III. TSR, Inc., \$13.

Though included as part of the DARK SUN® line, this could more accurately be considered a sequel to *The Complete Psionics Handbook*. Baker offers an assortment of new kits (including the Beastmaster and

the Sensai, a martial-arts master), along with a supplementary set of rules for mental combat, suitable for any campaign using psionic characters. The appendix introduces 60-plus new sciences and devotions, many of extraordinary power. *Mindflame* destroys up to six adversaries as the same time. *Mega-kinesis* levitates small mountains. These psionics are guys you don't want to cross.

The Complete Book of Villains, by Kirk Botula. TSR, Inc. \$18.

Rather than serve up a collection of pre-rolled NPCs, this engaging source book shows how to create believable bad guys from the ground up. In clear language and with plenty of examples, Botula covers villainous organizations, the role of henchmen, and of particular interest to novices, the construction of intelligent adventures. Botula correctly asserts that motivations and objectives are more important than Strength scores and armor classes; in fact, the near-absence of statistics makes this an excellent reference for all fantasy RPGs, not just the AD&D game.

Ye Booke of Monstres, by Scott David Aniolowski. Chaosium Inc., \$11.

"... a tentacled mass of what looked like bloated raw en trails and eyes..." While that pretty much summarizes what I see in the bathroom mirror first thing in the morning, it also describes a M'nagalah, one of the dozens of monsters, aliens, and animated gore globs on display in this CoC collection. In addition to game stats, the entries include excerpts from the fiction of Ramsey Campbell, the late Robert Bloch, and Mythos godfather H. P. Lovecraft. ("... the *Necronomicon* illustration had not reproduced everything; they had not shown the transparency of the half-gelatinous flesh, revealing the mobile organs beneath the skin.") A pronunciation guide explains how to say the names, so you won't be embarrassed at the next Zy'tl Q'ae rally.

ParaNormal, by Ed Gibson, Brian Schomburg, Jesse Van Valkenburg, and Charles Ginsburg. West End Games, \$18.

With their pun-heavy prose and adolescent wisecracks, West End seems determined to turn the PARANOIA* game into the role-playing equivalent of *Beavis and Butt-Head*. In this episode, half the text is devoted to television parodies, the other half to horror film spoofs. Gimmicks include a comic book ("Lifestyles of the Rich and Ultraviolet"), finger puppets (for the likes of the Algae Chip Monster), and fortune cookie fortunes ("If you can read this, you've exceeded your security clearance."). *ParaNormal* demonstrates that the PARANOIA game is still good for a few laughs—I liked Bernie and Ert, the Mupbots of "Poppyseed Place"—but the glory days of *Send in the Clones* and *The Yellow Clearance Black Box Blues* seem like a long time ago.

Metamorphosis Alpha to Omega by Slade Henson with Shane Hensley and John Rateliff IV (system guide by David "Zeb" Cook). TSR, Inc., \$13.

I've got a soft spot in my heart for the *Metamorphosis Alpha* game, as it was the second RPG I ever played (the D&D® game was the first). Reincarnated as part of the AMAZING ENGINE® line, it's as goofy as it was in 1975 and just as much fun. Essentially a dungeon in outer space, *Alpha to Omega* casts the players as mutated animals and sentient plants, then sticks them aboard the starship *Warden* to battle security robots, rogue androids, and one-eyed flying fungi. The combat system could've used some streamlining; you've got to determine advantage (a Psyche check), initiative (10% of the character's Reflexes attribute added to his 1d10 roll), and targeting (a general, non-vital, or vital area) before you get around to making an attack roll. Still, it's worth the trouble to get the chance to play an intelligent daisy.

Sacraments of Evil, by Scott David Aniolowski, Fred Behrendt, Penelope Love, Kevin A. Ross, and Todd A. Woods. Chaosium Inc., \$19.

The award-winning *Cthulhu by Gaslight* supplement, which set the CoC game in 19th century Great Britain, came out in 1986. *Sacraments of Evil* is only the second supplement since then, the first being *Dark Designs*. Was it worth the wait? Sort of. Like most adventure anthologies, *Sacraments* is a mixed bag. In this case, the strong stuff (the scenarios that evoke both the Victorian Era and the scope of the Cthulhu Mythos) edges out the weak stuff (the scenarios that could've been used in a standard CoC game with a little editing). The best entries include "Signs Writ in Scarlet" by Kevin Ross, inspired by Jack the Ripper, and "The Eyes of a Stranger," a quirky blend of spiritualism and alien invasion. I look forward to the third supplement, which should hit the stores in, oh, say 1998.

Rick Swan has designed and edited nearly 50 role-playing products. His recent projects for TSR include Caravans (for the AL-QADIM® setting) and Elminster's Ecologies. You can write to him at 2620 30th St., Des Moines IA 50310. Enclose an SASE if you'd like a reply

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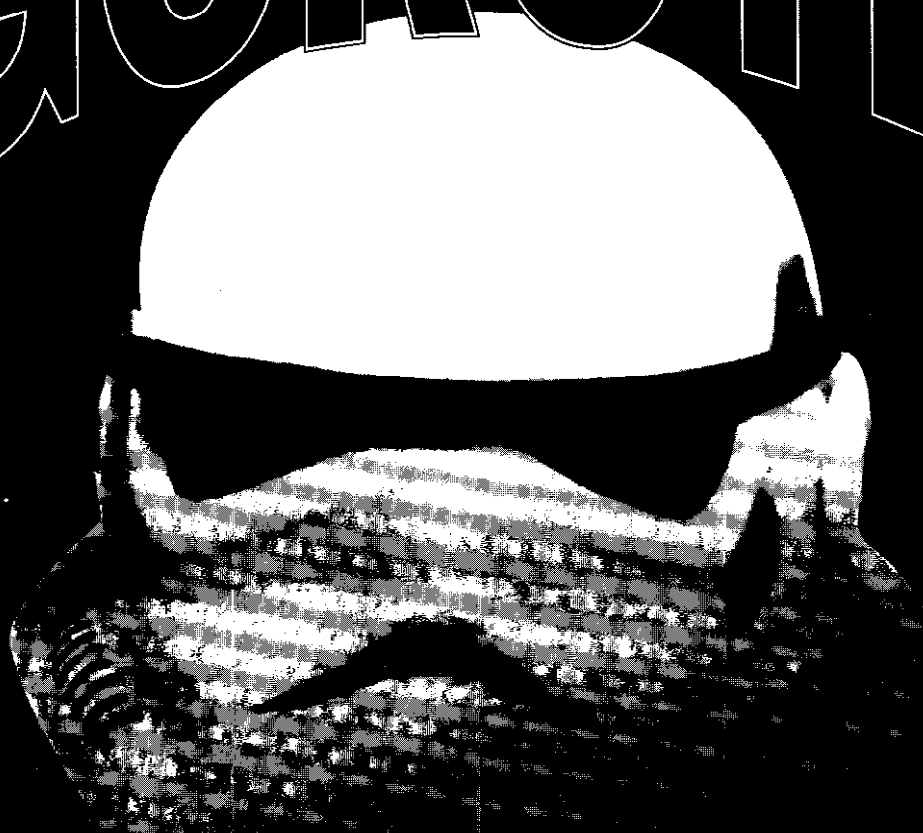
* indicates a product produced by a company other than TSR, Inc.

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!

STAR WARS

GOROTH



SLAVE OF THE EMPIRE

Also from **West End Games**
Platt's Starport Guide

Featuring original color art by Chris Gossett, artist of Dark Horse Comics' *Tales of the Jedi* and *Dark Lords of the Sith*.

A smugglers' guide to starports large and small, civilized and otherwise from Platt Okeefe of the *Star Wars Adventure Journal*.

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News of people & events in the gaming industry

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Lead story:

Del Rey and Legend Join Forces

Legend Entertainment and Del Rey Books have announced that they will jointly produce software and books with SF and fantasy themes. Del Rey is the leading publisher of SF and fantasy; its best-known authors include Terry Brooks, David Eddings, Anne McCaffrey, R. A. Salvatore, Katherine Kurtz, Jack Chalker, Frederick Pohl, Christopher Stasheff, Harry Turtledove, and Alan Dean Foster. The first products will be available this year.

Also from Legend, the Death Gate computer game is available, based on Margaret Weis and Tracy Hickman's seven-novel series of the same name. The graphics in the promo stills look very sharp, and the game includes a new short story by Margaret Weis. Although it covers many sites described in the series, according to Margaret Weis, "The game is different from the novels, so reading the books won't help you."

SJG and White Wolf play nice

Steve Jackson Games and White Wolf Game Studio have settled their differences over the licensed GURPS® releases of WW's games, and the GURPS® MAGE: THE ASCENSION® game is on a store shelf near you as a result. The GURPS MAGE game is the last GURPS/Storyteller release; the GURPS WRAITH®, GURPS CHANGELING®, and the GURPS MAGE Accessory products will not see print.

Also in the "Win Some, Lose Some" category, SJG's ILLUMINATI: NEW WORLD ORDER® card game has been released, but the requirements of getting it to press have pushed the IN NOMINE® RPG even farther back in the SJG schedule. It should appear this month.

More sounds of adventure

Following TSR, Inc.'s lead into the audio gaming world, Gold Rush Games recently has gained a license from R. Talsorian Games to produce an original soundtrack for Talsorian's CYBERPUNK® game. The composer will be Erich Izdepski, and the title of the soundtrack is *Cyberpunk: Night City Trax*. The tape, available now, costs \$9.95 and is suitable as a background soundtrack for any science-fiction game.

The wolf howls

Black Dog Games, a wholly owned subsidiary of White Wolf Game Studio, will begin releasing its "very mature" role-playing titles this year. The Black Dog line will deal with "intensive role-playing themes." White Wolf is currently lining up designers, including all three of the designers of the HOL® RPG, a hilarious yet obscene game first released by Dirt Merchant Games. Black Dog's first release will be a January or February re-issue of the HOL game, but the Dirt Merchants also are involved in future projects (including, according to a highly-placed WW source, "a major fiction release"). One later release has a tentative title: *The Last Supper: the Giovanni Chronicles*®. The designers are Dan Greenberg and Teeuwynn Woodruff.

White Wolfs fiction branch is bearing fruit also. The first product of White Wolfs alliance with HarperCollins will be Dark *Destinies*, a WORLD OF DARKNESS hardcover anthology that includes a new Harlan Ellison story. It is due out this

month.

White Wolf Game Studio also is moving its offices. The pack currently is scouting locations. We'll provide more details when the address of their new den becomes available.

Roll them tanks, girls

They should call it the "MOVIEBOOK" system. West End Games is licensing right and left, and Bill Olmesdahl and Brian Schomburg are currently working on a *Tank Girl* movie tie-in for the company's MASTERBOOK® system. The supplement will be released by the end of February to tie in with the release of the movie. It will definitely include movie stills; line art by Jamie Hewlett, the artist on the *Tank Girl* comic book, is a definite maybe. As if one cult flick per year weren't enough, Ed Bolme will write the *Necroscope* movie tie-in for the MASTERBOOK system. It won't appear until August.

Off the wire: New FASA software house

FASA Corp., will spin off another computer design company, headed by former SHADOWRUN® game developer (and DRAGON Magazine contributor) Tom Dowd. The company is called FASA Interactive Technologies and will concentrate on a BATTLETECH® CD-ROM game for 1996. FASA Interactive will absorb FASA Corporation's animation department, those hardy souls who produce the BATTLE-TECH animated series. Mr. Dowd has been busy lately; he is also the author of a new SHADOWRUN novel, *Burning Bright*. We've no word on whether he'll be able to keep writing books in his new job.

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"Finally home after an over-long day with little more planned than a good dinner and a mindless night of TV watching," I sighed to myself. The door making its usual rattle as I opened it, I didn't notice anything different about my apartment until I went to get my mail—only to be confronted by a parchment scroll floating amidst a cloud of blue sparkles in the middle of my living room!

Now, as I made clear in my previous article ("I Sing a Song by the Deep-Water Bay" in DRAGON® issue #211), I'm becoming accustomed to the visits of personages varied and powerful in my office at TSR, Inc., but I'd never been bothered at home and I thanked the Fates for that. But, of course, all good things come to an end.

I immediately stifled a comment about trespassers and nosy wizards (as said offenders tend to lurk around longer than many believe) and reached for the floating missive. Sparkles swirling about my hand and dissipating, the scroll fell into my palm, its seal face-up and identifying it as a message from the Archmage of Water-deep, Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun! The scarlet wax seemed to glow faintly where the Blackstaff's mark was pressed into it, suggesting magic.

Well, Laeral had warned me that he wanted to meet with me; I guess I just missed him. Just as well, since my apartment—like my office—is organized as a minor variant of Chaos theory, and books and papers lie haphazardly stacked on any horizontal surface. As I broke the wax seal, the scroll leapt from my hands, unrolled itself, and levitated perpendicular to the floor, with a small image of Khelben hovering regally an inch off the parchment. I muttered, "Nice touch, Khelben. I trust you'll tell me what you were doing here" as I sat down to listen and take notes—aside from Elminster and a few dottier souls of the Realms, there are no guarantees that a mage will ever repeat himself.

"Greetings, chronicler. Though I had been warned that you keep odd hours, I had expected you home at a civil hour for supper; I choose not to disturb those at their work, as I know how little I enjoy disturbances during my labors. Still, in an attempt to find something suitable for dinner, I found your plentiful collection of dried soups, half-curdled milk, and frozen collections of meager meats and vegetables on a slab of something that only resembles an edible bread pitiful. Elminster introduced me to that delicacy called pizza that exists only on your world, and that, sir, was most definitely not of the same calibre. When next I visit, please be so kind as to have something remotely edible on hand.

"That said, I shall reveal the original purpose of our aborted meeting. I had intended to talk of Waterdeep and of things magical, specifically an old phenomenon borne anew referred to now as 'series magic.' Of late, Waterdeep and her

environs have seen a rebirth in the use and creation of items that, when used in certain sequences or organized in a particular arrangement, have new and expanded powers. While I shan't bore you with the minutia of the newer items, suffice it to say that they are a nuisance soon to grow out of hand without some control of the perpetrators.

"Series magic is highly dependent on the casting and creation preparations. Often, series magic can be worked only with the purest of materials. Such surviving elven and dwarven craftsmen who know of the necessary qualities and processes to procure such materials number less than two score across the Realms; even among Bruenor Battlehammer's folk at Mithral Hall, only three smiths know of forging techniques that can purify metals and stone sufficiently for the purposes of series magical items. In addition, series magic can be set or triggered only at various places of power throughout the Realms. These places, for the most part, are becoming ever fewer, since the demise of Myth Drannor, Delzoun, and the Fallen Kingdom. Among places of power in the Savage Frontier, a few isolated areas remain in the High Forest, the Spine of the World, and Neverwinter Wood, though I wouldst doubly be a fool to reveal their exact locations and what preparations need be done there.

"Series items, due to their rarity and complexity of creation (as well as their awesome powers), are often considered artifacts, though their destruction is sometimes far less a trial than, say, trying to unmake the *ring of gaxx*. For centuries, the only objects commonly known to have abilities of series magic were the much-fabled rod of seven parts and my own relatively recent creation, the *staff of Waferdeep*. Now, those who studied such things knew of more items and artifacts that existed in the Realms (and other worlds) but wisely kept such information to themselves. Now, I feel it is time to share some of that knowledge that your cohorts might know of the coming magical threats in the Realms (and on my colleague Dalamar's world of Krynn).

"Included with this missive is a sheaf of parchments delineating two collective items of aeons past that have been active of late, and serve to inspire those mages greedy for coin or power into creating worse devices for their own gain. Make wise use of this information, and educate those of your world of these magical antiquities and the magics behind them. Some of the items' constituent parts have not been located at this time, and it is my hope that they should find their way into scrupulous hands, whether mine or another like-minded Torilian, for the sake of all the Realms."

Blades of Ochir Naal Tiamat's prophet

Origin: The once-named Blades of

Dragons' Tongue were created by Mahtor Auricheart, a fabled female dwarven dragon-slayer and smith from long-lost Delzoun; legend has it she managed to create five adamantite daggers with magical abilities through lost runic magics and a process of tempering the blades in dragons' blood. Each of their platinum pommels resembled the dragon that tempered it; hence, the pommels have a standard grip that ends with the heads of a black, blue, green, red, or white dragon. The blades were in use for a few centuries during Delzoun's twilight, and their abilities resembled those that are now commonly held by dragon-slaying swords.

Nineteen centuries ago, the Blades of Dragons' Tongue were stolen by a corrupt human wizard or priest named Ochir Naal. Various and conflicting tales claim he was a Netherese necromancer, a forgotten and outcast founder of the Cult of the Dragon, the powerful mentor of Halaster Blackcloak, or an evil priest of an otherworldly dragon god. None of these claims matter much, nor can any be conclusively proven, but his alterations to the blades linked his name to them forevermore and granted him the secondary title of "Tiamat's prophet." Ochir Naal was slain 1,400 years ago by Harkter Allhon, a human paladin, and his paramour, Pyyra Thesme, a priestess of Helm.

Last known location: Since the death of Ochir Naal, no one person has collected and wielded all the blades, but their powers were carefully archived by Pyyra; the diary of her quest for and slaying of Ochir Naal, including the notes and information on the now-named blades of Ochir Naal, was kept a precious secret heirloom of the Allhon family for seventeen centuries. Only Khelben Arunsun, Laeral Silverhand, and a handful of others (most likely the Chosen of Mystra and one or two Master Harpers) even know of the volume's existence, let alone what secrets it contains. Of the blades, these are their last known locations:

Black Blade/"Acridirk": The black dragon blade was lost in Undermountain 32 years ago. Its carrier was a ranger/Harper friend named Cirel, of the adventuring company "The Clan of Dark Justice." Only two of this company survived the encounter where Cirel was lost; they made it to the Temple of Eilistraee (see DRAGON issue #176) via a *teleport*, but Cirel remained behind to hold back their enemies and buy them time. This ambush by a horde of nagas happened on a lower level of Undermountain (Level Six or Seven).

Blue Blade/"Azurazor": The blue blade is currently in the hands of an elven Harper named Orist Moonbow. He is currently traveling in the foreign lands of Maztica.

Green Blade/"Chlorazor" and White Blade/"Icedge": After centuries of ownership by the Allhon family, the white & green blades were stolen or taken from their slain masters' grip. Both blades are in

the hands of the Cult of Dragon, though the names of their one or two owners remain unknown.

Red Blade/"Firedge": Sylune of Shadowdale was the last known possessor of the red blade. Since her fiery death at the hands of a dragon, the blade's location has been concealed by her confidants. Many believe it still lies somewhere around the Shadowdale area, though no magical inquiries have turned it up.

Appearance: On their own, the blades of Ochir Naal are daggers of exquisite workmanship. Each of the blades was formed of purest adamantite, and their edges remain undulled despite their use over the past twenty centuries. The pommels are each made from a respective dragon's tooth and a platinum grip wrapped in the skin of a black, green, blue, white, or red dragon. The blade is seated in the dragon's tooth, carved to appear as if the pommel held the blade in a dragon's jaws. At the end of the pommel, an appropriate dragon's head is carved.

Abilities: Each of the blades grants the bearer the ability to understand and speak dragons' languages. Each also acted as a *dagger of throwing* +2; against their respective dragons, the blades acted as *daggers of throwing* +4 and dealt triple damage against the dragon (3d4 +4 hp of damage). Khelben's note: "These abilities, given to the blades by their dwarven creator, still exist, regardless of the form or combination of the blades."

Altered abilities: Ochir Naal infused the blades with the ability to fuse together into collectively more powerful weapons by simply touching them together. While each blade was a dagger individually, two merge into a short sword, three together become a long sword, four daggers fuse into a broad sword, and all five combine to become a two-handed sword. When the blades join, the pommels' skin becomes a alternating colored-scale pattern of the respective dragons, and the heads of the dragons remain, facing different directions. The power of the collective blades grows with each addition, in the following ways:

Short blade (any two daggers): The blade bearer can cast *fly* twice per day; when cast, the bearer's back sprouts illusory wings of one of the respective dragon types of his blade. This form includes all above-listed magical abilities.

Long blade (three daggers): The blade bearer is immune to the breath weapons of the respective blade types. Includes all above abilities.

Broad blade (four daggers): The blade can release the breath weapons of its respective dragon-types; this power can be used four times per day, but each dragon breath type can be used once per day. Includes all above abilities.

Great blade (all five daggers): The blade

can, using a ceremony delineated in Pyrre's diary from Ochir Naal's own notes, slice open a gate to the Outer Plane of Baator and allow Tiamat, the Queen of the Chromatic Dragons, to enter the Prime Material. This power never has been used, as Ochir Naal was in the midst of the ceremony when he was slain by Pyrre and Harkter. Includes all above abilities.

The four ruling rings of Yrix Alquinnar

Origin: Centuries past in the lost realm of Netheril, the foremost elemental mage of that age was name Yrix Alquinnar. His passing came just after Netheril reached its height, and his power was not available to help stem the tide of the advancing desert of Anauroch (which brought Netheril to its end). Still, some of his works still exist in the Realms today. *Rings of elemental command* are changed only slightly now from their original prototypes created and honed by Yrix long millennia ago, and the same holds true for many basic elemental spells in use in modern Toril. But the greatest artifact left of Yrix Alquinnar the Elementalist are his four ruling rings.

The ruling rings of Yrix Alquinnar are fabled for their power among elementlists, since the combined power of the rings allows their wielder to command any and all elementals and para-elementals! For this reason alone, any mention of the rings to a student of the elements is likely to procure rapt interest. Outside of elemental circles, many practitioners of magic misconstrue the title of the items and seek the ruling rings, assuming their power is tied to charms and enchantments and will allow them to conquer peoples' wills. Due to these confusions, the rings have seen a total of over 200 different owners in the centuries since Yrix's death by natural causes; he left one of each of his ruling rings to his four apprentices, four sisters by birth, named Sarim, Tasia, Natasa, and Leia Maarekh. The sisters eventually married and three of them began long-lived dynasties that many believe have long since died out, passing their powerful inheritances to other hands.

Last known locations: All but one of the ruling rings has indeed passed out of the family dynasties of Yrix's apprentices. The four rings are hereafter referred to by the elements that they command, to easily identify the powers and the owners.

The ring of air lies deep in the family vault of the Maerklos noble clan of Waterdeep; of the clan, only Matriarch Aldara Maerklos (LG hf W14) knows of its power and history. Her original clan name was Marrek, an old, established merchant clan with at least one mage per generation within the bloodline (a near-direct line running to the family's original name of Maarekh, though this fact is known only to Khelben; Aldara herself only traces her

Serries Magic

by Steven E. Schend

Warnings of cause and effect from Waterdeep

direct roots back six centuries). Aldara married Bastiabas Relekos and fused his name with her matriarchal holdings to form the Maerklos clan 32 years ago. She has never used the ring herself, but she is preparing her daughter for her stewardship of this powerful item. Outside of the Maerklos clan, only Laeral and Khelben are aware of the clan's possession of the ring, and they both approve of the matriarch's utter discretion with it.

The ring of earth has been lost for centuries; its last known holder was Sarim, the eldest Maarekh sister. She was slain by the greedy brother of her own husband, once he realized the power of her ring. The brother was, in turn, slain by Sarim's husband and he threw the ring into the Sea of Swords. In the centuries since, tales of the ring of earth are spun in taverns, often with no basis in fact. However, 143 years ago, a mage and pasha of Calimport wore what seemed to be one of the rings and commanded powers over stone and earth. When he was assassinated by rivals 127 years ago, his body was recovered but the ring has never been found.

The ring of fire has rested on a scarlet pillow of crushed velvet within the magical vaults of Blackstaff Tower for 178 years; Khelben won it as a prize for winning a spell duel against a tiefling wizard while traveling amongst the planes. Only Laeral, Khelben, the Simbul, and Elminster know of this item's location, and none have had cause to use it for 149 years.

The ring of water is one of the treasured artifacts in the hands of the Simbul, the ruler of Aglarond and sister to Laeral. Given to her over six centuries ago by a former lover and the final heir of Natasa Maarekh, she has carefully guarded it since then. It has only left her possession once for a short time, to allow her sister and Khelben Arunsun a chance to examine the item.

Appearance: Each of the ruling rings is, in fact, two rings of various metals joined together by two small silver chains set with very small gems in the middle of the links. Each of the rings that comprise the ruling rings have tiny gems set all around the ring.

The ring of air has two platinum rings set with diamonds and sapphire chips are set in the linking chains. The ring of earth has two copper rings set with onyx and amber chips rest in the links of its chains. The ring of fire is a set of two gold rings with inset rubies, the chains encrusted with peridots. The ring of water is made of two silver rings set with emeralds and joined by aquamarine-set chains.

Each ruling ring is then worn by two adjoining fingers, and all four rings would be worn on eight fingers of two hands. Legends describe Yrix Alquinna cupping his hands and glowing bands of power would unite the four ruling rings when in use.

Abilities: The respective ruling rings all

were the original templates that created *rings of elemental command*; thus, they operate with all the powers attributed to their respective items from the DMG, though the bearers of the ruling rings have the following benefits:

Wearers do not suffer the saving throw penalties of the current elemental rings.

Wearers need to slay an elemental to gain access to the ring's power.

All powers function at 16th level of experience or greater if needed.

In addition, the ruling rings hold the power to individually or collectively control elementals of the noted types (*charm* with a —6 penalty for elemental's save):

Ring of Air: Air elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Ring of Earth: Earth elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Ring of Fire: Fire elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Ring of Water: Water elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Rings of Air & Earth: Air & earth elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

Rings of Air & Fire: Air & fire elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD); smoke para-elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Rings of Air & Water: Air & water elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD); ice para-elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Rings of Earth & Fire: Earth & fire elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD); magma para-elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Rings of Earth & Water: Earth & water elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD); ooze para-elementals (1d4 8HD, 1d2 12HD, or 1 16HD).

Rings of Fire & Water: Fire & water elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

Rings of Air, Earth, & Fire: Air, earth, & fire elementals (1d8 8HD, 1d6 12HD, or 1d4 16HD); magma & smoke para-elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

Rings of Air, Earth, & Water: Air, earth, & water elementals (1d8 8HD, 1d6 12HD, or 1d4 16HD); ice & ooze para-elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

Rings of Air, Fire, & Water: Air, fire, & water elementals (1d8 8HD, 1d6 12HD, or 1d4 16HD); ice & smoke para-elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

Rings of Earth, Fire, & Water: Earth, fire, & water elementals (1d8 8HD, 1d6 12HD, or 1d4 16HD); magma & ooze para-elementals (1d6 8HD, 1d4 12HD, or 1d2 16HD).

All four rings: Air, earth, fire, & water elementals (1d10 8HD, 1d8 12HD, or 1d6 16HD); ice, magma, ooze, & smoke para-elementals (1d8 8HD, 1d6 12HD, or 1d4 16HD). There is no chance of any elemen-

tal or para-elemental breaking free of the control of the wearer of all four rings.

Of late, the ring of fire has garnered the Blackstaff's attentions, as it periodically flares with power; upon conversing with Matriarch Maerklos and finding the same reactions from her ring of water, he theorizes that the fourth ring is within Waterdeep! What truly maddens Khelben is the fact that he cannot locate either the ring of earth or anyone who apparently knows about it and its power. He has not alerted either the Watch-wizard corps or the Watchful Order of this occurrence, as his reputation would hardly keep any greedy souls from seeking the ring for their own. He has, oddly enough, confided in Lord Maskar Wands, whose conservatism in magic use makes him an ideal ally in preventing anyone from abusing the abilities of this precious item. Still, the search by these two arch-mages and their assistants has taken up five weeks with neither being any closer to discovering the item (though both believe to still be within the city).

A final note

"Oh, fair word, chronicler. Bear in mind while informing your public that these are far from the only series items within the fair city of Waterdeep and definitely not the most powerful of such items within the Realms. Should none abuse the information and only learn wisely from the education herein, we shall all talk at a later time of such wonders as Ahghairon's Great Cloak, which chooses its own wearer for one night a tenday and aids the worthy while punishing the guilty, the Master Staff of Halaster Blackcloak, one of the most ancient of items and ten times more powerful than any current staff wielded by those who walk the Realms Above, or perhaps you might learn of the simple yet powerful Mosaics of Mystra, whose power aids the Lords, their agents, and those worthy enough to visit her private chapel deep within the bowels of the Palace of Waterdeep.

"It is imperative that I close this missive now, as other matters need my attention in the City of Splendors. By the gods, I'd thought my duties would lighten with my resignation from the Lords' Circle! Well, when next we speak, it is my hope to meet thee in the flesh, for I must bestow my felicitations on your meticulous collecting much of Waterdeep's lore. And then may I teach you of proper foods and their preparations. Fare thee well, chronicler, and may Mystra guide thee in thy endeavors."

Here it comes!

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ELMINSTER'S notebook

Aldreth Fireshar

by Ed Greenwood

Harper reports¹ indicate this ambitious youngster came to her powers somewhere in the cities about The Lake of Steam, and journeyed to Thay in hopes of becoming a Red Wizard. She either was rebuffed or someone tried to enslave her, and she came to Telflamm with fire in her eyes and strong magic in her hands.

Watch this one; rumors in Impiltur say she has ties to the Pirates of the Fallen Stars, and has recently become a partner in both a caravan company and an uplands thaedar.² The obvious questions ("With what? Whence came her coins?") have been asked in Telflamm more than once, with no good answers as yet. The usual fast-money means for a mage are simple coercion of common folk by magic, or selling spell-gained information about rivals or magical protection to ambitious, sharp-dealing merchants. Yet the whispers in Telflamm—particularly in the adventurers' tavern known as The Sword And Horn—speak of ships sailing the night sky, and a few corpses that can only be giff left in an alley. Trade with other worlds must always been looked into, or we'll have the Arcane (or worse) ruling Faerun before (as they say in Aglarond) "one can count one's own fingers and toes."

Among all the unscrupulous young human wizards I've seen down the years, male and female, this one stands out for the strange spells she's mastered: she's seldom without at least one animated human skull flying about at her shoulder. A bit ostentatious, but then she's still young. These skulls spit flame and lightning as she wills—and that smacks so much of old Netherese magics that I'd best investigate where she's picked up such tricks. There've been rumors in Raurin about a lich taking young mages as apprentices, in return for their services as agents going into large and magic-strong cities, where liches dare not venture.

This Aldreth Fireshar makes her home on a barge that spends much of its time in Telflamm harbor. It's guarded by at least six gargoyles, so she's either ever-scared or has something mighty valuable aboard. Sunder³ thinks she broken into a few Red Wizards' tombs in Thay, and may have had to leave in a hurry—but brought a few books of lore with her, and perhaps an "Evermagic."⁴ Such an artifact would explain the huge variety of items she's wielded over the last year, while taking on every brigand group or adventuring band she could find an excuse to attack. Whenever the Witches of Rashemen or my

beloved in Aglarond get concerned at all this spell-hurling and come looking for her, this Aldreth drops out of sight. Perhaps Jhessail of the Knights could look into this—local Harper eyes aren't even sure if she has a refuge somewhere, or takes jaunts onto other planes, or goes down into The Realms Below.

Aye, this Aldreth bears watching. There's more to her than spell-spitting skulls. She was involved in a recent goblin attack on a Zhentarim caravan near Melvaunt—supposedly a raid by desperately hungry goblins, but Manshoo's lads knew as well as I did that magic must be behind it. As far as Immer⁵ can tell, they don't know which mage or mages did the dirty work—but the Harpers are sure. A mage trained by my beloved⁶ used a powerful spell that can identify magics recently used in a precise location. One of Aldreth's personal spells, commanding massed goblins, was employed. No one is sure quite what she took from the caravan—nothing seemed to be missing, after the goblins were driven off—but I suspect that the coffer of scrolls won by Zhent agents from a spider-haunted ruin in upland Chessenta also contained a record of where a powerful magical item, a sky chariot made in ancient Mouratavi Teshy Mir (others render that name differently) lies hidden, and how to get past the magical defenses laid upon its hiding-place. I must get back to work on that *blood* tracer spell—it's the only way to follow her through *gates* and *teleports* and magical shielding. I must personally draw blood from her to activate it, which might be tricky, and will certainly earn me yet another foe, but after that it will last as long as her present body does (in whatever form), and so I can put the Knights, or a few senior Harpers, to trailing her. She might well lead them straight to this sky chariot; I know she's not tried for it yet, because its defenses were devised to exhaust the magic that any one mage, however mighty, can wield. So she'll need aid: powerful wizards she can trust or at least work with, and I've seen no sign of her contacting such folk . . . yet.

Notes

1. From Thorn Astarl of Nethentir. (Look this young man up: he runs an adventuring band, The Black Horns, out of an old keep on Duldriir Street, at the east end of town, and sounds like he'll bear watching. He's a likely candidate for the Red Wizards to buy his loyalty or impersonate by magi-

cal means, and my favorite witch, old Ulthaea Moonhawk of Rashemen. I wonder if she's learned dragonshape by now? Drop in on her in spring or summer, by the wise eyes of Mystra! Those winter winds are cold.) Perhaps some of her grandnieces will be ready to be apprenticed to outlander mages by then . . . don't forget about this now, El.

2. Thaedar: An organization created by several farms for common defense, transportation of goods to market, and a pool of labor for harvest-time. More common in the northeastern lands of the Inner Sea than elsewhere, but popular in Amn and Chessenta of old (where many still exist).

3. Sunder Snowhand, Mage of Many Circles (a former apprentice of mine), about of an age with Vangerdahast; his nickname comes from the airborne spell-circles he creates, as shields against hostile magic. A good man, straight and decent, if a bit too stout and peace-loving for his own good. He's helped Harpers in Thesk any number of times.

4. These powerful artifacts were old when Netheril was young; they survive because of their random, everchanging nature: they take the shape of one widely-known magical item after another, functioning as a wand of *magic missiles* or a *censer controlling air elementals* for a time—and then changing to something else (always at the worst possible time, it seems). Any mage who tries to divine the nature of an Evermagic with spells, or influence what it turns into, will never see it again—it always *teleports* far across Faerun whenever its wielder uses magic on it. Curiously, this never occurs when a neutral or hostile mage hurls spells at it, but only when its owner takes action.

When an Evermagic changes form, a tinkling chord is heard, rather like the "swash" of notes made by striking one's hand down a row of harpstrings. That's the only known way to be sure an item's really an Evermagic. The true form, purpose, and origin of these pieces remains a mystery. Something else I'll have to look into, someday . . . in my idle hours, of course.

5. Harper spy in The Citadel of the Raven, a wizard in the Zhentarim—and not his real name, of course.

6. The Simbul, Queen of Aglarond, of course. The mage she trained was Yandra Bellfrost, a sorceress who now dwells in disguise, in Hillsfar.

Ω

ALDRETH FIRESHAR-
AS SEEN RECENTLY
THROUGH A
SCRYING-POOL

ALWAYS WEARS
JEWELRY-(PROBABLY
MAGIC ITEMS OR
SIMPLE SPELL-
STORING DEVICES)

SELDOM WITHOUT
A SKULL FLOATING
BY HER SHOULDER.
NO APPARENT
LINK TO TASHARA
OF THE SEVEN
SKULLS: ALDRETH'S
ANIMATED BY SPELLS-
FIRE AND LIGHTNING
ATTACKS- DOES IT
SERVE HER AS A
SECONDARY SPELL-
LAUNCH FOCUS?
INVESTIGATE THIS-

ALDRETH'S
EYES ARE GREY-
GREEN, BUT
REPORTS SAY
THEY TURN
ORANGE OR
BUTTERY-YELLOW
WHEN SHE'S
EXCITED OR
ANGRY-

ALDRETH'S SIGIL-
IF DRAWN WITH AN EXTRA
CIRCLE IN THE PATTERN,
IT'S THE MARK
OF A TOUCH
ACTIVATED
SPELLTRAP,
THAT
UNLEASHES
AN ATTACK ON THE ONE
WHO DISTURBS IT.





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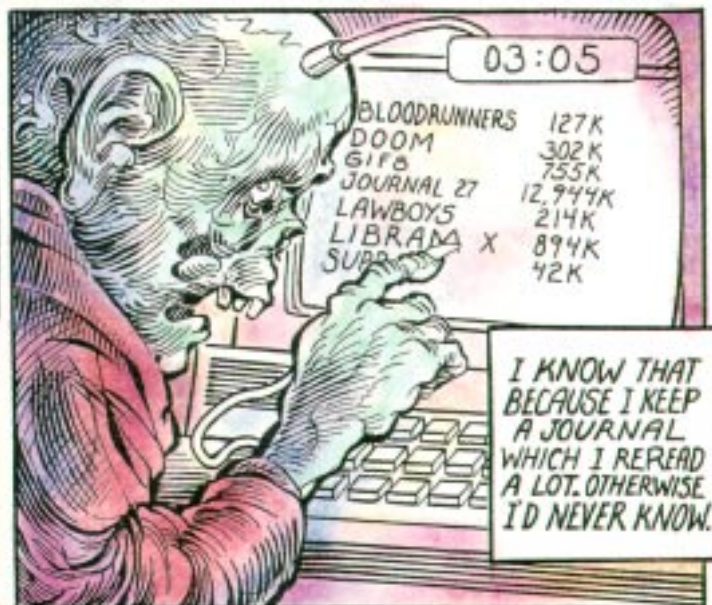
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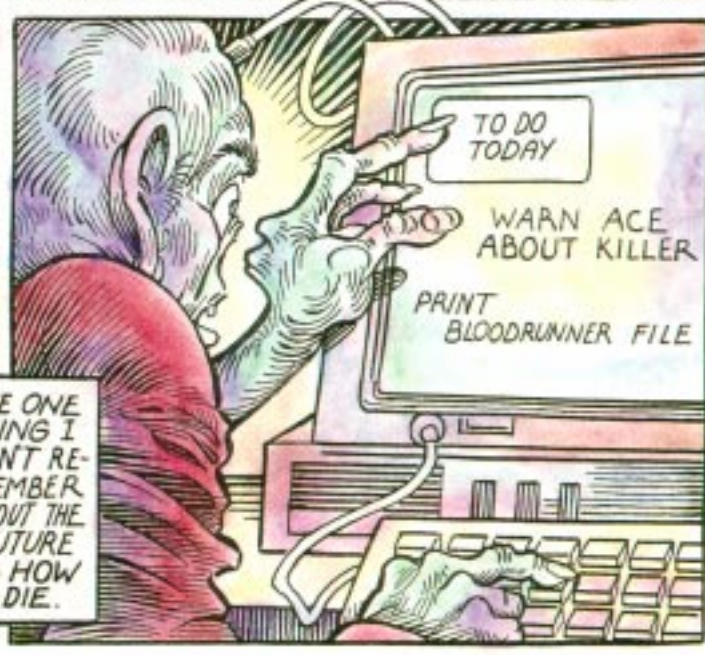
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DIE AGAIN,
THIS TIME
FOR GOOD.

BLOODY
TYPES!

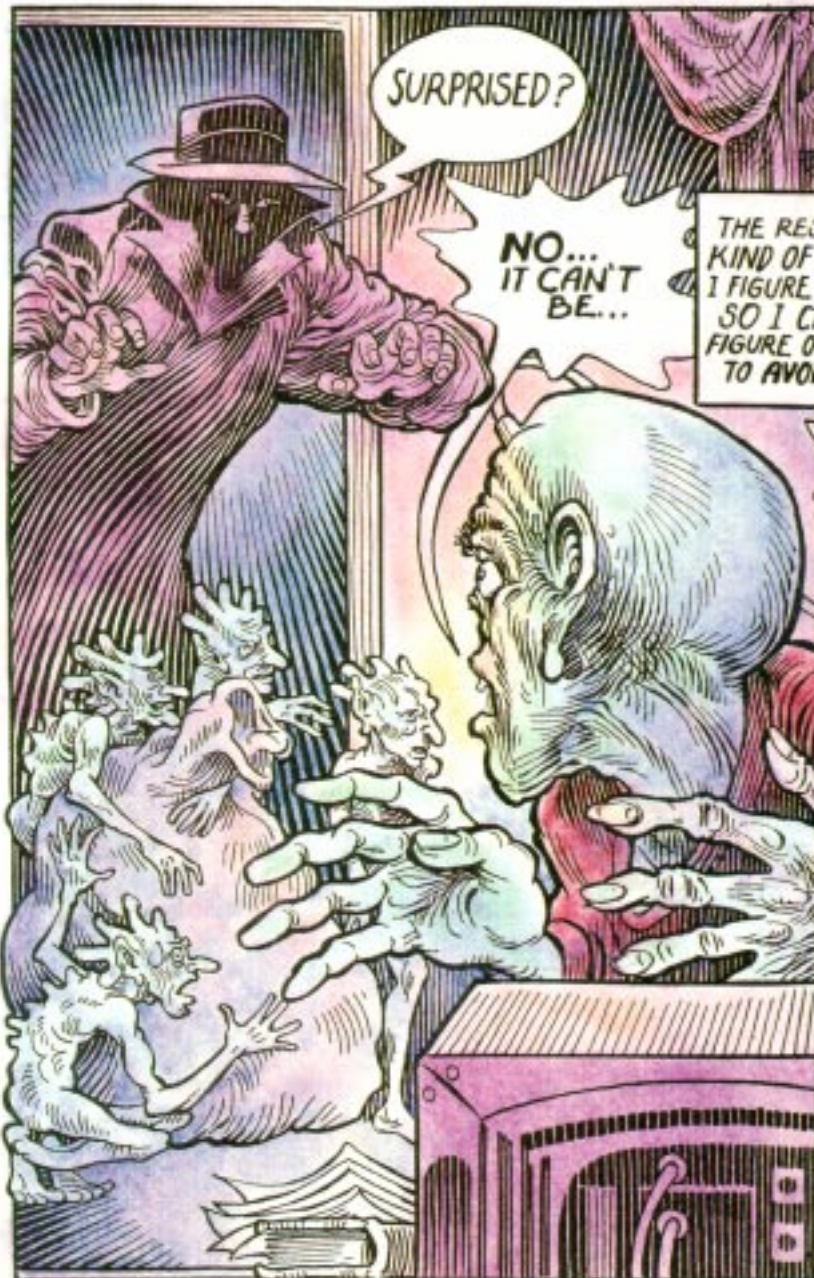


I EVEN
KNOW
WHEN.



IT'S IN
ABOUT TWO
MINUTES.

WHAT?
AM I
EARLY?



SURPRISED?

NO...
IT CAN'T
BE...

THE REST IS
KIND OF FUZZY.
I FIGURE THAT'S
SO I CAN'T
FIGURE OUT HOW
TO AVOID IT.

NO...
NO...
NO...



SORRY,
CHARLIE.

DON'T LISTEN
TO WHAT
ANYONE ELSE
SAYS ABOUT
LIVING BACK-
WARD. TAKE
IT FROM ME...



...THERE'S
NO
FUTURE
IN IT.

Dragonmirth



By Mathew Guss



By Mark Doney



"... Excuse me, I have a plane to catch!"

By Brian Lam



Yomcupa
MEANWHILE, BACK ON PLANET WYHTL...

ON THE WORLD OF

HARD FUN

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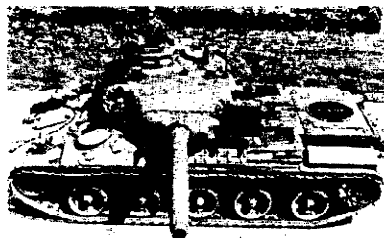
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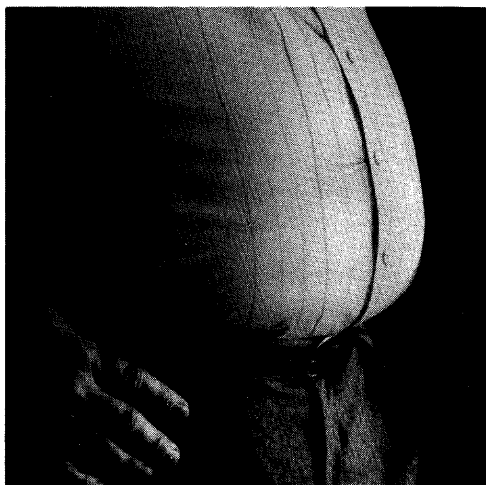
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What's your opinion?

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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Tables (Mystic Molds)

Hot figures for cold weather

Happy New Year! This month we've got a large number of old and new products to present to you. Therefore, as a New Year's present, I'm going to skip the soapbox and move right into the reviews. Let's see what we can do to brighten your spirits during this cold season, and help you find something that you will enjoy.

As a last note, it is not too early to be planning an event for the 1995 GEN CON® Game Fair. The deadline for judge registration is approaching (see the ad in his issue), and you want to have your scenarios ready to avoid the last-minute rush.

Reviews

Mystic Molds
1565 SR 19
Bucyrus OH 44820

TPK 101 Temple Kit

This plaster temple kit was originally designed as a 25-mm structure, but can be used for any figures up to 32-mm scale.

Currently this kit is available only by mail order only throughout much of the U.S. and Great Britain. The kit comes with all of its components sealed in bubble wrap and tightly packed in a heavy mailing box.

The temple base measures 275 mm high X 330 mm long and contains the temple foundation and a small amount of grassy, bumpy ground around it. A stone walkway and steps lead to an uneven temple floor showing signs of settling and a stone dais. The 140 mm X 180 mm inner floor is surrounded by a low, uneven wall that would be at the perfect sitting height. There were few bubble holes noted in either of our two floor models. The 12

stone pillars were a different story. These pillars are cast in two pieces and then assembled at the manufacturer. Both of our kits had pillars that were slightly askew or uneven at the top or bottom. Usually these fit correspondingly rough spots on the wall, but frequently there was a gap between the top of the post and the one-piece roof. There was a lot of bubble pitting on the pillars. Both of these problems can be fixed by filling the offending areas with some sort of putty and letting it dry completely. The roof is vented and is molded to represent large blocks with some cracking on the smooth tops and bottoms, and rough sides and lips. The very top of the roof is supported by four quarter-size pillars. There are no flaws in the roof.

The temple is an excellent buy, and simply requires time and some TLC. It is interesting that the problems were much worse on the painted set that was sent to us than on the pieces sent to us for assembly or on my store stock. The kit is available in either a finished version for \$22.95 or an unfinished kit for \$14.95, which can be primed and painted with any oil or water-based medium. Remember that shipping costs will be added to this price.

Tables

These plaster tables are scaled to fit 25-mm figures and represent the thick plank-type usually associated with medieval taverns. The tabletops are supported by cast ribbed pedestals, all of which have a slightly rough appearance with some problems with fill or partial bubble holes. The one circular and two of the rectangular tables have a variety of foodstuffs on them; beverage containers, chicken, bread, fruit, vegetables, and cheese are all clearly visible. The third rectangular table contains two books, an ink pot, and two used candles. The last detail is a small chest that has little separation from the table. Most of the items have small imperfections that can be easily fixed. All this for \$1.50—what a deal! This is a very good addition to any low-tech RPG.

Miniatures' product ratings

..	Poor
...	Below average
....	Average
.....	Above average
.....	Excellent

Global Games

1666 St. Clair Ave. W.
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M6N 1H8

I want to thank Global Games for providing us with the Advanced Rules for the LEGIONS OF STEEL* game (stock #1100). All information for the following units came from that book.

Behemoth Armor

**** 1/2

While the particular miniature we reviewed is made of lead, this 28-mm-scale figure is currently being released in a lead-free format. The Behemoth suit is a heavy, multi-weapon platform on legs. This miniature is over 48 mm in the crouched position and 35 mm across the shoulders. The figure is made up of two arms and a main torso connected via oval shoulder sockets that allow a one-way-only fit. The suit is molded to appear to be a series of joined plates. Electronic muscles are visible in both legs. Joints are visible and armored. It is obvious that this unit is both a vehicle and an exoskeleton. A full array of environmental and communications devices can be seen on the rear pack. Power fists are supplemented by forward-firing grenade launchers. Sides are protected by shoulder-mounted lasers, and the rear is protected by a SPLAT system. These weapons could be replaced by whatever weapons are employed in the system you are playing. Whether it is used for LEGIONS OF STEEL or a GAMMA WORLD® game, the piece is highly recommended even at the \$8.95 price.

1720 CI Succubot

**** 1/2

The Succubot CI is a 28-mm scale, leaded version of a mechanical centaur crossed with a mobile command unit. The expansion book cover shows the unit on four legs firing, but the figure is molded in an upright position. Rearing to 35 mm in height, it has four usable hands. The framework is a visible mechanical skeleton with fully jointed limbs. The tail on the unit is made of interlocking plates and acts as a support. The legs appear to be simple hinges with strengthening side plates, although they are at angles that would suggest an additional ball and socket is present. The upper third of the torso gives the appearance of being a metalized female cyborg firing a large pistol and covered in plate. The book informs us there is no humanity to this figure. My guess would be that the female features were designed to make a UNE trooper hesitate for a split-second, thus giving the machine an advantage.

There was little flash, and the mold line was designed to enhance the figure rather than detract from it. If there is a fault with this piece, it would be its fragile nature. Our miniature came with a crack in the arm holding the pistol, and the arm immediately fell off when an attempt was made



Temple Kit (Mystic Molds)

to repair and strengthen it. The legs and torso also twist freely, and multiple twisting will lead to metal fatigue. This figure can survive for long periods with a careful packing job. It can be used in many of near-future games as a cyborg, robot or guard. The price is \$5.95 for each robot.

Reaper Miniatures

1660 S. Stemmons
Suite 220, LB11
Lewisville TX 75067

1216 Fire Elemental

**** 1/2

The fire elemental is a 25-mm lead gem that can add heat to any AD&D® game. The figure is simple in its construction. A

humanoid figure rises up from a tower of individual flames that give the impression they are flickering. The face is almost elven, complete with pointed ears, almond eyes and high cheeks. The figure is wearing a chain necklace with a jewel. The necklace is framed by dancing, flaming tendrils of hair. If your wizard likes playing with fire or elementals, this is a must-have piece. Best of all, there was no flash on the piece and mold lines were built into the whorls. This is an excellent piece and a steal at the price of \$2.50 for lead, or still a good deal at \$3.50 for lead-free.

1248 Lich

***** 1/2

This lead lich is scaled for 25 mm, and measures in at a low 23.5 mm standing upright on a stone-textured base. The figure is dressed in full-length robes with a fur hem and edged long sleeves. The robe is deeply wrinkled inward from lack of support, and the body lacks depth when viewed from the side. This and the skeletal hands and face reinforce the aura of death. His left hand is clutching a staff made of braided wood, while the right hand raises an amulet strategically placed at mid-chest. Teeth and skull detail are good, but could use an ink wash with black to bring out the shallow separations. A crown topped with a jewel and a chain belt are the only ornamentation, although rings could easily be painted on the bony fingers. This figure is a good buy at \$.90 each for lead or \$1.35 for the lead-free version.



Behemoth Armor (Global Games)

1256 The Evil Eye Lord

This 25-mm scale lead piece was the original AD&D® game beholder from Heritage and should bring back a burst of nostalgia from the older collectors among us. The figure comes in two halves that go together well and is supported by a non-textured blob and pole. The eyestalks, ropey veins, and leering, crooked mouth with slime dripping from it are all molded onto the slightly flattened face. There are even bloodshot veins on the eye! There was no flash nor any detracting mold lines on the subject piece.

Even with the difference in quality between Ral Partha's version and this figure, this piece is very good when one considers when this figure was designed. For history's sake it is worth the \$4.00 lead price tag, but I'm not sure that I could highly recommend its more expensive lead-free version.

The finished versions of these three figures were painted by the people at Reaper Miniatures. Thanks, folks, and well done.

Heartbreaker

Paoli Tech Ent. Cir.
19 E. Central Ave.
Paoli PA 19301

Gamecraft

A16 Gardner's Row
Business Ctr., Ltd.
Liverpool L3 6TJ UK

2002 Orc Standard Bearer

***** 1/2

This figure is a lead-free miniature standing 23 mm tall from the rough-surfaced, slotted base to the top of his head. Both arms and legs are bare, and somewhat blocky corded muscle is shown in appropriate places. Finger and toe detail is visible, including nails, though the left hand clenching the sword is very indistinct when compared to the rest of the figure. The rest of the orc's torso is covered in chain mail, chest guards, and a



Lich (Reaper Miniatures)



Succubot (Global Games)

bulky enough for use with most of the newer Games Workshop orcs. Also, the obvious mold line on the right arm is hard to get at without nicking the flagpole. This is still a very good figure that will enjoy an undetermined spot on my front line. The price of \$2.50 is not unreasonable.

2005 Orc Archer Loading

***** 1/2

This heavily armored 28-mm scale lead-free orc piece stands 30 mm tall from the base to the top of his spiked helmet. His feet are wrapped in fur-trimmed hide strap boots, while his legs are bare from knee to mid-thigh. His upper torso is covered by metal armor with overlapping plates on the left shoulder. Neither arm is covered, but the right wrist has a spiked arm strap and the left has a metal wrist guard secured by straps. His left hand holds a bow at the ready, while his right hand reaches for an arrow from his quiver. Fingernail detail and individual feather detail on the arrows are pluses for this figure. A provision pouch on his left and a sheathed sword on his right are supported by a disk belt around his waist. The facial leer is pure orc, although the tooth detail is not as clear as I would like. Special



Fire Elemental (Reaper Miniatures)

touches on this orc include a nose ring, a ring hanging from the left shoulder armor plate, a tiny skull hanging from his helmet ear flap, and last but not least, bags under his eyes! This could be an archer unit's commanding officer. The price is \$2.50.

RAFM Company, Inc.

20 Parkhill Road E
Cambridge, Ontario
Canada N1R 1P2

3611 Barbarian Cyclops

**** $\frac{1}{2}$ (Before work)

It's hard to think of a cyclops as being anything but a barbarian, and this 55-mm tall, fine pewter figure supports this view. The base is molded to represent a rocky surface, and has a mold line in the middle and a sprue edge on the underside that will have to be removed before it will stand right. The figure is a pot-bellied, underfed giant striding across the land.

Ribs are visible on the side and chest area, where there appears to be little muscle.

His arms are bare and exhibit some smooth muscle. Both hands clutch weapons; a smooth, round rock in the left and a long, squared wood-grained log with throng-held spikes driven through it in the right. Hand detail is fair, but the shallowness will require careful priming. The upper torso is partially covered by an over-the-shoulder fur shirt with open sides secured by a thin belt. A large provision bag is supported by a buckle and strap that loop over the base of the right shoulder. His wrinkled pants are tucked into strapped hide boots with the tops folded over. His head resembles that of an old monk with a bald pate and surrounding fringe. He has a stupid expression on his face which is emphasized by his large pointed nose. The single eye socket is surrounded by lids, and the eyeball is elongated. If you don't want this figure as



Orc Standard Bearer (Heartbreaker)



Evil Eye Lord (Reaper Miniatures)



Orc Archer Loading (Heartbreaker)



Barbarian Cyclops (RAFM)

a cyclops, it would take a little putty and very little work to make it a two-eyed giant.

This is a figure with several possibilities, but there also are several problems not evident until you remove it from the package. A hardened mold line runs across the chest and stomach like an old scar and extends up the right side of the neck. The right back of the figure is sunken and appears to flow into the right arm. In this same area there is thick flash that will have to be removed with a Dremel tool or some other heavy-duty method. This figure has definite possibilities, but is definitely not a project that can be quickly done before an encounter. If you don't mind a lot of work, this could be a nice figure, but with the amount of work required, the \$6.50 price tag is pushing it.

5852 Coalition Marines in Battle Dress

This set is a three-member unit scaled to 25 mm and made out of fine pewter. All three figures are dressed in the same basic combat suits. The figures' main differences are in weapons, fine detail, and positioning. All suits are full-bodied, medium-armored outfits complete with protected separate joints, shoulder plates, pockets, and metal gauntlets. Each figure is wearing an environmental control and communication pack on its back. All figures have a slightly raised mold line along the legs and arms and flash between the legs in the groin area. The helmets are basically featureless with closed visors and a mold line running completely around the helmet. Two marines are armed with



Coalition Marines (RAFM)

heavy weapons, one holding his gun at rest and one firing upward. The third member is armed with a medium weapon and a grenade launcher in an over-and-under setup. He also is wearing an ammo belt over his left side with projectiles for the launcher. The other troopers are carrying assorted pouches in different places on their belts.

This set will go well with almost any science-fiction game that requires closed suits. While there is some cleaning to do, three troopers for \$5.50 is still a bargain. I highly recommend this set.

Thunderbolt Mountain Miniatures

656 E. McMillan
Cincinnati OH 45206-1971

1037 The Sorcerer's Apprentice

This is a must-have gift for the wizard player in your life, and a constant reminder of the dangers of overstepping our limits. The five-piece pewter casting is scaled to 25 mm and requires very little work to assemble. The base is a 60-mm circle molded so that the top resembles a stone floor with a raised summoning platform surrounded by a deeply engraved pentagram and several small circles. Raised details on the floor consist of runes, a book, a scroll and scroll case, a pot, and several spell components that have fallen over. From these components pours a roll of smoke that forms the lower half of a large demon. The 45 mm-high demon is standing with his arms crossed and his hand under his chin, and seems to be contemplating someone's fate. The leathery wings will require only a light cleanup and are inserted into a hole in his back so that the pointy spines line up. If there is still a gap, use filler as needed. A belt with a jewel separates his torso from the smoke, and he is wearing no other clothes on his muscled body. The twisted horns and long, pointed ears frame a face that contains a smirk—not the expression you want to see on a demon's face.

The object of amusement is a very young apprentice dressed in his master's embroidered robe. There is a look of anticipation on his face as his hair falls backward. A simple rope belt binds the robes while a magic symbol hangs from his neck, but the funniest part is that the robe is about six sizes too large for him. He obviously does not see the demon as he practices a spell from the book at his feet. Nor does the demon show up in the gilded mirror that he is practicing in front of.

There is one major problem that keeps this miniature from getting five stars: the demon is not stable. Both sides, the base, and the body have a socket connection, but there is no ball. Nor is the belt large enough to fit over the bottom of the body. The figure needs to be pinned or a ball molded into place if it is going to survive any handling and not break like mine did. The base also needs to have mold pieces removed, but the pieces are quite small. There is also a small line around the base.

I really like this piece in spite of the problems with the demon. This figure is worth the \$11.95 price tag. To paint the mirror to look like a mirror, paint the lens a bright silver then put a thick layer of gloss coat over it but do not overflow the edging.

Tactical Conflict Systems Inc.

545 Newport Ave. Suite 155
Pawtucket RI 02861

FP-005-25 Cloaked Traveler with Lantern

The traveller is a 25-mm scale lead figure that is actually 26.5 mm to the eyes. The figure is dressed in layered robes that flow out behind as he walks, with the outside layer slightly open in front. A boot toe peeks out from beneath the robe as he moves over the textured, circular base, and the left foot is obviously pushing at the robe from the inside. The robes are secured by a wide belt with large buckle that also supports an empty sack at the right rear of the figure. The hands are

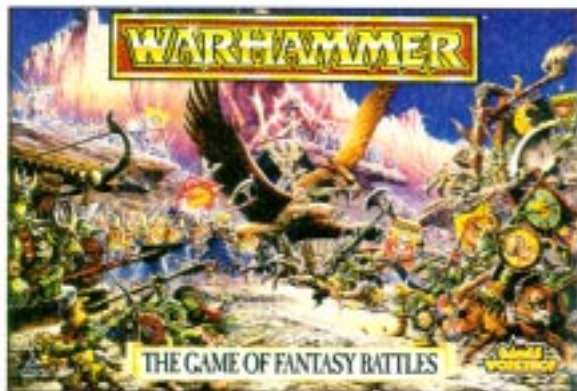
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Sorcerer's Apprentice (Thunderbolt)



Cloaked Traveler (Tactical Conflict Systems)

indistinct, and either have gloves over them or are not highly detailed. The left hand clutches a bag that rides back as he steps forward, and in his right hand he holds a battered lantern. The face has little detail and is very plain in appearance. A layered beard with moustache falls to the belt line. A ragged cowl covers the hair, although a few wisps manage to escape.

This figure has no flash and no highly visible mold lines. The bottom of the base, however, will need heavy cleaning to remove the sprue ends. The major drawback of this figure is that many of the details are indistinct, or separations aren't crisp. These problems could easily be masked by careful painting. The low price of \$1.50 per figure makes this a good practice piece.

907 Euro Houses

People are always looking for buildings for micro armor games or BATTLETECH* game brawls. This set consists of six 5-mm scale, old European style houses that could represent dwellings of the late medieval age, the Napoleonic era, or the simple homes of a backwater agricultural planet. The first piece in the set is an L-shaped manor house 38 mm X 40 mm on the outside walls of the L, with a thatched roof, a set of second-story windows and shutters. The surface is stone or stucco, and three chimneys are available for heating. The next two buildings are slightly different stone cottages or homes measuring 15-mm wide x 10-mm deep x 12-mm tall. One entrance and a number of windows present firing points, while the walls provide some protection (but remember that thatch roofs burn quickly). The fourth building, an offset thatch house, could be

used as a toolshed or a dwelling. Its waffle-textured walls hint at slightly greater strength. A second manor home with block or large plank walls measures 54 mm x 10 mm and has a second story on the right half. It would be easy to carve a door on the left and use it as a store or forge. The last building is a large, one-door barn 43 mm x 22 mm. There is a loft and the walls appear to be stone, while the rest is thatch.

The epoxy castings are not heavily detailed, but at \$5 for six buildings, they are well worth the price. This company has a number of other "value" packs that will put large numbers of structures on the battleboard for a low price.

If you have any suggestions or comments, you can call me at (708)336-0790 after 2P.M. CST M,W,Th,F or 10A.M.-5P.M. S & S. Or you can write me: Robert Bigelow, c/o Friends Hobby Shop, 2411 Washington St, Waukegan IL 60085.



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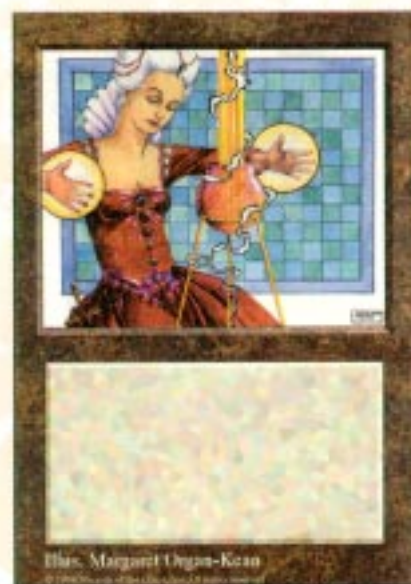


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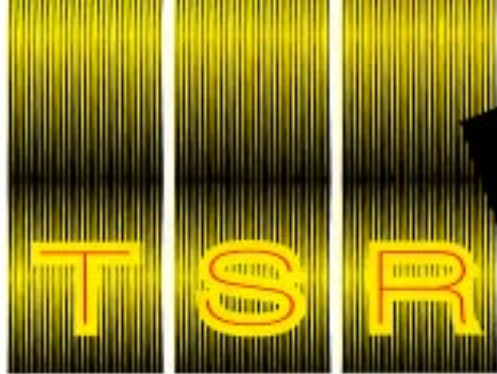
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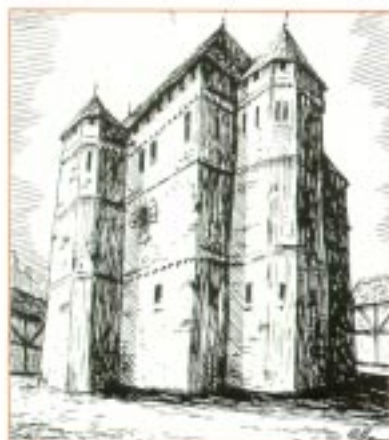
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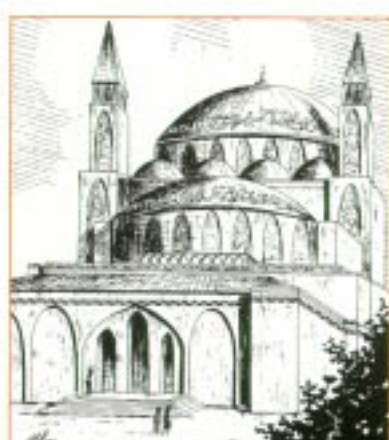
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Civic Court. Originally a fortress and ducal residence, the city's three-story keep is a courthouse, jail, and popular gathering place. Quality and detail galore! Great hall/throne room, mess hall, chapel, courtyard, more. P38. Ask for Prakis.



The Double Rose. Location, location, location! Business is brisk at this exclusive drinking/dining establishment in the heart of the city. Housed in a stately manor, impeccably restored and maintained, it has a fairy-tale quality. P65. Ask for Ian.



Civic Temple. One of the most beautiful structures in the city, the temple also serves as a busy marketplace, public forum, and bank. Its regal domes shine like huge jewels in the sunlight. A must see, inside and out! P15. Ask for Erek.

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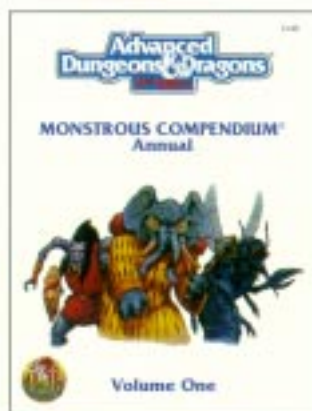


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